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# FEDERAL PROGRAM REDIRECTION: IMPLICATIONS TO SERVICE TO PEOPLE

JOHN E. COSGROVE\*

We are deeply concerned, as you have been here through yesterday and will continue to be, with the right to life of the unborn. Presumably though, we share an equal concern for those already born. Indeed this continuum of human rights, I think, is unbroken. I want to address primarily the latter concern.

Mr. Consedine asked us to speak on the impact of cuts in federal anti-poverty and other spending. These are part of some broad redirections of federal policy with which you all, of course, are acquainted. I am sure that some of these do have some direct effect on your work for the church. Others, less directly, are of concern to us in terms of social justice and social doctrines of the church.

When we speak of federal redirections, at this point in time, we talk mostly of proposals of the Executive Branch of the Federal Government. I think it's manifest that congressional influence is severely limited at this point and indeed I think through most of our history that's been true. Despite the proabortion decisions we have, I think, and are said to have, an era of judicial restraint. Thus, we look to the defense of human social values through the Executive Branch which at the same time appears to be growing stronger, at least compared to the two other branches. The superior information and communication resources of the President and the veto power, both through the informal impoundment of funds and through the formal veto giving the President the equivalent of 1/3 plus one of the votes in the two houses of Congress. This, of course, tends to make the executive stronger relatively.

As Frank indicated, there are four areas on which I would briefly comment. Four areas of redirection, if you like, of federal programs.

First is the OEO liquidation and related budget cuts. As you know, the President proposes to and will terminate the Office of Economic Opportunity apparently by the end of June. That is the end of the present fiscal year. This will be done by the transfer of some programs to other agencies. Indeed, this has been underway for some time now. And it will

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be done by the termination of some other programs. Two of the chief OEO programs to be ended are the Community Action Program, which has done so much in my judgment to develop local leadership, particularly among the poor, and the Legal Services Program, which has provided legal advocates in so many cases of benefit to poor people. In addition to the end of OEO, we see proposed the end of the Economic Development Administration and the separately administered Title V Programs under that act, the Public Works and Economic Development Act of 1965. Only the well entrenched Appalachian Regional Commission, which is a sacred cow, politically, only this will be continued. The other 5 or 6 Regional Commissions are to be terminated. The interstate Regional Economic Development work provided by Title V bears, I think directly, on the development of job opportunities outside the great megalopolises and thus on the problem of increasing concentration of population of this country. I suggest that this in turn relates to many of the urban pressures, including proposals for looser definitions of death with dignity, sterilization, and the abortion issue itself. This thesis of this relationship is developed in testimony we gave last year to the Public Works Committee.

There are legislative proposals to require that some of the revenue sharing funds be devoted to financing CAAs and CAPs—Community Action Agencies and Community Action Programs, through the states or localities. It is not at all clear though, in my judgment, that this would be desirable, because of the lack of help to poor people by the states and local governments over the years. It is impressive in its inadequacies, I think. The track record is not that good. At this point I would like to refer you to the second handout, with the news release on the top, that is before you. This was a statement of the National Interreligious Committee of General Secretaries. This is Bishop James S. Rausch and Dr. Ed Espy of the National Council of Churches and Rabbi Henry Siegman of the Synagogue Council of America. This will be of value to you if you care to look into this issue further. In addition, we have important testimony from a variety of church leaders. His Eminence, Cardinal Medeiros of Boston, on March 22 addressing the Sub-Committee on Equal Opportunity of the House of Representatives made some cogent points about his immediate circumstances in view of the OEO termination. He said that: "In Boston alone, for example, some 350 persons, most of them low income persons, served without compensation on the local APAC Boards. Eight of the eleven neighborhood boards in this city will cease to function within months. Many of the employees of the local programs and Action for Boston Community Development, which is their organization, their umbrella group, were once welfare clients, face the loss of their jobs within 6 months and the prospect of the return to welfare subsistence or unemployment compensation. Think of the damage that will be done to the human spirit and the morale of these people and their families." The Cardinal went on to say that some 54,000 people who annually are served by OEO programs will be deprived of these services. These include elderly people who are

being given hot meals, medical care and transportation, companionship, consumer aid and other simple but vital services in East Boston, Charlestown, and other neighborhoods, young people in Jamaica Plain, Brighton, and elsewhere. And it involved 20,000 other unemployed persons and 5,000 people in the neighborhood youth corps. Now this is, of course, not unique to Boston. The Catholic Committee for Urban Ministry has cited examples of the closing programs across the country: Reports of mounting problems and misery in cities large and small continue to hit our desk as a result of federal cutbacks. Just a few examples from one area of the country:

. . . Fifty of the 85 children who are retarded will be dropped from the Knoxville (Tennessee) County Association of Retarded Children. The new guidelines demand that their parents can earn no more than \$4,000.

. . . In Mobile, Alabama the \$3 million Mental Health Program is now scuttled. Next year's appropriation from revenue sharing from local and states resources will be "zero."

. . . They are probably not letter writers, but the 2,643 people in Birmingham, Alabama who will be cut off the Emergency Food and Medical Service Program will find that when the emergency arises, it will be too late to write.

. . . None of the 650 children in Montgomery, Alabama will realize who cut off the funds when they learn that the summer program promised them last year is now dead.

The compilation of the instances of difficulty that will arise as a result of these cut-backs is immense.

