

700 Violations Of Election Law Reported

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The Justice Department said yesterday that "more than 700" apparent violations of the Federal Elections Campaign Act have been referred to it for possible civil or criminal action.

But an informed source told The Washington Post that the figure—termed "preliminary" by the department was "extremely conservative," so much so that the true number could be "double or triple" 700.

In reply to a query, the department said one lawyer and his secretary are assigned to handle the cases. The department says unofficially it is so overburdened with other responsibilities that it has no more attorneys to spare.

The bulk of the apparent violations, such as failures of candidates to file financial reports, were referred by Clerk of the House W. Pat Jennings. He declined to discuss the referrals, saying only that he is enforcing the law as it applies to House candidates.

A spokesman for Secretary of the Senate Francis R. Valeo told a reporter that seven Senate candidates who did not file financial disclosures, even after two warnings were sent to them by certified mail, had been referred to the department. An eighth referral was made of a candidate who deliberately chose not to comply with the law, which took effect April 7.

The Senate spokesman said that none of the apparent violators is an incumbent, and that all of them had lost in one or another of 33 state primaries. He said that "dozens" more candidates had filed late reports after being warned of possible prosecution.

The General Accounting Office has referred a handful of cases to the department, each involving a possible violation by a committee or a candidate in presidential race, and each publicized with detailed GAO press releases. One of these referrals resulted in the only prosecution to date, civil case against a committee that placed a newspaper ad suggesting impeachment of the President.

The Justice Department spokesman said that after an early effort to secure voluntary if belated compliance, 28 out of 30 defeated congressional aspirants filed statements following warnings by the department.