INTERVIEW II

DATE: March 17, 1969

INTERVIEWEE: C. ROBERT PERRIN

INTERVIEWER: STEPHEN GOODELL

PLACE: Mr. Perrin's office in Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 2

G: This is the second session with Mr. Robert Perrin, Acting Deputy Director of the Office of Economic Opportunity. Today's date is March 17, 1969.

Last time I had asked you in the context of your discussion of your 1967 tour on a federal team to visit the states, and I think you visited thirty states, whether you had found in your discussions with public officials, at that time, grassroots support for what became the Greene amendment of that Congressional session.

P: I don't think that that tour particularly pointed up anything in regard to the Greene amendment per se, or what became the Greene amendment. I talked mainly with governors and state officials, and we did not meet with mayors and county officials. The governors, certainly not all of them, but a number of them were concerned about money coming into their states over which they had no real controls. And they indicated interest in distributing the money

Well, some of them, I'm sure, were sincere in this. Others saw this as a political weapon of considerable magnitude if they could determine where the funds went after they came into the state. I facetiously told a number of governors that they didn't know how well

off they were in not having to answer for some of these programs that were being funded with anti-poverty dollars.

But there was a great concern among some of the state officials, or at least those who operated the state Economic Opportunity offices, that they didn't have enough power really over the programs in their states. And I couldn't really argue with this too much, because they didn't have that power and they weren't intended to have that power. So therefore it was not really a misinterpretation on a lot of their parts.

G: Was there a consensus on the part of the governors either for or against the fact that they really didn't have absolute veto power over the poverty programs in their states?

P: I didn't get that. There was a consensus--a lot of governors seemed to be at the mercy of their state Economic Opportunity director, at least in terms of what their knowledge of the program was. A number of governors showed really quite a lack of specific knowledge as to how all of this worked, and consequently their contact with the program quite often was when the state OEO director brought to them the papers or the applications for them to sign, either vetoing or approving. In a couple of instances, I think we helped clear this up with the governor and made him more aware of the problem.

G: Has this veto power been exercised very much?

P: Not as much as one would have assumed from all the hullabaloo over it. I don't have the figures now at my fingertips, but I think there

probably have been less than fifty vetoes out of thirty thousand applications of one kind or another. And of those vetoes, probably less than half were overturned, overridden by the director of OEO. So in practice it has not been a serious break either in our ability to proceed nor has it, I think, given the governors a feeling that we would simply ride roughshod over them, because in quite a few cases we have accepted their veto or have altered the program to the extent necessary, so that they would withdraw the veto. At one point Governor Reagan of California was bragging about the number of vetoes that he had issued on our program, and we never considered that quite a proper contest for a governor to engage in.

G: On the first tape, you have mentioned the Economic Opportunity Council. You discussed it in terms of the twenty-odd meetings that it had had up until 1967. It's my understanding that it's the intent underlying the council, its rationale was that it was to provide a mechanism to coordinate all the federal anti-poverty programs. Has this been part of its function? Has it been successful in this? Has it failed in this? What is your general opinion about that?

P: That was part of its basic design. The council and the director of OEO were to assist the President in coordinating all anti-poverty efforts of the federal government. It was something of a dream world, I think, to begin with, because the council never had the specific power that is necessary to instruct or to insist upon coordinative mechanisms. Furthermore, we ran into internal political

problems. The director of OEO was named by the law to be the chairman of the EOC, so this put a non-Cabinet member supposedly chairing a Cabinet committee. This just doesn't work very well in Washington's scheme of things.

Sargent Shriver did as well, I guess, as he could as chairman, but we had no full-time staff. The staff, such as it was, was operated out of my old office of Interagency Relations. Shriver is not one who likes to plan ahead very far either and we were invariably coming up to the day before the EOC meeting with agenda that had been prepared out of blood and sweat over the preceding few weeks. And it would be submitted to Sarge, and he would arbitrarily knock out items and substitute others on which absolutely no staff work had been done. So it was not an easy kind of a committee either to run or to staff.

Also, as time wore on, we began having trouble with attendance by the Cabinet members. We always had members present. All the agencies were represented at every meeting, but we began to notice that the representation was getting down into the third and fourth levels of the agency hierarchies, and therefore there came a reluctance on the part of many of these individuals to actively participate in the discussions. They came primarily as observers and listened to others talk and didn't really enter into the swing of it.

We also had difficulty in getting the other members to bring problems to the council, which of course they were supposed to do under the original thought. This was not an OEO forum, although it

was accused of that really. I'm sure this was one of the problems. Of course, with the other members failing to bring problems to the council, OEO was then more and more required to devise the agenda, and then this simply seemed to encourage the others in believing that it was an OEO forum. So it was a round robin affair that was very difficult to break. Specific requests to the other agencies to come up with ideas and thoughts for the council's agenda simply produced very little, almost nothing. I think one of the things that held the council together was Vice President Humphrey, because he, in his usual enthusiastic and energetic way, created a considerable spark of interest at the council meetings which he attended, and he attended most of them. He took this quite seriously.

So the conclusion that I came to was that the council simply could not continue to function as it was functioning, and consequently we proposed in 1967 that there be a significant change in the law to give it a different kind of a complexion. We had our last meeting in December of '67, which was the same month that we got our new amendments. I took that opportunity to simply stop further meetings. I suppose we could have continued under the old system even though we had this new legislative design for the EOC, but I felt that we weren't getting any place with it and might as well stop. So I proposed to Shriver that we simply not have any more meetings, and he agreed.

Then, as you know, President Johnson never did pick up that particular ball and recreate the Economic Opportunity Council, as it

was restructured by the amendments. Why, I don't know, but he didn't. So consequently there were not further meetings from December '67.

G: You mentioned that Shriver as a non-Cabinet member of the council or chairman of the council had difficulties with other Cabinet members. Does this reflect at all on the conception of OEO as a part of the Executive Office?

P: I don't know that that was the case so much. I think it was just a recognition of the political realities of the Washington pecking order. That Shriver, I suppose, if he had wanted to bear down and throw his weight around as a member of the Executive ffice of the President in citing the language of the act, coordination, and generally making himself obnoxious, may have made something else out of the EOC. I'm just not sure under those conditions though whether it would have been wise to try it. He was reluctant to order Cabinet members around, even if he had that particular authority, and he never assumed that you really had that authority.

G: Did the President ever attend any of those meetings?

P: He attended certainly the first one, at which time he laid down what he thought was to be the function of the council, his domestic national security council. As far as I recall, I'd have to go back through the minutes of the meetings and check, I think that's the only one he personally attended, although a couple of subsequent meetings were held at the White House. By the time I came here, the regular location for the meeting was the Indian Treaty Room of the old Executive Office Building.

G: Members of the Bureau of the Budget were represented on the council, were they not?

P: That's right.

G: Was the council ever informed of the five-year-plan, the OEO five-year plan?

P: I don't recall that that was a specific item on the agenda although I believe they were--I just don't know the answer, how far the circulation of that plan went.

G: That went to the Bureau of the Budget?

P: That's right.

G: Where did it go from there?

P: That is what I don't know. It's conceivable that all members of the Cabinet with domestic programs got copies of it, but I just don't know what happened to it. We were primarily concerned with more immediate problems in the council than the five-year projection.

G: I'm just thinking in terms of the coordination that was desired, at least in 1964, that the five-year plan, as much as anything else, might have provided the kind of format or mechanisms for that coordination.

