



Welcoming Remarks

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Federal Election Commission

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Welcome to the Federal Election Commission's first open meeting of 2021. Today marks our first public meeting since June of last year, and the first with six Commissioners since February 2017 – almost four years ago.

I'd like to welcome my fellow Commissioners, and to thank 2020 Chair Trainor for taking over the helm of the Commission on short notice in June and seeing us through to the end of a tumultuous year, a period when we not only lacked a quorum but were confronted with significant challenges associated with the pandemic.

I look forward to working with Vice Chair Dickerson and Commissioner Cooksey, both of whom I had the pleasure of getting to know during the nomination process last year. I have enjoyed working closely with Commissioner Weintraub over the years as a staff member and I look forward to doing so as a fellow Commissioner in 2021. And once again, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Commissioner Walther for offering me the opportunity to work for him over the past several years; two of those years during which he served as Vice Chair and one of those years during which he was Chair. Hopefully, I've learned a thing or two from him about being an effective Commissioner and Chair and, equally important, about being a kind and considerate person.

And of course, I want to praise our dedicated and hardworking staff for their exemplary work during these difficult times. I think it would be fair to say that they were dealt a “triple blow” last year. First, like most federal workers, our employees had to figure out how to perform their jobs and keep this agency running smoothly without access to their offices, while simultaneously caring for their loved ones and dealing with the general upheaval created by the COVID-19 crisis. At the same time, given that so many Americans have endured severe economic hardship as a result of the pandemic, I’m sure I speak for many of my colleagues when I say how fortunate we were to still have jobs.

Second, as you might expect, our workload at the FEC tends to increase during a presidential election year, but 2020 stands out by far in terms of the demands that were placed on a large segment of our staff. The sheer volume of campaign finance activity in 2020 shattered many records; the 2020 election was roughly twice as expensive as the 2016 election in terms of presidential and congressional spending. As you can imagine, this translated into substantially more work for our staff, who did a fantastic job getting accurate and timely information out to the public regarding amounts and sources of money raised and spent on federal elections.

Finally, the absence of a quorum for approximately 15 out of the last 16 months proved to be a unique and daunting challenge for our agency. Although the Commission was prevented from performing basic policymaking and enforcement functions, our employees continued to fulfill our crucial mission of providing transparency and fairly enforcing and administering Federal campaign finance laws. As disclosure filings increased, our staff rose to the occasion by reviewing, processing, and making public millions of pages of disclosure information and hundreds of millions of transactions. And they continued to diligently litigate ongoing court cases, examine and process new enforcement complaints and responses, and analyze and investigate enforcement matters to the maximum extent possible.

I don’t wish to dwell on statistics today, but I think it’s important for the public to grasp the magnitude of data that we handle and the ever-increasing volume of information that our employees process in an efficient and timely manner. The

2020 election cycle set numerous records, both in terms of the money raised and spent on federal elections and the amount of financial activity reported to the FEC. The number of financial transactions reported to the FEC has increased dramatically over the past several election cycles: In the 2016 election cycle, it was just over 122 million. In the 2018 cycle, it rose to nearly 270 million. By the 2020 cycle, that number had risen to over 616 million financial transactions – a five-fold increase since the last presidential cycle.

To put this rapid increase into perspective, consider that in October 2020 alone, we received 28,026 reports and statements disclosing 147.9 million transactions. In other words, more transactions were reported to the FEC last October than we received during the entirety of the 2016 election cycle. Public interest in our campaign finance data was similarly high: on the busiest day of October 2020, our website's API (Application Programming Interface) successfully handled 1.4 million data requests. Total API hits for the election cycle were over 392.8 million. Our dedicated staff reviewed over 104,529 documents and 121.5 million pages last year, a four-fold increase over the 2016 presidential year. Our staff stood ready to help committees comply with the law and to assist the public in understanding campaign finance data.

Of course, without the minimum number of Commissioners, it was simply not possible to make progress in certain areas. My colleague Commissioner Weintraub performed a great service by periodically disseminating sobering figures on the backlog; for example, she noted that around the time we regained a quorum last month, there were 446 enforcement matters pending before the agency. This figure counts all matters before the Commission and everything being handled in our General Counsel's office, including 275 staff reports that sat atop our desks awaiting a Commission decision.

We must now collectively roll up our sleeves and tackle these matters, both complex and simple. As Chair, my main priority will be to focus our attention on the numerous enforcement cases that are imperiled by an impending statute of limitations. I am hopeful that we can make progress in other areas as well, such as promulgating rules that curb the activities of "scam PACs," which are committees that employ misleading tactics to divert funds that contributors believed they

were donating in support of their favored candidates and causes. I also hope we can achieve a consensus on new rules for internet advertising disclaimers; the need for having these rules in place increases in tandem with the growing use of social media as a campaign tool.

The lack of a quorum has left Commission unable to send legislative recommendations to Congress since 2018; I hope that we can achieve consensus this year, as we have been able to do in the past, and agree on sensible measures for Congress to consider. For example, we should revisit proposals to extend the prohibition on conversion of campaign funds to personal use, and to prohibit aiding or abetting the making of contributions in the name of another.

In addition, we can do more to take advantage of social media by making educational tools readily available to the public. We have made great improvements to our website over the past few years and will continue to do so this year; I am keenly aware that it often serves as our primary vehicle for engaging with the public.

Finally, I want to take a moment to reflect on recent events related to our elections, which have been both encouraging and disheartening. Almost 160 million Americans voted in the November general election, the most in history by far, and American citizens showed their determination and resolve by casting their votes in the midst of a global pandemic while encountering structural and legal barriers to voting. However, we have sadly witnessed the fragility of our democracy in our capital city last week. As my fellow Commissioners and I affirmed to the FEC staff last week, “The work that all of you do furthers the FEC’s important role in promoting participation in our democracy and protecting the integrity of our elections.”

Despite our differences, the Commissioners and FEC staff are committed to joining efforts toward that goal. I’m enthusiastically looking forward to working with everyone as we forge ahead in 2021.

Thank you.