INTERVIEW V

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INTERVIEWEE: SARGENT SHRIVER

INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette

PLACE: Mr. Shriver's office, Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 1, Side 1

G: Let's begin, if we may, with a discussion of your legislative efforts. You had the House Education and Labor Committee on the one side and then the Senate Labor Committee on the other. Of course, Adam Clayton Powell chaired the House committee. Was there anything unique about your dealings with Powell, a very mercurial guy?

S: Adam Clayton Powell was, to use your phrase, a very mercurial person. In his day, I think it would be fair to say that he was probably the most conspicuous spokesperson for black people in this country, especially from a legal or legislative point of view. In the Congress of the United States there were a number of black congressmen, but Adam was by far the most eloquent, the most charismatic, the most ambitious, most colorful, and therefore the most newsworthy of all the black congressmen. There was a man there who was senior to him, I think, namely William Dawson from Chicago, but Dawson was an insider-type of politician, very effective internally and very effective in Chicago. But he was not a public figure in any sense the way Adam Clayton Powell was. Adam Clayton Powell was not only a successful congressman but he was also the minister of the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem. And the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem was the most famous church in Harlem, and membership in churches and attendance at church services is an element of life among black people in our country which transcends the church activities of most white people. So to be a big leader in the church as a black man gave Adam Clayton Powell a tremendous foundation for his political activities. Now, so far as the War on Poverty was concerned, Adam was instinctively in favor of a struggle to help people who were poor. A huge percentage of his constituents were poor.

So he was open, he was ready; he was, as I say, prone to support an outstanding war against poverty, and that certainly was his original position with respect to the OEO legislation.

Secondly, I think like most politicians he wanted the War on Poverty to be handled in a politically astute way, and we were not always that astute in the sense of considering all of the political ramifications of everything that we did. In fact, we were maybe either naive or focused on elements beyond the sheer politics of what we did. And as a consequence after I'd say a year or two of our operation, Adam became highly critical of me personally and of some of the things we were doing.

Moreover, we didn't give politicians control over where the money was spent or how much was spent, and that's in some cases almost a fatal flaw, because money is the mother's milk of politics--some eloquent person from Texas probably said it. And we were not sufficiently sensitive to that or even if we knew it, we were not following that dictum. We put the money where we thought the problem was without regard to politics. So as a consequence we had a lot of political problems, and we began to have political problems with Adam because Adam in a sense did not control where the money was going to be spent in Harlem, which was his area. And that's a very bad way to deal with politicians, that is to put money into the state--let's say you have a governor--where the governor doesn't control where it's going to spent in his state. And [we] had a lot of trouble with Governor Connally of Texas in that regard. So it isn't a direct criticism at all of Adam Clayton Powell that he reacted like Governor Connally of Texas, it just is a fact that if you're spending public money as we were and we decided to spend it in the suburbs of, let's just say Tuscaloosa, Alabama, because there's a problem there, and we decided to do that and we spend it there and we don't consult with the governor of Alabama or even the mayor of Tuscaloosa, we just intervene directly to the problem, that causes political troubles normally in our society.

But we were sufficiently naive, or egotistical, or whatever critical word you want to use about us, that we attempted to use every dollar to its maximum effectiveness by putting the money where the problem was and not dispersing it generally, but focusing it. And once you focus it, that's a value judgment, and we were making those value judgments. And therefore spending money in a certain part of Syracuse, for example, without respect to what the mayor of Syracuse might have thought--we not only had trouble with Adam that way, we had trouble with everybody. Mayor Daley was angry--the mayor of Chicago was a good friend of mine--that we would decide to spend money in a certain part of Chicago and then give it to people in that area of Chicago to spend, federal money, and he, the mayor of Chicago, didn't have anything to say about where it was spent or who was spending it. That's very bad politics.

G: Was there any particular situation in Chicago? Was it the Woodlawn Rangers?

S: The gangs, yes. Sure.

G: He had not signed off on that?

S: We didn't get sign-offs.

G: But he hadn't even been aware that this was where the money was going to go, or approved it?

S: Not in the sense of having been consulted or having participated in the decision. One could say that we were very egotistical in that we did it that way, or you could say that we were like a medical doctor. Let's say you go to the doctor and you tell him you feel terrible and then he makes tests on you and he says, "The real problem with you is that you've got a bad liver." You don't get into an argument with him about the fact that in addition to taking care of your liver he ought to do something about your chest, and your right leg, or your left ear. You turn to the doctor and you say, "Well, doctor, if that's what's causing the trouble, let's work on my liver." Right?

Well, we took that attitude. We would make the study and we would decide what was causing the problem of poverty, let's say, in a particular place and whether there was something we could do about that. Obviously, there was plenty of poverty we couldn't do anything about. But then we would decide that what we had in the way of a medicine, to continue that analogy, that that medicine would work in this part of West Virginia. That medicine wouldn't work at all in Harlem. But we decided that.

G: Well, how did Daley react in this situation?

S: Well, he didn't like it.

G: Did he go to the President or did he go directly to you?

S: No. I'm not certain, but I think he did talk to President Johnson about it at one time or another, and Governor Connally did, and plenty of mayors did. The mayor of Oakland, California, the mayor of Newark, New Jersey, the mayor of Syracuse--it wasn't political, you understand. They reacted--and not all of them reacted that way. And I want to give you one from Texas which always interested me, and that was Dallas.

