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CONTACT: DAVID FISKE
SUSAN TIFFT
(202) 523-4065

FEC REQUESTS PUBLIC COMMENT

WASHINGTON - July 12 - The Federal Election Commission today announced it will hold public hearings this Fall to consider "practical problems" relating to the funding of debates between Federal candidates.

The hearings arise out of the FEC's decision last Fall that the Carter-Ford Presidential debates could be sponsored by the League of Women Voters, but that corporate or union funds to help finance the debates were prohibited by the Federal campaign finance law.

In a notice published today in the Federal Register, the FEC said that public hearings would begin September 12. The FEC also asked for written comments, suggested regulatory language, and factual material relating to the numerous questions about Federal candidate debates posed by the FEC in the notice. The notice said that the public may submit written comments through September 30.

Among the questions being considered by the FEC are the following:

1. Are Federal candidate debates held "for the purpose of influencing" an election or are they "in connection with" a Federal election?
2. Does the exclusion or inclusion of third party and independent candidates affect whether the funds to finance debates "influence" an election, or are "in connection with" an election? Do such factors as receipt of public funding, or ballot qualification determine whether debate funding "influences" or is "in connection with" an election?
3. How do these factors affect debates between congressional primary and general election candidates?
4. Should candidate debates be sponsored by educational and non-profit organizations, or should other categories of sponsors be included?
5. Who should have control of the subject matter and format of candidate debates?
6. What are the partisan effects of candidate debates on the election?
7. What effects do corporate, labor union and Federal contractor sponsorship and funding have on candidate debates, and the ensuing election?