

The Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives: How It Clarified and Developed Government's Partnership with Religious Groups

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This research explores the enterprise of the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (OFBCI) that President George W. Bush established in 2001. The Office's purpose was to create a partnership between the Federal Government and grassroots and religious charities to aid America's poor. Many opponents of the OFBCI decried it as blurring the separation between church and state; however, a succession of directors successfully rebutted these criticisms in open forums and eventually before the United States Supreme Court in *Hein v. Freedom from Religion Foundation*. Despite the opponents' best efforts, the Office endured. The paper makes extensive use of the archives of the George W. Bush Presidential Library to explore the rationale for the Office and the reasons for its survival. It builds, therefore, on the September 26, 2013 Southern Methodist University's Center for Presidential History panel, "Faith, the White House, and the Public Square," which brought together the Office's four former directors and the current Director. Additionally, an exclusive interview with Jim Towey—the Office's longest-serving director—is discussed and analyzed.

President George W. Bush declared on January 29, 2001, nine days after his inauguration, that “faith-based and other community organizations are indispensable in meeting the needs of poor Americans and distressed neighborhoods. Government cannot be replaced by such organizations, but it can and should welcome them as partners.”¹ The president’s opening remarks, embedded in Executive Order 13199, ushered in the establishment of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (OFBCI). Dr. Marvin Olasky—University of Texas professor and advisor to George W. Bush while governor in Texas—spurred on the president’s idea of “compassionate conservatism, which embraced excellence in education, tax relief and volunteerism among faith-based and community organizations.”² Bush’s OFBCI, however, underwent significant scrutiny and criticism from groups who saw it as blurring the separation between church and state. By upholding the Federal Government’s authority, the directors of the OFBCI maintained the mission of the Office; and in turn, clarified and developed the partnership between the White House and American charities.

In the mid-1990s, during the Administration of President Bill Clinton, Senator John Ashcroft of Missouri engineered legislation that influenced the future construction of the OFBCI. Ashcroft famously stated that “Government alone will never solve our welfare problem. We need to enlist our charitable institutions in the war on poverty.”³ In 1996, President Bill Clinton signed his welfare reform legislation which included Senator Ashcroft’s “Charitable Choice” provision. Ashcroft’s addition allowed for charitable organizations, either secular or religious, to compete

¹ Office of the Press Secretary, “Executive Order 13199: Establishment of White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives” (January 29, 2001).

² Presidents, “George W. Bush,” White House, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/about/presidents/georgewbush>, (accessed October 10, 2013).

³ “Ashcroft Charitable Choice Provision Triumphs in New Welfare Reform Law” (October 1996), One Page on Charitable Choice in Welfare Reform Law, Box 1, Folder 11, Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives Subject Files, George W. Bush Presidential Library.

for federal grants that assisted in providing welfare services to the poor.⁴ Additionally, the provision forbade States to discriminate against a religious provider “on the basis that the organization has a religious character.”⁵ Senator John Ashcroft’s provision to Clinton’s welfare reform made him a valuable ally for the OFBCI when he served as the Attorney General during President George W. Bush’s Administration from 2001-2005.

Charitable Choice depended on executive enforcement, and according to Dr. Marvin Olasky, Governor George W. Bush was the optimal enforcer. In Olasky’s 2000 book, *Compassionate Conservatism: What It Is, What It Does, and How It Can Transform America*, he endorsed the expansion of Charitable Choice by Bush as the future president. He believed that “only political courage will enable compassionate conservatism to carry the day and transform America.”⁶ Governor Bush authored the book’s foreword emphasizing that faith-based charities respond better than the Federal Government alone; that is, they have more flexibility and give more attention to local circumstances. Big government, with its reliance on bureaucratic welfare programs, failed in the eyes of Bush and Olasky. In Olasky’s final chapter, he pointed out the insufficiency of Charitable Choice and included a blueprint for the future OFBCI when he said, “In Washington, creation of a faith-based advocacy office in the Executive Office of the President would help enormously.”⁷ By recognizing the inadequacy of “Charitable Choice” that depended entirely on an initiative from the Center, Dr. Marvin Olasky laid the groundwork for the President’s Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives.

Once elected, President George W. Bush worked quickly to establish the office that he

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Governor’s Advisory Task Force on Faith-Based Community Service Groups, “Faith in Action: A New Vision for Church-State Cooperation in Texas,” (December 1996).