There was a very, very distinguished businessman at that time who had become mayor of Dallas, and he looked at these problems the way I have described that we looked at them. So when we went into Dallas, to do something in Dallas, instead of being up in arms about what we were doing in Dallas because he hadn't been a part of the decision-making process, he rejoiced and helped us to do things in Dallas better, to help us execute what we thought needed to be done in Dallas. He helped us in Dallas. The result was that in Dallas we had a very good program. Another place that was like that was Cincinnati. And I've always been amused by those two examples because Cincinnati is run by a city manager, not a mayor, and secondly, it's very Republican. And Dallas is very conservative. Lots of people attacked the War on Poverty as being too liberal, but one of the most conservative mayors in America, namely the mayor of Dallas, and one of the most independent-kind of mayors, namely the city manager of Cincinnati, we worked

perfectly with them. From my point of view we worked perfectly with them because they were not politicians in the sense I've been referring [to]; they were people who wanted to achieve a result in Dallas or Cincinnati, and they could see that what we were trying to do in those towns had a chance of achieving a result that they couldn't do locally. Maybe they didn't have the money to do it.

So they were very easy to work with, and some of my best friends who were strong politicians were very angry with what we tried to do. Now Adam was in that media like those other political leaders.

G: Now when some of these complaints came to President Johnson, how did he react?

S: He was terrific, from my point of view. He never ever complained to me. Can you believe that? It's true. He never did. The most I would ever hear was, "Governor Connally's coming up next week and he's going to spend two or three days with us over at the White House, and while he's here he wants to talk to you about the War on Poverty things that you're doing in Texas." So obviously, I'd set aside a morning or whatever was necessary to listen to the Governor and we'd have a very straightforward, back and forth conversation with Governor Connally. He had some people with him, and I had a few people with me. So we had a very good exchange of views. But Governor Connally didn't change us in our decision about what to do, and I'm certain that Governor Connally complained to President Johnson that it was okay for me to listen to him or me and my staff to listen to him, but he wasn't getting any success out of his conversations with us. I think that probably was what he said to Johnson. I'm sure that what we did with Governor Connally, the meetings and decisions we made with respect to Texas, were not--at any rate not all of them--very well received by Governor Connally.

G: The two I guess he was concerned about were the VISTA lawyers and the Gary Job Corps Center. Any insights on the specifics there?

S: No. I can't remember what specifically he was worried about with the VISTA lawyers.

G: I think they were working with Hispanics in the [Rio Grande] Valley, weren't they, organizing--?

S: Sure. I always used to be amused by the fact that if we sent Peace Corps volunteers to Peru to work with the people in the Altiplano of Peru and help them to organize themselves, and to get their production going better and create communes or cooperatives, and then vote and stand up for what they believed in, you know, everybody in the Congress of the United States rejoiced over that. But if we went and did the same thing in Arizona, Senator Goldwater would be up in arms, and the same thing in Texas. The same thing anywhere, because what the political people instinctively know, even before you have the thought yourself, they instinctively know that if you come into a state and you start registering people, telling the citizens of that state that they should register and vote and helping them to get registered and vote, that you're a threat.

Now we were not registering Republicans or registering Democrats; we were trying to develop a sense of personal responsibility on the part of poor people for the conditions where they lived, and to tell them that they could bring about change in the conditions where they lived by doing A, B, C, D, E. Now some of those people had never voted, they didn't have any political power, they were not listened to by anybody because lots of them were Spanish-speaking people, and they were totally cut off from the political process. When we would go in there and tell them about what they ought to do to get some political power for themselves so that the elected officials would listen to them, the elected politicians don't like that. It's obvious; they don't want anybody going in and encouraging persons to become active in politics. We were not encouraging them to be active in politics for the Democratic Party or the Republican Party or the Socialist Party or any party. We were trying to tell them, these are your rights as citizens and the way to make progress for yourself economically and civilly in our country is to become active and fulfill your job as a citizen. There's nothing more normal in a democratic

society than that; technically there's nothing more innocuous. But if you're the elected congressman from that area, you get very worried about how those people are going to vote and you don't want somebody, like say me, coming in and encouraging people to register to vote, using federal tax money to do that, in your district. You didn't authorize an appropriation of federal tax money for some guy named Shriver over there in the War on Poverty to go around getting poor people registered to vote so they could get their fair share. That was never a concept that was approved by Congress.

So when our people who were VISTA volunteers were out trying to mobilize poor people to achieve independence, economically or politically, they were a threat. I'll go back and say [again], the same person who applauds a Peace Corps volunteer doing exactly that in Brazil or Colombia or anywhere else, in Africa, is overcome with hostility to it when it's done where they live. I'm not telling you anything that's surprising. What we're talking about is human nature.

G: Do you think that President Johnson recognized this need often to by-pass the establishment and sort of shake up the local power structure by empowering--?

S: I don't know. I don't know. I never talked to him about that, not because I was reluctant to bring it up, but my theory in running these various programs in Washington was that to take the problems connected with those programs and try to solve them yourself without bothering the President--my theory always was that the President had many, many problems of greater magnitude than the ones I was dealing with and that his time and energy should be reserved for those problems, and the best thing that a bureaucrat can do is to try and solve the problems without bothering the president. I never bothered Kennedy or Johnson or Nixon. My theory was the less you have to bother them, the better you were serving them.