P: It does in theory, except that in practice it calls for a certain dollar appropriations which we never got, so that it became a rather esoteric argument over the long run. You couldn't really grapple with the recommendations of the five-year plan until you knew you were going to get the money to carry them out. So it was a little unrealistic, I think.

G: Was there a disproportionate amount of any serious consequence between the initial projections of that five-year plan and what OEO finally came up with in the way of requests to the Congress year-to-year?

P: We tried to follow the general outline, particularly in the employment areas of the five-year plan. I'm really not in a very good position to go into detail on that, because I had little to do with putting together the plan, and even less to do with what happened to to it after it was issued.

G: What was the National Advisory Council?

P: The National Advisory Council also was created by the act to bring together, at a high level, citizens simply to serve as an advisory group for the director of OEO. It subsequently, through Congressional action, was divorced from OEO and made an independent advisory group. So that today while we cooperate with it in terms of supplying information and attending meetings and generally have good relationships, we have nothing to do with the direction the council takes. It has its own staff that is not only outside of OEO, but it's outside of the building altogether.

G: I'd like to turn to a specific topic, although it's jumping out of the chronology the way we've been going, and that is when you became deputy director in March, 1968, I wonder if you'd explain what your duties were then, what they became.

P: At that time we were, of course, aware that Sargent Shriver was going to be leaving for somewhere, the exact destination wasn't known; but

the rumor was becoming fairly strong that he was to become an Ambassador, perhaps to France. I've forgotten the exact dates, but some time after the first of the year Bert Harding called me in and said that it was quite certain that Shriver would be leaving--the timing wasn't known, again, the destination wasn't known. But he asked me if, when this took place, I would be interested in serving with him as acting deputy director. While I was quite flattered and somewhat startled by this suggestion, I quite promptly agreed to do this if this was what he wanted, and of course if the White House had no objections to this. He said that he had served previously as an acting commissioner of Internal Revenue, and that he found that this simply wasn't something that he could handle alone. He determined then that he didn't wnat to have to do that again, and he needed some assistance. So, as I say, I agreed to serve. Neither of us thought that it would be a very long time.

G: Why did you think that?

P: It just didn't make sense that this would continue very long. Here it was, it was in March finally when Shriver--when the announcement was made, and Harding asked me again to, told me for sure that Shriver was leaving, and that we would be taking over right away, even though Shriver hadn't actually left town and wouldn't for several weeks. But we were proceeding as if he were out of it completely. This was at President Johnson's request.

It was in March; the election was in November, and at that time I guess the President still hadn't withdrawn from the race, and there

was just no reason to believe that the nomination of a new director and deputy director could be very far down the line. So we were looking at it probably in terms of two or three months duration.

All sorts of things began to happen then: The President's withdrawal; the Martin Luther King assassination. That was really my first feeling of the difficulties of running an organization like this. Mr. Harding was out of town at the time of the King assassination, and I was serving as acting acting director which I had taken to call myself when he was away. And I remember being in my office on Saturday watching the smoke rise up over Washington, D.C., and wondering how the events were going to be overtaking our building and our program.

G: That was also the poor people's campaign.

P: That, of course, really set that in motion. It had already been set in motion by King, but it was picked up as the holy cause then and subsequently came about during the summer. So these were really--it was a climactic summer in many ways with these events, the politics, campaign, the poor people's arrival, our Congressional problems; it just never really let up from then on.

Bert and I got along very well in handling the chores of the agency. He indicated he wasn't the kind that had to know everything, see every piece of paper, sign everything, everything that was going on all over the agency. He looked to me to handle as much of it as I could, keep as much of it off his desk as I could. I had an excellent working relationship with him, enjoyed it very much. As the year wore

on and the President finally submitted his name, Harding's name, to the Congress and nominated him for director, Bert had a lot to do with the fact that I was shortly then nominated for deputy director. Unfortunately, confirmation never came about, as I'm acutely aware of today. When we got our first pay checks under the new pay raise and that I'm earning now $192 a week less than I would be earning if I had been confirmed as deputy director, so it's a very real problem.

G: What is the story of that confirmation, or that attempted confirmation?

P: Well, it got snarled up basically, I guess, with politics, the Congressional situation. It's hard to tell precisely what motivates people in these situations. I guess you can point to certain things. One was the fact that at that moment Senator Dominick had chosen to introduce an amendment to, I guess, it was the Vocational Education Bill, of all things, to transfer Head Start to the Office of Education. And it passed the Senate through some freak maneuver without hearings--it was a floor amendment. Senator Morse, who was floor managing the bill in the Senate, went along with it, and we could only assume that he had a quid pro quo in there some place. He was quite concerned about some kind of Japanese log bill that was affecting the state of Oregon, and he was trying to get votes for it in the Senate. As I say, I suspect it was a quid pro quo in here.

In any event, after taking a look at this surprise amendment, our people quickly discovered many flaws in it that would have been very catastrophic to the Head Start program had it passed. So we

began to fight it, and one of the ways that we fought it, we put out a memorandum to employees indicating that we didn't think the amendment was proper and that we would oppose it.

G: Was this standard procedure to do that?

P: Yes, I think it was standard procedure. Certainly Shriver had done these things. Harding hadn't, because he really had never had an opportunity to do it. But these matters are always taken very emotionally by our employees, and we found that one thing that we should do as soon as we can is reassure them on matters on where the leadership of the agency stands. And in this case we put out this memorandum which Morse took violent exception to and got up on the floor of the Senate and castigated Harding personally and vowed that he would fight him to the death and all of these wild statements that only Wayne Morse can make. I've heard them over the years, heard him stand up there and accuse the President of the United States of treason. These kinds of things begin to bother you after awhile. But he took this on as a personal fight against Harding. Obviously, he was going to attack Harding in this fashion, and that meant that there wasn't any place for me to go because Harding was occupying the deputy director's slot, and I could hardly be confirmed, despite the fact that I had a number of friends in the Senate and I was under no personal attack.

G: What was Morse's objection to that? Wasn't there more to this? Wasn't there something to do with a Job Corps Center that had been closed down?

P: We can only assume that. One of the Job Corps centers which had

been closed the year before was in Oregon, and Morse had also taken violent objection to it. And we can only assume that his attitude on that continued to color his thinking.

G: And he from then on declared total war against OEO.

P: That's about the way it worked. And he prevailed upon Lister Hill, the chairman of the Senate Labor and Public Welfare Committee, not to hold hearings on our nominations, which wasn't difficult to do--Hill, not being too interested in the subject anyway and not running for re-election. So there were three nominations being held here: Harding's, mine, and Pat Kennedy as director of the VISTA program. So this was the situation then as Congress took off in August for its vacation. And when they came back, there was still no action and no promise of it. I made some efforts to crack it loose. I went up to see people in the Senate--senators and some of the staff people--in an effort to shake it loose. And there was simply no action. Finally, and I don't recall my dates here, but it was about the week before Congress adjourned, I finally got fed up with the situation and I called Morse, who was then, I discovered, out in Oregon campaigning. He wasn't even coming back. So I talked to his assistant out in Oregon, and I asked him if he would ask the Senator what he intended to do about this, that I wanted to know now whether he was going to continue to block it, or was [he] willing to try to let it go through. Within a couple of hours, I had word back that he certainly didn't intend to block it; and that, as a matter of fact, he had told Senator Mansfield two weeks before that he was no

longer blocking it. I had no independent way of checking that statement. But anyway the word now was that Morse was not going to block it. So I got this cranked into the machinery over there, and my friends in the Senate Labor Committee and staff prevailed then upon--I know I called Senator Hill's office to make sure that they knew--to call a hearing. We knew the deck was stacked really at this hearing because there was a problem of getting a quorum. There was just a few days before the end of the session, and there had to be six senators present. No, I guess they had to have nine, and I think we wound up with six that morning. Harding, Kennedy, and I sat around for about an hour while they attempted to get a quorum, and could not, so that was the end of that.

