

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FEBRUARY 16, 1976

Office of the White House Press Secretary

THE WHITE HOUSE

TO THE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES:

In only two weeks time, unless there is affirmative action by the Congress, the Federal Election Commission will be stripped of most of its powers.

We must not allow that to happen. The American people can and should expect that our elections in this Bicentennial year, as well as other years, will be free of abuse. And they know that the Federal Election Commission is the single most effective unit for meeting that challenge.

The Commission has become the chief instrument for achieving clean Federal elections in 1976. If it becomes an empty shell, public confidence in our political process will be further eroded and the door will be opened to possible abuses in the coming elections. There would be no one to interpret, advise or provide needed certainty to the candidates with regard to the complexities of the Federal Election law. If we maintain the Commission, we can rebuild and restore the public faith that is essential for a democracy.

The fate of the Commission has been called into question, of course, by the decision of the Supreme Court on January 30. The Court ruled that the Commission was improperly constituted. The Congress gave the Commission executive powers but then, in violation of the Constitution, the Congress reserved to itself the authority to appoint four of the six members of the Commission. The Court said that this defect could be cured by having all members of the Commission nominated by the President upon the advice and consent of the Senate. Under the Court's ruling, the Commission was given a 30-day lease on life so that the defect might be corrected.

I fully recognize that other aspects of the Court's decision and that, indeed, the original law itself have created valid concerns among Members of Congress. I share many of those concerns, and I share in a desire to reform and improve upon the current law. For instance, one section of the law provides for a one-House veto of Commission regulations, a requirement that is unconstitutional as applied to regulations of an agency performing Executive functions. I am willing to defer legislative resolution of this problem, just as I hope the members of Congress will defer adjustment of other provisions in the interest of the prompt action which is now essential.

It is clear that the 30-day period provided by the Court to reconstitute the Commission is not sufficient to undertake a comprehensive review and reform of the campaign laws. And most assuredly, this 30-day period must not become a convenient excuse to make ineffective the campaign reforms that are already on the books and have been upheld

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by the Court. There is a growing danger that opponents of campaign reform will exploit this opportunity for the wrong purposes. This cannot be tolerated; there must be no retreat from our commitment to clean elections.

Therefore, I am today submitting remedial legislation to the Congress for immediate action. This legislation incorporates two recommendations that I discussed with the bipartisan leaders of the Congress shortly after the Court issued its opinion.

First, I propose that the Federal Election Commission be reconstituted so that all of its six members are nominated by the President and confirmed by the Senate. This action must be taken before the February 29 deadline.

Second, to ensure that a full-scale review and reform of the election laws are ultimately undertaken, I propose that we limit through the 1976 elections the application of those laws administered by the Commission. When the elections have been completed and all of us have a better understanding of the problems in our current statutes, I will submit to the Congress a new, comprehensive election reform bill to apply to future elections. I also pledge that I will work with the Congress to enact a new law that will meet many of the objections of the current system.

I know there is widespread disagreement within the Congress on what reforms should be undertaken. That controversy is healthy; it bespeaks of a vigorous interest in our political system. But we must not allow our divergent views to disrupt the approaching elections. Our most important task now is to ensure the continued life of the Federal Election Commission, and I urge the Congress to work with me in achieving that goal.

GERALD R. FORD

THE WHITE HOUSE,

February 16, 1976.

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