RurAL-CAP

ACTION REPORTS

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SUITS SEEK TO STOP OEO DISMANTLEMENT

OEO to Close RurAL CAP Dec. 31

In February, RurAL CAP received a notice from the Office of Economic Opportunity in Seattle that money would not be available after June 30, 1973 under Section 221 of the of the Economic Opportunities Act which is the section that funds community action agencies.

In some cases, and RurAL CAP is one of them, certain phase-out funds would be available to sustain the agency through December 31, 1973. At that time all operations would cease.

The President's budget message stated that, ". . . in addition to private money, State and Local governments may use general and special revenue sharing for these purposes."

In order to apply for State funds, RurAL CAP prepared an impact statement encompassing some of the past activities and future aspirations of the agency.

Some of the programs initiated under the anti-poverty program for rural areas have been Head Start, which now has 850 children in 38 villages across the State.

This was not only the first pre-school program in rural areas, but also is the first bilingual program, the first with paid para professionals in education and has the first local policy-making board.

It has the lowest cost per child ratio in the entire Northwest region, despite vast logistic extremes.

RurAL CAP also implemented an alcoholism program which utilizes local people as counselors in rural areas, with counseling at the village site, not in an unfamiliar urban setting.

The Vehicle Equipment Mobilization program, better known as VEMP, sent 40 pieces of heavy equipment such as D-8 and D-4 caterpillar tractors, trucks, etc. in villages and trained local people in their operation and maintenance.

The equipment was used to move villages, build and maintain airports and roads, construct boat landing ramps, haul fuel from beach areas to villages, etc.

Emergency food programs were conducted, in which assistance was given to the State in distributing Food Stamps, and training the eligibility workers; experimental gardening projects were developed; a hot breakfast program was implemented; and a nutritional program which demonstrated preservation and taught values of food was successful in the villages.

The corporation which helps to organize co-operatives, the Community Enterprise Development Corporation (CEDC) was started by RurAL CAP. It is currently a $3.2 million business employing hundreds of people in fishing, marketing, construction, etc.

Other activities of RurAL CAP include helping the Alaska Village Electrification Co-operative (AVEC) to organize; operating two pilot Parent-Child Centers (PCC) involving 80 families, utilizing all local staffs.

Also, sponsoring Alaska Legal Services Corporation; operating a youth program in Seward and one in Mt. Edgecumbe High School; funding a skin sewing operation in Nome, and others.

The agency also provided testimony and information in the Sea Mammal hearings, the air transportation hearings, and helped with proposed legislation in education, social services, health, etc.

RurAL CAP's main consideration has been that poor people would actually decide the emphasis and direction, and to that end, Regional Development Corporations were established which have served as quasi-borough governments in the rural areas, have trained rural people in financial management, corporate board structure and responsibilities, Native Land Claims Act, land selection and planning and other areas as requested by their region.

The most significant and lasting impact RurAL CAP has brought to Alaska in undoubtedly the human resource development over the eight years of its existence.

Judge Jones Doubts Justification

Although U.S. District Court Judge William Jones made no formal ruling on three suits filed against the administration to stop dismantlement of the Office of Economic Opportunity, he indicated that he had "serious doubts about some of the arguments used by the administration as justification."

Jones said he was "bothered" by the use of Fiscal Year 74 budget as a justification for eliminating the agency.

OEO Acting Director Howard Phillips has cited the budget message as a mandate to dismantle the agency and use FY 73 Community Action funding for closing out outstanding obligations.

"The thing that bothers me," Judge Jones commented, "is that the budget message is just the President saying what he'd like to do. It's simply the executive department proposing."

John Ferren, arguing against the dismantling for the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights, said that the suits are not trying to compel the spending of money, they are trying to enjoin the phaseout until Congress has had time to act.

He argued that there are four right ways for the President to seek an end to the agency and direct funding for Community Action: (1) file a formal reorganization plan which Congress could reject; (2) file a bill to repeal the authorization for the programs; (3) put a certain amount of money in the FY 74 budget request for phase-out operations; (4) ask for zero funding (as the President has done).

Although the President has followed the fourth point, "he can't step over the line and prejudge the issue by instituting phase-out procedures before Congress has responded to the proposals," Ferren said.

