

Federal Elections

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Putting the Fat Cats On a Diet

WASHINGTON—When a campaign financing bill that would sharply curtail the influence of wealthy contributors to candidates in Federal elections cleared the Senate last week, there were wry references to the measure as “the Clem Stone Benefaction Control Act.”

Two weeks ago, W. Clement Stone, a self-made Chicago insurance millionaire, acknowledged having given Richard M. Nixon a total of \$4.8-million in unreported campaign contributions since 1968, first to win the Presidency and then to hold on to it in 1972. That amounts to \$2,900 a day for every day that Mr. Nixon has occupied the White House. Mr. Stone said he had been prepared to give \$10-million. That this was too much money from one man for anyone's good seemed obvious, even to the Republicans who were getting it; by subterfuge that was then more or less legal they had concealed most of Mr. Stone's gifts.

And although Mr. Stone received no known quid pro quo, other than the opportunity to proselytize the President as the guru of an upbeat philosophy of life the Chicagoan calls Positive Mental Attitude and the chance to drop a wishful hint that he wouldn't mind being Ambassador to Britain, he did report that the President had twice told him: “Clem, you and I know that I wouldn't be here if it weren't for you.”

Mr. Stone's apparent claim to a lien on the Nixon Presidency was invoked darkly during five days of Senate debate that ended last Monday with passage of statutory curbs on the evasive, demeaning and sometimes corrupting influence of contributors' big money in shaping public policy. The vote was 82 to 8. But Mr. Stone was only an incidental, rhetorical villain for the piece. He was responsible, really, for nothing more than holding the conviction that Mr. Nixon is “one of the greatest, if not the great-

est, of all Presidents,” and of putting his money where his mouth is.

Watergate was invoked too. Passage of the new measure, the Senators claimed would guarantee that a Watergate could not happen again. But this, like the oratorical fright at the Stone transactions, was largely for the benefit of constituents. They, after all,

expected to contain much learned detail on electoral and office-holding reforms. Calling his colleagues' statesmanship good as far as it went, but premature, Senator Howard H. Baker Jr., of Tennessee, the Republican vice chairman of the Watergate committee, declined to vote yea or nay on final passage of the campaign finance bill. Instead he invoked a little-used rule that allowed him to be recorded merely as “present.” The Senate, Mr. Baker predicted, would per force “have more to say later” on the subject of campaigning and money.

There was even the possibility, the

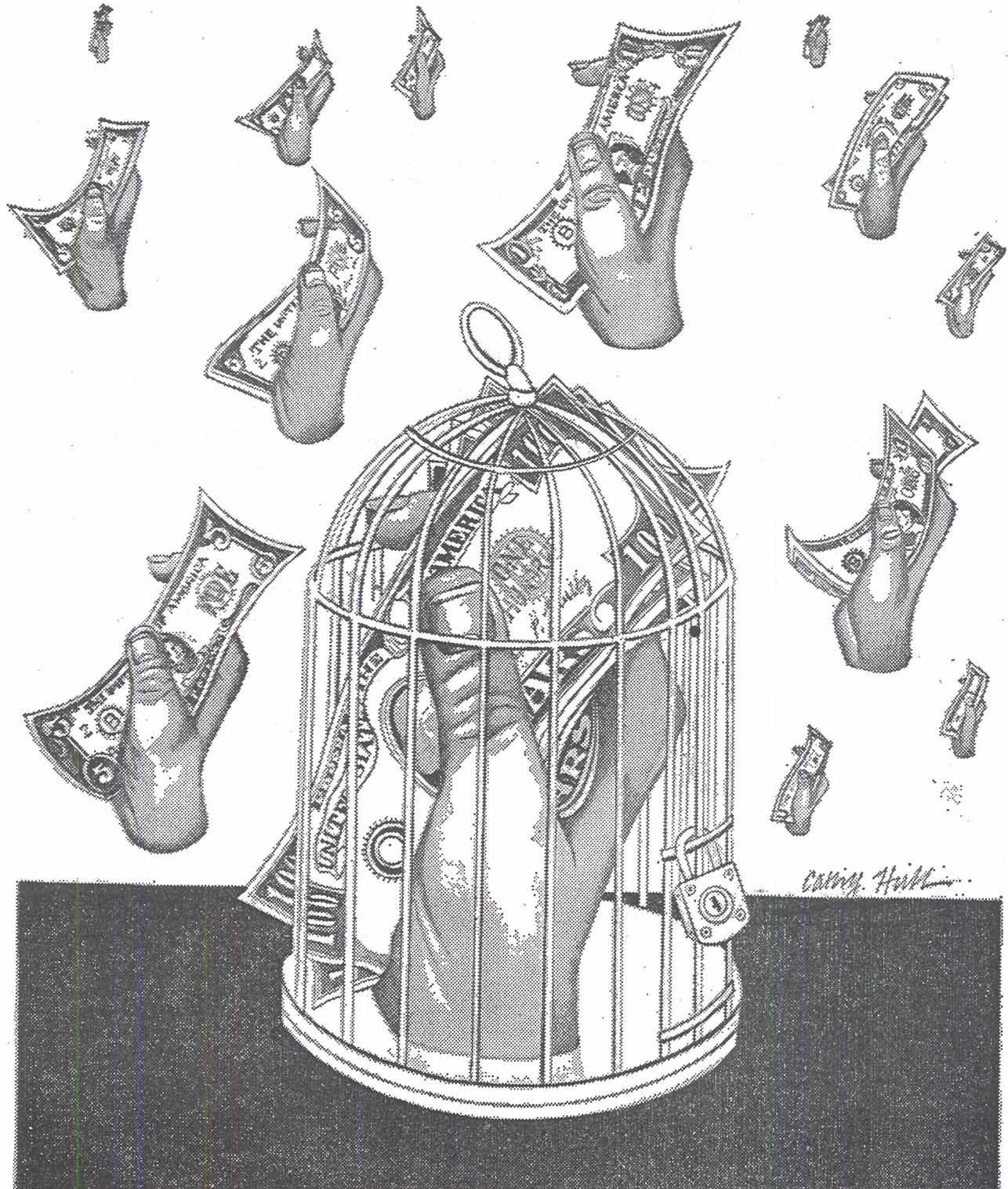
could be presumed to be looking for some evidence of Positive Mental Attitude in Washington, too.

But what really motivated the Senators to add scores of restrictive amendments to the 18-month-old Federal Election Campaign Act was simply the shame of being a politician in these days of mounting public cynicism regarding politics and government.

The desire to act was such that the Senate could not even wait for the forthcoming report of Senator Sam Ervin's Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities, which is

Tennessee Senator said, that he would break with the traditional Republican opposition to the most “radical” scheme of campaign finance reform—outlawing private contributions and paying the election costs of all bona fide candidates out of public funds. Hearings on a number of such proposals are to begin before two Senate committees in September, 65 years after the idea was first broached by that old radical, President Theodore Roosevelt, a Republican.

There was hope among campaign reformers that before 1976 some form of public financing might result from



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