

Director says budget cut could end legal service

By Patty Pryor

Legal Services of Southeast Nebraska offers aid to low income clients, but that aid may be eliminated if President Reagan's proposed budget cuts pass a legal service director said.

Reagan has said he wants to eliminate the Legal Services Corp., an independent agency created by Congress in 1974. The corporation provides funds for 323 local agencies that represent poor people in civil cases.

Legal Services of Southeast Nebraska is one of these agencies, said Tim Sindelar, executive director.

The corporation provides about 75 percent of his organization's funding, he said, with additional financing coming from United Way of the Midlands, various organizations for senior citizens and other local sources.

The agency, which serves a 17-county area, offers free legal service to people who fall within federal eligibility guidelines, Sindelar said.

To receive help, he said, a person living alone must earn less than \$395 a month.

Figures adjusted for families

A couple must earn less than \$522 a month to be elig-

ible, he said, and the figures are adjusted upward for larger families.

The cases the agency handles include domestic matters, consumer issues and welfare problems, all of which comprise about two-thirds of the agency's total service.

Domestic matters include divorce, custody battles, adoptions and some juvenile court cases, Sindelar said, with divorce services being in most demand.

"We have a three-month wait for divorce now," he said, "so we've had to start limiting ourselves."

Consequently, the agency no longer handles divorces in which no children are involved, he said.

Consumer issues include bankruptcies and lawsuits concerning debts and collection agencies, Sindelar said.

Welfare problems usually involve illegal termination of Social Security or disability payments.

In addition, the agency deals with housing conflicts, particularly landlord-tenant disputes, and has a specialized unit to represent clients in institutions like the state penitentiary or Lincoln Regional Center.

Students account for approximately 10 percent to 15 percent of their clients, Sindelar said, adding that the agency experienced a sudden influx of students when the ASUN Legal Services was temporarily without a lawyer last fall.

Southeast Legal Services is staffed by nine lawyers and three paralegal assistants at its Lincoln headquarters. Three lawyers and one paralegal assistant operate out of a branch office in Beatrice.

In Lancaster County last year, Sindelar said, 10,000 people were served, but this included many cases of short-term service, such as referrals. The actual number of cases for the year was 730.

More recently, the agency rendered service to 1,215 during February 1981, he said.

Of this figure, 1,000 received advice over the telephone, 57 received adequate help in the office and 108 were actual cases contested in court, he said.

"We represent people at all levels," Sindelar said. "We have at least a dozen cases in federal court."

Although he said he expected some kind of budget reduction, Sindelar said he was surprised by Reagan's proposal to totally eliminate the program.

"We knew something was going to occur," he said, "but we thought it would be in the form of changing the method of allocating funds."

As an example, he said, the government could allocate funding in a block grant to the state, rather than directly funding the individual agencies.

Less opposition to other cuts

Legal Services may have been targeted for elimination, Sindelar speculated, so that there would be less legal opposition to other proposed budget cuts.

"Legal services have always been under attack," he said. "We're seen as a bunch of liberal lawyers who are always trying to sue the government for the rights of the people."

Since Congressional approval is needed before Reagan's proposal passes, lobbying efforts have been undertaken across the country to stop elimination of the program, he said.

However, there is difficulty in the agency lobbying for itself, Sindelar said, because federal funds cannot be used in lobbying activities.

Problem in using federal dollars

Even though the proposed legislation would directly affect the agency, he said, "there is still a problem in using federal tax dollars to continue a federal program."

Sindelara said he did not see much chance of Legal Services Corp. being eliminated.

"Realistically, it won't happen," he said. "However, I do see a very real threat that our funding will be cut enough that our efficiency will be drastically reduced."

If the program is totally eliminated, he said, the poor will have no alternatives.

"They will either go to private attorneys, whose fees they can't afford, or they'll be out of luck."



Spring cleaning

Photo by Mitch Hrdlicka

Lincolniters are taking advantage of the warm weather to wash the winter road salt off their cars and motorcycles.

Priest blames junta for El Salvador's civil war

By Ward W. Triplett III

Although the United States' concern with keeping a friendly, non-communist regime in power in El Salvador is understandable, sending further military aid and weapons to that country's ruling junta will not help the U.S. cause, nor will it stop the killing of Salvadorans, a Salvadoran priest said.

Speaking at a seminar at Sacred Heart Church Saturday, the Rev. Luis Coto, currently a priest in Des Moines, said the leftist rebellion is the fault of the junta, the ruling governmental body in El Salvador.

"The coalition of over 150 resistance groups, comprising all levels of Salvadorans, is trying to put an end to what American leaders were trying to put an end to 200 years ago," Coto said.

"It must be remembered that at that time, people like Thomas Jefferson, George Washington and others were the terrorists, like the leaders of El Salvador's rebellion are called now."

El Salvador, a country about the size of Massachusetts, is in Central America. For several years it has been run by a ruling group that cared little about the public and took care of the most prominent landowners, Coto said.

Spurred by starvation and repeated killings, which Coto said were done by the government, an increasing number of Salvadorans joined rebellion groups like the Popular Liberation Forces, and has engaged in a civil war with the government forces.

The leftist forces allegedly are supplied weapons by Cuba and other communist nations, which has led to U.S. support of the governmental forces, he said.

Government forces

But Coto said the chief killers of Salvadorans are the

government security forces.

"Right now, the government will label anyone who speaks out against it as a communist, a subversive or extremist," Coto said.

"Even a general is removed if he doesn't comply with the policies of the junta," Coto said.

The military and the junta have decided that the best way they can attempt to crush the rebellion is to kill as many people as possible, he said. That includes all who worked with the poor, like missionaries and priests," he added.

The civil conflict has caused the disappearances and deaths of many Salvadorans who are suspected of joining the rebellion, Coto said.

"When people are simply gathering to talk, or have a church function, if they speak on social issues, they are in danger."

America's supplying of military aid to the government makes impartial citizens lean more to the left, Coto said.

U.S. intervention

"We always point to Soviet intervention as being wrong, but we often forget about U.S. intervention being wrong as well," he said.

"No solution can be decided by any outside people. It must be the Salvadorans who solve the Salvador problem."

He defended the church's involvement in the struggle by saying it is the organizing force of the beleaguered people.

"When we (the church) try to understand the situation, we have to ask ourselves what is our responsibility as Christians?" he said.

So far, no one has been tried for killing four American missionaries and nuns last year, Coto said, so the church

must take some stand.

The reasons for El Salvador's turmoil can be tied to economic and repressive reasons, Coto said.

"The economy is parasitic in that it is dependent on the markets for sugar and coffee in West Germany, England and the United States. When those are down, the El Salvador economy is down as well, and the poor persons in that country are the first to feel it, and sometimes the only ones to feel it," Coto said.

Sacred Heart Church will sponsor petition and letter-writing drives asking the United States to stop all military aid to El Salvador. It also will be requesting a day-long fast March 24, and will hold a prayer service the same day. Coto's appearance in Lincoln was sponsored by the Salvadoran Solidarity Task Force of the Catholic Hispanic Community of Lincoln.

Coto, who said he left El Salvador because it was not a good place to study the ministry, said his chances of survival upon return depend upon which side he takes.

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