

Special Political Funds Grow

Washington

Political finance committees for special interest groups have collected \$16.4 million to contribute to 1976 political campaigns, Common Cause reported yesterday.

That amount, which is expected to increase by millions of dollars before the November elections, represents more than a 40 per cent increase over the \$11.7 million such committees collected for congressional races in 1974, according to the self-described citizens' lobby.

Fred Wertheimer, Common Cause vice president, said citizens should view the growth of the political action committees — especially in the corporate and labor sectors — with alarm.

"There is a potential corporate explosion in campaign financing," Wertheimer declared. "These developments present one of the most compelling cases yet on the need

for public financing of elections," he said.

Robert Griebner, director of political participation programs for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, which represents business interests, disagreed:

"You could bankrupt the country with federal financing of political campaigns," Griebner said. "Federal funding of elections removes the opportunity of people to participate in the political process. And, by God, that's what this country was founded for. That's why we have the political action committees — to broaden the base of political participation," he said.

Common Cause said in its report that "one of the most significant developments since the passage of the 1974 campaign finance law" was the birth of 242 new political giving committees — 75 per cent of them related to business and labor.

The citizens' group said that the 242 committees now represent 30 per cent of all special interest groups registered with the Federal Election Commission, which oversees campaign financing.

Of the new groups, 107 were established by corporations — including oil and steel companies — and 22 were set up by banks, Common Cause said. The remaining 25 per cent were sponsored by labor organizations, such as the AFL-CIO, and "miscellaneous groups," the report said.

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