G: [In] the OEO in Syracuse, the Community Action Program was actually placed in some form of trusteeship. Do you recall that and the background of that?

S: I don't recall it in detail, no. But what we did was simply this: when the program actually degenerated to the point where it was not doing what it was supposed to do, we just, as you said, put it into a trusteeship until it could be reorganized. The problem there came from the mayor of that city, whose name I have forgotten momentarily. He was a very strongly entrenched local politician who wanted to run the program in his city the way he thought it ought to be run without regard to what the federal government thought.
See, the normal process in our country is if you have federal money to be spent in a particular state, then the first person you talk to, or the first persons, are at the gubernatorial level, the state government. Then you work out with them how that money is to be distributed in that state, and then they decide that so much is going to go to Houston, so much to Dallas, et cetera. The War on Poverty was not organized that way at all. We were not instructed to conduct a program of universal applicability everywhere in the United States. We were not instructed to go out and make sure that everybody got their fair share of the money appropriated by Congress; that wasn't what we were told to do. We were told to go out and wage a war to eliminate poverty. That meant you had to go where poverty was and deal with it where it is, so that you could go into a state and concentrate maybe all of your money, practically all of your money, in one place in that state or two or three places and completely eschew doing anything anywhere else in the state.

Normally, federal money is not spent that way nor is state money spent that way. If you raise money in a state through taxes for a certain purpose, it usually is spread over the state so that everybody benefits from the expenditure. Well, that wasn't our mission. We were prejudiced in favor of doing something for poor people. We not only were prejudiced, we were ordered to do it for poor people. So, for example, when we started the Head Start program, it was only for poor people, and a lot of people who were close to being poor resented it very much, that those children of very poor people were getting this

extra help and our children were not getting any help. Now that's not easy. So let's say, in those days, the income level was four thousand dollars. You had four thousand dollars and four kids, and across the street there's a guy who has seven thousand dollars, six thousand dollars, he's working his hands off, his wife is killing herself and he's got four kids. Now he sees your four kids, my four kids, getting this extra help through Head Start and right across the street, his kids can't get into Head Start. The Head Start kid is getting free medical examinations, the Head Start kid is getting food, the Head Start kid is getting extra education and his kids can't get it. Why not? Simply because he's got six thousand dollars a year and you've got four. Well, I only have to tell you as an example to illustrate that that is the seed of trouble for a political leader, because the political leader in that district wants the vote of both those guys.

Secondly, the fellow who only has four thousand dollars a year is usually looked down upon by the guy who has six, seven or eight thousand. The guy who has six, seven or eight thousand has a tendency to say, "That guy who's only got four is a bum. He's stupid. He doesn't work hard; he spends all of his money drinking." You understand what I mean?

So here I am, I'm the guy who's working hard and I'm making seven thousand dollars a year and I've got no help. Across the street there's a drunk who's got four thousand dollars a year and four kids, or he's black and he's got six kids, and he's getting a lot of help. And I'm over here, I've only got two kids and I'm getting nothing. I think it's obvious that that, politically speaking, is a situation fraught with trouble. And of course we had that trouble everywhere. In Texas or Alabama or New York, wherever you do that, you're in trouble.

G: What is the solution?

S: I don't know that there is a solution. My own belief is simplistic. I think if you're going to operate a war against poverty, everybody who's not poor has to understand that the money you're spending is to eliminate poverty.

For example, AIDS. We've got this AIDS epidemic now. The federal government is spending I think maybe now billions of dollars to fight AIDS. But it's not spending billions of dollars to fight certain other diseases. Now some people could complain that, "By God, we're spending too much on AIDS and not enough on"--I don't care what, some other disease. Because AIDS is something everybody is interested in right now. Therefore the apportionment of federal money at the National Institutes of Health is, how much goes into studying heart disease, how much goes into studying lung disease, how much goes into working for children, *et cetera*. Those are usually political decisions.

I'll give you an illustration. Until my wife got President Kennedy to open up something called the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development in 1961, there never was a research institute at the National Institutes of Health focused on the problems of women and children. Nothing. Why not? I always said to myself it must be because in the Senate and the House 98 per cent of the people are men. So they wanted to have the diseases that men die from, especially old men, the subject of a lot of research out there. So what did we spend the money on? Well, we spent the money on heart and lung, cancer, things that normally older people die from. And there wasn't one place out there where the particular medical problems of women were focused upon at all. Zero. I'm telling you, zero. And there was nothing for children, nothing until 1961.

So these discriminatory activities go on in any society, at any time, and there are always these areas where nothing is being done and something should be done. But you can't wage a war on poverty by simply taking the money the Congress gives you and distributing it across all the people in the country; that's not a war against poverty. It's as

if you said to Eisenhower, "Here are three million men. Use them in Europe." Well, he decides he's going to attack [a] Normandy beach at a certain time with two million of those men. He doesn't distribute them all down the coast of France or Germany, he has to focus them to get a certain result. We understand that in warfare; we don't understand it in social programs, or we don't understand it deeply enough. But that's the problem. That was one of the problems with a war against poverty.

