

FEDERAL ELECTION COMMISSION



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FINANCE CHAIRMAN THOMAS ADDRESSES HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS PANEL

WASHINGTON -- Commissioner Scott E. Thomas told a House appropriations subcommittee today that the Federal Election Commission requires a funding level of \$30.8 million for Fiscal Year 1997 if it is to accomplish what Congress has requested.

Thomas, chairman of the FEC's Finance Committee, testified before the Subcommittee on Treasury, Postal Service, and General Government of the House Committee on Appropriations. He told panel members that the FEC is making progress in Congressionally-mandated computerization upgrading at the Commission, saying:

"The FEC's FY 1997 budget request...seeks \$30,877,000 and 331.5 FTEs [employees]. This funding level will enable the agency to perform at current levels and avoid serious backlogs (like those during 1992-93-94) caused by surges in workload. It provides adequate funding for significant progress on the three computerization initiatives, as well."

Congress appropriated some \$26.5 million for the FEC in the FY'96 budget, but "fenced" \$1.5 million for computerization initiatives, an ongoing effort at the Commission.

Thomas noted, "The President's suggested funding for FY 1997 is only \$29.3 million with an FTE level of 313.5. Thus, the President's mark falls \$1.5 million and 18 FTE short of the amount we feel necessary to simply sustain current performance levels and avoid the backlogs caused in the past by workload increases. The President's figure would not even accommodate the costs of the three computerization initiatives, unless we make extensive cuts in other operations," adding, "At this point, our goal is merely to hold the line."

He continued, "The FEC is charged by Congress to perform several difficult functions. The FEC's primary duty is administering and enforcing the disclosure provisions and contribution limits and prohibitions applicable to over 8,000 federal candidate committees, PACs, and party committees. We process over 100,000 disclosure reports and statements and computerize over 1.5 million transactions each election cycle."

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"The FEC's Reports Analysis Division reviews these reports and transactions for signs of non-compliance. Over 1,000 respondents routinely are pending on our enforcement docket. Our legal staff closed more than 500 enforcement cases in the 1994 cycle. The Public Records Office received over 237,000 information requests for the 1994 cycle, and other divisions handled over 200,000 inquiries or visitors seeking guidance on how to comply with the law. On top of these tasks, the FEC administers and enforces the presidential public funding provisions and provides information to election administrators across the country through the Clearinghouse on Election Administration. In short, the FEC has a full platter."

Thomas continued, "The signs are unmistakable that the FEC's FY 1997 workload will be greater than ever before. The spending level disclosed to and processed by the FEC probably will reach \$2.5 billion for the 1996 cycle -- 25% higher than any previous cycle. Fiscal Year 1997, which begins on Oct. 1, 1996, will experience the brunt of this surge in activity. The October quarterly, pre-election, post-election, and year-end reports will be processed and reviewed during FY 1997. The biggest wave of audit and enforcement work related to the 1996 election will fall in FY 1997, as well. Adequate resources must be available to assure prompt disclosure and compliance efforts and to avoid the backlogs and delays experienced in the past.

"The FEC, contrary to what you often hear or read, has taken and continues to take many steps to improve its performance. We are totally and enthusiastically committed to making the FEC work better," the FEC Finance Chairman concluded.

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