

Shorter Campaigns Proposed by Nixon

Libel Changes

By John P. MacKenzie
Washington Post Staff Writer

Charging that Supreme Court decisions had become "virtually a license to lie" about politicians, President Nixon said yesterday that Congress should relax state libel laws to give candidates redress against falsehoods uttered about them.

In a radio address and a congressional message on political campaign practices, Mr. Nixon said a change in libel laws is needed to encourage "good and decent people" to run for office without fear of "slandorous attacks on them or their families."

At present there is no federal libel law. White House aides and Justice Department lawyers could think of none in American history since the expiration of the much-criticized Alien and Sedition Act in the early 1800s.

No legislation was advanced yesterday, but Mr. Nixon said he had asked lawyers at Justice to draft a proposal. The process is expected to take at least a month.

Among the ideas under study:

- A federal libel law that would displace or supplement existing state laws where the person claiming he was libeled was a federal office-holder or candidate. Such a plaintiff would have an easier time proving that the falsehood was malicious than he would under current Supreme Court doctrine.

- Guidelines to ease the burden of proof in libel cases tried in the federal courts. Such cases reach federal tribunals because the plaintiff and defendant are from different states.

- A national "right-to-reply" law giving candidates access to space in news media whenever they are criticized there.

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Other Reforms

By Carroll Kilpatrick
Washington Post Staff Writer

President Nixon yesterday proposed a series of campaign reforms to require full disclosure of campaign spending and to shorten presidential campaigns by several months.

He said that no state should hold a presidential primary or convention before May 1 and that national party conventions should not be held until September.

Some states have held primaries as early as March, and conventions have been held in June, July or August. A shorter campaign would also reduce the cost of conducting a campaign, the President said.

He again urged serious consideration of a single presidential term of six years and a four-year term for members of the House.

The President's proposal would bar many of the "dirty tricks" and financial scandals that marred his own 1972 campaign.

The new proposals, many of which are contained in pending House or Senate bills, would require full disclosure of campaign contributions but would set no limit on total spending.

Strongly opposing Democratic recommendations for federal financing of congressional and presidential campaigns, Mr. Nixon said public financing would give incumbents an unfair advantage and would "sap the vitality of both national parties by placing them on a federal dole."

The President outlined his ideas in a message to Congress and in a radio address before departing for a weekend in Key Biscayne, Fla. In a busy morning, he also held a Cabinet meeting and conferred for over two hours with

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By Douglas Chevalier—The Washington Post

Bryce Harlow: "Not an effort to shaft the press."

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Republican congressional leaders to push his campaign reform package.

Democrats attacked the President's proposals, particularly his arguments against public financing.

The President recommended that:

- No candidate be allowed to have more than one political committee, thus barring a proliferation of committees that are now used to circumvent campaign finance laws.

- No congressional candidate be allowed to accept more than \$3,000 from an individual donor and that no presidential candidate be allowed to accept more than \$15,000 from a single donor.

- "In kind" contributions in the form of paid campaign workers, printing supplies and airplanes be prohibited unless fully accounted for and within the \$3,000 or \$15,000 ceiling.

- All donations of more than \$50 be made by check or other negotiable instrument.

- All campaign expenditures of more than \$50 be by check and made only from a candidate's campaign account to be held in a single bank.

LIBEL, From A1

whether the criticism is true or false.

Administration officials emphasized that their study is far from complete, and the President acknowledged that "a constitutional problem" existed for any such legislation. White House counselor Bryce Harlow, responding to a barrage of reporters' questions, said it was "not an effort to shaft the press."

Questions of the administration's motive arose because of Mr. Nixon's long history of differences with the press.

A line of Supreme Court decisions beginning in 1964 has required public officials, public figures and newsworthy persons to meet high standards of proof in order to maintain a libel suit.

They must prove that an injurious falsehood was uttered or published with what is termed "actual malice" — either with knowledge of its falsity or with reckless disregard of its truth or falsity.

Any more permissive standard, the court has said, "dampens the vigor and limits the variety of public debate" in violation of the First Amendment.

- All political loans be barred, stock donations prohibited and contributions from a foreigner outlawed.

Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) charged that the President's message was "grossly misleading and distorted in its opposition to public financing."

Kennedy said the President was trying to "obstruct or even kill the most effective response Congress has yet made to Watergate."

Kennedy described as "fatuous" the President's contention that public financing would mean taxation without representation.

After the leadership meeting at the White House, Senate Minority Leader Hugh Scott (R-Pa.) also said he did not agree with the President on the public financing issue.

Common Cause, another advocate of federal financing of campaigns, issued a statement declaring that the President's proposals "are an attempt to kill meaningful campaign finance reform . . . The story of his 1972 presidential campaign finances constitutes the greatest case ever made for controlling campaign finance abuses through public financing of elections."

The President urged repeal of the "equal time" provision that requires radio and television stations to give the same amount of time to all candidates instead of only to major party candidates.

Repeal of the "equal time" provision would cut campaign costs by allowing the electronic media to provide free campaign coverage to major candidates, Mr. Nixon said.

NBC president Julian Goodman hailed the President's call for repeal of "equal time" as an "affirmative step, which stands on its own merits."

In a more controversial suggestion affecting the media, Mr. Nixon said he had asked the Justice Department to draft legislation to make it easier for politicians to sue for libel when attacked by opponents or the news media.

To deal with the issue of "dirty tricks," the President urged federal laws prohibiting "activities that unreasonably disrupt the opposing candidate's campaign," which involve the use of force "such as the organized use of demonstrators to impede or deny entry at a campaign rally," and practices that involve rigging voting machines and stuffing ballots.