

FULL FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE

Recently, the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Administrative Law conducted hearings of the Financial Disclosure Act of 1976. At those hearings I introduced an amendment to the Financial Disclosure Bill to require that Federal office holders, Federal executives, and candidates for Federal office release their income tax returns from the previous year. The Bill is now under consideration in the House Judiciary Subcommittee and may be reported to the full committee in the near future.

I have this week included the text of my remarks to the Subcommittee in my report. My testimony follows.

TSONGAS TESTIMONY

The issue of full financial disclosure is a critical one in the 94th Congress. Most members of the Freshman Class were elected to Congress with a mandate to reform a system which too often has failed to police itself. Public confidence in government and in Congress in particular has plummeted. Clearly, disclosure legislation is long overdue. Since the Financial Disclosure Act of 1976 is a major reform measure, it is important that this law require the most complete and responsible financial accounting. For this reason I am offering an amendment to the bill which will require that those covered in the Financial Disclosure Act shall release copies of their income tax returns from the previous calendar year.

CONFIDENCE IN GOVERNMENT

We have experienced a crisis of confidence in the integrity of Congress. A Harris Survey last November showed that public confidence in Congress has dropped from 42 percent in 1966 to 14 percent. Last March, a Harris survey on public confidence in American institutions showed Congress ranking lowest in public trust, with only nine percent of the American people expressing confidence in Congress. In another question about the quality of leadership both inside and outside the government, the Survey revealed that 53 percent of the American people feel that the caliber of leadership has grown worse in the past ten years.

One way we can restore public trust in government is by requiring total financial disclosure by key government officials and candidates for Federal office. In 1952, former Senator Paul Douglas stated in his book, Ethics in Government, "Disclosure would, in my judgement be a great reassurance to the general public. On the basis of a rather long participation in local and national government, I believe that the level of integrity is much higher than is commonly realized. The vast majority of administrators and legislators are comparatively honest."

UNETHICAL PRACTICES

In a statement on unethical practices which seems applicable today, Douglas said:

"The good name of the vast majority of decent public servants has been besmirched by the misbehavior of a relatively small minority...because of the apparent reluctance of many in high station to carry through any vigorous clean-up policy, the public has come to believe that the revealed sins of the few are the predominant practices of the many. The men who have committed unethical acts have not only disgraced themselves; they have disgraced the federal service and they have seriously weakened the faith which people have in their government. When faith is thus weakened, the power of our democracy to survive is also dangerously impaired."

Complete financial disclosure would go a long way in restoring public confidence. The Watergate scandal only served to highlight the general public suspicion that government is not worthy of public trust. A Gallup Poll following the 1974 Congressional elections revealed that 24 percent of those who did not vote refrained because of discouragement or disinterest in the political process. In April 1975, a Harris Survey revealed that 72 percent of the American people think that "Congress is still too much under the influence of special-interest lobbies" and that "one trouble with Congress is that it looks after its own benefit instead of acting in the public interest."

AIM OF FULL DISCLOSURE

The function of total financial disclosure would be primarily to restore public confidence in government by putting to rest any public suspicion of wrong-doing and leaving the record open for public inspection. In addition, strict financial disclosure laws can serve to discourage possible candidates for public office who would rank their financial interests above public service and act as a guide for those persons in office who might not otherwise think twice.

I respectfully urge the Committee to consider the amendment I have offered as further assurance to the public that government is worthy of their trust.