

Campaign Panel Differs With Nixon

Washington

The Fair Campaign Practices Committee yesterday rejected what it termed President Nixon's implication that the Watergate scandal resulted from inadequate laws.

The committee said the case demands not special studies, as Mr. Nixon recommended, but firm prosecution of Watergate violators.

In a statement filed with the Senate privileges and elections subcommittee, the nonpartisan, private organization said:

"The essential problem the Watergate affair dramatizes is not inadequate laws, but the breaking of laws and the conspiratorial thinking behind the law-breaking."

ACTION

The committee acknowledged there is a need to strengthen certain campaign laws, especially in the areas of fund-raising and spending, but disagreed with Mr. Nixon's call for quick action by Congress.

On May 16 the President called on Congress to create a 17-member nonpartisan commission to do "nothing less than a complete examination of our system of elections and campaign practices" and to recommend changes by December 1. He suggested any changes be made effective by the start of the 1974 congressional campaign.

The committee said of Mr. Nixon's recommendation: "He would include questions about the President's term of office, which was one of the most controversial topics at the Constitutional Convention of 1787 and has been the subject of some 160 proposed constitutional amendments over the years.

"He would include the question of the term of office in the House of Representatives, which has also been the subject of debate for years.

"The point is not that these and other problems on the President's comprehensive list do not warrant serious attention," the committee said. "Precisely because they do, they should not be addressed on a crash basis within 6½ months."

CORRUPT

In its statement to the Senate panel, the Fair Campaign Practices Committee suggested any new probe of campaign ethics "should concern itself with the extralegal practices associated with the Watergate affair, including personal vilification, falsification of letters and advertisements, stacking of polls, spying on oppo-

nents and other corrupt practices."

The committee recommended consideration of proposal to make a candidate for federal office personally responsible for the conduct of his campaign, and to unseat any official convicted of engaging in illegal campaign practices.

The committee, whose leaders include former chairmen of both major parties, told the Senate panel:

"The President has implied that the Watergate affair — or the record of 'widespread abuses during the presidential campaign of 1972,' in his terms — is largely the result of inadequacies in the law itself and of weaknesses in the American political system. This implication confuses the issue, for the fact is the Watergate affair involves conspiracy to break the law,

and conspiracy to obstruct justice."

MANNER

The Watergate scandal requires that government move not in haste but "in a calm and orderly manner to address certain priority problems arising from" the case, the committee said. "Failure to do so can increase distrust and disillusionment and threaten further degradation of the American political system."

The committee, whose chairman is Charles P. Taft, said the proper way to deal with Watergate is firm prosecution of all violations arising out of the 1972 campaign, congressional action to strengthen federal election laws where necessary, and a study to determine whether laws governing campaign ethics are possible or advisable.

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