

Wednesday, March 14, 2007

Chairman Feinstein Calls for Passage of Senate Campaign Electronic Filing Bill at Rules Committee Hearing

Washington, DC – U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.), Chairman of the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration, today called for passage of legislation to require that Senate campaign finance reports be filed electronically.

The following is the prepared text of Chairman Feinstein's opening remarks for today's Rules Committee hearing:

“Good morning. I'd like to welcome Ranking Member Bennett and the other members of the Committee to this hearing today.

In the coming months, our committee will be taking a hard look at a wide range of campaign finance reform issues – 527 Organizations, Leadership PACs, Public Financing and the high cost of television ads to name a few.

We also have several nominees to the Federal Election Commission pending and we will carefully consider this important Commission.

But I believe that one of the first things we should do is consider a bill, S.223, which requires that Senate campaign finance reports be filed electronically, rather than in paper format.

We have its two lead sponsors here today: Senators Feingold and Cochran, and we will be hearing from them shortly.

Currently, House candidates, Presidential candidates, political action committees and party committees are all required to file electronically. But Senators, Senate candidates and party committees are exempt.

As a result, we have a cumbersome system in which paper copies of disclosure reports are filed with the Senate Office of Public Records, which scans them to make an electronic copy and sends the copy to the FEC on a dedicated communications line.

The FEC then prints the report and sends it to a vendor in Fredericksburg, Virginia, where the information is keyed in by hand and then transferred back to the FEC database – at cost of approximately \$250,000 annually to taxpayers.

Frankly, this makes no sense to me.

Some may wonder why we are even having a public hearing for such a common-sense proposal.

But after looking at the difficult path that this legislation has had in the past, I felt it was important that this Committee establish a legislative record which, among other things, will demonstrate the strong support that is out there for electronic filing.

And I wanted to build the case for urging my colleagues to refrain from holding this bill hostage over other campaign finance battles that have been going on for years.

This is exactly the type of good government law that the Senate could adopt as a stand alone measure.

I anticipate we will be having a mark-up of this bill in the coming weeks.

And I hope we can move the legislation without burdening it with extraneous items that will hold up passage.

It's long past time to bring the Senate into the modern era."

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