⁶ Marvin Olasky, *Compassionate Conservatism: What It Is, What It Does, and How It Can Transform America* (New York: Free Press, 2000) 1.

⁷ Olasky, 195.

and Olasky envisioned. In the first month of his presidency, Bush issued the document “Rallying the Armies of Compassion,” which outlined the role of the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. In the foreword, President George W. Bush stated that in order to achieve “compassionate results,” the Government and the armies of compassion must “be outcome-based, insisting on success and steering resources to the effective and to the inspired.”⁸ President Bush acknowledged the Charitable Choice provision, but noted that it had “appli[ed] to only a small portion of Federal social spending,” and that “many states and localities continue[d] to ignore the legal requirements of Charitable Choice when they spen[t] covered Federal funds.”⁹ Furthermore, the President said that in some cases, “the regulations of some Federal programs restrict[ed] the involvement of faith-based groups more than current law warrant[ed].”¹⁰ In rallying the armies of compassion, President Bush acknowledged the limitations of Charitable Choice and promised that his Administration would expand the provision to provide a better fit for the needs of the poor and the charities that assist them.

Following his discussion of Charitable Choice, President Bush announced that the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives’ main objectives were: to identify barriers that interfered with faith-based and community programs, guarantee equal opportunities for faith-based groups to compete for federal support in ways that are consistent with the law, expand upon the policies of Charitable Choice, promote Federal and private cooperation, and monitor execution of the Office’s agenda as it concerned charitable groups.¹¹ The goals reflected the President’s strong desire to establish a partnership with community and faith-based welfare organizations and the Federal Government, while also eliminating the impediments that had kept

⁸ “Rallying the Armies of Compassion,” (January 2001), Bush43 Sample Collection, Box 1, Folder 1, Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives Subject Files, George W. Bush Presidential Library, foreword.

⁹ Armies of Compassion, 9.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Armies of Compassion, 14-15.

the two entities from cooperating for so long.

One day after President Bush announced the establishment of the OFBCI, Stephen Goldsmith, the chief domestic policy advisor to the President during his campaign and his special advisor for the OFBCI, published a *Wall Street Journal* article in order to clarify and define the Office's mission and principles.¹² He dispelled what he termed a "misunderstanding" among critics who presupposed that the Federal Government would overreach its authority by subsidizing faith-based initiatives.¹³ Anticipating opposition from strict church-state separationists, Goldsmith stated that, "the programs should be evaluated by their performance, not by their faith."¹⁴ He emphasized that government dollars would not "fund proselytizing."¹⁵ Goldsmith's defense of the Office recognized the potential for public suspicion of the government's involvement with faith-based organizations.

Forging ahead of the suspicions, President George W. Bush furthered his agenda for the OFBCI by means of Executive Orders. In fact, the OFBCI was the subject of the first two Executive Orders of Bush's presidency in 2001. Executive Order 13198 delineated the "Agency Responsibilities with Respect to Faith-Based and Community Initiatives."¹⁶ Here the President recruited the Attorney General John Ashcroft, Department of Health and Human Services' Secretary Tommy Thompson, the Department of Labor Secretary Elaine Chao, the Secretary of Education Roderick Paige, and the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Mel Martinez to serve as reviewers of policies and practices that affected funding from the Charitable Choice

¹² Stephen Goldsmith, "What Faith-Based Programs Can and Can't Do," *The Wall Street Journal*, January 30, 2001, Media, Box 1, Folder 7, Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives Subject Files, George W. Bush Presidential Library.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Office of the Press Secretary, "Executive Order 13198: Agency Responsibilities with Respect to Faith-Based and Community Initiatives" (January 29, 2001).

legislation.¹⁷ Executive Order 13199, released simultaneously, established the OFBCI and outlined its principal functions to be carried out by “ad hoc committees, task forces, or interagency groups.”¹⁸ With a continued focus on results, President Bush ordered that the relevant agencies and Departments report on the performance of faith-based groups under the Charitable Choice provision implemented by Bush’s predecessor, President Clinton.

