

FEDERAL ELECTION COMMISSION



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WASHINGTON -- Federal Election Commission Chairman Robert O. Tiernan today estimated that state and local governments will expend close to \$300 million for administration of the 1980 elections.

"These governments will absorb close to \$1 billion in elections administration costs between 1978 and 1981, and these estimates do not reflect the 47.2 percent jump in the Consumer Price Index since 1974," he declared.

Testifying on cost estimates of a series of bills introduced by members of the House of Representatives to provide for postage free mailing of absentee ballots, Commissioner Tiernan said that during the four year cycle 1970-1973, State governments provided \$42 million and local governments \$770 million for election costs.

The FEC was invited to testify by Representative Charles H. Wilson, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Postal Operations and Services.

Joining in the FEC appearance was Vice Chairman Max Friedersdorf, Dr. Gary Greenhalgh, Director of the Commission's Office of Information and the National Clearinghouse on Election Administration, and William Kimberling, Deputy Director of the Clearinghouse.

In discussing the legislative proposals, Chairman Tiernan asserted, "There can be no question that postage paid return ballot envelopes may increase the return of absentee ballots." He cited as examples, La Salle County, Illinois, and Pima County, Arizona, which already provide return postage on absentee ballots at county expense, and Los Angeles County, California, which does not.

"La Salle and Pima Counties have a return rate of 93 percent and Los Angeles County has only 69 percent," he said.

An important consequence of the bills would be benefits to the elderly, the handicapped and all other absentee voters who, by reason of infirmity, find it as difficult to go to the post office as they do to go to the polls on election day, Tiernan concluded.