

STATEMENT ON THE CONFERENCE REPORT

November 10, 1966

RUSSELL B. LONG, Chairman

Let me turn now to the area of political campaign contributions.

First, let me make it clear that this is an area on which the Senate Finance Committee has held hearings. An earlier version of the amendment adopted by the committee was presented in these hearings for consideration by the committee. This is also true of various other plans, including the tax deduction plan favored by the Senator from Delaware (Mr. Williams). I might also add that the problem of political campaign contributions has been discussed on the Senate floor not merely in connection with this bill, but also in connection with earlier legislation. At the time we last raised the debt limitation, the Senator from Delaware (Mr. Williams) sought to amend that bill with his provision providing for political contribution deductions. The matter was extensively considered by the Senate at that time and rejected. However, this proposal was analyzed in hearings on political contributions held by the committee as I promised at the time.

This is a matter which has been considered extensively, not only in the current year, but in past years as well. As the Senator from Tennessee (Mr. Gore) indicated, this is a problem which he had under study some 10 years ago. The problem with these past studies, however, is that they were just studies—no action was taken. I can well understand this, because the area of political campaign contributions is a multiple problem. It is a problem which, in part, is appropriately considered by one committee and, in part, by other committees. In the past it has been difficult to obtain action on this problem because of the feeling that it was impossible to act on any one of these problems until action had been completed on the others. This, in turn, prevented action by all of the committees. Senator Clark made this aspect of the situation quite clear in his discussion of the Presidential Election Campaign Fund Act.

I should make it clear that I do not consider the Long Act as a full answer to all of the problems in connection with political campaign contributions. First of all, this deals only with presidential campaigns. It may well be that after we see how this provision works in the case of presidential campaigns we may want to extend either this provision or some modified version of it, to cover congressional elections. I do not know the answer to this, and I think it would be unfortunate for us to reach an inflexible position in this regard until after we have tried this provision for a period of time in the case of presidential campaigns.

Second, I want to make it clear that in my view this bill does not replace the need for additional legislation regulating political contributions or requiring disclosure of the source of political campaign contributions. Moreover, this does not deal with other issues which we may have to face with respect to the division of television time or what organizations can properly make campaign expenditures. These are all issues, however, as to which it will be easier to come up with specific answers after my amendment is a part of the law, because it will give assurance of adequate financing for the most important of all political campaigns.

Nor do I contend that my provision itself even in the limited area in which it is intended to operate is, in all respects, necessarily a perfect answer to the problem. I am sure that modifications will be necessary as we gain experience under this provision. Nevertheless, I view the Long Act as major legislation which will give assurance that presidential candidates are not necessarily obligated to any financial interests as a result of the necessity to raise funds to finance their campaigns. There are sizable groups of citizens in our country who suspect that these financial contributions have influenced governmental decisions. We should remove this shadow and prevent the possibility of anything like this in the future. To me this is the most important aspect of my amendment.

I realize that some say, "But you haven't prevented the other campaign contributions from being made in addition to the funds provided by your bill." I have two answers to this: first, as I have already indicated, this is not the last time that I expect legislation to be passed with respect to political campaign contributions. I will be prepared to support limitations to outlaw private contributions to presidential campaigns when such legislation is before the Senate, and now that we have assurance of adequate financing for presidential campaigns, it will, for the first time from a practical point of view, really be possible to consider limitations such as I have referred to.

Obtaining funds on a very small basis from a very wide group of our citizens is the best possible way of being sure that no financial group can be said to have gained undue influence. Others have tried to find a way of obtaining this broad participation through tax deductions or credits. However, the effort which would be required to obtain these contributions in amounts as small as \$1 from so many people raises the collection costs under these other devices to such an extent as to make them impractical. Moreover, a tax deduction or even a tax credit tends to provide more of an incentive for those in the higher income groups to make contributions than for taxpayers of more modest means. This is a kind of selection that I think is undesirable in attempting to influence political contributions.