

Packwood snub troubles critics



WASHINGTON (AP) — Sen. Bob Packwood's Capitol Hill confession Thursday ignored what critics say is one of the most damaging allegations of misconduct — that he launched a campaign to dig up dirt on women accusing him of sexual harassment.

"It troubles me that Sen. Packwood refuses to discuss efforts made to discredit his accusers," said Rep.-elect Elizabeth Furse, D-Ore.

At least two women claim Packwood, his aides and friends have engaged in a deliberate effort to smear the characters of the women who have come forward with stories about the Oregon Republican's unwelcome sexual advances.

"I am not going to discuss that issue at all," Packwood said during a news conference at the Capitol.

"I am not going to respond to any questions about any efforts to characterize the women," he said.

Ginny Burdick, a spokeswoman for Oregonians for Ethical Representation, said Thursday her group is following up on allegations that Packwood personally tried to discredit the accusers.

"That's the real story now — the blatant cover-up, the smear campaign," she said.

Mabsie Walters, a former campaign volunteer for Sen. Bob Packwood, said last week that Packwood telephoned her to try to gather potentially damaging information about another woman who had accused the senator of sexual harassment.

Walters, a former president of the Oregon chapter of the National Abortion Rights Action League, said Packwood called her Nov. 9 to ask questions about Mary Heffernan, who founded the chapter.

Heffernan is among 16 women who have accused Packwood of making unwelcome sexual advances during his 24-year Senate career. She said during a visit to his office in the early 1980s, Packwood grabbed her arms and kissed her.

Another of Packwood's accusers, Julie Williamson, has said one of Packwood's friends telephoned her last spring to warn that Williamson's private life would be made public if she leveled accusations at Packwood.

Williamson, who claims Packwood forcefully kissed her and tried to pull her clothes off when she was his aide in 1969, said she interpreted the call to be an attempt to silence her.

Williamson said from New York on Thursday Packwood was lying when he told the *Washington Post* in October that he did not recall any of the incidents.

"I know he was asked about the incident with me over the years. I know that he remembers the incident because he immediately went out of the *Washington Post* interview and told people to send letters about me to the *Post*. I think he'll do anything to hang on to power," she said.

Rep. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., said Thursday that the political playing field had changed now that Packwood had admitted generically to pressuring the women with unwelcome advances.

Woman sues police; claims false arrest

PORTLAND (AP) — A Portland woman has sued police, claiming she was falsely charged with staging a hate crime that her former roommate later admitted staging by herself.

Susan Soen, 45, also claimed in her lawsuit that Portland police withheld a videotape that might prove her innocent.

Her former roommate, Azalea Cooley, has admitted staging a series of hate crimes outside her home that drew widespread media attention. Cooley publicly apologized for her actions and said she was very sorry they had affected Soen.

Soen is seeking money damages for defamation and infliction of emotional distress. Police have accused her of filing a false report about someone burning a cross in her yard.

"The purpose of the lawsuit is to restore Miss Soen's good name," one of her attorneys, Tom Steenson, said in a news conference Wednesday. "She absolutely denies any wrongdoing; it's a false charge."

A police videotape is central to the lawsuit. Soen's attorneys say the tape, from a hidden camera trained on Soen's house, clearly implicates Cooley.

The two had been the subject of intense media and police attention since May 5, when the southeast Portland home they shared became the target of numerous hate crimes, including cross burnings and racist graffiti.

Cooley, who is black and had led people to believe she was confined to a wheelchair, said she was the target of the hate crimes. After a suicide attempt in early November, she admitted that she can walk and that she staged all of the hate crimes without her roommate's knowledge.

Rainy weather raises hopes for long-awaited end of drought

GRANTS PASS (AP) — High winds that blew over trees and power lines Thursday along the southern Oregon Coast brought heavy rains that raised hopes a seven-year drought may be ending.

By the time the storm crossed the Cascade Range, the winds had lessened and at Klamath Falls the rain turned to snow, just in time for the evening Snowflake Festival parade.

"It's not over, but we're chipping away at this drought thing," said Dave Williams, National Weather Service meteorologist at Klamath Falls.

Gusts of up to 110 mph were reported at Humbug Mountain near Port Orford, where U.S. Highway 101 was closed for five hours. It reopened by 5 a.m., officials said.

Damage was limited despite the high winds. The most rain-

fall recorded was 3 inches in 24 hours at Newport. More than one and a half inches of rain were reported in the same period at Gold Beach.

Storm drains couldn't keep up with the pounding rain in the Rogue Valley. Cars driving in pre-dawn darkness in Grants Pass sent up rooster tails of spray from big puddles. Medford recorded .31 inches of rain in 30 minutes.

"All things considered, it sounds like we were pretty lucky," said Coos County sheriff's Sgt. Ken Marlin, who spent the night out in the storm.

Oregon's main urban areas were spared in the Willamette Valley.

Heavy snow was reported on 7,523-foot Mount Ashland, where the ski season opened with \$1 lift tickets to thank area residents for their contributions

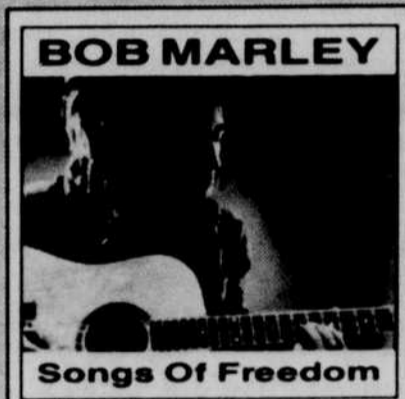
to buy the resort.

On the coast, gusts up to 70 mph at Bond, flung a small airplane at the airport and knocked down trees and power lines, said Marlin.

"The power crews and road crews cutting up trees were being run ragged," he said.

But most trees withstood the storm because the rain didn't arrive to soften up the ground until after the winds, he added.

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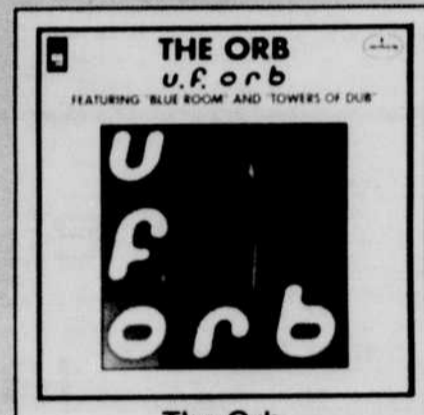
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