

The Oklahoma Journal

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Editorials

A Plea For Support Of O.E.O.

While a small segment of one minority race sought to redress its grievances with riot and disorder a quiet voice spoke for another minority people in America in the halls of Congress, appealing to the reason and compassion of the country's leaders.

LaDonna Harris, speaking before the Committee on Education and Labor in the House of Representatives, on behalf of the American Indian, urged support for the programs sponsored by the Office of Economic Opportunity, pronouncing her strong conviction that the O.E.O. must be continued as a separate agency of the government and endorsing the provisions and the increased funds contained in the authorization bill before the committee, H.R. 8311.

To our way of thinking, this must be more nearly the proper course in these troublesome times.

Mrs. Harris, wife of Oklahoma's junior senator, who was recently named to a vital committee to try and figure some way out of the riot dilemma, made a dramatic and lucid appeal, based on fact and reason, for the continuation of programs she believes are providing the answers to so many of the problems facing her people.

Mrs. Harris' presentation was a long and studied assessment of changing conditions in America which are bringing about the need for action in previously untrodden provinces.

While acknowledging "nobody is altogether certain of how to accomplish the goal of human resource development," she pointed out that those connected with the O.E.O. program in Oklahoma are trying "and mostly succeeding."

Better Means Of Advancement

Mrs. Harris' most persuasive pleas on behalf of O.E.O. in our opinion, were those that dealt with people and programs she had observed personally.

She told of some young people she had seen in Altus, Oklahoma, "who had caught a glimpse of a whole new world of opportunity when they were exposed briefly to campus life at Southwestern State College through the auspices of the Community Action Program.

"I think of their neat appearance," she said, "and their hopeful eyes and their change of attitude toward themselves and other people."

"When I think of the Work and Training Program," she continued, "and the Neighborhood Youth Corps, I think of the beautiful young Indian high school girl in McLoud, Oklahoma, who had been a severe disciplinary problem, but who has, now, for the first time, begun to see what she was meant to be and can become.

"When I think of the Legal Services Program, I think of a lady in Oklahoma City, who for the first time, now sees the law and those who administer it as possible friends, rather than enemies.

"When I think of the Headstart Program, I think of 'Project Magic,' an

activity in my hometown of Lawton, Oklahoma, and I see children with a sparkle in their eyes for the first time in their lives because they were brought together with older people, under the Foster Grandparent Program, people who formerly had felt useless and unwanted. I think of a particular pair, a child starved for love, who for the first time now is beginning to talk, and an older person, who now has someone to whom to give his love.

"When I think of the adult training program, I think of an 80-year-old Negro woman in Lawton, who is learning to read and write. She said, 'It seems like I had just been waiting to die; there was nothing for me to do. Now, for the first time, I feel like a real human being.'"

Mrs. Harris concluded her appeal to the committee by saying, "From all over American people have written me asking, 'What can I do?' That is a terribly difficult question to answer, and we must make it easier. But one way, I always say, is to support the programs of O.E.O. and their funding. Another is to become personally involved in them."

One thing may be safely said, we believe, is that this beats riot, incendiarism and pillage as the means for advancement of a people.