

35 Statement About an Explosion in East St. Louis, Illinois, and the Use of Planned Variations Funds. *February 1, 1972*

I WAS most distressed to learn of the chemical car explosion on January 22 which caused such great damage in East St. Louis, Ill. My thoughts have been with those who have been injured or left homeless by this tragedy and with all who were affected by the damage to schools and streets and by interruptions in the water and electric supply. I want the Federal Government to do everything it can to help during this difficult time.

Often tragedies of this sort are compounded when the delivery of resources needed for recovery is obstructed or delayed. Fortunately, this will not be the case in East St. Louis. For under a new Administration program, substantial Federal resources are available to East St. Louis without redtape—to be used as the local officials think best.

This new flexibility has been achieved through the Planned Variations project, which we have been carrying out under the Model Cities program in the Department of Housing and Urban Development. This project began last July when I announced that 20 cities—including East St. Louis—would participate in an intensive effort to demonstrate what local governments can accomplish with Federal money when they are given greater freedom from Federal regulations.¹

In spending Planned Variations money, a city can decide for itself which problems are most pressing and how they can best be attacked. And when a city's needs shift, as they have in the wake of the East St.

Louis explosion, local officials can quickly shift their programs to meet those needs, without having to obtain Washington's approval for every detail of their new approach.

East St. Louis has recently received \$760,000 under the Planned Variations program—the first installment of the \$3.8 million it will eventually receive. I am pleased to note that the city has decided to direct a portion of these funds to provide shelter for those whose homes were damaged and destroyed in the recent explosion and to repair needed public facilities, including four badly damaged schools. This action was taken this past Saturday by the mayor and city council of East St. Louis. It was concurred in by the Model City Agency in East St. Louis at its meeting just last night. This prompt action would not have been possible if these monies were encumbered by strict Federal guidelines and restraints.

The Federal Government has also been able to provide the city with technical assistance in planning the recovery effort and has made available some 200 temporary housing units for those who have been displaced from their homes.

The advantages of local control, so dramatically evident in this particular case, could be experienced on a regular basis in all of our communities if the revenue sharing programs which I have recommended to the Congress were put into effect. The Planned Variations program was designed as a test of what cities and States could accomplish under the revenue sharing approach. I believe that the

¹ See 1971 volume, Item 241.

prompt actions which have been taken to meet pressing human needs in East St. Louis are evidence of the soundness of that approach.

I am pleased that the Federal Government could be of assistance in this time of emergency and that the local govern-

ment was in a position to use that assistance with the greatest possible effectiveness. I hope and trust that the neighborhood affected by the tragedy of January 22 will now experience a quick recovery and a healthy development.