

FEDERAL ELECTION COMMISSION

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
THURSDAY, APRIL 30, 1987

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FEC ISSUES FIRST REPORT ON ACCESSIBILITY OF POLLING PLACES TO THE HANDICAPPED & ELDERLY

WASHINGTON--Election officials across the country have evaluated nearly 82% of the nation's polling places to determine their accessibility to handicapped and elderly voters. Over one-quarter of those inspected pose obstacles to the disabled.

The Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped Act of 1984 requires the Federal Election Commission to gather and compile state-by-state information on obstacles faced by the disabled when they go to the polls. The compendium, prepared by the FEC's National Clearinghouse on Election Administration, is the first of five such reports to be submitted to Congress between now and 1995.

A national picture emerges from a compilation of the state-by-state figures. There are 157,922 voting places in the United States, of which 82% have been inspected to determine their accessibility. Some 34,595 polling places (27% of those inspected) were reported as being inaccessible to the disabled. Among the major problems are stairs without ramps, obstructed passages to polling place entrances and inadequate parking facilities.

The FEC report discourages comparisons between states because the data collection and reporting techniques used by election officials varied from one state to another. Also, some jurisdictions conducted polling place inspections during or after the 1986 general election, while others made their evaluations in 1985 and implemented changes prior to the '86 election.

The Commission report says that most state election officials have made positive efforts to inspect and improve polling places. Because of the late start by some states, the FEC expects to document substantial progress in its next report. That report should present a more accurate national picture and provide a basis for comparisons between states.

To obtain copies of Polling Place Accessibility In The 1986 General Election, contact the FEC's Clearinghouse at (800) 424-9530 or (202) 376-5670.

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