We tried one last gasp of trying to get the committee to poll out the nominations which they can do, although they have to have unanimous agreement to do it. Then Dominick refused to go along with that, so Congress then adjourned, and that was the end of our effort.

G: Did you feel the lack of support on the part of the White House during this period, or was there anything going on as regards this incident at the White House?

P: As far as I can tell, there wasn't anything going on. They didn't really care, was the impression I got. If we could swing it, that was all right with them, but they weren't about to go to great lengths to try to put it through.

G: I mean, had they wanted you badly enough, the White House could have

done something?

P: I think, yes, they could have. Whether they would have succeeded, I don't know, but they could have certainly done more than they did, which was nothing.

G: Since you have been with the Office of Economic Opportunity, that's since 1966, what has been the nature of the contact between OEO and the White House?

P: It has been quite extensive. We had our channels of communications there. Primarily in recent years it has been boiled down to Joe Califano, and then to Jim Gaither on Califano's staff. Those were the people that we dealt with, most often, on day-to-day matters. But there was a good flow of communications and contact.

G: Ever with the President directly?

P: Occasionally, I guess. I'm not sure to the extent which Shriver had relationships with the President. It seemed quite clear to many of us that during Shriver's final time here that the President wasn't taking too great a personal interest in OEO, and I'm sure this was reflected in his relationships with Shriver. As far as Harding was concerned, there wasn't a great deal. Johnson called him over to ask him to take on the job as acting director, and I guess there were a couple of other contacts since then, but very little personal contact with the President. We had a meeting in his last days, I guess it was in October, 1968, with the regional directors. The President agreed to meet with our regional directors and top staff of OEO a pleasant little session in the Cabinet Room, but that's about the

extent of it.

G: You had mentioned that you were talking about your knowledge and contact with Senator Johnson during his Senate period, that he had what you called the natural conservatism and that this came out later in his dealings with OEO. What did you mean by that?

P: I don't think he ever really understood what Community Action was about, in the sense that it was going to be controversial and was not going to be smooth. I think that if everything had gone along quietly, and there hadn't been any blow-ups around the country President Johnson would have been delighted. I think he wanted to take great pride in the poverty program, but I think from his point of view it was a somewhat superficial pride. He just wanted it to look good that he was doing things for poor folks. But as soon as we began having controversy, which was inherent in a program like this, that's when he got disturbed about it. Of course, it's like anything else. As long as things are going well, you don't get any flak; as soon as you have one problem, you start catching hell. And that was his technique. As he saw something come over the ticker that he didn't like, he would pick up the phone and call, or call Califano, who would call us. I just don't--

G: Do you have any knowledge of any specific instance of that nature?

P: I have heard of them. I really don't recall right now any specific, but I know that it has happened. But I just feel that he took a line that people should be grateful for the help that they were being given and never, I don't think, fully understood the forces that were

actually at work in communities.

G: Do you feel that his White House staff and the people with whom you dealt, or that OEO dealt, were sympathetic with OEO's problems?

P: Yes, I do. I think that they were and this in turn served to blunt quite a bit the attitude that the President seemed to be developing about OEO.

G: Would you point to certain people? Would Califano have been one?

P: Califano and Gaither, yes.

G: At what point, do you think that OEO reached its watershed in terms of its relations with the White House? Could you point to, let's say, an historical way since its inception in 1964 to any trend that might have been evident?

P: I've never really looked at it quite that way, and I'd have to give that some thought to try to develop that kind of a pattern. I would imagine 1966 was probably the high spot, and from there it went down because certainly of the difficulties that we had getting our legislation through in 1967, without benefit of great Presidential support. And we had the feeling here at that time that the White House had practically written off the program and felt Congress would take care of matters and that would be the end of it. Well, I think they were quite surprised as was everyone when we got that legislation through in 1967.

G: That was almost Shriver singlehandedly taking it to the Congress and fighting for it, getting it through.

P: I think so, yes, he did a remarkable job.

G: Do you feel that added to the controversy that OEO--I won't say helped to create, but certainly was involved in--that the stringencies of the budget helped to diminish that support?

P: The support from the White House?

G: From the White House.

P: Oh, I think that the White House realized that it was going to be a very expensive proposition, but I don't know that there was a cause and effect there as far as OEO was concerned. The President was bragging about the fact that over twenty-five billion dollars in federal funds were going to programs for the poor, so the total amounts didn't seem to bother him.

G: And yet each year OEO, I guess within the framework of the way budgets are worked out, will always ask for more than it actually receives.

P: Yes, that's right. Oh, I'm sure that if we'd had a more sympathetic ear in the President in terms of deeper understanding of what we were doing, we probably would have come out with a higher budget each year, if he had been totally approving of our activities.

G: Have programs suffered because you haven't gotten the money that you wanted?

P: Yes and no. I think that there's one attitude around here that we could have used double the money that we've gotten, triple. Certainly the need is there, but I don't think OEO could have handled funds like that. I think where we have been handicapped, however, is in our inability to significantly follow up after the first year funding to increase the allocations to the Community Action agencies and other

programs which we were funding, particularly the CAA; that after that first year, very few of them actually got much of an increase in their level of operation. This not only handicapped them and disillusioned them because this was supposed to be just the beginning of a program that was going to grow. Instead of growing it stayed static, it not only disillusioned them, but it also prevented us from funding more Community Action agencies, particularly in rural areas.

Now there's another side to that story. Whether we could have handled more if we had been able to fund them, I question whether we could have, given the difficulties in management in the field that existed then and still exist today with the Community Action agencies we have. But there are many reasons that all have to be fitted into the context when you talk about this, because we have been held back in staffing; we can't put the people out into the field to do on-site monitoring to the degree that we should. They're wrapped up in paperwork. And the Bureau of the Budget has held us, and the Congress, with their tax law, held us back on staff which we desperately needed. Certainly we could have used more money, but you have to remember in this business that what you spend in one year you've got to spend the next year plus. Almost every time you put out a dollar, you're mortgaging your next year's appropriations. The only exceptions to that are, say, the research and demonstration projects that were one-shot funding. And even those, you usually wind up the next year with them coming back to you and saying, well, they couldn't pick up the expected resources that they

thought they were going to get to carry the program on and could you fund them for another year. So you have to keep this very much in mind every time you come up with a little extra money, you try to decide where to put it, to realize what it's going to do to you the next year.

G: Did Congressional earmarking of OEO funds hurt the programs?

