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Watergate's Effect in California

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By Carl Irving

If nothing else, the Watergate scandals seem to ensure major reform in future political campaigns in this state — from local to statewide levels.

San Francisco's Supervisors are considering some revolutionary changes in regulations over campaign spending; San Diego has passed one of the toughest laws in American history. Similar measures are in the works in San Jose and Sacramento.

And in the state Capitol, legislators are being pushed toward action by the threat of a stiffly worded initiative backed by a dozen public groups.

The massive publicity in recent weeks from Washington about illegal spending of huge chunks of individual and group donations is providing sufficient incentive, say a variety of sources.

California is a fertile field for change in this area. As long ago as 1966, incumbent

Pat Brown and challenger Ronald Reagan spent close to \$5 million in their battle for governor; in 1971 the candidates for mayor of San Francisco spent more than \$1 million. Mayor Alioto later reported having spent \$547,000.

The present state law is the basic guide; parts of its are decades old.

Robert Stern, counsel in the Secretary of State's office, says all that is now required is to report contributions of more than \$500 before the election. Candidates do not need to disclose all their contributions and expenditures until after the elections.

Before the San Francisco Supervisors is a measure to require reporting under that figure and limit individual contributions to \$500. Candidates would have to limit their own expenditures to \$2500. Perhaps most important, contri-

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butions would be barred from either corporations or labor unions.

When it comes to campaign financing, he said, "We get very little from the neighborhoods. Labor and downtown groups have an understanding of the need."

But Edmund Brown Jr., the California Secretary of State, urged the Supervisors to get away from this. Public confidence in politicians is down, he noted. He envisioned a return to former times, when, he said, candidates got support from friends, neighbors and acquaintances instead of "huge sums from well-heeled special interests."

These days, Brown contended, candidates tend to spend campaign funds "like drunken sailors."

If this measure is passed, future candidates for mayor of San Francisco would be limited to spending \$120,000 each, less than one-fourth of what Alioto reported in his last campaign.

City Attorney Thomas O'Connor doesn't think the proposal is legal. Although he says he is in accord with its aims, he believes the "subject matter is of statewide concern and is not a municipal affair."

Requirements

But San Diego City Attorney John Witt believes his

city had the constitutional right to enact its own election laws. The new San Diego ordinance is a new world in politicking.

It requires financial reporting by candidates 20 to 25 days before elections; again seven to 10 days before; and then 35 days after, and every six months after that until all campaign bills are paid.

Reporting would include contributions and expenditures going back a year before the election, listing all contributors of \$50 or more. The basic enforcement tool is a trust fund with separate accounts for each candidate, maintained by the city auditor and controller.

All contributions are to be deposited immediately into these trust funds, and release of funds requires bills or vouchers certified by campaign treasurers. These papers must explain what the money will be used for.

The San Diego law permits investigation of complaints and authorizes fines of at least \$500 for violations. Convicted candidates will be eliminated from campaigns and ineligible for city office for five years.

In Sacramento, a coalition formed by Common Cause, the People's Lobby and Secretary Brown are pushing an initiative which would require reporting of all contributions and expenditures over \$50 before elections.

The state Franchise Tax Board would audit reports from candidates for state office. Also in the works are proposals prohibiting gifts from lobbyists to people they are lobbying, and requiring that all elected officeholders disclose annually their personal financial resources within their jurisdiction.

Bills Passed

Committees in both houses of the Legislature have passed campaign disclosure bills somewhat weaker than the initiative proposal. If the Legislature fails to approve something close to the proposal by August, informed sources say a statewide effort for 320,000 signatures will be undertaken.

The signatures are needed by January to place the initiative on the ballot in the primary election next June 4. The sources are confident that the present public mood would ensure sufficient signatures.