



Welcoming Remarks
Chair Ellen L. Weintraub
Federal Election Commission
February 7, 2019

Welcome to the Federal Election Commission's first open meeting of 2019!

Those are words I had planned on saying much earlier in the year. The shutdown has meant that we start the year off already behind in fulfilling our important mission. The 2020 Presidential election is already underway. I seem to read about a new candidate throwing her or his hat into the ring every day. If past elections are any guide, the upcoming election is almost certain to involve the raising and spending of billions of dollars.

The FEC's job is to ensure that the public knows where all that money is coming from and where it goes. Congress has required this campaign finance transparency as a protection against the potentially corrosive influence of money in politics. The Supreme Court has upheld it as critical to ensuring an informed citizenry, empowered to hold our public officials accountable. The FEC thus performs a vital anti-corruption mission in our democracy. I believe in the work we do here, and I am proud to take the agency's helm at this important time. I do so with a positive attitude, tempered by experience.

We are able to do this important job through the dedication, hard work, and public service of each and every employee of this agency. I say to all of our staff, welcome back. I am painfully aware of the hardships imposed upon you and your families by the shutdown. I am grateful to you for your continued service, and I know I can count on you to help us catch up and move forward.

We have our work cut out for us. We must continue to confront ongoing attacks on our democracy by foreign adversaries. Aggressive actors are constantly innovating new ways of hiding the sources of political money. We have hundreds of cases on our enforcement docket, 326 to be precise, over 50 already imperiled by a looming statute of limitations. We have to keep up with the review, processing, and disclosure of an ever-increasing volume of political activity.

We're starting late, we have a lot to do, and I'm going to push hard to get it done. But it's going to take the sustained cooperation of every member of the Commission if we are to make real progress. There are cases that have languished too long, there are cases that have been held up, and that's got to stop. I'm pleased to be serving in a leadership capacity this year with my colleague, Matt Petersen. This is the first time we've served together as chair and vice chairman. We have a very cordial relationship, and Vice Chairman Petersen has assured me that he's prepared to work with me to try to get the work of the agency done. I believe he's a man of his word. So let's get to work.

As I look forward to the coming year, in addition to tackling our enforcement backlog, I see some opportunities for bipartisan action. There are issues where I believe we can find common ground.

I would like to see us move forward to take stronger measures against **scam PACs**. We should not sit idly by while bad actors siphon off money that American citizens thought they were donating in support of their favorite candidates. I believe my colleagues share this concern.

I continue to hope that we will be able to come to consensus on new rules for **internet advertising disclaimers**. The process stalled out toward the end of last year, but I intend to light a fire under it and see if we can't get it done.

The FEC is already a hub for information. As Chair this year, I want to provide a space for serious discussion of the important issues facing our democracy. To that end, I will be inviting provocative and thoughtful speakers to come to the FEC and share their perspectives with us and with the public. And I will be organizing events to create opportunities for people to engage with folks who may be outside their normal silos.

The **first two** of those events will be on the afternoon of February 21.

That day, I will be convening a panel to discuss how money was raised and spent during the 2018 midterm elections, with fresh analysis based on the year-end reports just filed at the end of January. I'm delighted to announce that Sheila Krumholz of the Center for Responsive Politics and Michael Malbin of the Campaign Finance Institute, now part of the National Institute on Money in Politics, have agreed to come share their latest research. Details to follow.

And from 3-5 p.m. on February 21, I will host a reception for the campaign-finance community. Many of you haven't had the opportunity yet to check out the new building. Whether you're an advocate for fewer restrictions, a campaign finance reformer, or a journalist covering our beat, come on down and start a conversation with someone with a different perspective. I will be sending out invitations soon to all those for whom I could find e-mail addresses, but if you're interested in coming, please don't stand on ceremony. Everyone is welcome.

I also see opportunities for progress outside this building. Vice Chairman Petersen has agreed to partner with me in going to Capitol Hill to meet with our oversight committees and appropriators to advocate for the FEC's legislative recommendations. These recommendations have been carefully considered by the Commission, they have unanimous bipartisan support here, and they deserve to get a full hearing by Congress. These are solid, commonsense proposals. If the notoriously gridlocked FEC can get behind these recommendations, perhaps there is hope for broader agreement.

- Some proposals would strengthen the FECA by extending personal-use restrictions to all political committees, enhancing our ability to protect the public from scam PACs, and reinforcing the ban on fraudulent misrepresentation of campaign authority.
- One proposal would restore an FEC regulation that was struck down by courts, the regulation that prohibited aiding or abetting the making of contributions in name of another.

- Some proposed legislation sounds prosaic but would help this agency run better, by giving us the authority to create Senior Executive Service positions.

I believe we are in a moment when democracy issues have captured the public's imagination. The time may be ripe for progress. If you care about any issue, you should care about campaign finance. Because campaign finance affects every issue, affects who gets elected and what gets enacted.

The American people deserve the transparency about money in politics promised by Congress and the Supreme Court. I look forward to working with my colleagues and our terrific staff to follow the money and shed sunlight on our democracy.

Thank you.