G: Did Adam Clayton Powell, because of his position as chairman of the committee, try to essentially hold the legislation hostage in order to get money or control of the program in his district?

S: I can't say that to be true. First of all, my memory isn't that good, and secondly, he probably would not have done that unless he felt he could succeed. He may have counted noses up there and figured out he couldn't succeed with that kind of a limitation and therefore not attempted to force it. But the truth is what I'm now talking about is speculation; I cannot remember. There are some people probably who were in the war against poverty like Jack Conway, who ran the Community Action Program for a number of years, he probably would remember.

One of the best people, unfortunately, in terms of remembering would be Gillis Long, the former congressman who was in charge of congressional relations for me, and brilliant at it. He understood the Congress so well. He was a courageous fellow, and men like him save people like me a million problems. I don't know now as much as he knew when he was forty years old. He was just very, very good on politics and very good on the Congress.

G: Former House member from Louisiana.

S: Louisiana. And he came over and he was our first director of congressional relations. He was a godsend, terrific fellow. Courageous, intelligent, clean.

G: This was a year, I guess 1965, when Long was in that spot, where the southerners would criticize OEO publicly and yet privately lend support to the program.

S: That's right.

G: One of them even came out with a statement, "Let's don't spin off these programs. Let's keep all the trash in one pile."

S: (Laughter) I'd forgotten that. I love those southern politicians, I really do. They have such a great way of describing what the reality is from their point of view, from a political point of view. Who said that?

G: Let's see, who was it? I think it was perhaps [Rep. Joe D.] Waggoner.

In your dealings with these people, would they on the one hand offer complaints, [and] on the other indicate that they were willing to go along with the program? Did you sense that there was sort of a dualism? That they had to do so much posturing for their constituents and yet--?

S: There were some of them who were really adamantly opposed to what we were doing, and a number of them had very substantive foundations for their opposition. I admired them very much. They were diametrically opposed to what I thought ought to be done for the United States, but they had intelligent positions and they adhered to their positions with great loyalty to what they believed. And some of them were southerners. I never had any difficulty in dealing with people who were philosophically or doctrinally opposed to what I was attempting to do. I respected them for their position and I actually enjoyed them, because a lot of them were quite intelligent and had a different idea about what ought to be done than I did. What I was doing wasn't my idea; I was trying to carry on something for the president of the United States. But I like people who are clear and clean and opposed to you, that's okay. The ones I don't like are the ones who vacillate or wiggle around in the middle, and you don't know where they're coming from or what they're likely to do. And there were some of them who would attack you publicly but

quietly say, "Go ahead and do what you're doing." So there's all different shades of people in the Congress just as there are different shades of people in the population of our country. To the extent that Congress really represents the people--which I think it does--in the Congress you get this microcosm of the entire country. That's why it's so interesting to work with the Congress on any problem.

G: Describe your efforts to mobilize the mayors on behalf of the War on Poverty.

S: A question like that is a very big question and I'm sorry to say I haven't had any time to reflect on an answer, but let me just try to recall some things and maybe be helpful to you.

Point number one is this: Most of the poor people in America were in cities. Now that doesn't mean there was no poverty in West Virginia or other rural areas of the country; there was. But a huge proportion of the poorest of the poor were in cities. That meant that we had to deal in those geographical areas where mayors were very important. I understood that right from the beginning because I had been in Chicago. In Chicago I was president of the Chicago Board of Education, and I had been working with the inner-city problems for five or six years before I ever came to Washington, and I knew the mayors of Chicago very well and respected them and knew about the difficulties of doing something for poor people in these big urban areas. Whether it was educational or police protection or cleanliness or health, I was sensitive to those problems in the cities. I thought then, and I think now, that we are not going to be a successful society unless we solve those problems in the cities. That's where we have the troubles in our country, in my judgment. And I'm sorry to say, I think most of those problems are still unsolved. I'm very sympathetic with the mayors right today who are protesting about the lack of federal funds to deal with the problems of the cities. So I am prejudiced in favor of mayors and I'm prejudiced in favor of cities because that's where the problems are. With respect to the war against poverty there are cities and cities. Some cities are better off than other

cities, and some parts of cities are much better off than other parts of cities. So we had to decide which cities to go into and what parts of what cities to go into.

Now when you do that from the federal level and then execute it within the city, you run into the problem I was attempting to describe a minute ago. You run into the problem that the mayor himself is the mayor of the whole city, and it takes a very broad-minded, far-sighted mayor to understand that if you go into a particular part of his town and start throwing money around, so to speak, it upsets other parts of the town. And that causes political problems.

So I went several times to the U.S. Conference of Mayors and gave speeches. I went to groups like the mayors of the big cities--they have a special group, the mayors of the big cities of America--and made speeches and asked for their help. I was attacked by a number of mayors. I'm particularly happy to say I was attacked by two or three mayors who subsequently went to prison; they were just crooks. That's another way to get the temperature, the political health or the moral health of a community, is to go in and try to do something good in the community and find out who opposes it. If you find out who opposes it, you've got a list of who the bad people are in the city.

So we were attacked violently by the Mayor of Oakland, California, for what we were doing in Oakland, and about eighteen months later he went to jail. We were attacked violently by the mayor of Newark, New Jersey, and two years later he went to jail. So there are people out there who oppose you when you're trying to run a program for the federal government, and they oppose you for good reasons, because they're crooks. Then some of them are not crooks, but they have objectives in their political life which are being hurt by efforts such as the war against poverty.

