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Introduction

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INTRODUCTION

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Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 established the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and defined its assignment—to assure that all are given a fair chance at employment and promotion on the basis of ability and qualification without regard to race, color, sex, religion or national origin.

In the first six months of the Commission's operation, more than 3000 complaints charging discrimination in employment practices were received. This avalanche far exceeded anyone's expectations. It represents more than the former President's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity received in three years and almost as many as all state fair employment practices agencies received in a year. I believe this high number of cases also represents a strong confidence on the part of the public in the Commission's determination and ability to provide relief from unfair employment practices.

An effective fight for equal employment opportunity must be based on recognition of three basic facts:

First, the fact of discrimination in American life—some of it willful and bigoted; much of it unwitting and flowing from deeply entrenched patterns of business and community behavior. To meet this problem, the Commission's program of vigorous investigation, conciliation and, where necessary, litigation is the answer.

Second, the fact of good will in business, labor and in the general community. This fact is no less real or significant than the fact of discrimination. To put to the best use this reservoir of good will, the Commission has designed a comprehensive program of affirmative action. It is no exaggeration to say that much of the program consists of persuading businesses throughout the nation to adopt the progressive employment policies of the leaders of American industry.

Our appeal is that business go beyond the letter of the law in

* Chairman, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

order to carry out the spirit of the law. Our emphasis is on the fact that equal employment opportunity is good business as well as good for the community, and we offer the testimony of industry leaders to substantiate this fact.

To assist businesses throughout the country in establishing and carrying forward an affirmative action program on a community-wide basis, the Office of Technical Assistance, which is the educational and promotional arm of the Commission, has prepared a step-by-step plan, based on established and successful programs. In an effort to broaden business participation, Technical Assistance has scheduled a "Sixty-City Plan," calling for regional meetings with small groups of business leaders on the community level during the coming months. The purpose is to counsel and guide these leaders in forming Merit Employment Councils in their respective communities and to cooperate with them in establishing equal employment programs. Meetings are being held in key cities throughout the country and are expected to draw businessmen from surrounding communities. A traveling field staff will follow up on the meetings, contacting the participants for reports of progress and offering solutions to the problems which they may face.

It is our hope that through persuasive and aggressive promotion of affirmative action we may be able to achieve more significant results, both quantitative and qualitative, for minority group workers than through the complaint procedure.

Third, it must be recognized that substantial numbers of minority group workers are underqualified for the jobs industry offers today and tomorrow—underqualified but qualifiable. Even if we should achieve outstanding success in our enforcement program and in our affirmative action program, the sobering fact is that many jobs will go unfilled because minority group workers lack the requisite qualifications. The Government has offered to industry and to minority workers generous programs for training and remedial action. The Commission is determined to see that these programs are effectively exploited by industry and labor.

There will be no social peace unless we right ancient wrongs. That requires us to undo the damage done by 250 years of slavery and 100 years of segregation. In this effort, industry and organized labor have vanguard roles and prime responsibility. Leaders of industry and labor have shouldered their responsibilities with unreserved enthusiasm, knowing that the goal which seeks to bring minorities into the mainstream of American economic life is a goal which is at harmony with community peace, business interests and national morality.

All would agree that giving a man a job is better than giving him relief money. However, many may think that this is beside the

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point because you cannot give a job to a man who is unemployable by today's standards. There is a certain surface validity to that view. Many members of the principal disadvantaged minority groups—Negroes, Mexican-Americans and Puerto Ricans—are among those who comprise the "hard core unemployed." Discouraged by generations of isolation and rejection, and embittered by the feeling that, whatever their efforts and preparation, they will not be given a fair chance, they have not jumped to take advantage of existing openings for employment and training. This is a phenomenon which is easy to understand but difficult to counteract. To qualify these people for today's labor market is a task which requires the imaginative cooperation of government, business and organized labor. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission urges industry and labor to undertake specific projects of training and recruitment to find a productive place in our economy for those who are presently unemployable in order to reintegrate them into our economy and our society and to fill the expanding needs of our free enterprise system. A good start for any firm or industry is the appointment of a top-ranking officer charged with implementing equal employment opportunity.

Those who think it cannot be done underestimate their own capacity. They are ignoring our recent history and selling short the vitality of the American system.

The Commission stands ready to assist business and labor in carrying out the spirit and letter of the law. We need their help. They can count on ours.