

Senate Panel Votes Bill to

By Morton Mintz
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The Senate Commerce Committee yesterday approved a bill to create an independent elections commission empowered to investigate and prosecute violations.

In addition to stripping the Justice Department of enforcement authority, the bill would also:

- Put a ceiling of 25 cents a voter on expenditures by

presidential and Senate and House candidates;

- Make it easier for Democratic and Republican presidential and vice presidential candidates to get free television time.

- Require all contributions and expenditures in presidential contests to be accounted for by the national committee of each candidate's party rather than ad hoc groups.

The bill, approved without objection in an executive session, now goes to the Senate Rules Committee, which must hold hearings and act on the measure within 45 days.

In the House, Reps. John B. Anderson (R-Ill.) and Morris K. Udall (D-Ariz.) were drafting a letter to the chairman of the House Administration Committee, Rep. Wayne L. Hays (D-Ohio), in hopes of speeding consideration of their own proposal for an independent elections commission.

And President Nixon, in a related development, sent to Capitol Hill his recommendation for creation of a non-partisan study commission on election reform.

The Senate Commerce bill was introduced by Sen. John O. Pastore (D-R.I.), to "halt

the spiraling costs of campaigning for public office." One section would limit all expenditures for a federal candidate in a primary or general election to 25 cents a voter in the geographic area involved.

The existing law, which took effect in April, 1972, has an expenditure limit of 10 cents a voter, but it applies exclusively to spending in communications media. This provision would be repealed.

In a hearing of his Commerce communications subcommittee in March, Pastore said that voter "cynicism" is "not without cause" in the light of reports that one successful Senate candidate spent \$2.5 million to win election to a job paying \$42,500. His reference was to the re-election campaign of Sen. John G. Tower (R-Tex.). Under the proposed 25-cent limit, Tower could have spent \$1.9 million.

Yesterday, the full Commerce Committee adopted an amendment in which in sparsely populated states a candidate for the Senate or for Congressman-at-large could spend a minimum of \$175,000. A House candidate running in a congressional district could spend at least \$90,000.

The Pastore bill would also repeal Section 315 of the communications law in presidential races. It says that broadcasters providing time to one candidate must provide equal time to another. By suspending the requirement in 1960, Congress made possible the televised debates between Richard M. Nixon and John F. Kennedy. But no sitting President since 1960 has favored suspension.

If repeal of Section 315 is accomplished, Pastore has said, the broadcasters have expressed willingness to give "substantial amounts of time to all of the significant presidential candidates free of charge, and in a format of their (the candidates') own choosing."

Sen. Marlow W. Cook (R-Ky.) sponsored the successful amendment to make the Republican and Democratic National Committees central clearing-houses for the financing of presidential campaigns. The amendment reflects the discontent of Republican legislators with Mr. Nixon's separate effort, the Committee for the Re-election of the President, which they tie to the Watergate scandal.

The proposal for an independent elections commis-

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sion came principally from Minority Leader Hugh Scott and Sen. Charles McC. Mathias Jr. (R-Md.).

The Senate in 1971 approved such a commission, 89 to 2, but it died in a conference with the House after Rep. Hays made its sacrifice the price of broad reform legislation. In the resulting compromise, supervisory authority was divided among the General Accounting Office, the Clerk of the House and the Secretary of the Senate.

The Commerce Committee developed a strong sentiment in favor of a limit on contributions as well as expenditures, but it left legislative action on that issue to the Rules Committee. Reps. Udall and Anderson want to limit contributions from any single source to \$2,500 for a

presidential candidate and \$1,000 for Senate and House candidates.

Mr. Nixon's proposal for a study commission led Democratic National Chairman Robert S. Strauss to express concern that it may be "another delaying tactic and whitewash effort." John W. Gardner, chairman of Common Cause, said the commission "can only serve to stifle action."

The President vetoed one reform measure in 1970. Before the present law took effect his fund-raisers collected \$15 million to \$20 million with an assurance to contributors that they would avoid disclosure.

However, Kenneth E. Davis, legislative assistant to Sen. Scott, said the President told a group of bipartisan legislators Tuesday, "We

have no intention of precluding present on-going actions on election law proposals."

Mr. Nixon said in a radio broadcast yesterday with the message that the proposed study group would have a mandate "as broad as the federal election process

itself," including possible public funding of campaigns and the relation of tax laws to contributions.

With quick congressional approval, the study commission could provide the basis for reforms "in time for the 1974 congressional election," the President said.