

Election Cost Lid Kept on Lawyer Fees

Washington

The Federal Election Commission voted yesterday to reject an attempt to exempt the fees of accountants and lawyers from the new spending limits that now govern federal elections.

The package of new campaign statutes that went into effect last January 2 already has been labeled by some wags as the "Lawyers' and Accountants' Relief Act of 1974."

Yesterday in opposing the move to exempt the fees, one commissioner, Vernon W. Thomson, voiced his fear that, were the commission to exempt the costs (as it now does for some fundraising costs) from the limits, "We're going to create a new business" of campaign administrators.

"I'm always fearful of the Parkinsonian Law taking hold," said commission vice chairman Neil O. Staebler. "You create a new ceiling, and expenses rise to fill it."

Dozens, if not hundreds, of firms already exist that contract with campaigners to handle their problems of dealing with the new laws.

Commissioner Robert O. Tiernan argued that, because of the new laws' complexity, and because of the criminal penalties possible for non-compliance with them, a Senate or House candidate cannot risk operating without an accountant and lawyer.

These costs, he maintained, have nothing to do with whether the candidate gets elected, but only with whether he stays in compliance with the law.

The commission voted 4 to 2, with Tiernan and Joan D. Aikens voting nay, to include the costs under the spending limits, with an important exception for accounting or legal costs that are created by formal challenges to a campaign's compliance.