

FEDERAL ELECTION COMMISSION

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FEC FY '87 BUDGET REQUEST DETAILED TO SENATE COMMITTEE ON RULES AND ADMINISTRATION

WASHINGTON--Whether or not the Federal Election Commission is able to continue its "unequaled record of public service" depends upon Congressional action during the next few months. That today from FEC Vice-Chairman John Warren McGarry during an appearance before the U.S. Senate Committee on Rules and Administration.

Commissioner McGarry, presenting testimony as Chairman of the Agency's Finance Committee, was accompanied by FEC Chairman Joan D. Aikens and Commissioner Thomas J. Josefiak, Vice Chairman of the Finance Committee.

Addressing the Balanced Budget and Deficit Reduction Act, which required cuts in the FEC's computerized campaign finance data base, Mr. McGarry said, "We take great pride in our accomplishments which go beyond what is mandated by law...Yet this performance has obviously led to expectations by some that such service must be continued even at the cost of mandated activities, including enforcement and our small Clearinghouse program, which has already been cut more than 90 percent from previous levels."

Turning to campaign finance, the Commissioner noted that disbursements in connection with the 1984 elections exceeded \$1.265 billion, including \$218.8 million spent by Presidential candidates. That represents a one-third increase from both the 1980 and 1982 elections. FEC experience is that Congressional elections following a Presidential year have cost as much as the prior Congressional and Presidential contests combined.

"If that pattern holds true," Mr. McGarry explained, "1986 campaign finance activity will approximate that of 1984." He predicted that "total spending will surely be astronomical" in 1988, when both major parties' Presidential nominations may be contested by 20 or more publicly-funded candidates.

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Additional informational calls and press inquiries, more pages of reports, more Presidential certifications and more work for every division will result from this projected increase in financial activity, according to the FEC.

"Beyond sheer quantity of information provided to the Commission, many of the issues presented through advisory opinion requests, enforcement matters and audits have grown more complex in nature, requiring greater expenditures of time and effort by staff, the Commissioners, and the concerned political committees," Mr. McGarry testified.

"Despite this burden of a vastly expanded workload, we have been able to meet our obligations in a timely and efficient manner," he continued. "While improving our timeliness in the face of a growing workload, we have also been able to enhance both our disclosure and outreach programs--up to this point that is," he said.

Mr. McGarry explained the repercussions to the FEC of having its budget reduced this year by \$535,000 under the Balanced Budget and Deficit Reduction Act on top of an earlier cut of \$323,000 for a proposed government-wide salary cut that never materialized.

"While the combined dollar amount is not significant by overall Government standards," the Commissioner pointed out that "this reduction proved to be extremely disruptive to a small, personnel-intensive agency such as ours."

He said the Commission was forced this year to react promptly to unanticipated budget reductions. "We have done so in the most responsible manner under the circumstances. It is because we have done so much with so little in previous years that we are being penalized heavily by budget cuts. Funding of \$12.8 million will give us limited flexibility to build on progress to date. A budget of less than \$12.8 million is an alternative we hope not to face," Commissioner McGarry said.

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