

Perkins Asks a 5-Year Extension of Federal Poverty Program

By EDWARD C. BURKS
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WASHINGTON, March 24—A Congressional advocate of the campaign against poverty called today for a five-year extension of the program plus a near doubling of its funds. Carl D. Perkins, chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee, rejected President Nixon's proposal for a one-year extension as entirely inadequate.

"It's ridiculous, discouraging and demoralizing," the Kentucky Democrat said. "We've got to assure the poor man we're going to stick with him for awhile."

He said that an expanded poverty program should take on the problem of hunger and provide public works jobs for the hard-core unemployed. The works program, he said, would be "no leaf-raking job" but akin to Public Works Administration projects of the New Deal era.

Mr. Perkins opened today a series of committee hearings on the future of the various poverty programs.

Transfer Opposed

At the start he made it clear that he opposed an Administration suggestion to shift the Head Start preschool program away from the Office of Economic Opportunity, the official poverty agency.

As for the Administration's proposal to shift the program to the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Mr. Perkins declared: "They're just not qualified yet to operate this program without disrupting it and tearing it up."

Commenting on the criticism of various poverty programs in a recent report by the General Accounting Office, he said: "If that report is worth the paper

it's written on, then I'm not sitting here."

One committee member, Edith Green, Democrat of Oregon, sharply questioned some of the witnesses who had been invited to testify by the chairman.

She spoke out against "unbalanced views" and against the sort of argument that makes those who question any part of the poverty program seem to be "in favor of poverty and against kids."

Further, she said that there would be a fight on the floor of the House if the committee "tries to whitewash everything."

A former school teacher, Mrs. Green indicated that educational programs such as Head Start could better be handled in the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, but she favored emphasis on local initiative.

More Funds Urged

Mr. Perkins said in an interview after the hearing, "We should spend another \$1.5-billion a year in addition to the present appropriation of \$1.9-billion if we do the job the way we should do it."

This was counter to recent Administration indications that various parts of the poverty program, such as the Job Corps, might be scaled down significantly.

Opposition to Mr. Perkins's views came repeatedly from Mrs. Green and Albert H. Quie, Republican of Minnesota.

Mrs. Green was particularly nettled by one of the chairman's chief witnesses, Dr. Robert S. Mendelsohn, chief medical consultant for Head Start projects for which the American Academy of Pediatricians supplies "consultative assistance" under a Federal grant.

He reported that 660 con-

sultants sponsored by the academy had found considerable success in health improvement. But he then said that Head Start children faced a "deadening atmosphere" and lost their achievements when they entered public schools and asked how much longer this could be permitted.

He called for setting up a "second" school system for Head Start children.

Mrs. Green sharply questioned his knowledge of school performances and said that Head Start funding for each child was much greater than the average school could afford.

Dr. Mendelsohn had compared the Head Start child entering a regular public school with a "patient who has just been saved from pneumonia and gets hit by a truck."

Under Mrs. Green's interrogation he conceded that his comments represented his own views and not those of the academy and its 9,000 members.

He also conceded that his consultants had reported solely on the health benefits of Head Start and could give no

"hard evidence" on its educational benefits. As a consultant he received \$26,000 paid by the Government but denied that he was a "Government employe."

Dr. Hugh C. Thompson, president of the academy, spoke of Head Start as a "truly comprehensive approach to meet-

ing the developmental needs of pre-school children."

Although the academy could make no partisan statements, Mr. Perkins said that the 660 consultants were "free as jay-birds to make their opinions known."

The hearings are expected to continue for some weeks.