In the 2001 Audit, required by the President’s Executive Order 13198, the OFBCI Task Force published, “Unlevel Playing Field: Barriers to Participation by Faith-Based and Community Organizations in Social Service Programs.” The audit organized into “Centers for Faith-Based & Community Initiatives in five cabinet departments, which included Health and Human Services (HHS), Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Education (ED), Labor (DOL), and Justice (DOJ).”¹⁹ The purpose of the document was:

To identify all existing barriers to the participation of faith-based and other community organizations in the delivery of social services by the department, including but not limited to regulations, rules, orders, procurement, and other internal policies and practices, and outreach activities that either financially discriminate against or otherwise discourage or disadvantage the participation of faith-based and other community organizations in Federal programs.²⁰

Even after the enactment of the “Federal law known as ‘Charitable Choice,’” the document re-stated Bush’s argument that it was “almost completely ignored by Federal administrators, who [did] little to help or require State and local governments to comply with the new rules for involving faith-based providers.”²¹ The Department of Justice established the Faith-Based and Community Initiatives Task Force since barriers that impeded the collaborative efforts between

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Office of the Press Secretary, “Executive Order 13199: Establishment of White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives” (January 29, 2001).

¹⁹ Faith-Based and Community Initiatives Task Force, “Unlevel Playing Field: Barriers to Participation by Faith-Based and Community Organizations in Social Service Programs” (August 2001) accessed October 9, 2013 <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/08/unlevelfield.html>.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

the Federal Government and religious groups had been discovered by the five Centers identified in the 2001 audit.²² The audit emphasized the Centers' acquisition of results and outcomes in order to improve fund allocation for faith-based and community organizations.

A year after the 2001 audit, President George W. Bush issued a third Executive Order that provided clarification regarding the OFBCI. "Executive Order 13279: Equal Protection of the Laws for Faith-Based and Community Organizations" defined a "social service program," and listed the kinds of programs it supported: child care, transportation services, job training, counseling, meal distribution, health support, mentoring and literacy, preventative substance abuse and criminal acts, and housing assistance.²³ If a faith-based organization fit the social service criteria and sought federal funding, the President ordered that the group "may retain its independence and may continue to carry out its mission, including...expression of its religious beliefs, provided that it does not use direct Federal financial assistance to support any inherently religious activities."²⁴ Furthermore, the President insisted that it was permissible for the faith-based organizations who partner with the Federal Government to keep religious iconography inside their social service facilities, and "retain religious terms in its organization's name, select its board members on a religious basis, and include religious references in its organization's mission statements."²⁵ The President's pronouncement prohibited religious discrimination for Federal funding which, in turn, reiterated his argument for a partnership between the government and faith-based groups.

Concurrent with Executive Order 13279, the President developed Executive Order 13280 which established the "Centers for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives at the Department of

²² Ibid.

²³ Office of the Press Secretary, "Executive Order 13279: Equal Protection of the Laws for Faith-based and Community Organizations" (December 12, 2002).

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

Agriculture and the Agency for International Development.”²⁶ The Order required that the Centers must conduct their own agency-wide audits to determine barriers for faith-based and other community organizations.²⁷ With the addition of these two participants to OFBCI, it indicated that the Office lacked contributors and required more governmental advisors.

In June 2004 and March 2006, the President again issued two Executive Orders which recruited the Department of Commerce, Veterans Affairs, the Small Business Administration, and the Department of Homeland Security to report and strategize their efforts with respect to the OFBCI.²⁸ “To better meet America’s social and community needs,” the President ordered that each agency must create a “Center for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives.”²⁹ Again, like the other OFBCI governmental centers, the agencies were instructed to carry out agency-wide audits to identify impediments inhibiting charitable efforts and propose solutions to those barriers.³⁰ This extensive use of six Executive Orders to promote the OFBCI demonstrates President George W. Bush’s deep and ongoing dedication to the inaugural project of his administration.

The Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives achieved the mission outlined in “Rallying the Armies of Compassion” and the six subsequent Executive Orders. The departmental audits identified barriers, Executive Order 13279 provided equal protection for faith-based organizations, and Charitable Choice expanded with the establishment of the OFBCI inside the Executive Branch. Executive Order 13279 also allowed faith-based organizations to maintain their religious symbols in the same space where Federal programs were delivered.

²⁶ Office of the Press Secretary, “Executive Order 13280: Responsibilities of the Department of Agriculture and the Agency for International Development with Respect to Faith-based and Community Initiatives” (December 12 2002).

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Office of the Press Secretary, “Executive Order 13342: Responsibilities of the Department of Commerce and Veterans Affairs and the Small Business Administration with Respect to Faith-Based and Community Initiatives” (June 1, 2004). Office of the Press Secretary. “Executive Order 13397: Responsibilities of the Department of Homeland Security With Respect to Faith-Based and Community Initiatives.” (March 7, 2006).

