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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 213

Offered January 24, 2000

Establishing a joint subcommittee to study campaign finance reform issues.

Patrons—Wagner, Blevins, Cantor, Devolites, Griffith, Ingram, Jones, S.C., McDonnell, Nixon, Orrock, Putney, Reid and Ruff

Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, House and Senate candidates in the 1999 contests for the General Assembly spent more than \$22 million in total even though 67 of the 140 seats were uncontested, and candidates spent more than \$500,000 in each of 11 House of Delegates and six Senate races; and

WHEREAS, total expenditures in the 84th House District and 21st and 34th Senate Districts neared or exceeded \$1 million; and

WHEREAS, the total spent by the two candidates in the 1997 race for Governor climbed past the \$20 million mark; and

WHEREAS, spiraling campaign costs force officeholders and candidates to focus time and efforts on fund raising rather than governing; and

WHEREAS, pressures exerted by expensive campaigns make larger contributions, and their donors, more important; and

WHEREAS, these pressures test the integrity of the candidates who ask for money and the donors who respond; and

WHEREAS, Virginia has relied on voluntary disclosure by candidates and political committees to keep the process free from corruption; and

WHEREAS, the Commonwealth has declined to impose limits on campaign contributions or to audit or examine campaign disclosure reports for compliance; and

WHEREAS, significant developments in campaign finance law are underway with the enactment since 1996 of "clean elections acts" in Maine, Vermont, Arizona, and Massachusetts, as are court challenges testing these new efforts to limit expenditures and contributions; and

WHEREAS, the United States Supreme Court heard arguments in October in Nixon v. Shrink Missouri Government PAC, a case challenging Missouri's contribution limits; and

WHEREAS, the Shrink case allows the Court to revisit its 1976 decision in Buckley v. Valeo, the case in which the Court upheld federal campaign contribution limits as a means to prevent corruption of candidates but struck down campaign expenditure limits as an unjustified interference with free speech; and

WHEREAS, the increasing costs of political campaigns, new campaign finance experiments in other states, and the pendency of a new Supreme Court ruling, all combine to justify a study of the campaign finance laws in Virginia; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That a joint subcommittee be established to study Virginia's campaign finance laws. The joint subcommittee shall be composed of nine members, which shall include seven legislative members and two nonlegislative citizen members as follows: four members of the House of Delegates and one citizen member, to be appointed by the Speaker; and three members of the Senate and one citizen member, to be appointed by the Senate Committee on Privileges and Elections.

In conducting its study, the joint subcommittee shall examine the costs of campaigning in Virginia, the effectiveness of the Commonwealth's present disclosure laws and their enforcement, the constitutional options available to regulate campaign finances, and possible revisions in Virginia's laws to promote the integrity of, and public confidence in, Virginia's campaign system.

The direct costs of this study shall not exceed \$11,700.

The Division of Legislative Services shall provide staff support for the study. Technical assistance shall be provided by the State Board of Elections. All agencies of the Commonwealth shall provide assistance to the joint subcommittee, upon request.

The joint subcommittee shall complete its work in time to submit its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the 2001 Session of the General Assembly as provided in the procedures of the Division of Legislative Automated Systems for the processing of legislative documents.

Implementation of this resolution is subject to subsequent approval and certification by the Joint Rules Committee. The Committee may withhold expenditures or delay the period for the conduct of the study.

INTRODUCED

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