

Packwood Lays It on the Line to Nixon

By R. W. APPLE JR.

WASHINGTON, Nov. 16—When Bob Packwood, a 41-old first-term Republican Senator from Oregon, went to the White House last night to talk to President Nixon about the Watergate case, he was thoroughly prepared.

Robert W. Packwood, a convivial yet intensely serious young man, took with him an outline for a six-or seven-minute statement. He had thought it through carefully. A supporter of Mr. Nixon in the earlier stages of the Vietnam war and on the antiballistic missile, an opponent on Supreme Court nominations and the supersonic transport, Mr. Packwood had come to view Watergate as a symbol of rot in American public life, and he had waited months to tell the President why.

With 10 other Republican Senators, he was ushered into the White House solarium—newly christened the "California room." After a drink and a few social amenities, he and his colleagues sat in an oval around the President, who relaxed in an overstuffed chair. Four White House aides, including Ronald L. Ziegler, the press secretary, were also there.

Statement to President

Others preceded him. But Mr. Packwood's statement was the most comprehensive one, according to Presidential aides, during the whole series of Congressional meetings.

Here is some of what he said:

"All of us, Mr. President, whether we're in politics or not, have weaknesses," the Senator began. "For some, it's drinking. For others, it's gambling. For still others, it's women. None of these weaknesses applies to you. You're weakness is credibility. This has always been your short suit with the news media and the general public."

According to eyewitnesses, the President took that remark and the equally frank ones that followed with equanimity—obviously concentrating, obviously thinking, serious but neither grave nor piqued.

Mr. Packwood suggested that Watergate had created a twofold problem for Mr. Nixon: one with the Congress, the other with the general public.

The President's Congressional difficulties, he went on, arose from neglect—he described the Congressional Republicans as "never consulted, never heard, never heeded"—and from the ousting of Archibald Cox, the

special Watergate prosecutor. Most members of Congress, Mr. Packwood said, believe, rightly or wrongly, that Mr. Nixon broke his word by that act.

Matter of Credibility

"Congress has come to expect that many people who testify before it lie," the earnest young Senator said. "It's an entirely different matter, however, when one person gives his word to another. That is a bond which those of us in politics revere highly. Those who breach that bond suffer an incalculable loss of credibility."

Bridging the Congressional gaped, would be relatively

easy. Simple communication, he said, together with a bit of political ego massage, would correct much of the difficulty. In an unusually candid remark, he told the President that "most of us will succumb to attention"—the old slap on the back.

"If Stans and Mitchell are acquitted," Mr. Packwood insisted, "it simply means that there was not presented evidence beyond a reasonable doubt to convince reasonable jurors of their criminal guilt. It does not mean they were innocent of wrongdoing."

Senator Packwood's advice for dealing with the credibility gap was simple. He rec-

ommended two specific steps:

One: disclose "everything—the tapes, confidential notes—everything" bearing on the scandal. "There can't be a missing tape accidentally disposed of by a janitor. There can't be a memo uncovered by an inquiring reporter."

Two: Hold an open-ended, no-time-limit news conference with only six or seven reporters.

"I recommend this first," the Senator said, "because you are good at an adversary proceeding and second, because the public must be convinced that you have opened yourself up to your harshest critics."