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

Faith-based groups could hire employees based on religious affiliations, and they could retain religious references in the names of their organizations. The President's Office achieved its main objectives that it announced at the outset.

In an exclusive interview I conducted with H. James (Jim) Towey, the longest serving director of the OFBCI, he held that the initiative “was successful; and that President Bush was always active in working with the Office; he made it his priority.”³¹ When asked specifically how the OFBCI “rallied the armies of compassion,” Towey said,

The Office held White House conferences across the U.S., and invited registered 501(c) (3) groups. The President even made an appearance at some of the conferences. During the break-out sessions, the non-profits would have the chance to meet with representatives from the Department of Labor and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, just to name a few. This method provided a way for the Office to build up a network of Faith-Based and Community groups.³²

Even with all of the Office's successes, Towey found that the OFBCI proved less effective in measuring the results of the charities' work. He said, “Our main goal was to promote a level playing field among faith-based and other charitable groups. The second mission was to gather their results... These private organizations were sometimes too busy helping the needy, that it became difficult for them to report results.”³³ Securing a partnership between the Federal Government and grassroots or faith-based groups took precedence over the reporting of charitable outcomes. If there was one failure of the OFBCI, it was the lack of tangible results from the Office's collaboration with faith-based and community groups.

Critics from outside of the Office took note of what they believed were serious flaws of the OFBCI. The American Civil Liberties Union in Miami, Florida “condemn[ed] President Bush's Executive Order on Faith-Based Initiatives” on December 12, 2002, referring to

³¹ Jim Towey, interview by author, Dallas, TX, September 26, 2013.

³² Towey, interview.

³³ Towey, interview.

Executive Order 13279. The ACLU noticed that “rather than wait for Congress to approve legislation that has been stalled in the Senate, President Bush issued a sweeping executive order today directing federal agencies to let religious charities compete for social service grants.”³⁴

Howard Simon, Executive Director of the ACLU of Florida, said that the OFBCI “is essentially government-funded religion and a formula for discrimination in employment and services.”³⁵

The ACLU criticized the President’s removal of federal guidelines pertaining to “professional services performed by religious organizations.”³⁶ Simon argued that “without these standards in place, we're basically saying it's okay for government to fund religious practices.”³⁷ The achievements of President Bush’s OFBCI were viewed as major issues for the ACLU.

A substantial criticism made against the OFBCI was heard in the United States Supreme Court in 2007 with the case of *Hein v. Freedom From Religion Foundation*, 551 U.S. 587.

“Incorporated in 1978 in Wisconsin, the Foundation is a national membership association of more than 17,000 freethinkers: atheists, agnostics and skeptics of any pedigree. The purposes of the Foundation are to promote the constitutional principle of separation of state and church, and to educate the public on matters relating to nontheism.”³⁸ The issue at the Supreme Court was

“whether taxpayers have standing under Article III of the Constitution to challenge on Establishment Clause grounds the actions of Executive Branch officials pursuant to an Executive Order.”³⁹ The United States Supreme Court ruled that taxpayers do not have the right to challenge the constitutionality of expenses made by the executive branch of the government. In a 5-4 vote

³⁴ ACLU Florida, “ACLU of Florida Condemns President Bush's Executive Order on Faith-Based Initiatives,” <https://www.aclu.org/religion-belief/aclu-florida-condemns-president-bushs-executive-order-faith-based-initiatives>.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Freedom From Religion Foundation, “About the Foundation FAQ,” (accessed November 15, 2013) <http://ffrf.org/faq/item/14999-what-is-the-foundations-purpose?>

³⁹ *Hein v. Freedom From Religion Foundation* 06-157, (accessed November 15, 2013) <http://www.supremecourt.gov/qp/06-00157qp.pdf>.

the Supreme Court ruled that the Foundation did not have standing to sue; therefore upholding the authority of the White House OFBCI.

Even at the very end of President George W. Bush's tenure in office, Toni Van Pelt, Vice President for Center for Inquiry and Director of Office for Public Policy, spoke to Americans at the National Science Foundation in Arlington, Virginia about Charitable Choice and the OFBCI on January 9, 2009.⁴⁰ Van Pelt pointed out that before the establishment of the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives under President Bush, government-sponsored religious charities complied with regulations that prohibited the presence of religious icons and forbade hiring tactics based on religious beliefs.⁴¹ She argued that Charitable Choice caused problems because it did away with those "safeguards" and allowed "taxpayer dollars to be mingled with religious funds."⁴² Similar to the ACLU, Toni Van Pelt insisted that Bush's use of Executive Orders overturned all prior legislation and removed protections for tax-paying Americans.⁴³ Both critics, along with the Freedom From Religion Foundation, saw the OFBCI as an overreach of George W. Bush's presidential authority. Despite all of the arguments made against the OFBCI, the White House Initiative survived.

