

Key Accord on Campaign Law

Washington

Senate and House conferees reached agreement yesterday on extensive changes in the law governing the 1976 campaign, but their action came too late to permit restoration of federal subsidies for presidential candidates before mid-May.

The conferees' compromise could not clear both houses before Congress begins its Easter recess today so the Federal Election Commission won't be able to authorize campaign subsidies for about another three weeks.

As a result, presidential candidates will not have their subsidies available until the last three rounds of primaries in late May and early June.

The final compromise was reached when Senate conferees agreed to withdraw provisions requiring broad financial disclosure by federal officials and provisions creating a commission to improve the presidential nominating

process. The provisions were to be in exchange for House agreement to raise from \$15,000 to \$25,000 the total speaking fees that federal officials — notably senators — may earn in a year.

Congress moved to change the campaign law after the Supreme Court declared in January that the FEC had been unconstitutionally established. Legislation to reconstitute the agency rapidly became a vehicle for many other changes in the new system of subsidies, spending limits and disclosure of political fund-raising and spending.

Among major provisions of the conference recommendations reached yesterday are:

- New ceilings on the amounts that a political committee can give either to a party committee or another nonparty committee. Currently, there is no limit on such contributions; the bill would limit such gifts to a party committee to

\$15,000 and to a nonparty committee to \$5000.

- Political action committees set up by unions and corporations have unlimited solicitation powers, respectively, to union members and corporate stockholders and executive personnel, but they also have a right to appeal for contributions from the opposite constituency by mail twice a year.

- The FEC can investigate campaign law violations it discovers in reviewing reports or auditing, without a sworn notarized complaint.

- A candidate who raises money in pursuit of one federal office can transfer it to a second campaign for another federal office. This would presumably permit Senator Robert Byrd, a Democratic member of the conference committee, to use money raised during his current "favorite son" presidential candidacy for his re-election campaign in West Virginia in 1978.

New York Times