

A 'Better Way' To Run Our Campaigns

In almost every aspect of the Watergate there was one common element: the flow of unreported campaign cash—lots and lots of cash, stashed in safes and hidden bank accounts, transported in black satchels, disbursed without an accounting—polluted rivers of cash drenching everyone and everything in sight.

We mustn't let the drama of political espionage and high-level intrigue divert us from that element. The deepest lesson of Watergate is the corrupting influence of money in politics, of uncontrolled campaign financing. If we don't learn that lesson, future Watergates will be bigger and nastier.

So where do we go from here in the control of campaign financing? The Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971 was better than any earlier legislation, but it has not been adequately en-

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forced—and that failure could destroy its effectiveness. We now know that the Clerk of the House and the Secretary of the Senate cannot be expected to police their own employers and it is clear that the Justice Department does not intend to enforce campaign spending laws. It never has. Presumably it never will.

The only hope of adequate enforcement is an independent election commission with its own subpoena powers and its own ability to go directly to court to enforce campaign laws. The President, the Speaker and the Senate President Pro Tem each should make two appointments and the Controller General should serve as seventh member of the commission. In this way each of the key institutions covered by the law—the Presidency, the House and the Senate would share in the selection process. It is particularly important that the commission be independent of the Department of Justice which has failed so miserably to enforce campaign spending laws. In addition to existing criminal penalties, there should be heavy civil fines (up to \$100,000) for violations—fines imposed jointly on the candidate and on those responsible for handling his finances. Prosecutors could then resort to civil sanctions in those cases where criminal sanctions are not appropriate.

Citizens should be authorized both to file complaints with the commission and to bring court action when enforcement is not forthcoming.

These provisions would strengthen the present disclosure law. But the real hope for the future is a totally new approach—public financing of campaigns. Experts are not in full agreement as to the appropriate ingredients of a public financing law. Here are the Common Cause proposals.

1. Provision of federal funds for election campaigns by qualified candidates.

2. A limited role for private contributions including a strict limitation on the size of individual gifts—say \$250 for congressional races, \$500 for the presidential race.

3. An overall limit on expenditures for a given race.

4. An end to organized interest group giving, and to all forms of pooling contributions.

5. A bar to the transfer of cash in political campaigns.

6. A role for the political parties in the financing of general elections.

7. The creation of a hardnosed oversight and enforcement agency to ensure compliance, with heavy fines (up to \$100,000) for violations.

Sen. Philip A. Hart (D-Mich) has introduced a bill which is the most comprehensive legislation to date on public financing. With one or two exceptions it covers the points listed above.

Estimates of the cost of the presidential and congressional elections in 1972 vary from \$200 million to \$400 million. This means that for \$1 to 2 per capita, Americans can own their own government.

Last fall Common Cause members throughout the country polled congressional candidates to get their views on public financing of campaigns. Of the 227 winning House candidates who answered our members, 129 favored the idea of public financing, 73 opposed it and 25 were undecided. This hardly fits the widely expressed view that federal financing of campaigns is not politically feasible at this time. What we need now are congressional hearings on this whole issue.

Many citizens make political gifts with no thought of personal gain. And the best of our elected officials do not permit campaign money to affect their decisions. But the more common circumstance—a link between campaign gifts and preferential treatment—was summed up by Edward Garmatz, former Maryland congressman who had served as Chairman of the Merchant Marine Committee. When questioned about the heavy political contributions he received from the maritime industry, he said, "Who in the hell did they expect me to get it from—the post office people, the bankers? You get it from the people you work with, who you helped in some way or another. It's only natural."

There must be a better way.