P.S. to the NEWS

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WATERGATE "REFORM" LAWS

As a result of Watergate, Congress and many state legislatures passed a plethora of new laws supposedly designed to reform election machinery and prevent Watergate-type abuses from happening again.

Several years' experience with these laws indicate that they bear no relation to the prob1ems raised by Watergate, they do nothing to make elections more honest, they have failed to restore public confidence in government, and they interfere with a citizen's right to participate in the process of self government.

The core of the Watergate abuses was a symbiosis of perjury, the secret taping of private conversations, the misuse of the cover of "national security" to **break** into private premises, and conspiracy to cover up crimes and obstruct justice. What in the world does all that have to do with the financing of political campaigns?

Yet Watergate has been used as the justification for laws that require taxpayer financing of presidential candidates, that severely restrict the individual's right to contribute to Congressional candidates of his choice, and that impose onerous and useless burdens on political candidates.

These burdens were justified on the rationale that they would eliminate the influence of "special interests." But "special interests" were not the cause of Watergate, and their elimination (even if it were possible) could not be its remedy. In fact, the money raised and spent in the Nixon presidential campaigns was as broadly based as any in history and came from millions of individual contributors;

Present "reform" laws so severely hamstring individual political contributions that they raise a serious constitutional question as to whether our First Amendment rights to express political views are being proscribed. But these same

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laws do little or nothing to limit the so-called special interests.

Thus an individual can give only $1,000 to a candidate for the U.S. Senate, but a special-interest Political Action Committee (PAC) can give $5,000, and there seems to be no limit to the number of PACs a special interest group can form.

According to Dr. Herbert E. Alexander, an authority on campaign laws and practices, "reformers set out to weaken the influence of special interests, but they are not accomplishing it.... It is ironic that special interests are becoming more influential than in the past, according to financial reports."

The reporting requirements which the laws impose on candidates require the use of expensive lawyers and accountants to keep the candidates and their friends from going to jail. There is no evidence that this cost is producing better candidates or more honest elections. These "reforms" have not "opened up" the political system to more citizen participation but narrowed it because of fear of becoming an innocent victim of technical regulations or arbitrary rulings.

Despite the dissatisfaction with the election "reform" laws now in effect, some are continuing to push for taxpayer financing of Congressional candidates as well as presidential candidates. This would take away the individual's right to contribute to a Congressional candidate of his own choice and substitute some kind of Federal formula for the allocation of taxpayer funds.

To finance Congressional campaigns by taxes instead of voluntary contributions simply forces the individual indirectly to finance candidates he does not choose to support.

It's beginning to look as though the so-called "reform" laws, which were sold to the public as a means of eliminating "special interests," are instead increasing the power of the biggest "specia1 interest" of all, namely, the Federal bureaucrats who yearn to spend our money and manage our lives.