Let's say you're the mayor of a place and you were elected by 54 per cent of the vote or 53 per cent of the vote, and the War on Poverty comes in there and starts, quote, “empowering poor people,” telling them how to vote, encouraging them to vote, to be

better citizens. Those people may end up by voting against you, and that type of political activity as part of an effort to eliminate poverty arouses the absolute opposition of anybody who is already in office. But you can't hope to overcome poverty if you don't give the people who are poor not only economic help but political help and--how shall I say?--a sense of personal pride in themselves. You have to deal with a human being across the board, and in our society people have to feel that they are accepted as a part of the total community: They're accepted economically; they're accepted racially; they're accepted religiously; and they're accepted politically. But that's no good if you're a politician and you get elected, let's say, in narrow elections, close elections. If you're getting elected by a certain group of people and somebody else comes in there and starts mobilizing another group in your community, mobilizing them politically, that's a threat to you. And you say to yourself, "What in the name of God is the federal government doing using our tax money to mobilize people in my community who may end up by voting against me?" That's a perfectly normal reaction. But you can't fight poverty if you don't help people who are poor, and one way you have to help them is by helping them to gain their self-respect, economically speaking, in terms of housing, in terms of food, and in terms of politics.

That's what the slavery problem was all about, [why we] fought the Civil War.

G: Now early in 1966 you resigned as director of the Peace Corps.

S: Yes.

G: Tell me about your decision to do that.

S: Well, it wasn't my decision. There were two things involved: One, we had in the Peace Corps what we called the five-year flush, which I started myself. And that was that nobody could be in the Peace Corps for more than five years, especially guys like myself, the bureaucrats running it. I can give you a long speech about why we proposed that.

There never had been such a thing in the United States government and we had to get the Civil Service Commission to agree, and we got them by a vote of two to three to agree, because that idea was a threat to the whole idea of the civil service, but they allowed us to do it. So in the Peace Corps nobody was allowed to serve for more than five years in a bureaucratic position in the Peace Corps; they had to get out. We called it the five-year flush. I won't take up the time now to tell you why we did it, but that's what we had.

The second thing was that there had been some kind of a newspaper story attacking President Johnson for having me in two jobs, or somebody in the Congress was attacking the OEO on the grounds perhaps that I wasn't able to concentrate on it full time. President Johnson decided just like that, in twenty minutes so to speak, or overnight, that he was going to take me out of one job so that political criticism couldn't be made. Secondly, we had this five-year flush and thank God they happened to coincide. From the first of March 1966 my five years were fulfilled in the Peace Corps, so I was able, so to speak, to resign or get kicked out, whatever you wish, on that due date. On that anniversary date, my five years were filled. And on that day, Johnson relieved me of the Peace Corps responsibilities and put Jack Vaughn in to run it.

Now nobody had much advance notice of that, truthfully. Jack Vaughn--a terrific fellow, but he was assistant secretary of state and he wanted to stay there, although he'd been in the Peace Corps. He wanted to stay there and Johnson said, "No. You've got to give that up and come back here and run the Peace Corps." He wasn't wildly enthusiastic about doing that.

G: My notes suggest that about a year later you tried to resign as head of OEO and LBJ wouldn't accept your resignation.

S: That's right.

G: Can you tell me about the circumstances of that?

S: I want to go back one step and say that I never applied to be the director of OEO. When we first started OEO, I gave President Johnson--I can't remember if it was four or five names of very distinguished Americans that I thought would be excellent people to run OEO. I thought they knew a lot more about the problem of poverty, they had experience which was more relevant to it than I had, and that he would be wise to pick one of them. I mentioned that only to indicate that I was not a political person aspiring to that job from the very beginning. Johnson insisted that I run the War on Poverty regardless of the fact that I gave him four damned good names of people to run it. When I actually ended up by leaving the War on Poverty, again my feeling was that President Johnson ought to have--he had it but I thought he ought to exercise the power, to put somebody else in there to run the War on Poverty because he was getting shellacked all the time by opponents. He was getting criticized by opponents of the war against poverty. He's the president of the United States; he's the guy who has to run for political office. I wasn't the president of the United States and I didn't have to run for political office, so why not get rid of me? So I encouraged him to do that.

I was told--I don't know whether this is true or not; I guess I never will know--that if I quit that Johnson would just fold the whole thing up and take whatever we were doing and just distribute it through the other divisions of the federal government and close up OEO. Now as I say, I don't know whether that's true or not. I think maybe it was true. I guess I was conspicuous enough so that a certain amount of brickbats could be thrown at me, which if I weren't there might get thrown at the President. So I may be able to deflect some criticism from him.

G: And is it correct that he simply would not let you resign?

S: That's right, he wouldn't. And then the last year, I guess it was 1967 when I tried to get out, he said, "Well, Sarge, you can get out, but if you get out, we're just going to close it up."

G: Did he say that?

S: Sure. So I'm not absolutely certain of why he took that position, but the President, one has to remember, was under terrific fire from all different parts of the American population, and he was so preoccupied by the war in Vietnam that I guess you could say if I wasn't there to take the heat or the brickbats, he wasn't going to accept all those additional brickbats to be thrown at him. I guess also he probably figured that at that time it would be very hard to get a really good person to take on that job, because the political heat was so intense in 1967-68 on account of the war in Vietnam.

