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Watergate Hurts GOP Fund Drive

By Jules Witcover

Washington Post Staff Writer

Tightened purse strings among Republican fat cats as a result of the Watergate affair have forced planners of the GOP's big "New Majority" fund-raising dinner next Wednesday to cut their target in half, from \$2 million to \$1 million.

Buehl Berentson, executive director of the Republican senatorial campaign committee and a chief organizer of the dinner, said yesterday about 700 tickets to the \$1,000-a-plate affair have been sold. President Nixon is scheduled to be the main speaker.

The \$2 million goal, he said, had to be halved when it became clear about three weeks ago that Republicans were not responding, out of concern about Watergate, among other reasons.

The other reasons, he said, included reluctance of some givers who had read about the \$4.7 million surplus left from the 1972 Nixon re-election campaign.

That surplus, Berentson noted, is held by the Committee for the Re-election of the President and is not available for use in the 1974 congressional elections, the prime beneficiary of next week's dinner.

To counter this reluctance to give, and to dissociate the dinner from CRP and the Watergate break-in, the three co-chairman of the dinner last week sent a strong letter of disavowal to potential contributors.

The dinner sponsors are the Republican National Committee, and the House and Senate campaign committees, which will split the proceeds. The letter was signed by GOP National Chairman George Bush, Sen. Bill Borck (R-Tenn.) and Sen. Bill Brock (R-Tenn.) and of the three committees. It said:

"At no time has the Republican National Committee or its financial arm, the Republican National Finance Committee, or the congressional or senatorial committees been accused of any wrongdoing in their political activities or handling of campaign funds last year.

"But the fact remains that many of our supporters identify these committees as part and parcel of what they are reading in the papers. This is very unfortunate, because the 'Watergate affair' has had an effect on our fund-raising."

To further spur sales, the dinner committee has had a bank of eight telephones at the Washington Hilton with volunteers manning them, urging Republicans to buy tickets. Berentson denied a report that two individuals manning the phones had quit out of disillusionment with the slow pace of sales.

On Thursday, he said, 10,000 "mailograms" — messages wired to local post offices and then placed in regular mail—were sent out as a last major effort to boost sales. The Mailograms told recipients they could order tickets by calling collect.

One prominent Republican, Sen. Barry Goldwater (R-Ariz.), already has said the dinner should be called off and has sent back his own ticket. But Berentson said no other senator had taken similar action.

Berentson declined to release the names of any individuals who have bought tickets. He said they will be filed in accordance with the federal political contributions law on June 10.