

FEDERAL ELECTION COMMISSION

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FEC CERTIFIES IDAHO FOR PAPER-FILING WAIVER

WASHINGTON - The Federal Election Commission (FEC) this week certified 12 states, including Idaho, as exempt from a federal requirement to receive and maintain paper copies of campaign finance reports from Presidential and U.S. House of Representatives candidates and most political committees. This is the initial certification group, with some 20 other states to follow soon, Commission officials said.

Replacing the paper filings will be electronic immediacy -- the public gaining Internet-access to those campaign reports of most federal candidates on computers located at their respective state's campaign-finance records office (the Secretary of State offices in most of the certified states). The reports are accessed through the FEC's Internet site (www.fec.gov) and to expedite and enhance public access, the FEC has provided hardware and software, including laser printers, to those states requesting them. To quickly implement the system, the FEC offered to provide any requested computer equipment, Internet capability, and training.

FEC Chairman Scott E. Thomas said of the filing-waiver program, "This is a great example of using new technology to make a government program more efficient. It will relieve states of paperwork and filing tasks, will relieve reporting committees of unnecessary filings, and will encourage the public to move to a better information access system."

In December 1995, President Clinton signed Public Law 104-79, which exempts states from receiving and maintaining paper copies of federal campaign finance reports provided that the state, "as determined by the Commission, has a system that permits electronic access to, and duplication of, reports and statements that are filed with the Commission."

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The FEC began posting disclosure reports filed by Presidential and House candidates, parties and political action committees, on its Web site in 1997 and has since expanded the site to include electronic filings and a query system that allows for on-line searches of the campaign finance data base. The public in the certified states will be accessing the FEC's Web site to view campaign finance reports, but they are the same reports from federal candidates that, by regulation, have to date been duplicated in paper form and filed with the state. Upon connection to the FEC's Web site, the states have access to reports filed since 1993 for PACs, party and Presidential committees, and since 1996 for Congressional committees.

The state waiver program does not apply to reports filed by campaigns for United States Senate candidates and other political committees that support only U.S. Senate. Point of entry for Senate candidates' reports remains with the U. S. Senate, not the FEC. While the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee and the National Republican Senatorial Committee file their reports with the Senate, copies of their reports are available on the FEC Web site because the Senate provides the FEC with paper copies that meet requirements for scanning.

The other states in addition to Idaho certified by the Commission this week are Arkansas, Florida, Illinois, Kansas, Michigan, Nebraska, New York, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, and Wisconsin. The certification by the FEC for these states is indicative that they possess an adequate computerized system to allow the public electronic access to, and duplication of, reports and statements that are filed with the FEC. Criteria leading to their certification by the FEC were: (1) The state has at least one computer terminal that can electronically access the Commission's Web page, with at least one printer (connected either directly or through a network); and (2) the state will, to the greatest extent possible, allow anyone requesting federal campaign finance data, the use of this computer terminal, at any time during regular business hours.

Idaho Secretary of State Pete T. Cenarrusa said in a letter to the FEC that the State of Idaho "...is anxious to participate in the state filing waiver program," and said that he appreciated the opportunity to participate "...in this reduction in bureaucracy."

The December 1999 monthly report (November's transactions, due Dec. 20) will be the first federal campaign finance report that will not be required to be filed by committees in the certified states.

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