At a symposium held on September 26, 2013 at the Southern Methodist University all former directors and the current Director of the OFBCI discussed "Faith, the White House, and the Public Square." John Dilulio, the first director of the OFBCI, emphasized how after its establishment the term "faith-based" began to permeate public discourse.⁴⁴ He pointed out that Democratic Party leaders Bill Clinton and Al Gore agreed with Republican President George W.

⁴⁰ Toni Van Pelt, "Faith-Based Initiatives and Charitable Choice," National Capital Area Skeptics, (lecture, National Science Foundation, Arlington, Virginia, January 9, 2009). http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_2joZIdXHhc (accessed October 31, 2013).

⁴¹ Van Pelt, Part 1, 3:35-3:52.

⁴² Van Pelt, Part 1, 5:33-5:37.

⁴³ Van Pelt, Part 4, 0:59

⁴⁴ John Dilulio, "Faith, the White House, and the Public Square" (lecture, Southern Methodist University Center for Presidential History, Dallas, TX, September 26, 2013).

Bush that the Federal Government should embrace faith-based groups in their charitable strivings. The military and the church are the most trusted entities in America, according to Dilulio. Even though the church-state issues go deep, Dilulio positively affirmed that what unites Americans is always more important than what divides them.

Dilulio's successor, Jim Towey, was the longest-serving director of the OFBCI. He spoke to the church-state disputes that arose during the Office's tenure in the Bush administration and asserted that the OFBCI achieved its main goal of leveling the playing field even against a very strong headwind. Towey noted that in nearly all of President Bush's eight State of the Union addresses, he mentioned the achievements of the OFBCI and he never wavered in his passion for the Office even after two wars and the events of September 11, 2001. According to Towey, the OFBCI succeeded against all odds because the President maintained the Office's bipartisan mission and gained approval from Congress who funded the signature programs. For Jim Towey, the OFBCI was successful because of the President's ability to fend off opponents and prioritize its agenda.

Jay Hein, the third and final director under President Bush, expressed his initial skepticism of OFBCI. However, prior to his appointment, Hein began to embrace the mission of the Office, recognizing that his own Christian beliefs were compatible with the construction of a solution for society's ills. Like Dilulio, Hein noticed that the term "faith-based" truly entered the American vernacular during George W. Bush's presidency. He remarked that "Bush led a culture change."⁴⁵ As director, he helped frame "The Quiet Revolution: The President's Faith-Based and Community Initiative: A Seven-Year Progress Report" which highlighted the achievements accumulated by the President and the Office. It was during Hein's term that the OFBCI faced the

⁴⁵ Jay Hein, "Faith, the White House, and the Public Square" (lecture, Southern Methodist University Center for Presidential History, Dallas, TX, September 26, 2013).

Supreme Court in *Hein v. Freedom from Religion Foundation*, with a victory for the Office in 2007. A strong proponent of the OFBCI's mission, Jay Hein will publish "Quiet Revolution: How Faith Based Initiative Put Compassion in Action" in 2014.

After the eight years of George W. Bush's administration, President Barack Obama continued his predecessor's office, but entitled it, the "Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships" with Joshua DuBois as the first director. At the symposium, DuBois said that Obama's office "buil[t] on an existing foundation," namely, Bush's OFBCI.⁴⁶ Even though the name underwent a slight change, the mission remained. According to President Obama's "Executive Order 13499: Amendments to Executive Order 13199 and Establishment of the President's Advisory Council for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships," the Office varied in that it summoned experts in the fields related to faith-based and neighborhood organizations to serve on the President's Advisory Council.⁴⁷ DuBois also mentioned that many of the charitable groups sought non-financial partnerships which marked a significant difference between the OFBCI and Obama's OFBNP.