P: It has caused a lot of internal problems because it put emphases on areas that were of concern to a particular number of Congress and did not necessarily fit into the overall pattern which we were trying to establish. So it hurt, and we had to go to considerable lengths at times to convince other members of Congress to say that the earmarking was not a valid one. I say "we" went to considerable lengths, it wasn't all our doing. Certainly, other members of Congress understood this problem and would assist in diluting or blunting the effect of the earmarking operations. But there's no question that the earmarking has led to what we have now as national emphasis programs. And I don't find too much fault with the national emphasis theory because given the inability of many Community Action agencies to truly effectively handle large-scale programs, I think this kind of shopping list of national programs that they can draw on, such as Legal Services and the health centers, Head Start, and what have you, is beneficial to them. Because all communities need these things. The argument that we should have strictly local initiative, I think begins to break down at some point because they're all going to need health services of some kind, they're all

going to need child care programs, they're all going to need legal services, so what's the difference whether it's called local initiative or national emphasis. The trouble is if it were all local initiative, you'd have a thousand different patterns being established. That's why you at least have some national ground rules that hopefully have been created as a result of experience and work.

G: Again, going back to the first tape, you mentioned in that tape that you occasionally questioned Shriver's judgment, and I didn't ask you at the time what you meant by that. Could you point to any decisions that he might have made with which you disagreed?

P: I'm not sure I remember the context in which we were discussing that. Sarge would tend to make decisions based, in my estimation, quite often on how to get out of a situation in the easiest fashion. And when you make decisions on that basis, you usually regret it at some point down the line. You're just postponing your troubles if you make a compromise today with someone, it usually comes back to haunt you at some future point. And Sarge would tend to take care of today's problem by putting it off until next month or next year. It's hard to recall specific instances of this. I'm sure I could. But mainly it was a feeling I had in observation, working with him.

G: Could you tell me briefly the process by which the Economic Opportunity amendments are put together and presented to the Congress? Do they emanate from here, from the BOB and the White House and OEO working together, from the White House alone, or where?

P: Normally they start here in OEO. We have developed a general pattern

of circulating the program areas and collecting from them ideas that they would have for amendments that would affect their programs, things that they believed were necessary or appropriate or for clarification, improvement, what have you. This exercise was run by the General Counsel's office. And once these were pulled together and polished, the extraneous weeded out, or the politically impossible discarded, and other ideas cranked in, we would then begin the process of selling it to the Administration, which began with the BOB. And of course the White House got into that too. But this was the general procedure that was followed. And the draft bill that was finally transmitted to Congress by the President reflected these kinds of looks and actions by the various people within the Executive Office.

G: Although you weren't deputy director at that point, but in 1967 was this the process?

P: Yes.

G: Were the suggestions for the administrative tightening up, as it was called at the time, coming from OEO?

P: Yes, there was that in it. One tends to get a little confused unless he reviews these things in detail as to what we proposed and what was done in committee and was done on the floor. They all begin to blend into each other to a degree, and you'd have to go back and look at the specific pieces of paper. But we took these matters into account and attempted to strengthen the act ourselves.

G: What happens when the bill gets to the Congress? Does OEO have

people at the Congress who are providing information to Congressmen about certain aspects of the bill and helping to get the bill through?

P: We work very closely with the committees that handle the legislation. This contact is year-around, and then once the bill is transmitted, we work with the chairmen and their staffs to make sure, one, that we know what their timetable is; and that we know what they expect of us in terms of what kind of testimony they want and what shape they want it in. So that there is a very close relationship. Of course the first order of business is the open hearing by the committee. We testify, sometimes at considerable length. Sarge used to open the testimony and then on subsequent days, once they got finished with him, various program directors would take over and testify and answer questions. It was usually done on this kind of format.

Following the hearings, the committee would go into executive session, sometimes a subcommittee, or in the case of the House, I guess Perkins was handling it last year as a full committee rather than a subcommittee. They go into executive session and start marking up the bill. And on those occasions, we also continue to work very closely with the committee staff by having certain key people right there on the Hill, and usually in another room; but they are available so that as matters are proposed in the executive session someone can check them out with knowledgeable OEO staff as to what the effect of this would be if it were accepted. And this continues really right on up until the House or the Senate enacts, passes the

legislation; even when it's on the floor of the House or the Senate, we have our staff people on the Hill ready and available to answer questions.

G: What do you do with a person like Goodell or Quie or Greene who might present certain problems?

P: We don't really do anything with them except try to answer their questions and/or charges as they come up. We have long since given up on some of these people in trying to convince them that we're not all bad, and that we don't think they're all bad. When you're just attacked continuously by one of them, there's no point in trying to stay friendly really. They're not going to do you any good.

G: Goodell has puzzled me, and I'm not sure I'm able really to place him in the spectrum of supporters or opponents of OEO. How do you interpret his seemingly unqualified support for Community Action, while at the same time advocating the break up of other portions of OEO's programs?

P: He was playing a game that he felt was tailored to his district. He was one of the few who tried alternatives. Quite often it's simply an attack with nothing constructive offered as an alternative. He and Quie at least would trot out alternatives, although we didn't think very much of them. Now, with Goodell as a Senator, he seems to be taking a little broader view of the programs, and he has got a larger base of constituents that he has to please.

I didn't do much in the way of Congressional relations myself. I didn't want to. Shriver in the summer of 1967, or late spring, asked

me to become Director of Congressional Relations which was then vacant. I didn't have any trouble in saying I didn't want it. I said I would do it if he wanted me to, if he needed me and couldn't fill the job and thought I could serve, I would do it on that basis, but I didn't want to do it on my own. I really never considered myself much of a lobbyist and I didn't want to go back up on the Hill and trade my friendships there in this way. I just never was really interested. So I didn't do much in the way of personal Congressional relations.

G: You used the word "lobbyist." Did you use that in a qualified way, or do you mean that OEO does lobby? I'm thinking back to Mr. Goodell's charge in 1967 that OEO lobbied.

P: Yes, OEO lobbies, there's no real question about that.

G: As do other Executive--

P: Certainly. It's done all the time. It's a word--I won't use it in the legal sense, they might come around and put me in jail as a result of that, but Congress asks for information. They want the kind of assistance. Simply because one Senator or Congressman claims that by your coming up and giving information you are lobbying, this is just 180 degrees away from another member who asked you to come up and provide this kind of information. So it's just a matter of definition. But in terms of the requests that Congress levies on an agency and the way the game is played, the need to get your story across, I guess you have to call it lobbying of sorts.

G: Does the game include certain processes such as calling or sending

telegrams to various of the Congressmen's constituents who will then write or phone or telegram him and apply pressure?

P: No. Certainly not as far as OEO as a federal agency is concerned. I'm sure that various advisory groups and Community Action agencies and other grantees no doubt did this sort of thing, but as far as an agency is concerned, it never engaged in that. That would be illegal, there's no question about it.

G: I'm wondering what prompted Goodell's charge. He made it into a legal charge, as I recall, back in 1967.

P: I think he was--if that's the one I'm thinking of, it would have had to do with this telegram from the Republican mayors. Is that the one that you're--?

G: I'm not sure. I recall an incident. I think it was Kansas City, but I'm not sure.

P: Oh, yes. That was a different one. The Kansas City regional office got a little carried away by a suggestion from headquarters that they let their news people know about some particular event and the regional office got carried away and fired off long telegrams to each newspaper in the region. This embarrassed the agency, it was improper.

There was another charge that was made in 1967 that had to do with the telegram to Senator Dirksen and to Congressman Ford from twenty-one Republican mayors urging that OEO be continued. This got carried to the point of an actual FBI investigation as to our part in that telegram.

