

MAY 10 1973

Watergate Dominates GOP Governors' Talk

By Jules Witcover

Washington Post Staff Writer

NEW YORK, May 9—Republican governors met privately tonight to try to draw up a resolution on the Watergate scandal that would call for full and swift disclosure as imperative to preserve the credibility of the political system.

The effort under way was to push for such disclosure without criticizing President Nixon, but rather to indicate a feeling of assurance that he will see to it that all the facts do come out.

In the forefront of the move are Gov. Linwood Hol-

ton (Va.), chairman of the Republican Governors' Association, and host Gov. Nelson A. Rockefeller (N.Y.).

The meeting was at Rockefeller's Fifth Avenue apartment, during a supper for the governors and their wives before the formal opening of their spring conference Thursday. The objective clearly was to have a resolution ready for adoption at the start of the conference, to avoid getting bogged down on Watergate discussions throughout the two-day meeting.

"If we don't do this," one Republican source said, "we're going to have 19 dif-

ferent statements on what should be done about Watergate." Nineteen of the 22 Republican governors are expected to attend the conference.

Among those who were expected to be most strongly in support of a Watergate resolution calling for swift disclosure are Govs. William Millikin (Mich.) and Robert Ray (Iowa), another GOP source said.

The strongest opposition might come, this same source said, from Gov. Ronald Reagan (Calif.), who last week said the perpetrators of the Watergate break-in were not "criminals at heart."

Just as at a meeting of Democratic governors in Huron, Ohio, two weeks ago, the mood among the GOP governors concerning Watergate was distinctly cautious.

Holton and Gov. Winfield Dunn (Tenn.), in an opening press conference this afternoon, both expressed confidence that President Nixon was in no way personally involved in the break-in or subsequent cover-up. Holton called talk of impeachment of the President "ridiculous."

At the same time, however, he and Dunn took pains to disassociate the regular Republican Party from the Watergate case. The political espionage was perpetrated out of "an ad hoc committee"—the Committee for the Re-election of the President (CRP), Dunn noted. "It did not involve Republicans per se," he said.

Holton said one of the lessons of Watergate is that campaigns ought to be conducted by the regular Republican National Committee machinery, with that committee held responsible.

Holton said he did not think "a single governor" running as a Republican in 1974 would be hurt because of Watergate because none had been involved in the affair and the American voter would not unfairly penalize anyone who wasn't.

But Holton acknowledged that the Watergate was hurting in local fund-raising. Although the party in Virginia had its most successful fund-raising dinner recently, he said, some party people told him they would not give until "you clean up Watergate."

Neither Mr. Nixon nor Vice President Spiro T. Agnew, both of whom were invited, according to Holton, is expected to attend the conference, which was preceded by a public reception tonight at which Watergate was the major topic.

On Thursday, the agenda features panels on energy problems and political survey research, and briefings by Republican National Chairman George Bush and Kenneth R. Cole Jr., the President's domestic council head.

On Friday, the governors are to meet all day at Rockefeller's North Tarrytown home, with the press barred. Holton said today that "we want to go off by ourselves" to talk politics. He said he doubted the subject of 1976 presidential politics would come up. All the GOP governors agree, he said, that "it's dangerous" to talk 1976 candidates.

That may be so, but in informal discussions going on here about Watergate, it is inevitable that its impact on both 1974, when 12 Republican-held governorships are to be contested, and 1976 will come up.

Two of the major-state Republican governors, Rockefeller and Reagan, already are considered strong 1976 possibilities. The impact of Watergate on their chances—and on those of Agnew and recently converted Republican John B. Connally—is a certain subject for speculation here.