The Illinois Catholic Conference, for example, running to even a broader concern, including housing, protested the cuts and His Eminence, John Cardinal Cody, indicated that frustration and helplessness of the impoverished communities of the nation may result from the end of the program, the OEO Program. They estimate that totally, including ten of their catholic Charities Agencies in the Chicago Archdioceses, there will be a loss of \$4.5 million in federal aid. It's interesting to note the government's action will affect so many places across the country and we could cite many more. It is well to compare this policy to the statement of the American Bishops when they founded the Campaign for Human Development in 1969. They said at that time, "There is an evident need for funds designated to be used for organized groups for white and minority poor to develop economic strength and political power in their own communities." This was the purpose that the Bishops set out.

The Legal Services Program is, of course, of tremendous consequence and I would suppose that some of you have been involved in this, perhaps most of you, in one fashion or another. The Neighborhood Legal Services Program, since 1965 under OEO, has greatly benefitted people in the area of civil litigation. Some 25,000 lawyers in 900 neighborhood law offices have been involved. The present 70 million dollar program expires in June. It has helped with legal problems arising from housing, employment, domestic relations and a variety of other causes. While there have been problems with this program as, of course, there are with any new program,

particularly one of this scope, it has, I think, served the American interest to the goal of equal justice under law. Presumably, the poor to an increased degree, though I think still inadequately, now are better aware that they have legal rights. They may be demanding some substitute from the bar associations and conceivably from the religious community.

Now a word about Job Corps and manpower cuts. The extremely efficient Job Corps Program will be reduced by approximately 35% under the proposals of the Executive Branch of the government; reduced to a figure of 121 million dollars next year. This is unfortunate for the thousands of young people, mostly school dropouts who re-enter the mainstream of social opportunity through the Job Corps and to the thousands of citizen volunteers, 5,000 for example under church auspices, working with Joint Action in Community Services, assisting these young people. I was recently in Phoenix where there is a residential Job Corps training program and went through it. It is scheduled to be closed as are all of the residential Job Corps centers. I am told that Senator Barry Goldwater is seeking to have this one kept open. This gives an extremely important advantage for young people who have opted out for one reason or another from the mainstream and are thus given the opportunity—in an intensely pertinent, up-to-date sort of concerned vocational education program—to re-join the community. The Job Corps slash, of course, is a major cut-back.

The Department of Justice's Community Relations Service deserves at least a word. This was established by the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Its purpose is to help resolve or, indeed, prevent: "disputes, disagreements, or difficulties relating to discriminatory practices based on race, color, or national origin." In his budget message of January 29 to the Congress, the President announced that he was requesting a decrease in this program of over 3,000,238 positions from the level authorized by the Congress for the current fiscal year. So this is again being substantially cut-back. The budget announcement explains in the 44 cities where it has offices these crisis resolution and crisis prevention activities must be cut.

The rural services cut-backs are wide ranging and I won't elaborate on them, simply to say that Steve Bossi, the Washington Representative of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference, our Division for Rural Life, is here. Archbishop Stricker, of Kansas City, Kansas has testified against these cuts very recently, viewing them as of great consequence.

I think you are entitled to ask whether in our judgment a pattern exists. I think it is very clear that it does. It seems clear that the policy of the Executive Branch of the Federal Government to which we referred in the opening holds that one, inflation is an overriding problem, indeed they are certainly correct in this; and secondly, that a slowing of the economic process with the necessary attendant unemployment at perhaps 5%, is a proper way to fight inflation and that in doing this it dampens the whole economy. Now part of this game plan, it is announced, would allow consideration at least of tax increases including those of the poor and moderate income people, as another device to dry up purchasing power. Thus, at a

cost, inflation as well as economy would be dampened. This plan has been tried indeed for the last two or three years; it is not novel. I think it has failed.

The direct economic stabilization controls, authority for which has been just renewed by the Congress, are obviously under consideration and must be.

Just a final comment if I might, I suggest it might be a more humane approach, in my judgment, a more Christian approach, if the society could first establish what national priorities ought to be to meet human needs and human aspirations. In practical terms, I think, this would mean the right of access to all, for all people, to food and clothing and shelter and legal and medical services; and, of course, the opportunity to participate in the political process. I think the acts of the Administration have not served this purpose.

It seems to me there are two things that we in the Christian community are then faced with at this point in history. One, to attempt in the short term to take up some of the slack that has already begun to be felt by the termination of federal programs, realizing at the same time we could never substitute for the federal role. And secondly, more importantly, more difficult, seek to renew an appreciation of human dignity with the Christian liberating force which can come from practical appreciation of the reality that there is an interdependence and a brotherhood of men. Now, this latter is both an ideal which we hold as a religious truth and it's an operating necessity for any society that would prosper. I think that, like liberty, prosperity is indivisible. We must demonstrate then the interests of the poor, the working people, all indeed, are one—as in our brotherhood under God. This would be a more affirmative program and one to which the political parties should address themselves. And I must say in a spirit of honesty as well as bi-partisanship that this lack of appreciation of the human values and the moral values is in no sense confined to one party. Some of the entrusted leadership, the extremely reactionary leadership of some congressional committees is, as you know, infamously a problem.

One would wonder whether if we might not better serve our fellow men by getting a better appreciation of the interdependence of the Spanish-speaking and English-speaking, the black and the white, the rural and the urban, the young and the old, and the poor and the middle class. In just about three years we will be celebrating this Bicentennial of the Declaration of Independence, to which I referred. The Bishops are considering, of course, the role we might best play in this. One might wonder whether it would not be possible to consider that even as the Constitution has evolved over these years, one might say there has been an evolution hopefully of the Declaration and that these God-given rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness now have a practical meaning in terms of food and clothing and shelter and medical service and full legal representation for today's citizen and for all of us as we near the third century of the United States. If this kind of interpretation, this concept of evolution of the Decla-

ration's meaning, can be made part of our social policy and our operative procedures, I think we will become all of us even more proud of the United States of America.

Thank you very much.