G: At whose request was the FBI investigation?

P: I'm trying to remember. I don't know that it was Goodell; it may have been Quie who made the accusation and asked the Justice Department to investigate this as a violation of the anti-lobbying statute. So that enlivened things around here for a while, with the FBI agents asking questions.

G: Was that resolved to the satisfaction of all parties?

P: I doubt if it has ever been really resolved. I'm sure the FBI never got enough, or the Justice Department never got enough to make a case out of it. There really wasn't enough to make a case, so I imagine it's just one of those things that's gathering dust some place, and that's the end of it. It was all done in a political context.

G: I've noticed that there are people at OEO who have worked either on Senate committees or have been personal aides to senators, such as yourself. Does this help in the way of promoting better understanding between the Congress and OEO?

P: I am sure it does, if only in that it contributes to a better understanding of others within OEO as to what the Congressional process is. You find people who are not aware of the delicate nature of this kind of relationship just wanting to fire off all kinds of operations aimed at members of Congress, or accusing them of this and that and the other thing, and suggesting tactics that are clearly impossible of being carried out. So to that extent, I suppose, people like

myself and Don Baker and a few others who have had experience on the Hill are able to bring a little sanity into these relationships.

G: What have been the typical internal administration problems that you have had to face since being deputy director?

P: I guess they run the gamut of all management problems, personnel--

G: OEO has been charged again and again and again with administrative malfeasance, if that's not too strong a word to use. You can go to the Republican minority reports on committees and just see this year after year--this kind of charge being made.

P: It just isn't true. It is true that we have had difficulties, but it has never been as bad as is laid out. Now, Sarge had a peculiar way of operating. He did it more by personal assistant than he did by program mechanisms that had been established. This always creates problems in an organization. Or his assigning a problem to whoever he happened to run into in the men's room or thought of on the spur of the moment, was given a matter to take care of, no matter how many other administrative lines it crossed. Bert Harding, of course, came in on the basis of having conducted the management survey which isolated and surfaced a lot of the difficulties that had grown up in practice in a rush to get things done, and I think has had a considerable effectbringing more stability to the administrative operation, not only here but in the regions. Bert has been quite responsible for the delegation of authority to the regions to minimize to the extent possible the red tape involved and confusion in bringing things here to Washington. In other words, settle as many things as you can on the

spot at the region. But our management procedures are quite good really. We've established a lot of procedures that I don't think many federal agencies even today have. Ours haven't always worked precisely right, but on the other hand, no one has ever had to deal with these kinds of programs before and these kinds of grantees. But our audit procedures, our inspection, the management training, we try to establish--these are all quite unique in the federal establishment, and I think we've taught other agencies quite a bit about it. But as far as problems that I have to face, as I say, they're usual ones and quite deep in the budget process each year as we develop the needs, conduct in-depth interviews with each of the regions as to their capabilities and their requirements; the personnel matters generally fall into my jurisdiction, not only the staffing problems of the various offices but the specific problem cases, grievances, quite often find their way up to me. I'm the chairman of the Executive Selection Board that interviews candidates for all supergrade positions. And just the general hot spot, hot shot problems that crop up in an agency like this from day-to-day and can't be settled elsewhere, come to me usually before they go to Harding. And if I can settle them, I do.

G: Could you describe briefly the kind of impact that either external or internal investigation or evaluations have had in OEO? I'm thinking, for example, of the GAO investigations or your own consultants in certain programs.

P: Quite often these problems surface before they hit the press, and we are able to take care of them before they get out of

proportion. Now this inspection has done quite a bit of this. It's a very extensive operation, our inspection department. We tend to rely on it quite a bit to dig into problems, not only in preventive maintenance, so to speak, but once problems and troubles crop up, to fire the inspectors out to look into it. Our own auditing is really getting into action, our current instructions are now that every program has to be audited once a year, and those that refuse are simply not going to be funded again. Of course, when GAO does its kind of auditing, we respond to this. If it's something that needs correcting that we didn't know about, we move to correct it.

G: Would you like to comment on a recent article by Joseph Alsop in the Washington Post where he cites a hitherto unpublished GAO--I think it's the latest GAO investigation of OEO, which is done for the Nixon Administration?

P: It wasn't done for the Nixon Administration. It'll come out at this time. It was required by Congress in 1967, and it was actually due in December, I think. And it has been found out what they were getting into and they're taken a lot longer. Alsop--this article, I think, has infuriated me more than most I have seen, not so much because I'm shocked at the inaccuracies in it, but because you don't expect somebody like Alsop to write things like this.

G: I think for the benefit of the tape we should say what the article [says]. Perhaps you'd like to sum it up, as to what it said.

P: He implies in this column that the only reason that President Nixon is extending the Office of Economic Opportunity is that he's afraid

that if he closed it down, there'd be riots in the streets by all the people that we are funding. He says, to be blunt about it, that straight blackmail payments to individuals and groups have been a rather common practice in the Office of Economic Opportunity almost since the famous War on Poverty began. This is just very erroneous, which is about the mildest word that I can use. Interestingly enough, the number of examples that he had in here, most of them aren't even OEO programs. They are Labor Department programs. Yet anything that has a poverty label, of course, finds its way back to OEO whether it's ours or not. He refers to this GAO study. He said, "Before very long a special report by the General Accounting Office is due to take the lid off of a lot that has been going on behind the well-intentioned facade of the war on poverty with fairly sensational effects. Thereafter, one can expect a rolling series of revelations by grand jury presentations and indictments by other governmental and Congressional investigations and the like." Well, Mr. Alsop is going to be sadly disillusioned when this GAO report comes out because it doesn't have anything like that in it. It's critical of a lot we're doing, but in a programmatic sense, and does not provide the ammunition for his rolling series of revelations and grand jury indictments. It's simply not there. So I don't know--Harding wrote him a letter. Are you aware of that?

G: No.

P: He wrote him a letter to complain about the column, and Alsop wrote back and said that what he had said was true, so there wasn't any

point in arguing about it. He used the word, said what we were paying was danegeld. Have you ever heard of that?

G: Yes.

P: Which I thought was fascinating.

G: Shades of King Canute.

P: Yes.

G: I remember going back over the, I think it was 1966 or 1967, GAO report on one of the Job Corps centers, it may have been a complete Job Corps investigation. One of the difficulties in a report of this kind is that it usually takes a long time for the investigation to be made, and then by the time the report is published, many of the criticisms that they might have in the report have already been tended to by the agency.

P: That's right. That's true. There are two things wrong with a GAO approach to matters, and that's one of them. Quite often what they're attacking is six-eight months-ayear in the past, and it's awfully difficult to respond to something like this when it comes out and looks to be a fresh revelation of inadequacies.

The other defect in the GAO approach is that it inherently takes the negative--find out what's wrong instead of what's right. Now, you can't quarrel with this. That's their job. They go in and they look and they see where things have gone wrong, and they write it up this way. And therefore when you get--I guess this is something that happens in any internal auditing operation; they don't tell you what you're doing right, they tell you what you're doing wrong. When you

get a book or paper that shows all the things that you're doing wrong, to the casual reader it presents a rather startling picture. And the problem with GAO's evaluation of all of OEO was ordered by Congress. GAO had never done anything like this before, this kind of study and evaluation that they were instructed to do on all of OEO. And they proceeded by contracting out a lot of the work, and a lot of the contractor studies that we have read are quite good. But, unfortunately, when it got into the hands of the people who were going to write the final report, they reverted to their old business of putting everything in a negative sense, and said that we had not achieved perfection here and that we had a limited success there, and these kinds of phrases. I characterized it, when I first read the draft of their report, as telling us how far below a hundred we were rather than how far we'd come from zero. Others in OEO said it was taking the approach of the half-empty glass or the half-full glass.

