

ADMINISTRATIVELY CONFIDENTIAL

File

May 6, 1965

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White House Task Force on Education

INTERVIEW WITH DR. KENNETH MILDENBERGER, DIRECTOR, DIVISION OF COLLEGE
AND UNIVERSITY ASSISTANCE

Description of Function

Dr. Mildenerger indicated that his activity started as a Branch in 1958 under the National Defense Education Act and was raised to the level of a Division in 1961. It was the first program of assistance to higher education, including the first student loans, which was later pulled out to be made a separate Division under Peter Muirhead. It is now limited to the graduate fellowship program, language development programs, and counseling and guidance institutions. All of these programs involve direct relationships with the institutions themselves. There are no intermediate relationships with states and most activities are on a contract basis.

Problems

One problem he cited was the fact that he has no Deputy and no other individual in his Division who understands the full range of the programs. This puts an excessive burden on him.

Another problem was that program planning functions in the Bureau were moved up to the Bureau level and he lacks a personnel staff to help him in planning. As a result, he feels that he has not had the staff and time to do the kind of review job that is needed on proposals before they go up for approval. Another problem is that he feels that there are "people", whom he did not identify, who would like to discredit Federal aid to education and that by keeping the eye on tightness of administration, this could be lost sight of. This discussion led to a plea that it is important to recognize the need for professionals in the organization with whom professionals; i.e., language teachers, etc., could identify and could deal with as counterparts.

Another problem mentioned was the lack of adequate funds to bring in panels and advisory committees often enough to keep them up on the field on which they are asked to advise. He said this has improved somewhat since Commissioner Keppel came on board.

Dr. Mildenerger did not see any payoff in decentralization to the field insofar as any of the programs he handles are concerned. He feels that

institutions prefer to deal with Washington and look for decisions to be handled here. They don't want to go through state bureaucracies and would prefer to take their chances with the Washington bureaucracy. On further pressing, Dr. Mildenerberger indicated that he is now planning to set up a five-man force in Washington to handle allocation of fellowships within designated geographical areas. He admitted that with guidance this could be decentralized to the field.

I asked him whether there were any problems flowing from the fact that his Division is concerned with Higher Education, but he is not under the Bureau of Higher Education. He said that while there are no operational problems, it is somewhat awkward. While he coordinates with Mr. Muirhead, he is sure that Mr. Muirhead should have a better and more basic knowledge of what is going on in this activity than he now gets.

Another problem area from Dr. Mildenerberger's standpoint is the feeling that professional people, in such field as English, in the universities like to deal with a professional counterpart in their own field in Washington. He thought perhaps we need to organize on a dual functional basis by providing a professional contact who would then feed this information to operating activities led by management people.

Another problem area is that the structure of the office is "Jerry built", and has never caught up with the new functions and activities. He said that, while people in the service areas (such as fiscal and personnel) are good, they are simply not sufficient to keep up with the work that is coming in. He feels that there is a lack of sense of urgency and a slow pace in the service areas, and that while, for example, he has been under pressure to get out 110 institutes in 100 days, personnel actions and contract approvals, etc., seem to get tied up for weeks and months.

Another area of difficulty has been in connection with sending people abroad on overseas fellowships. He feels that the Bureau of International Education is not "on the ball", in that they seem to lack imagination, drive, and have more interest in moving bodies than improving education. As one example, he cited the fact that he had to testify on the fellowship program for Congress and could get nothing valuable out of Mr. Caldwell.

Another problem cited by Dr. Mildenerberger was the extreme reluctance or fear throughout the organization to take action against incompetents. He said that, in his recollection, only once was there an employee he had anything to do with against whom action was taken. This was a girl during her probationary period and even then there was great timidity shown before the action was taken.

Other than these observations, Dr. Mildenerberger did not have any further suggestions for organizational changes in the OE.

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