

Fauntroy Fined for False Disclosure

Ruling in Other Case Saves Ex-Delegate From Felony Conviction

8/10/95

By Toni Locy
Washington Post Staff Writer

Walter E. Fauntroy, who represented the District in the House for 20 years, pleaded guilty yesterday in federal court here to a misdemeanor and was placed on probation for two years for filing a false financial disclosure report.

Fauntroy, 62, a civil rights activist and onetime mayoral candidate, originally had pleaded guilty in March to making false statements on a congressional financial disclosure form, a felony and a violation of federal law.

But the U.S. Supreme Court, in another case, ruled in May that the federal law on making false statements applied only to statements made to the executive branch of government, not to Congress or the judiciary. So prosecutors withdrew the felony charge despite the guilty plea and allowed Fauntroy to plead guilty to violating the D.C. law

against filing a false financial report, a misdemeanor.

The difference spared Fauntroy from losing his right to vote and run for office again.

Fauntroy, pastor of New Bethel Baptist Church in the Shaw section of Northwest Washington, admitted to violating D.C. law by filing a false financial report with the House that subsequently was submitted to the D.C. Office of Campaign Finance and Ethics.

During a sentencing hearing, Fauntroy was lauded by his attorney, the prosecutor and the judge for his contributions to the community, including his work with the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

U.S. District Judge Paul L. Friedman ordered Fauntroy to pay the maximum fine of \$1,000. Fauntroy has agreed to pay an additional \$5,000 in civil penalties. The judge also ordered Fauntroy to perform 300 hours of community service.

See FAUNTROY, B5, Col. 1

Fauntroy Fined, Given Probation For Filing False Financial Report

FAUNTROY, From B1

Prosecutor William J. Corcoran said the Justice Department seriously considered Fauntroy's accomplishments and contributions over the years before charging him with a crime.

Charles F.C. Ruff, Fauntroy's attorney, praised his client not only for his service but also for his decision to acknowledge his guilt. Sending such a message to the community, Ruff said, is perhaps Fauntroy's greatest contribution yet.

But Friedman tried to prevent Fauntroy's plea from being perceived as "a badge of honor" because he, as a former public official, admitted to what was essentially "a technicality." The judge said he thought the offense was serious.

Fauntroy later said he agreed with the judge. But he still compared his crime to the seriousness of a parking ticket. He insisted that he did not willfully violate the law by failing to report \$24,000 in loans he received in 1988; he said he forgot. He also said he did not gain personally by delaying a \$23,000 year-end contribution to his church that he used to offset income he received outside his job as a delegate to the House. He said he simply did not cover the check he wrote to the church in time.

But Fauntroy said he is most thankful for the Supreme Court decision that forced prosecutors to abandon the felony charge against him.

"I had great difficulty understanding how I could be charged with a felony not for taking from the church but for giving to the church," he said.