G: That's the Peace Corps advertisement on television.

P: That's right. So we had quite a few people upset by this negative approach. This became really one of my responsibilities to handle the GAO report as far as our reaction to it internally. We split up the pieces of the report among the program offices and asked them to write brief reactions to the conclusions and the findings and the recommendations of the report. Once we got those in hand, this was all on a very tight time scale, they were all ready to move, I led a small team over to GAO and we sat down with their officials and went through these matters and left with them our

written comments, which had literally been produced overnight, or twenty-four hours. So they weren't really polished, but they were the best we could do under the time restrictions that we had.

As a matter of fact, I read the report on my way to Dallas. Bert and I were going to Dallas to meet with our regional directors, and each had a copy of this huge binder which provided light reading for us on the way to Dallas. We also subsequently got a copy of their summary chapter . Harding and I went over to visit with Elmer Staats, the controller general and his people--the two of us--and we registered some of our complaints that I had registered the previous day at this larger meeting. And Staats and his people indicated that they recognized this and were attempting to take care of it with a summary chapter which would put things more in perspective. They realized that they hadn't talked about accomplishments. And we had asked for an opportunity to have a response from OEO included in the report itself. They agreed to this, but only in the sense that we could respond to their summary chapter; we would not have another crack at the body of the report. So subsequently we got a copy of the summary chapter. I think we got it last Thursday or Wednesday. We prepared again overnight a response, a hard hitting response to this. Actually the summary chapter wasn't too bad. It was much better than the tone of the rest of the report. But we were somewhat at a difficulty there in responding to the summary chapter which wasn't too bad, and we had a feeling that the rest of the book was going to be horrible. But nevertheless a very hard hitting

chapter was prepared. Harding and I took it over in to Staats on Thursday morning, and it was greeted with horror by the GAO people who thought that it was accusing them of very nefarious acts and bad faith and poor motivation and poor methodology, all kinds of dastardly crimes.

G: Who in OEO prepared that response?

P: Herb Kramer had done the first draft of it, and then because we were meeting, we didn't have time to do a lot of work on it. We met here in my office in committee and rewrote it. It's a terrible way to write things, but we had no choice.

Staats indicated that if we wanted to stick with this particular version, they couldn't really publish it in their book, but we could use it as a press release if we wanted to, or whatever we wanted to do, but they weren't going to include it. So rather than have an out-and-out fight with GAO, which we wanted to avoid, because they weren't being nasty or really harsh on the program, and they thought in their own way they were doing a fair job, rather than have a head and head encounter like this, we said that we would like to have a chance to rewrite that response, and they gave us until Friday night. So I took it myself and rewrote it personally, and showed it to a few people on Friday and a few changes were made and sent over to them Friday night. My current word is that they have now accepted this as a suitable response which will be included in their report.

G: This then goes to the Congress?

P: That's right. And it'll go to Congress tomorrow or Wednesday.

G: So OEO may make another Joseph Alsop article?

P: Well, if he wants to scout around in there for rolling revelations, he's going to have difficulty.

G: What does this kind of report do in terms of the administration of the programs, or the implementation of the programs?

P: We don't know yet. We're still confused because GAO claims that it has done substantial revision in the body of the report based on our conversations and contributions. Now, only time will tell in the next day or so how extensive those revisions were. So we are somewhat apprehensive about the impact of this study. As I say, those who are looking for scandal aren't going to find it; those who want to find criticisms of all kinds in the program management or evaluation or impact will probably find anything they want to look for. So we don't know how big a stink really this will create, whether it will set off a big hassle in Congress, or whether it will be a one-day sensation and that will be the end of it.

G: Is that kind of a report a duplication of effort? Isn't OEO one of the most investigated agencies in government?

P: I wouldn't be at all surprised. God knows, we spent an awful lot of our time over the last four-and-a-half years answering people. The Senate McClellan committee, for example, has a staff member on the premises here for an indefinite period. I don't know what he's after, but he's located in the building right now.

G: You mean he's being housed by OEO?

P: Oh, yes. And I find this rather insulting, as a matter of fact, that

we have to be host to this kind of operation.

G: Who pays for the office space?

P: We do, of course. God knows, how much xerox time he is taking up with getting copies of materials. But, yes, we've spent an awful lot of time answering things. That's not to say that a lot of it shouldn't have been answered and the questions shouldn't have been asked. But the reports that we have to prepare for Congress where an individual congressman--we just had a request from a senator wanting information on every grantee we've got, who they are, how much they get, and what their programs have accomplished.

G: Isn't that all on a computer anyway?

P: Yes, so we're going to give him about a foot high stack of the computer run. But it all takes time to collect this information, and that's probably one of the easier responses that we have to make. And then they wonder why we have to have such a large Congressional Relations office.

G: What I was getting at, by that question of duplication, is that this GAO report seems to coincide also with the investigations which were made by the Nixon Administration. I don't think that they operate in a vacuum. It's my understanding that somebody in Brookings Institution--was it Burns--who conducted a study of OEO, and they had to do this in order to come up with a recommendation for the new Administration.

P: Well, the Nathan report, yes. There have been all kinds of task forces operating on OEO, some of which we've been asked to participate

in; others, like the Nathan report, that we have absolutely nothing to do with. So there are all kinds of material extant. We have just done a particularly interesting job, self-evaluation, and this stems from a meeting that we had with Moynihan a few weeks ago who came over and spent some time with our senior staff.

G: Wasn't this the first contact between the Nixon Administration and OEO?

P: No, it wasn't the first contact, but it stemmed from conversations that Harding and Moynihan had. Harding invited him over to sit down with our senior staff and we'll give and take. But in that, he said, "Why don't you"--he was following this line of don't be afraid to say where things have gone wrong, not only just what's right but what have you learned, he said, "Why don't you try to look at your programs in this way, what you've really accomplished, and what you've learned." Well, I took that up, figuring that some of our program people would probably start firing off memoranda to Moynihan on the score. I tried to organize a response rather than have it done piecemeal. And as a result, we've come up with a book that's based on a series of headings like initial assumptions: what led to development of a particular program; what did we assume; and proof of these assumptions;did they prove out; what success did we have; what were the failures and modifications resulting from this experience; what's the unfinished business.

Following this format, we applied it to each of our program areas, not only the major ones--Job Corps, VISTA, and Community

Action, but then the break out of health and legal services and manpower and education, all of these areas. It's a very difficult thing for people to do, to go back and look at how they've changed their minds and where they felt they had failed, but we persisted in this. And after several rewritings we've got, I think, a very interesting document which we're going to use quite heavily in preparation of our Congressional justification this year. We haven't given it to Moynihan yet, as a matter of fact.

G: Isn't this kind of exercise done regularly in RRP&E?

P: Not regularly, no. They didn't handle this. We had it done by the programs--

G: I was thinking of the kind of evaluation of the kind of response that Moynihan was seeking. There's certainly no whitewashing done within OEO on evaluating programs.