G: Now one of the rounds of brickbats, criticisms, came at that Crusade against Poverty Convention in Washington. Remember when you went and spoke?

S: I had forgotten about that.

G: Tell me about that.

S: I don't remember very much about it--

G: Citizen's Crusade--

S: --except that it was a hostile group. I went over--it was in a hotel up here; I can't remember the name of the hotel--to give a speech and I had to have about three guys walking in front of me and three on each side to get into the place. It was a very hostile audience. I can't remember whether I was booed or not.

G: The press accounts indicate that you were booed and that Dick Boone apologized subsequently to you for the--

S: That's probably true. You know what those people were? I think that was that community action group, I think. You probably know this but maybe I ought to just repeat it. There were a group of people who believed that the only way to cure poverty was to empower poor people by giving them political power and economic power, and helping them to assert that power against other elements in the population.

Tape 1 of 1, Side 2

S: [The] Community Action Program was based in some part on that philosophy. A number of the people with the Community Action Program always thought that I was not totally sold on community action as the sole or even the principal way to eliminate poverty, and they were right. I never did think that the community action by itself was the only way to get rid of poverty in any society. What the hell, I could be wrong, but that was what I believed. That's why I started programs like Head Start, or Foster Grandparents. Those were not primarily community action programs, and the people in Community Action were angry, in my own office and around the country, that I was using the War on Poverty money for those programs, which they looked upon as like band-aids, they would say, or palliatives. They don't actually empower people, politically speaking. It's that old-fashioned charity or largesse, helping poor people, but you don't empower them. Community Action wanted to empower them, and since I was not opposed to it--community action--but also did not think it was the only way to eliminate poverty, I incurred the enmity of people who looked upon community action as the sole way to eliminate poverty. So those people were assembled in this convention; they were the community action activists. Dick Boone was one of them. He was the leader of the Community Action Program at that time in our government, yet he I think had some respect at any rate, some friendship also for me, and he was embarrassed that when I went to speak to his cohorts, you might say, that I was booed. That's why I guess he apologized.

G: The *New York Times* reports that in the summer of 1966 you met with LBJ at the Ranch and told him that the War on Poverty was working but it was only reaching half of the people who needed to be reached. Was this a call for expanding it, for more money?

S: Yes. I certainly didn't say it was reaching half the people. It was probably reaching something like a third or a quarter of the people, and we, therefore, had proposed--we had developed a whole budget and it was a matter of the official record--a whole budget for

what we believed was necessary to eliminate poverty over, let's say, a ten-year period. At that time our budget was, let's say, a billion and a half, or a billion seven, something like that. The budget I laid in front of the President was let's say six billion per annum, maybe six, seven, eight billion dollars per annum to eliminate poverty within ten years. And I laid it out to him, I said, "Look, Mr. President, this is what is needed financially to eliminate poverty in our country. With this amount of money, I think we really hold out the hope of eliminating poverty over a ten-year period."

Well, that was at the time that the war in Vietnam was heating up and taking a lot of money, and the President said, "Sarge, we can't go from a program of one billion or one billion and a half to a program of six billion. You can't do that. In Congress, you have to go by increments. Maybe we can go up another 150 or 250 million dollars, but we can't go from one billion to five billion overnight."

In addition to his decision that that was politically impossible, there was also the fact that the demands on the treasury for the war in Vietnam made it economically impractical at that time.

G: Did he explain that this was part of the problem too?

S: No. But you didn't have to be very smart to know that was part of the problem.

The fundamental thing is that we never had enough money to defeat poverty. Of course, one of the objections to the statement I just made is made by people like George Will or other conservatives saying, "All Shriver or the people in the War on Poverty were interested in was throwing money at the problem." That was a cliché of those days. That is a calumny for which there is no foundation whatsoever. One of the things I was always frankly quite proud of was that in the War on Poverty every program required a poor person to do something to get any benefit from the program. They in a sense had to volunteer. For example, in the Job Corps, nobody was drafted into the Job Corps. Young men and women had to look at the opportunity offered by the Job Corps and volunteer;

leave their home and go someplace, subject themselves to a year or two of tough discipline for those people, a lot of training; and they had to have the guts and determination to see that through to a successful end. That's what I was trying to get from them, that internal commitment to do something to help themselves. And everything in the War on Poverty was on that basis. That's where we got that slogan, "A hand up, not a handout." The Republicans liked to always say it was a handout because that's an easy thing to accuse Democrats of, handout programs. The War on Poverty was never a handout program and we never handed anybody anything for nothing. Never. Not a nickel. And that's a fundamental, philosophical fact about the War on Poverty which never gets talked about.

G: You must have encountered a number of individual success stories from these various programs over the years--

S: Oh, God. The country is full of them.

G: --but are there any that are particularly meaningful to you, or memorable?

