

# GOP Dinner Contributions Cut in Half

By Jules Witcover  
Washington Post Staff Writer

Republican stalwarts, hoping to bring their party through the ravages of Watergate in this fall's congressional elections, turned out for a \$1,000-a-plate fund-raising dinner last night at the Washington Hilton.

In the same ballroom where Democrats beside themselves with optimism raised nearly \$700,000 a week ago, the GOP Senate and House campaign committees hoped to match that figure—less than half what they were accustomed to raising until Watergate.

Buehl Berentson, executive director of the National Republican Senatorial Committee, said that going into the dinner more than \$650,000 had been raised or pledged, compared to about \$1.5 million the party usually raised for off-year elections before the Watergate break-in of June, 1972.

He attributed the slack-off to several factors, of which Watergate was only one. He cited specifically the 1972 ban enacted by Congress against block purchases of political dinner tickets by corporations and unions. Associations, lobbies and political education groups can still buy them, and Berentson said they were doing so as in the past.

"This is not to say that Watergate didn't hurt," he said. "It did hurt. But it is only one of four or five factors. It's not so much Watergate itself, but indirectly it has focused on campaign spending generally."

The Republicans met to talk 1974 politics—and to hear a talk from President Nixon—amid signals from several prominent GOP incumbents facing re-election that they'd rather run this fall without his help.

A survey by the Associated Press of 11 Republican senators up for re-election produced only one, Sen. Henry Bellmon of Oklahoma, campaign manager for Mr. Nixon in 1967, who said he had asked the President to campaign for him. Seven others, AP reported, said they didn't want him to.

Two GOP senators who have been critical of Mr. Nixon, former Republican National Chairman Bob Dole of Kansas and Jacob K. Javits of New York, both said they weren't going to invite the President but he was welcome.

"but it's not a boycott" of the President. He had been out of town two nights, he said, and wanted to stay home with his family.

Packwood said a "general disillusionment with parties" was the cause of the dropoff in the dinner. Individual candidates are not having as much trouble, he said, and he himself expects to raise all he is allowed to spend under the new Oregon campaign spending limitation law. He said he has already raised \$110,000 toward a \$180,000 limit for his primary race against former Democratic Sen. Wayne Morse, whom he defeated in 1968.

A random check by the Post of purchasers of large blocks of tickets to the 1973 Republican congressional campaign dinner indicated, as did a similar check of those who bought tickets to last week's Democratic dinner, that most had bought the same or nearly the same amount in dollar value this year as last.

It has become customary for lobbyists and "political action" groups representing special interests to give to both party dinners. One big giver, the American Medical Association Political Action Committee (AMPAC) bought \$20,000 worth of tickets to both the Democratic and Republican dinners this year.

The Democratic purchase actually doubled what AMPAC had bought for that dinner in 1973. An AMPAC spokesman explained last week that it had been determined that instead of just buying the same number of tickets to each affair—20 to the Democratic \$500-a-plate and 20 to the Republican \$1,000-a-plate as it did in 1973—the organization would spend the same amount on each.

Among other major contributors listed in an early filing with the secretary of the Senate were the chairman of Sun Oil Co. and three members of the Pew family of Philadelphia, major stockholders in the company. Together they bought one table at \$10,000.

Leonard Firestone of Los Angeles, recently nominated by President Nixon to be ambassador to Belgium, bought four seats for a total contribution of \$4,000. The report of the contribution came before announcement of his nomination. Firestone was a big Nixon giver in 1972 and is president of the Richard Nixon Foundation.

The Republicans who gathered to spur on their brethren in the fall did so against an ominous backdrop of special congressional elections this spring. In four races, all for seats previously held by Republicans, they lost three, including the House seat occupied for 25 years by Vice President Gerald R. Ford in Michigan before he was nominated to replace the resigned Spiro T. Agnew.

Ford campaigned in the three districts where Republicans lost but not in the fourth where a Republican won, in the Santa Barbara, Calif., area. Ford was sought after and warmly received in each place he appeared, and is expected to bear a major share of GOP campaigning for congressional and Senate candidates in the fall.

One of those who has called for Mr. Nixon's impeachment and a Senate trial, Sen. Bob Packwood of Oregon, said he believes a majority of Republican congressmen want Mr. Nixon to resign before they have to face the voters this fall.

"I have not gone around and counted," Packwood told the AP. "It is an intuitive feeling—and all of us in politics have it—that there is more wishing that he'd just go away, that he'd vanish."

"Most people would now regard close association with the administration as the kiss of death," Packwood said. "They're not going to be asking them for help in their races."

Packwood told The Washington Post he had decided not to go to last night's dinner