JeS& to the NEWS

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TAXPAYER FINANCING OF CONGRESSIONAL RACES

Although our country has survived the fifth anniversary of Watergate, and suffered through the long-drawn-out trials and convictions of some two score high Government officials, we have not yet seen the end of the damage it has caused to our system of government.

Watergate is being used as the excuse to saddle the taxpayers with a new and costly bureaucracy and to bring about fundamental changes which are disadvantageous to our democratic election process.

Masquerading under the label "reform," the latest gimmick spawned by Watergate is Taxpayer Financing of Congressional Elections. President Carter has made it part of his priority package of election legislation, Congressional leaders are backing it, and pundits are predicting its probable passage.

Since everyone admits that there is absolutely no public demand for taxpayer financing of Congressional races, why the persistent push? Because Congressmen see it as even more valuable to their self-interest than the substantial pay raise they voted themselves in the last session.

After a11, the pay raise only gave each Congressman a few more thousands of dollars of salary and expenses, whereas the Taxpayer Financing Bill will make sure they are reelected. It should be called the Incumbents' Protection Act of 197f.

Any plan which provides equal amounts of taxpayer financing to Congressional incumbents and their challengers, and putsa ceiling on campaign spending, is bound to advantage the incumbent Congressman by a sizeable and probably decisive margin. This is because the limits set by the money subsidies ignore the tremendous built-in advantages of an incumbent Congressman's perquisites of office.

These include his staff, his in-district and in-Washington office expenses, his trips home to his /district, his franking privilege, his free mail sent repeatedly to every addressee

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in his district, his media exposure and name identification. Estimates of the value of these advantages range from $200,000 to $1,500,000 per Congressman.

We already have taxpayer financing for the presidential race. The funds are derived from taxpayers checking off a little box on their Federal income tax returns to allocate one dollar of their taxes to this purpose. In 1975 (the last year with complete figures), only 26 percent of U.S. taxpayers checked that box. That means that 74 percent of taxpayers did not check the box and thereby silently expressed their disapproval of the plan.

It is estimated that a staggering number of lawyers, accountants, and auditors would be needed both by the Federal Election Commission in Washington and in the individual Congressional campaigns.

Federal financing of the 1976 campaign to elect one President of the United States required 12 million pages of information to be submitted by 15 candidates, and some 200 Federal employees to audit the paperwork. How many tons of paperwork and how many hundreds of Federal employees would be required to handle 435 House races and 100 Senate races?

The burden on candidates would be just as great. During the 1976 race, Jimmy Carter employed some 150 lawyers and nearly 100 accountants to keep his campaign receipts and expenditures in compliance with the law.

There is no evidence that the American people want taxpayer financing of Congressional races. Congressional mail and home-district visits reveal no public demand or enthusiasm for this bill.

With a11 the projects and programs that need Federal financing and to which we are already committed, and with the taxpayers saying 11ouchllat the tax bite in their pocketbook, this hardly seems the time to inaugurate an expensive new bureaucracy that will surely double in cost with each biennial election.