"Injuries are so extensive to CAAs", Ferren noted, "that the agencies cannot wait until June 30 to see how Congress resolves the issue".

He said that staff time which would normally be devoted to running programs must be diverted to phase-out operations. The program is irretrievable, agencies that close down on June 30 or before, would have to wait months to start programs again if Congress appropriated the funds.

Absenteeism is reported "rampant", as employees seek other jobs, and government and private supporters are holding off funding.

Ferren took issue with the argument that revenue sharing could be used to continue CAA operations at the option of the local community. The budgets of most communities, he said, were already "strapped" for funding to take care of such programs as fire protection.

The programs that the President proposed to transfer to other agencies will also suffer, Ferren argued, because they will have to use operational funds to pick up overhead costs which are being provided by CAAs.

Judge Jones told Ferren, "What bothers me most about Mr. Kelson's argument" is the implication that the White House could direct the phasing out of any government program for which future funding is uncertain. John Kelson is a Justice Department attorney representing OEO.

Several times during the hearing, Judge Jones and Kelson clashed over some of the points in the administration's case. Jones asked Kelson why the administration had not published most of its recent OEO instructions in the Federal Register as required by the 1972 EOA (the bill vetoed by the President) and reading from the Committee report on the vetoed bill.

Jones told Kelson he had "better get a stronger reed to lean on", and said that he was more interested in the statute than in vetoed bills or the administration's reading of Congressional intent.

Later, when Kelson repeated the familiar argument that Community Action was not being "abolished", but merely being "zero funded", Jones said Kelson was playing a game of "semantics".

The plaintiffs in the suit asked the court to rule that Phillips has exceeded his authority and asked that OEO be directed to resume all anti-poverty activity or that a preliminary injunction be issued against Phillips pending the outcome of the question of the legality of his actions.

DANCING CHILDREN — These Head Start children in Kwigillingok are showing their talents at Native dancing. There are 16 pre-schoolers participating in the program. The staff includes Margaret Beaver, Teacher-Director; Carrie Friend, Teacher-Aide; Jean Cook, Cook; and Mills Paul, Janitor. Kwigillingok is one of the five villages which received a new Head Start building with Rural Development Agency and village funds, assisted by RurAL CAP.

Brando Refuses Oscar Citing Treatment of Indian in Movies

There may seem to be little connection between the scene of a Hollywood extravaganza and a small Sioux reservation in South Dakota, but stranger things yet have happened in America and the contrast may not be without meaning.

On March 27, at the same time that a handful of militant Indian people were focusing attention on Wounded Knee, site of a confrontation with yesterday's history and today's federal marshalls, a Hollywood actor, Marlon Brando, failed to appear at the annual Academy Awards ceremonies to accept a gleaming golden statue for his portrayal as best actor in the lead role of the movie "The Godfather."

In his place, Brando sent a young Indian woman, Sasheen Littlefeather. The star rejected the Oscar "because of the treatment of American Indians in the motion picture industry, on TV, in the movie reruns, and the recent happenings at Wounded Knee."

Brando himself was enroute to Wounded Knee, S.D. "I would have been here myself tonight but I thought I could do more good at Wounded Knee," he said.

"I hope you will not consider this a rude interruption, because it's an honest effort to focus attention on a cause."

Although time limitations prevented Miss Littlefeather from reading the complete statement, it said in part, "The motion picture community has been as responsible as any for demeaning and degrading the Indian, depicting them as savage, hostile, evil, and making a mockery of their character.

"It's hard for Indian children to grow up today when they see a film and see how they are portrayed in films."

Miss Littlefeather is an Apache and represents the National Native Affirmation Committee.

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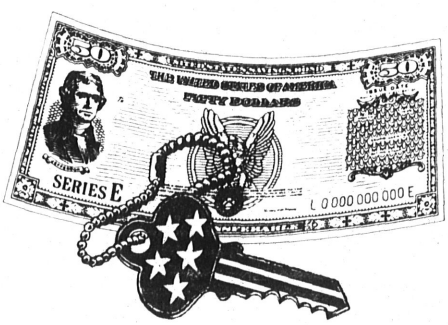

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