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Gov. Linwood Holton of Virginia, chairman of the Republican Governors' group, talking to reporters yesterday.

G.O.P. Governors Here; Watergate Prime Topic

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By EDWARD C. BURKS

Gov. Linwood Holton of Virginia, chairman of the Republican Governors Association, said here yesterday that he thought Americans would not "convict" Republicans in general because of the Watergate scandal.

"I think the American people will be perfectly willing," he said at a news conference, "to let the blame rest only on those who are guilty and not convict others simply because we were Republicans."

He spoke as 17 of the 19 Republican state Governors and two from the territories began a three-day semiannual conference here.

The Governors, it was frankly conceded, are ready to talk a lot of politics, especially the impact of Watergate. But they want to do it behind closed doors where, an observer quipped, "they won't be bugged by reporters."

Dinners iWth Rockefeller

The agenda affords considerable time for private discussion. Governor Rockefeller was host at a private dinner last night and will be again tonight, and there will be a day-long private session tomorrow at the Rockefeller estate at Pocantico Hills.

The Governors will be discussing how they can play a "broader and stronger role" both in the formation of party policy and in national policies, Governor Holton said.

On Watergate, he said that the "Republican party had nothing to do with this. It was an ad hoc committee that retained the people who have been convicted."

He went on to state that such ad hoc committees were a "personal peeve" of his because it was really the duty of the party to run electoral campaigns.

At the news conference, in the Park Lane Hotel on Central Park South, site of the formal

meetings, Governor Holton turned down requests by newsmen who hoped to go to Pocantico Hills, if only on a "pool" basis, in which one or two newsmen represent all.

"I'm sorry," he said, a smile on his face. "We want to be alone. We knew you wouldn't like it, and we're sorry you don't like it."

Governor Holton, joined by the association's vice chairman, Gov. Winfield Dunn of Tennessee, argued that there was no reason for the Watergate disclosures to tar Republicans around the country who had nothing to do with the situation.

He said that there was no reason for any Republican Governor or officeholder to feel "precarious" and added that he relied on the fairness of the America people to blame only the guilty.

'A Little Bit of a Valley'

Asked to comment on a Gallup Poll finding that half of the American people questioned the President's credibility, Governor Dunn said that polls reflected the peaks and valleys of a leader's popularity and added:

"I think this must be a little bit of a valley right now."

Neither Mr. Rockefeller nor Ronald Reagan of California, the two most prominent Republican Governors, attended the news conference, but both are in town for meetings.

Inevitably, there were corridor quips among the visiting Governors. One was about the Republican who rejected an invitation to go skiing because he found himself and the party already going downhill too fast.

The opening business session of the conference this morning will have a panel presentation on "The Energy Crisis" with Dr. Edward Teller, the thermonuclear scientist, taking part.

Republican National Chairman George Bush will also speak this morning.