S: There are literally hundreds, but I couldn't really recall them right now in any order of influence or priority. But to me the number of young men and women whose lives were totally turned around by the Job Corps--and it continues to do that right now--is absolutely miraculous. It's just wonderful. I bump into those people all over the place, Job Corps graduates who are doing very good work in some field or another. When I'm saying I bump into them, there are hundreds of thousands of graduates of the Job Corps working in good jobs in the United States today. You never hear a damned thing about that. But what do they call that? I guess it was the Bureau of the Budget that made a calculation that for every dollar put into the Job Corps the United States taxpayers get back two dollars and fifty cents in taxes, for every buck put in. So it is cost effective. One of the biggest boosters of it is Orrin Hatch, who is a pretty damned right-wing Republican. He sees it working in Utah and he knows it works. So I look upon a

program like that as an incomparable success. What is this? This is 1964. It's twenty-five years old. I can say the same thing about the Head Start program. It's now having its twenty-fifth anniversary. We're having a big celebration this afternoon. That is an incomparable success. A lot of people in pediatrics will tell you that that's the most important program for children every started in the history of the United States. Well, that's a War on Poverty program.

I personally, being a lawyer, have always been extraordinarily pleased by the legal services program. That program has literally saved thousands and thousands of people's lives, not medically speaking, but psychologically and legally and in terms of their citizenship.

Then we have that other program we started, which was health services for the poor. We started that with two programs, one in rural Louisiana and one in the Watts district of Los Angeles. One was run down there in Louisiana by two doctors who came from the Tufts Medical School, went down there and ran it out of a trailer bus. And the one out there in L.A. was run by the USC Medical School for us. That was in Watts. Those were the first two centrally located, slum medical centers in the history of the United States. There are now eight or nine hundred of them, eight or nine hundred of them located right down there where the poor people are, rendering medical service to poor people that never existed in our society. They are an unmitigated one thousand per cent huge success.

I can remember when President Reagan got elected, in the first six months Mrs. Reagan took a great deal of interest in a program called Foster Grandparents, and she wrote a book about it, in fact, in her first year there and said this was her favorite program. I wrote her a letter and thanked her for saying that because, I said, it was very comforting for me because that was something I personally had started in the war against poverty. Within six months, she was out of it and she never said another word about

Foster Grandparents. But Foster Grandparents--despite that little kind of a story--exists today; it does a very good job. I don't know how many people are in Foster Grandparents today but I'm certain they're in the tens of thousands.

I could keep on with a litany like this, but all of those were programs of the War on Poverty. They all exist right now, yet it is a platitude in political parlance to say that the War on Poverty was a failure. There wasn't one program started by the War on Poverty that was a failure; every one of them exists today. The Community Action Program today has nine hundred community action agencies in the United States, and they distribute somewhere around five to six billion dollars a year. That's five times as much as we ever had in the War on Poverty, and they're all working right now while we're talking. It isn't as if they don't exist; it isn't as if they were stopped. They're all right there. Foster Grandparents is there; legal services is there; the community health centers are there; the Job Corps is there. Head Start is there. So where's the failure? The failure is that all of these things are financed much too little. I'm not saying that if they were financed to the maximum that we'd get rid of poverty, but I can tell you one thing, it would be greatly reduced. Nor am I saying that those are the only things that should have been started in a war against poverty. But I do believe that the longevity of them speaks well for the concept, and it seems to me that it illustrates that a majority of people in the United States approve of what those programs have done.

Now [inaudible] from a political point of view. I always get a kick out of it because the same things happened under Roosevelt. The reality is that the Republicans always, it seems to me, catch up about a generation later. And it wasn't until George Bush came along that then they said, "Well, boy, we're going to put more money into Head Start." It's just about twenty-five years after we put the first money into Head Start. It takes about twenty-five years; that's a generation. It takes about twenty-five years for persons who are skeptical to begin with or who have a tendency to be Republicans, by

which I mean they don't want to try new things; they don't want to utilize government to try to do new good things for people. They want that to be done by the private sector or individualistically. They don't want government to have a hand in anything. That's been true ever since Franklin Roosevelt; there's nothing new about that. So these various programs that I've just mentioned here in passing, to me they are miraculous survivors. Think of it: They survived Ronald Reagan. I have no hang-ups at all about the War on Poverty and I think Lyndon Johnson and his family and his followers, whoever they are, they ought to take a lot of pride in the fact that when he was president that Head Start was begun.

G: Are there any programs that you did not envision at the time that with the benefit of hindsight you would have liked to have included in War on Poverty?

S: If I just say no it sounds as if I'm egotistical about that. I do want to say no, but I want to explain why I say no. I say no not because I think we did everything that ought to be done. God knows, I don't believe that at all. But there's something about me psychologically that makes it damn near impossible for me to go back and worry about things that we should have done and didn't do. I don't know why that is. I'm constitutionally incapable, I guess it is; I'm incapable of sitting down here with you today or sitting back in my office ruminating about the things we should have done, we didn't do, or the mistakes we made. What the hell, we made a lot of mistakes. The truth is I don't know anybody alive, especially anybody at the national level in any country, that hasn't made a lot of mistakes.

G: Let me rephrase it. If you were sitting down today--

S: What would I do.

G: --to start a new War on Poverty, how would it differ?

