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Statement by Senator Edmund S. Muskie on the Honest Elections Reform Act of 1971

Edmund S. Muskie

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MUSKIE

Maine

(202) 225-5344

FOR RELEASE

IMMEDIATELY
January 25, 1971

MUSKIE SUPPORTS ELECTIONS REFORM ACT OF 1971

In a statement released from his Washington office today, Senator Edmund S. Muskie, (D-Maine), announced his sponsorship of the Honest Elections Reform Act of 1971. The full text of Senator Muskie's statement, issued from California, is as follows:

MR. MUSKIE.

Mr. President, I am proud to join with Senator Gravel and Senator Pearson in sponsoring as the first Senate bill of the 92nd Congress, the Honest Elections Reform Act of 1971. The bill, S.1, is one which I hope will lay the foundation for debate and action by the Congress in this very important area of reform.

We are all aware of the need for substantial changes in the way campaigns are financed and run in this country. Existing law does not deal with the problem of spiraling campaign costs, nor does it provide complete coverage in the area of disclosure requirements. Its provisions dealing with limitations on campaign expenditures are totally outdated.

The result of such inadequacies in the existing law has been a loss of public confidence in our whole elections process which is at the very heart of our democratic way of life.

Now is the time to act to insure that political campaigns in this country reflect what the public demands--honesty and openness throughout the election process, and equal access to this process for all, regardless of economic means.

Last fall, the Congress passed legislation imposing a limit on the amount that a candidate for Federal office could spend on the broadcast media, by far the single most rapidly rising expense in campaigns today. This legislation was vetoed by the President.

I supported that legislation, as a strong step toward limiting the cost of political campaigns, while at the same time realizing that more comprehensive proposals were necessary.

Today, I have sponsored legislation which reflects just such a comprehensive approach. Among its most important points are:

---a limitation on the amount which any individual can contribute to any one candidate.

---a tightening of the campaign committee structure designed: (1) to require full disclosure of expenses, contributions, and transfers of funds by a political committee, thus closing significant loopholes in existing laws; and (2) to inhibit the proliferation of committees over which the candidate himself has no control.

---the establishment of an independent Federal elections commission empowered with broad authority to supervise the running of campaigns, report violations, and recommend further legislative action in the area of election and campaign procedures.

---a limitation on total media expenditures by a candidate

---suspension of the Equal Time provision of the Communications Act to provide free voters time for Presidential and Vice Presidential candidates, and to permit debates between Presidential candidates.

The bill as presently written is not a perfect one. Amendments will be required.

And the Congress should act on other proposals to make our election process more responsive, such as a proposal to establish universal voter registration which I understand will be introduced during the 92nd Congress.

But it is appropriate and necessary to begin with the broadest possible approach-- one which will stimulate debate by the Congress and the American people, and one which can be effective.
