

ON CAPITOL HILL

Part 5/24/95
**Clinton Opposes Halting
Public Campaign Funds**

The White House yesterday weighed into the fight over a Republican drive to scuttle public funding for presidential campaigns, saying it would roll back a major post-Watergate political reform and "lead to a spending spiral that would pollute our politics."

"The president is strongly opposed to the provision [in the Senate GOP 1996 budget plan] that would effectively repeal the election ethics laws enacted following the campaign finance abuses of the Watergate scandal," White House Chief of Staff Leon E. Panetta said.

Several Democratic senators—joined by the League of Women Voters, Common Cause and Public Citizen—made a similar point in supporting an effort by Sen. John F. Kerry (D-Mass.) to keep Congress from using the \$90 million-a-year program as savings to help produce a balanced budget by 2002.

The budget before the Senate urges elimination of campaign subsidies, which are financed by a \$3 a year income tax check-off and used as an inducement to encourage candidates to abide by voluntary spending limits. While not binding, the vote on Kerry's proposal is seen as a critical early test in what could be a long battle over whether to scrap the program after the current election cycle.

The Democratic senators suggested that it would be hypocritical for Majority Leader Robert J. Dole (Kan.), Sen. Phil Gramm (Tex.) and other GOP senators running for president to accept public funding for their campaigns and vote to scrap it for future campaigns. Dole and Gramm are planning to use public funds.

"The American people want us to decrease the role played by special interests and big money in our politics, not

increase it," Panetta said in a statement. He said the current system was "created by lawmakers of both parties" and "by and large, it has worked well." Repeal, he added, is "simply unacceptable."

—Helen Dewar

Packwood Given Deadline

■ The Senate ethics committee gave Senate Finance Committee Bob Packwood (R-Ore.) until June 20 to respond to allegations of sexual and official misconduct and offered him the opportunity for a public hearing, sources said yesterday.

The committee also turned over to Packwood thousands of pages of evidence it considered in concluding last week that there was "substantial credible evidence" to believe he may have violated Senate ethics rules and a federal obstruction-of-justice statute.

In a bill of particulars issued last week, the committee said Packwood may have engaged in 18 separate instances of sexual misconduct, sought jobs for his former wife from lobbyists and others with an interest in legislation and tampered with diaries the committee wanted in its investigation.

While appearances before the ethics committee are conducted in private, Senate rules allow accused senators to demand public hearings. Although Packwood used to say he wanted hearings, colleagues say they expect him to try to avoid them. The committee could order hearings but has not yet discussed that possibility, sources have said.

Packwood has until five days after his appearance before the committee to decide whether to seek hearings.

—Helen Dewar