The current executive director of the OFBNP, Melissa Rogers, restated that the goal of the Office is "not promoting faith," but simply, "service to our neighbors."⁴⁸ Like her forerunners, Rogers expressed that the Office "crosses ideological lines" because its purpose is to "address human need."⁴⁹ The director also maintained DuBois' observation that many faith-based and grassroots groups seek Federal assistance in terms of information, not solely by way of grants. Both lectures given by DuBois and Rogers hinged on the original ideas of Bush's OFBCI,

⁴⁶ Joshua DuBois, "Faith, the White House, and the Public Square" (lecture, Southern Methodist University Center for Presidential History, Dallas, TX, September 26, 2013).

⁴⁷ Federal Register, "Executive Order 13499: Amendments to Executive Order 13199 and Establishment of the President's Advisory Council for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships" (February 5, 2009).

⁴⁸ Melissa Rogers, "Faith, the White House, and the Public Square" (lecture, Southern Methodist University Center for Presidential History, Dallas, TX, September 26, 2013).

⁴⁹ Ibid.

but explained their circumstances during Obama's administration.

Motivated by compassionate conservatism, President George W. Bush, the directors of the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, along with the other governmental departments (summoned by Executive Orders) formed a partnership between American faith-based and grassroots charities and the White House. Even though opponents criticized the OFBCI and its commingling with religious groups, the Office survived, and is currently active under President Barack Obama. The establishment and survival of the OFBCI clarified the role of the Federal Government in its dealings with religious groups by developing a partnership between the two entities for the sake of the Nation's poor.

Note on Sources:

The author had access to one box of the David Kuo Subject Files (dating from 2001-2003) available at the National Archives and Records Administration at the George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum. Other documents pertaining to the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives were in the Bush43 Sample Collection, whose dates ranged from 2001-2009. The remainder of the OFBCI records that the author was unable to view is still being processed under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act, and will be accessible on January 20, 2014.

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Appendix 1

The exclusive interview with H. James Towey, the Director of the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives from 2002-2006.⁵⁰

Megan Best: After serving as director for the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, would you say many of the private organizations worked well as partners with the government?

Jim Towey: Our main goal was to promote a level playing field among Faith-Based and other charitable groups. The second mission was to gather their results. The Office did not have much success, though, in measuring the effectiveness of Faith-Based groups. These private organizations were sometimes too busy helping the needy, that it became difficult for them to report results.

Megan Best: What were some key characteristics of those non-profits that helped them succeed or outshine others?

Jim Towey: They were the groups with effective leadership, good training, and monetary security that went beyond their current grant.

Megan Best: How did the Office “rally the armies of compassion?” In other words, who sought whom?

Jim Towey: The Office held White House conferences across the U.S., and invited registered 501(c) (3) groups. The President even made an appearance at some of the conferences. During the break-out sessions, the non-profits would have the chance to meet with representatives from the Department of Labor and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, just to name a few. This method provided a way for the Office to build up a network of Faith-Based and Community groups.

Megan Best: Thinking of the Office, were there any similarities between the President’s “War on Terror” and his “War on Poverty?”

⁵⁰ The interview was conducted on September 26, 2013 at 4:15pm by Megan Best, a student of History at the University of Dallas, and intern at the George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum. It took place at the Hotel Lumen in Dallas, TX. The meeting was held on the occasion of the discussion, “Faith, the White House, and the Public Square,” hosted by the Southern Methodist University Center for Presidential History.

Jim Towey: It is very hard to say because of the vast resource difference between the two. For President Bush, the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives was not about resources. If I had to find similarities between the two, I would say: a) both had a decisive Presidential leader, b) the President attempted to engage Congress in regards to both efforts, c) both initiatives were outside of Washington, and d) both efforts were done in the light of the U.S. Constitution.

Megan Best: What other allies within the administration did you have on your side throughout the war on poverty?

Jim Towey: Unfortunately, the House could not have cared less about the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. When the Bill went to a vote, it polarized Congress. Many on the left thought that “compassionate conservatism” was a loser. We did have Secretaries from the Department of Health and Human Services; however, we struggled with Tommy Thompson, not so with Michael Leavitt. Other allies included the Budget Directors, [Mitch Daniels and Joshua Bolten], the President’s speech writers, [Michael Gerson and David Frum], as well as the Senior Advisor to the President, Karl Rove.

Megan Best: Do you have any final thoughts on anything that I might have missed during this interview?

Jim Towey: It is important to note that there was no honeymoon period during Bush’s entire presidency, beginning with the hanging chad dilemma in Florida. Nonetheless, the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives was successful. President Bush was always active in working with the Office; he made it his priority.