P: No, they do evaluate programs, but it has never been done in this particular way before. Just to try to encompass the whole four-and-a-half year period and bring out the distillate really and bring out the essence of where the failures had been.

G: What have been the drawbacks or what do you conceive would be the drawbacks in spinning off certain programs? You were in the Office of Intergovernmental Relations where you had quite a bit to do with the delegation of certain OEO programs to other agencies. Is there a resistance to spinning off a program in OEO? Is there a need to guarantee?

P: The resistance is based on several reasons. I guess, one of the

most popular and most visible reasons is that if we spin off all our popular programs, we're left with nothing but trouble. If you take Head Start away, which has given OEO considerable protection over the years, and take away Legal Services and health centers and these good programs that conceivably could stand on their own if they were under someone else's tent today, you'd just leave OEO with the almost impossible political problem of running Community Action agencies. And this agency just couldn't survive if that were its only task. So there is the reason.

The other reason that is more important to me is the assurance that programs will continue to be operated for the poor. And had a spin-off taken place early in the game, I'm quite convinced that that emphasis, that focus, would have been lost. We've always had to fight this tendency of our programs becoming middle-class programs in getting away from the poorest of the poor. Had these programs gone to other agencies early in the game, I'm sure that would have taken place very rapidly. And so there was that focus.

There was also the Community Action agency linkage that we were quite concerned about. We had tried to build into every program that the CAA is the presumptive sponsor of this program. And until you get that well established, you're just courting disaster if you spin programs off too early. So I think we're at the stage where this can be done now. But, again, you have to look at it in terms of what's left and what the justification is then for a continuation of an OEO.

G: Do you know personally the White House or the White House staff's attitude on this question of spinning-off programs?

P: My guess would be that they would like to have found a way to dismantle OEO, but they couldn't do it once they got into it and saw the complications and problems, the complexity of our relationships with communities and with public officials and with the other departments. It isn't something that they could just do with a wave of a wand. It's going to take a lot of time. And I think they've also found out the flexibility that we have in our legislation is a very helpful thing when you want to get something done in a hurry.

G: Are you talking about the Johnson White House?

P: No, I'm talking about the Nixon White House.

G: Let me rephrase the question then. While Johnson was President, would you have had any idea what his response would have been, or what his attitude would have been, or his staff's attitude?

P: No, the staff was quite protective of OEO, and they helped us resist raids from other departments. I think we were getting close to say a spin-off of Head Start. I think that would have happened, whether it was Nixon or Humphrey, it would have come.

G: Head Start to where?

P: It would have gone to HEW, but where in HEW, I don't, no one knows yet.

G: But certainly not along the lines of the Dominick amendment?

P: Oh, no. But I think we all felt that we probably couldn't survive another Congressional effort to move Head Start. It would have

happened the next time around, and so we'd better get busy and do it on their own terms.

G: How would you assess the kind of impact that OEO has had from your experiences here, and your observations of the OEO program?

P: I guess you'd have to define the word impact on whom.

G: In terms of institutional change. You've seen quite a bit of discussion of that. But also in terms of the changes in government within the government. Or, for example, just in the simple mission of overcoming poverty in the United States.

P: There's no question in my mind that there has been a significant impact in all of those areas. The hardest one to pinpoint is the actual emergence of people from poverty. Now, we can only assume that the accelerated rate at which this has been taking place must be due to the kinds of emphasis on the programs for the poor that OEO has been spearheading. The booming economy, while important, takes a long time to reach the people we are concerned with and just can't really explain the speed with which this has been happening. So therefore we will, I think, justly take credit for that, particularly in the rate with which the non-white have been coming out of poverty.

The impact on other federal agencies is, I think, impressive and obvious to those who live with this business and can see the changes, the willingness of other departments to consider not only the needs of the poor, but to consider the participation of the poor. This has become standard. The willingness of the existing programs to put more of their resources into reaching the poor rather

than simply upgrading the not-so-poor. Certainly the impact on communities is without question. We've had mayors tell us that if they didn't have Community Action agencies they'd have to invent them, because they have to have a means of expressing, of listening to the voice of the people which they never had before. So I feel that at all levels the general awareness of the fact that poverty exists today--it has always existed, we didn't discover anything new. There's quite a parallel actually between what we did and what's being done right now with this hunger investigation--

Tape 2 of 2,

P: The current investigation that a number of Senators are conducting into the problems of hunger around the country--quite an interesting parallel there in my estimation because here again, hunger is nothing new. These conditions have existed for years in this country, yet the attention that's being given to it through political means will, I'm sure, bring about alleviation of these problems with programs to help.

The same sort of thing happened with poverty. By calling attention to it, as was done in the early days of this program, you've gotten people interested in the subject and conditioned and willing to do something about it. I can see the day, I hope, when we'll have more of this, when people will look into housing conditions. God knows there's terribly ghastly housing conditions all over this country, and so perhaps some senators will take off on that, or

nutrition, well, that's under hunger, but health matters. So all things grow up really in a political context. The door is opened to them for reasons that have really not a great deal to do with the need or the need is not suddenly created.

G: How instrumental would you say that OEO has been in its didactic role of educating not only the American people but the Congress to take these kinds of problems and these kinds of needs?

P: I think it has been quite effective. I think it had to be or we wouldn't have existed. The more attention that has been called to it, the more is realized that something had to be done; and in turn you are then able to get the resources for doing the job. The danger is that you cause so much trouble while you're calling attention to these rather explosive items that you turn people off [so] that they no longer will support the work you're doing. So this is why we're quite concerned about the controversial aspects of the poverty program, and why we have to keep a hold on some of our own people within OEO who want to go out on their white charger and lance at the level and are ready to slay all the dragons. We point out to them that while they're working on that dragon they're going to be devoured by somebody else, and there's no percentage in taking on the whole fight here if the net result is that you lose the program.

G: Do you have many of these types in OEO?

P: Not so many as there used to be in the early days. Now, they were good. They were necessary, because they had the imagination and the

enthusiasm. And you still need them. But you have to be able to control their actions or they're going to plant the seeds that lead to your own destruction. So I think we've been successful in calming a lot of them down.

G: You were talking about the recent interest in the problem of nutrition and hunger in the United States. I think McGovern is one of those who's pushing that right now. As I recall back in 1966, as early as 1966, Senators Clark and Kennedy were making these kinds of revelations to the American public, and OEO had a role in that, as I recall. Do you feel that it's simply a matter of political timing, that the time has to be ripe for these kinds of needs to be so exaggerated as to call forth political action?

P: Oh, yes. There's no question that the timing is important. I think that the poverty program is an example of that. It really came into being in those rather awful moments following the Kennedy assassination and the new Johnson Administration. One can't really predict what would have happened if Kennedy himself had lived and had proposed this program. I don't think it would have happened, certainly not as fast as it did, because he wasn't really having a great deal of luck with his domestic programs; and something as controversial as this being added to the others that he was trying to get through Congress, I just don't believe it would have happened. But the timing and circumstances were such that it could happen with Johnson.

G: I'm not sure whether you want to answer this question, but it's one that occurs to me, and I'd like to ask it. And that is, at the beginning

OEO was very much a product of the Kennedy, at least, the research and the investigation and the evaluations and the proposals had been done under Jack Kennedy's Administration. And at the beginning, there were a lot of people who were obviously identified with the Kennedy Administration who were involved either in the task force or the beginning stages of OEO. Has there been any continuity of this kind of an identification being transferred, let's say, to Bobby Kennedy?

