

Following a recent interview with OEO Director Donald Rumsfeld, staff reporter Richard Critchfield of the Washington Evening Star wrote a particularly insightful article about the anti-poverty agency and its new chief which VIS thought would be of interest to Volunteers in the field.

Rumsfeld Is Reviving, Not Liquidating, OEO

By RICHARD CRITCHFIELD

Star Staff Writer

Donald Rumsfeld, far from presiding over the liquidation of the Office of Economic Opportunity, has moved in his first 18 days on the job to revive it as the dominant innovative force on most aspects of domestic policy.

The 36-year-old former Illinois congressman has already persuaded President Nixon to ask Congress to give OEO a two-year lease on life, won it a broad role in the war against hunger, expanded its experiments in welfare and income maintenance and discouraged moves to shift complete authority for all federal manpower programs to the Labor Department.

Perhaps most significant in the long run, Rumsfeld's generally sympathetic approach toward the community action programs, designed to help the poor reassert local power structures,

While he agrees with Moynihan that poverty funds should "not lead to the subversion of society in any way," Rumsfeld feels that some degree of tension between the poor and local governments may not be a bad thing, especially when it comes to changing institutions.

The difference in viewpoint between Rumsfeld and Moynihan—with one or the other likely to prevail when it comes to finally framing Nixon's specific social policies—can be seen, for instance, in their responses to a controversial \$960,000 economic development grant to a Durham, N.C., organization whose staff includes some well known black revolutionaries.

One of these, Howard Fuller, has repeatedly called for destruction of the existing power structure and has been involved in a number of campus rebel-

ions of what we accept as ordinary life isn't relevant to them in terms of what they're doing, where they're going or what their prospects are in life."

To Rumsfeld, OEO's task should be something more than just raising the incomes of the poor. "We have to decide what we're trying to do. Are we going for total victory, to eradicate poverty as President Johnson put it, or are we trying to find ways to allow all individual Americans to be part of society?"

If the country chooses the second goal, he said, community action will have a major role, not necessarily to set the poor against local power structures, but to bring pressure for institutional change.

"Look," Rumsfeld said. "We have a country. There are problems in this country that are the

task of Dr. Arthur F. Burns, Nixon's counselor, is to study what hard information is the basis for decisions. He described Burns as having "a tremendous respect for the facts."

Rumsfeld said flatly that the Vietnam war, by stimulating the economic boom of recent years, is one important reason why the number of poor has fallen by 16 million since 1959 to 22 million today.

How much the OEO has helped, he said with characteristic frankness, nobody knows—adding that "there's just an awful lot we don't know around this building."

OEO'S Troubles

Until Rumsfeld took over May 26, OEO seemed destined to be cut down to a small, low-budgeted "incubator" or experimental agency. It had been one of Nixon's prime targets during

Just elected to a fourth term in the House, Rumsfeld agreed to give up his safe Republican seat in return for equal status with Moynihan as a presidential assistant (he now attends the daily morning staff meeting at the White House) and Cabinet rank, plus a request for a 2-year extension of OEO and chairmanship of the Urban Affairs Council's poverty subcommittee.

And on April 21, when introduced to the press by Nixon, Rumsfeld himself said, "I am

certainly not standing here today with the idea of disbanding OEO."

Since then he has spent 10-to-12-hour working days poring through five years of congressional hearings on OEO and the poverty act, practically memorizing a green folder, the "congressional presentation book," which details OEO's guidelines, strategy and programs and in making sure what was left of the agency stayed intact for the time being.

Shultz's Idea

But just about the time his appointment cleared the Senate, another would-be ax fell on OEO.

Labor Secretary George P. Shultz sent the White House a draft of legislation to put all federal programs which seek to give jobs to the poor under the Labor Department.

The next move is up to Rumsfeld.

And while he says he has no interest in "empire building" or

in "how much money happens to flow through this particular faucet," Rumsfeld does not appear ready to help dismantle OEO.

This probable conflict over policy — the disparity of views among Rumsfeld, Shultz, Moynihan and Burns — appears to be what Nixon seeks.

More than just specific anti-poverty policy hangs in the balance, and Rumsfeld is taking his place now as an advocate of maintaining a strong Office of Economic Opportunity — an opportunity to him as well.



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