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Church Leaning Toward Running for President

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Sen. Frank Church of Idaho has told political backers he is leaning toward joining 10 others already in the Democratic presidential race.

A number of sources said yesterday that Church has signaled his willingness to enter the crowded field after the investigation of intelligence agencies by a Senate committee which he heads, winds up its hearings within the next two months.

Church said yesterday, "It would be untruthful to pretend that I'm uninterested, but there's no way for me to make a decision now." His press secretary, Bill Hall, told a reporter, "It's about 80 per cent certain he'll go."

The strong understanding that Church will run has also been communicated to such financial backers as Texas insurance man Bernard

Rapoport, but they are still operating under an injunction from the senator that no formal fund-raising or organizational activities can begin while his heavily televised investigation is still under way.

Church said the delay in his start would "make it impossible for me to run in the early primaries." Eight announced candidates plus Sen. Birch Bayh of Indiana and Gov. George C. Wallace of Alabama, who have still to make their formal declarations, will test their strength in those early races in such states as New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Florida, Illinois, Wisconsin and New York. Church backers think it doubtful that anyone will emerge as a clear winner.

The indications of Church's decision came as the Federal Election Commission made a ruling that should help his relatively late-starting

campaign, as well as those of other Democratic candidates without high-powered direct-mail fund-raising operations.

The FEC reported it will rescind its Sept. 9 ruling that the actual cost of fund-raising events was not subject to federal subsidy. The use of net contributions in figuring qualification for federal matching money had made achievement of eligibility more difficult for some candidates and would have reduced sums of federal aid available to them in the pre-convention period.

One of those candidates whose qualification was slowed by the Sept. 9 ruling, former Sen. Fred R. Harris of Oklahoma, announced yesterday before disclosure of the new FEC ruling that he had nevertheless qualified by raising the required \$5,000 in each of 20 states in amounts of \$250 or less.

In a Capitol Hill press conference, Harris and his

campaign manager, Jim Hightower, reported that Harris had actually met the requirement in 22 states, with an average contribution of \$24.40. He has raised a total of \$205,000, of which about \$175,000 is eligible for matching funds under the new FEC ruling, another aide, Frank Greer, said later.

Harris, the self-styled "people's candidate" who has been waging a low-budget, live-off-the-land campaign in which he has been fed and boarded by his supporters, has done little fund-raising outside his own circle of supporters. Instead, he has concentrated on building a grass-roots organization of activist campaign workers who have also given him money.

Harris' eligibility for federal matching funds also qualifies him for Secret Service protection, but he said yesterday, "I will not seek it at this time."