P: No, I don't think so. You mean in terms of a relationship existing between OEO staff and--?

G: It could either be that or I'm thinking that Bobby Kennedy was identified in the public mind with his peculiar constituency of the black, the poor, which is coincidentally OEO's constituency. There may have been staff connections. I'm not sure, that's just--

P: I don't think so. Of course, we don't really know how that would have all turned out. He was exhibiting a considerable degree of attraction in the hinterlands, among the poor and the blacks. And as far as OEO was concerned, though, I don't think that there was any great transference to him as the new guru or spiritual leader of the poverty program. He had, I think, a following within the agency politically. He and McCarthy were the types who would attract a number of our employees. So that existed. But I don't think he was looked to as the new leader, at least as far as OEO was concerned.

G: Is there any way of measuring that kind of support among OEO people? My brief exposure here, for example, I don't think I could have found

anybody who would have supported the Vietnam war. It was very difficult to find anybody who supported Lyndon Johnson within OEO. Do you happen to have any knowledge of this kind of phenomenon?

P: Not in any precise terms. I think you're right, that certainly Vietnam was not a popular subject around OEO. On the other hand, most of us realized that we owed the existence of the agency to President Johnson, and there wasn't much point in attacking him. Because for all the faults, he nevertheless was the chief political backer of this program. Once he withdrew that backing, we were dead.

G: By 1968 could you say that he was the mouth or the hand that fed you?

P: You mean, in the terms of the political campaign and so forth? Well, no, I think after he'd withdrawn from the campaign we went into a certain state of limbo which we have never emerged from yet. We didn't look to him as our supporter particularly, although he certainly was in a position to influence matters. We still had to get our appropriations, and we had a new budget that he was submitting, so we had many opportunities to cause the program serious damage if that had been his desire. But that's a negative way of looking at it. Positively we weren't looking to him for a great deal of support from then on.

G: So you were pleased with what you got.

P: Yes.

G: I just have a couple of final questions. I wonder if you'd like to

sum up, if you can, your impressions of Shriver. You have spoken of him in this interview. How would you sum him up as the former head of the poverty program?

P: I think he was a remarkable man that you don't see very often in political life. His enthusiasm, his intelligence, his persuasiveness were such that I personally am convinced that OEO would not have lasted, probably would not have come into being, certainly in the way that it did, and I doubt whether it could have survived during those early years without somebody like Sarge at the helm. I think there came a time, though, when for the good of the program when it was probably proper that he left, because we did need to settle down into a bureaucracy form that was really overdue , and I just don't think Sarge was capable of presiding over a bureaucracy. So that he certainly more than served his purpose as head of this agency and I think did an excellent job. I think he could have done a better job, should have done a better job, but maybe that's asking for perfection that no one is capable of.

G: By the same token, would you care to recapitulate your impressions of President Johnson and his sponsorship and support for the War on Poverty?

P: That's a very complex order to do. I think his desire to help people was what got him into this. I think he was somewhat chagrined to find what he had done and was disturbed by some of the problems that arose in carrying out this program. Yet every time the chips were down, he was usually there. At one point we were asked by the White House

to prepare a very succinct statement for the President. He was at that time, I think, trying to--I don't know quite what the exercise was in the White House, but they were putting together a list of the ten greatest social programs accomplished in this country in its history. And we were asked to submit a brief paper on OEO for this. I don't know what ever happened to that at the White House, but at least we were considered in that context, whether this was the President's doing or staff assumption, I have no idea. But he had a rather schizophrenic attitude toward us, I think. He loved us and he was repelled by us at the same time. I just don't know what went on in his mind. He was a very strange man. I was recalling his demand for loyalty, demand of his people for loyalty to the President. I was the recipient of this on two occasions: once, when I first came to OEO, I was called over for the Marvin Watson treatment at which time it was explained how important it was for members of the President's Executive staff throughout the government to be loyal to what he holds dear, so I accepted that all right. But then the next time I was called over there was to be told of my nomination as deputy director, and I was questioned at some length as to the attitudes of people in the agency on Vietnam. Not individual people by name, but I thought this was going a little too far, that we had the loyalty pill--

G: This wasn't after the VISTA Volunteers ganged up in New York, I think it was, and signed a petition using the name VISTA opposing the war in Vietnam?

P: No, I don't think this was anything [specific]. I think that this was something he did to everybody that he nominated. And I tried to be reasonably honest about it. I said, well, as a matter of fact, we don't really discuss it at length in OEO, which is true. It wasn't a subject of continual conversation.

G: Of what relevance is it, though?

P: This is what I couldn't really understand, and I conceded that we did not stand in the halls daily and every morning salute the President's picture and pledge allegiance to the flag. But apparently this wasn't held against me. I was nominated anyway, but I was a little irritated by this.

G: Was this Marvin Watson doing the questioning?

P: No, it was Jim Jones at this time who had succeeded Marvin Waton. He seemed a little embarrassed by the whole thing. I don't know what brings this on, but apparently the President had something of a complex that everyone was plotting against him throughout the government. I suppose the Vietnam thing. And it made him even more sensitive than he normally was. But this was the sort of thing that was going on. And to my knowledge and from other people I've talked to, it wasn't just limited to OEO.

G: Is there anything you'd like to add to this tape?

P: I suppose there's a great deal of specifics that come to mind from time to time, but I think we've pretty well covered it.

G: I have one last question then. You mentioned earlier on the first tape, the first interview that we had, that you came to OEO with some

apprehension, that you didn't want to come to OEO at the very beginning because of some of the things that had been going on here. Do you regret having come to OEO, after three years of being here?

P: No, not at all. It hasn't been an easy time, thinking back, and I haven't had as much personal enjoyment out of it as I had at the Senate, but in terms of what I think we have been working toward, it has been a lot more meaningful. You can see action here that you couldn't see on the Hill. You can pass a bill, but that's the last you see of it until you have them back for a hearing. But to pass the bill and then to see it applied, this is an experience that I found extremely helpful. It has given me a new perspective on Congress itself, looking at it from this angle. Certainly the year I've had now in the administration of a program is something that I never expected to get, and have found very valuable to me personally. So, all in all, I have no regrets. I think it's time I leave though.

G: Thank you very, very much.

[End of Tape 2 of 2 and Interview II]

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE
LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON LIBRARY

Legal Agreement Pertaining to the Oral History Interview of C. Robert Perrin

In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code and subject to the terms and conditions hereinafter set forth, I, C. Robert Perrin of Washington, D.C. do hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America all my rights, title, and interest in the tape recordings and transcripts of personal interviews conducted on March 10 and March 17, 1969 in Washington, D.C. and prepared for deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

(1) The transcripts shall be available for use by researchers as soon as they have been deposited in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

(2) The tape recordings shall be available to those researchers who have access to the transcripts.

(3) I hereby assign to the United States Government all copyright I may have in the interview transcripts and tapes.

(4) Copies of the transcripts and the tape recordings may be provided by the Library to researchers upon request.

(5) Copies of the transcripts and tape recordings may be deposited in or loaned to institutions other than the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

C. Robert Perrin
Donor

July 22, 1977
Date

James B. Rhoads
Archivist of the United States

August 10, 1977
Date