

State, OEO Meeting for State Involvement In Community Action Programs in Alaska

The State of Alaska is negotiating with the Office of Economic Opportunity for partial state involvement in community action programs, according to a March 10 article in the New York Times.

If an agreement is reached, OEO might be testing Alaska's capacity to conduct rural planning, poverty research and data gathering, and management of Federal manpower training funds.

And, if so, RurAL CAP will probably be affected for much of the OEO money in Alaska is received by the agency.

According to the Times story, Alaska is one of 15 states now in such negotiations with OEO.

An announcement on the first experiment of this type was reported to be coming soon and is to be in Oklahoma.

Outsiders familiar with the OEO plan reacted sharply to it. One Congressional figure charged that it was a foot in the door to further dismantling OEO. Another said that the plan amounts to a back-door surrender to what the agency had fought against on Capitol Hill.

Last fall, the House considered a proposal that would have given control over plans and grant approvals to the states. OEO worked against the proposal and it was narrowly defeated.

OEO director Donald Rumsfeld, in reply to the sharp reactions, noted that he had said all along that the agency should be moving toward closer cooperation with the states.

The community action program, an outgrowth of Johnson's war on poverty program, has sought to develop locally controlled organizations in disadvantaged neighborhoods, answerable directly to the Office of Economic Opportunity.

City and state governments, the Times article stated, were intentionally bypassed on the premise that they traditionally had been largely unresponsive to

the needs of the poor.

This aspect of the program provoked wide controversy, which led two years ago to a provision for control by local governments that wanted it.

There are now about 930 community action agencies across the country, about ten per cent of which have come under local government control.

In the Oklahoma experiment, OEO retains final signoff on grants and the power to monitor and supervise state performance, the Times article said.

The OEO official in charge of the community action, Frank Carlucci, implied that the Oklahoma program will serve as a testing ground for more state involvement nationwide.

A community action official said that the experiment was disturbing because it runs counter to the original concept of community action.

He criticized the atmosphere of secrecy in which the plan was developed. He said community action directors in Oklahoma had not been consulted about it and would not be until after the experiment is announced.