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Office of the White House Press Secretary

THE WHITE HOUSE

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

One year ago the Federal Election Commission was set up because voters across the country wanted a strong watchdog to ensure that we have clean and honest elections.

Now, as a result of a Supreme Court decision and a delay in Congressional action, the essential powers of that Commission are in jeopardy. Unless Congress acts within the 20-day extension just granted by the Supreme Court, the Commission will no longer be able to:

- Enforce the campaign reform laws;
- advise candidates on what those laws mean;
- or certify candidates for Federal matching funds.

In short, the watchdog will have lost its teeth. We must not retreat from our commitment to clean elections.

When the Supreme Court acted on this matter, it made it clear that the Congress could remedy this problem by simply reconstituting the Commission. I supported the court's view and asked that the Congress act swiftly to extend the life of the Commission.

Instead, various interests -- both political and otherwise, both in and out of the Congress -- have chosen this moment to advance a wide-range of hastily considered changes in the campaign laws. Most of the bills now being considered in the Congress would introduce great uncertainty into the campaign process. With the 1976 elections only nine months away, I do not believe this is a proper time to begin tampering with the campaign reform laws, and I will veto any bill that will create confusion and will invite further delay and litigation.

Certainly no one is fully satisfied with the campaign laws now in the books. When the current political season is behind us, I ask the Congress to work with me in conducting a thorough review and revision of those laws. But right now, the most pressing task is to re-establish the Federal Election Commission as quickly as possible. I urge the Congress to put aside its debates and enact the bill that I have sent to the Congress to provide for an immediate and simple extension of the Commission.

We must get on with the job of ensuring that the political process in 1976 will be just as fair and honest as we can make it.