

FOR RELEASE  
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MCGARRY CITES NEED FOR STRONG INDEPENDENT AGENCY

WASHINGTON--"Today we have an effective disclosure system. For the first time in the history of our country, the public fully knows where campaign money is coming from and where it is going," Federal Election Commission Chairman John Warren McGarry said today in testimony before the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration.

The Committee opened two days of hearings this morning on proposals to amend Federal election campaign finance legislation. Also participating in the testimony for the FEC was Commissioner Joan Aikens.

Chairman McGarry said the Commission welcomes the Committee's attention to the issues of whether the FEC should continue and, if so, whether it should remain in its present form. At the same time, he called attention to key objectives of Congress when it created the FEC in 1974 Amendments to the Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971. "Clearly, a major concern leading to the creation of the FEC was the need to ensure independent, impartial enforcement of the laws relating to campaign finance activity and public disclosure. Another objective was achievement of more efficient administration than had previously occurred when four separate entities--Secretary of the Senate, Clerk of the House, General Accounting Office and Justice Department--had concurrent responsibilities."

"While application of the letter of the law to the art of politics has not been easy," he said, "The FEC's monitoring procedures, technical assistance and enforcement actions have all worked to ensure that candidates and committees file timely and complete reports and comply with statutory campaign finance requirements. The details of political campaigns have been disclosed to the public to a greater extent than ever before."

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Confronting criticism of the FEC enforcement operations, Chairman McGarry said, "Resentment against the enforcement of particular provisions has been converted into hostility toward the Commission. While we may share some of the views of critics, and make recommendations for legislative change, until such legislative changes are made, the FEC is bound to enforce the law as it is written."

"Since its establishment, the Federal Election Commission has encouraged and promoted voluntary compliance with the requirements of the law," he said, but, "disclosure and other campaign finance requirements would be of little value if not meaningfully enforced. Absence of effective enforcement was the one reason why prior disclosure laws were largely ignored," the FEC chairman asserted.

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