S: I don't know. I know just as little about the answer to that question as I knew about the War on Poverty when Lyndon Johnson asked me to start it. I don't want to just seem to

be stupid, but the truth of the matter is that I left the War on Poverty whenever it was, in 1968. This is 1990. That's twenty-two years ago. And in the subsequent twenty-two years I've been busy doing a number of other things. Unfortunately I'm of a psychological structure that prevents me from reliving things that I did and worrying about them or concentrating on going back and talking about them all, because now I'm running the Special Olympics. And I don't think for one minute a month about community action. That's not my business now. You understand what I mean? I'm working twenty-four hours a day trying to make Special Olympics a huge success all over the world, and I love it. It isn't that I dislike those other things; I don't sit here and worry about the Peace Corps. If you ask me what I think, I can tell you I think the Peace Corps ought to be at least three times bigger than it is today, maybe four or five times bigger. It's only a third as big as when I left there in 1965, and when I left there we had thirteen or fourteen thousand volunteers in the Peace Corps. Today they've got six thousand. I think that's a disgrace. I've said so publicly, but am I going to sit here and agitate about that now? If I didn't have anything to do, I would do that, I would agitate about it. Do you understand what I mean? I'm so overoccupied doing something extremely worthwhile, I believe, and exciting, namely the Special Olympics, that I don't have time to fight those old battles. In a sense they're not old battles but--to fight wars that I was in before.

G: To refight the last war.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview V

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Agreement Pertaining to the Oral History Interview of

SARGENT SHRIVER

I, Sargent Shriver, of Potomac, Maryland, or my authorized agent, William Josephson, do hereby, except as provided in paragraph two below, give to the United States of America for deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library, the content of the tape recordings and transcripts of the interviews conducted with me on August 20, and October 23, 1980, July 1, 1982, February 7, 1986, and November 29, 1990.

This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

(1) The tape recordings and transcripts shall be available for listening and researching, respectively, by researchers authorized by the Library.

(2) During my lifetime I retain all copyright in the tape recordings and transcripts.

(3) During my lifetime researchers wishing to copy the tape recordings or transcripts or any part thereof, other than for short "fair use" quotations from the transcript, must first obtain my express consent or that of my authorized agent, William Josephson, in each case.

(4) Copies of the transcripts and the tape recordings shall be deposited by the Library with my papers in the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library where they shall be subject to the terms and conditions as are applicable to those papers.

Sargent Shriver — 4/26/05

Sargent Shriver or Authorized Agent — Date

A. Ma Weinstein — 5/19/05

Archivist of the United States — Date

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April 29, 2005

Ms. Linda M. Seelke
Archivist
Lyndon Baines Johnson Library
2313 Red River Street
Austin, TX 78705-5702

Dear Ms. Seelke:

This is in partial response to your letter of March 29, 2005.

Please include this letter in the Shriver oral history. There are a number of errors in Sarge's recollection as recorded in his oral history that I know from my own knowledge. For example, on pages 15-20 of the August 20, 1980 transcript he describes conversations he had with President Kennedy and Vice President Johnson about the independence of the Peace Corps. I am quite certain that he never took part in those conversations, if only because at the relevant time he was out of the country in India. So far as I know, the meeting between President Kennedy and Vice President Johnson, where President Kennedy overruled the White House staff recommendation from Mr. Ralph Dungan and the position of Budget Director David Bell, Civil Service Commission Chair John Macy and International Cooperation Administration Administrator Henry Labouisse, was entirely between the President and the Vice President with no one else in attendance. The story is well told in Gerry Rice's *The Bold Experiment* pages 65-66 and Scott Stossel's *Sarge* pages 223 to 225.

The long descriptions on pages 23-28 of the August 20, 1980 transcript of Sarge's conversations with President Johnson about the beginnings of Sarge's War on Poverty are probably extremely exaggerated, if not entirely wrong. The story, from my point-of-view, is told in my July 12, 2003 letter to Scott, copy enclosed. Scott tells the story on pages 343-45 of *Sarge*.

In the August 20, 1980 transcript, page 81, I don't think that Sarge's statements are correct about some presidential contingency fund and the amount of money he got out of that for the OEO start-up, compared to the amount of money the President allocated out of the Mutual Security Act contingency fund for the Peace Corps start-up. But I do not remember what the facts were.

In the October 23, 1980 transcript, page 66, if the Steven Smith is Jean Kennedy Smith's husband, that he was in, or even considered for, the Agency for International Development, is certainly news to me. I am not saying it is wrong or right, but I do think it is highly unlikely.

In the July 1, 1982 transcript on page 14, there is a little bit of confusion at the outset about Bill Kelly and Community Action and Bill Kelly and the Job Corps, but I think it gets straightened out.

In the November 29, 1990 transcript on page 19, Sarge has the so-called five-year flush wrong. There was never a Civil Service Commission vote, let alone agreement. John Macy, then Chair of the Civil Service Commission, was opposed to the legislation, as was whoever was then Director of the Bureau of the Budget, probably Kermit Gordon, possibly Charles Schultze. What happened legislatively was that the Peace Corps was taken out of Civil Service, and its personnel system was based instead on the Foreign Service personnel system which was not inconsistent with the so-called five-year flush which was also specifically authorized.

Also in the November 29, 1990 transcript beginning on page 19 and continuing on page 20, there is a little initial confusion about Sarge staying on the Peace Corps and OEO until he went to France in 1968, but the confusion straightens itself out on page 20. Sarge gave up the Peace Corps directorship in the Spring of 1966, but continued as Director of OEO until 1968 when he left for France.

Sincerely,

William Josephson

/jl
Encls.