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# Ford Travel Costs in '75 Exempted From Ceiling

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 20—The Federal Election Commission ruled today that money spent to finance President Ford's political travel as an announced candidate in 1975 should not be charged against his 1976 campaign spending ceiling except in special cases.

Beginning next Jan. 1, however, the commission held by a 5-to-1 vote, all of the President's domestic travel will be presumed to be in support of his candidacy and its cost will count against the \$10 million limit imposed on all Presidential candidates for the primary elections.

The effect of the decision was to increase by hundreds of thousands of dollars the amount Mr. Ford will be able to spend to turn back the Republican primary challenge officially announced today by former Gov. Ronald Reagan of California.

The commission's advisory opinion, which guarantees legal immunity for the President as long as he follows it, brought an immediate attack from officials of the Democratic National Committee, who said they might file a court action to suspend its effectiveness.

While formally affecting only

President Ford and the Republican National committee, the ruling included language that could have these following side effects:

Permit Democratic Presidential candidates to exempt from campaign spending limits the cost of their travel during the rest of 1975 as long as they

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were engaged in "party building" rather than personal political promotion.

Suggest, without requiring, that the Republican National Committee should "accord equitable treatment" to Mr. Reagan during the rest of 1975 by financing trips in which he could engage in "party building," without any reduction in his primary voting capacity.

The Democratic National Committee had urged that Mr. Ford's appearances before Republican-sponsored functions, since he announced his candidacy last June 19, should properly be attributable to the cost of his 1976 campaign.

The Republican National Committee and the President Ford Committee, his campaign agency, argued that he was appearing as party leader rather than candidate and that, in any event, he should not be held accountable for this spending retroactively.

'Sensitive Problem'

Despite the one-sided vote—only Thomas E. Harris, a Democratic member, dissented—the commission was clearly troubled by the decision. Its general counsel, John G. Murphy Jr., called it "an extremely difficult and sensitive problem" to determine when an incumbent President was acting as a candidate.

Neil Staebler, the Democratic vice chairman of the commission, supported the ruling as "a reasonable trade-off," under which the President accepted the presumption that all of his 1976 travel would be candidate-oriented and thus chargeable, in return for exempting all of his 1975 travel.

Democratic officials attending the commission meeting disagreed pointedly. Mark Siegel, executive director of the Democratic National Committee, charged that the commission had "made an illegal course of conduct legal" by the ruling.

Stuart E. Siegel, an attorney for the national committee, asserted that the Jan. 1 date for radically changing treatment of the President's political travel was "arbitrary" and suggested that Democratic officials might file a complaint with the commission or seek a court injunction or both.

'Equitable Treatment'

William C. Cramer, counsel to the Republican National Committee, said the committee would give "equitable treatment to all candidates" during the rest of 1975, but he indicated he regarded President Ford as the one national party leader entitled to financing for party-building travel.

In any event, Mr. Ford will have little opportunity for political travel during the rest of this year. A 10-day trip to China and a two-week vacation in Colorado are expected to occupy all but two weeks of his time before New Year's.

No record of the cost of President Ford's 1975 political travel is available yet, but the Republican National Committee has said it set aside \$500,000 for the purpose earlier this year.

Earlier this year, a commission opinion requested by Senator Lloyd M. Bentsen of Texas, a Democratic Presidential candidate, stated that, after a candidate declared candidacy, "All speeches made before substantial numbers of people are presumed for the purpose of enhancing his candidacy."

Expenses From Coordination

Today's ruling attempted to distinguish this decision from the Ford case by maintaining that the earlier question revolved around whether Senator Bentsen could accept travel expenses from a corporation for making a speech, rather than whether the speech constituted "party building."

The commission also formally approved, on the basis of audits, five Presidential candidates to receive Federal matching funds for their primary campaigns. They were former Gov. Jimmy Carter of Georgia, Senator Bentsen, President Ford, Senator Henry M. Jackson of Washington and former Gov. Terry Sanford of North Carolina.

Approval of Gov. George C. Wallace of Alabama, Representative Morris K. Udall of Arizona and former Senator Fred Harris of Oklahoma was delayed.

Audits were not yet completed for Senator Birch Bayh of Indiana, Gov. Milton J. Shapp of Pennsylvania, Sargent Shriver, the 1972 Democratic Vice-Presidential candidate, and Mr. Reagan, all of whom became active candidates too late for the first wave of auditing.

To qualify for matching subsidies for the primaries, a candidate must raise at least \$5,000 in contributions of \$250 or less in each of 20 states.