

SENATE STATE GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

SENATE COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE FOR **SENATE, No. 615**

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: MARCH 14, 1996

The Senate State Government Committee reports favorably a Senate Committee Substitute for Senate Bill No. 615.

This bill provides for an increase in the number of debates in which candidates for the office of Governor are required to participate as a condition of receiving public financing. Under present law, two debates are held among publicly financed candidates in the primary election and two debates are held among publicly financed candidates in the general election. Under the bill, the number of debates in each case is to be increased to three.

In addition, the bill would eliminate an existing provision of law that limits sponsorship of gubernatorial debates to organizations "which have previously sponsored one or more televised debates among candidates for Statewide office in the State since 1976". It would also permit cable television companies to be considered as eligible sponsors for gubernatorial debates.

The bill requires the Election Law Enforcement Commission (ELEC), when selecting a sponsor for each debate, to consider whether there is a history of conflict of interest or the potential for such a conflict with respect to any of the candidates for nomination or election to the office of Governor. As used in the bill, "conflict of interest" means an actual conflict of interest, as well as the appearance of a conflict of interest currently, in the past or prospectively, with respect to any candidate or the political party of such a candidate. The bill also requires the commission to select the sponsor of each debate by majority vote of the entire authorized membership of the commission, except that if there are two vacancies on the commission at the time of such a vote, the selection shall occur if both remaining members vote affirmatively for a particular sponsor and if both members are of different political parties.

The provisions of this legislation increasing the number of gubernatorial debates would implement a recommendation made by ELEC on May 18, 1994.