Common Cause fights PAC committees

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WASHINGTON — Common Cause Tuesday announced the kick off of a nationwide campaign to heighten public awareness of the damaging effect political action committees have on Congress.

"It is clear the members of Congress need to feel the heat of public opinion if we are to change the current system of financing their elections," said Fred Wertheimer, Common Cause president.

The campaign is titled "People versus PACS" and is designed to bring public pressure to bear on the House and Senate to adopted congressional campaign finance reforms, said Wertheimer.

As part of the month-long campaign, Common Cause also released a study showing that during the first six months in office, the 80 freshmen members of the House received $1,575,223 from PACs. That accounts for 43 percent of their overall receipts of $3,630,714 from Jan. 1 through June 30, 1982, said Wertheimer.

When the 80 individuals cited were candidates running for office in the 1982 congressional election cycle, they received roughly $1 of every $4 from PACs, the study showed. These 80 members received $7,412,321 from PACs in the 1982 election — 27 percent of their $27,1407,625 in total campaign receipts.

All 1982 House winners received an average of 34 percent of their overall contributions from PACs during the 1981-82 election cycle, Common Cause said.

"It doesn't take a doctor of philosophy degree holder to figure out why the percentage of PAC money being contributed to the campaign of these 80 freshmen members has already doubled," Wertheimer sid. "PACs put their money where the power is — and now that they're incumbents, these representatives are finding that PAC money flows much more swiftly into their campaigns."

Common Cause said it is planning to release additional PAC studies through its chapter organizations in October to show the source and amount of giving to federal candidates in every state of the union.

Other highlights of the freshmen PAC studies include:

- Freshmen representatives were in debt for $5,292,486 at the close of the 1982 campaign and 65 members still owed $3,834,589 as of June 30.
- Twenty-one freshmen representatives had received more than $25,000 from PACs in the first six months of 1983.
- The top 10 freshmen receipts of PAC money ranged from $711,806, or 61 percent of total $117,143 receipts, for Bill Richardson, D-N.M., to $38,432, or 43 percent of $88,725 receipts, for Ron Packard, R-Calif.

"These freshmen are caught in the same vise that has gripped many of their more experienced colleagues in Congress," Wertheimer said. "Many of them support campaign finance reforms but until we provide an alternative source of funding, they are goin to turn to PACs to pay for their campaign debts and to finance their next campaign."