

Packwood 'shrewd' but 'damaged' say analysts

By Lisa Kneefel
Emerald Associate Editor

Sen. Bob Packwood's return to Oregon is an attempt to contain the damage of sexual harassment allegations, two political analysts said.

The Republican senator arrived in Oregon Sunday after more than two months away from the state. Packwood's itinerary has omitted contact with the public for the most part and has focused instead on meetings with timber groups.

Bill Lunch, an associate professor of political science at Oregon State University, said by meeting with timber industry figures, Packwood is attempting to strengthen ties with key support from his constituency.

"His visit to the state is designed to start his political resuscitation," Lunch said.

Lunch said Packwood's re-establishment with sympathetic interest groups creates a base for similar mending with other constituents.

"Like ripples in a pond, he may be able to move beyond the core groups," Lunch said.

Marko Haggard, a professor emeritus of political science at Portland State University, agreed that Packwood is attempting to re-establish himself through the timber meetings.

"He's probably the shrewdest politician I've observed in my years in Oregon and he's showing that right now," Haggard said.

Haggard, who writes a commentary for Portland television station KATU twice a week, said Packwood will probably concentrate on repairing his image among fellow senators because his recent re-election leaves him securely in office and thus not directly accountable to constituents.

Lunch characterized Packwood as "a bright, intelligent man who's made a lot of errors."

"He's now politically damaged goods, no doubt about it," Lunch said. Lunch also said he suspects Packwood's image problem will lead his fellow senators to avoid ... for a while.

Although Packwood issued an apology in December regarding the sexual misconduct, he has not addressed specifics of the allegations. Lunch attributed this to two

reasons.

The first is political. Packwood "can't disprove the bulk" of the charges against him, Lunch said. There are more than ten charges, and disproving one or even a handful leaves a number of charges standing to tarnish his image.

The second reason is a legal one. Lunch said that by communicating with news media about his accusers' credibility, the possibility of a lawsuit involving defamation of character looms.

"Potentially, he may have a civil liability problem of substantial proportions," Lunch said.

Haggard expressed doubt Packwood will suffer much reprimand from his colleagues, saying "the club takes care of itself."

Haggard said he is certain of Packwood's tenacity to survive the charges, however.

"The guy's a street fighter and it's going to be one hell of a messy scene," Haggard said.

PACKWOOD

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meeting had begun and directed them to go inside the inn. Several rushed toward the lobby entrance and got as far as the front doors before they were turned away by hotel employees.

Yelling and chanting from the crowd persisted as they made their way around the building to protest just outside the meeting room. Many pounded on the hotel's glass windows.

Melanie Philippi, a front desk clerk at the inn, estimated 125 people had assembled for the protest.

After a brief presentation on the state of the timber industry from Jim Geisinger, Packwood was invited to speak. The five-term senator then fielded questions from the 22 representatives assembled. Though noise from outside was audible throughout the proceedings, Packwood appeared calm and unfazed.

"I'm glad to see the media have such an interest in our timber supply," Packwood said, surveying the reporters and photographers present.

Although Packwood answered questions from the media regarding the allegations of sexual harassment and his problem with alcohol, he appeared more interested in questions related to timber industry problems. He said he believed more coverage would be devoted to the assembly outside than



Leonard Green, general manager of Valley River Inn in Eugene, is jostled by demonstrators. The protesters sought to confront Sen. Bob Packwood, who was speaking at the inn. Photo by Jeff Paslay

to what transpired at the meeting.

Packwood, who has not been in Oregon for more than two months, said he has stayed away "because I've learned you make mistakes in haste."

"I wasn't going to come back until I was fully prepared," Packwood said.

When asked what response

he had for the angry mobs appearing at each stop on his Oregon tour, Packwood said only that unhappy constituents have always been a part of his public life.

Packwood also said he would not address protesters' questions, nor those of the media, regarding specifics of the allegations until the Senate Ethics

Committee investigation concludes.

"It would be inappropriate to do so before then," Packwood said.

Packwood further defended his refusal to step down, saying a majority of Oregonians placed him in office.

Packwood also clarified a remark made at a press confer-

ence Monday in Medford, where he said he is accountable for his actions only to the Senate.

"I was accountable to the people of Oregon in November," Packwood said. "Once you're elected to the Senate, you're accountable to the Senate."

When asked what he is doing about his problem with alcohol, Packwood said he has sought private counseling from three people in Washington, D.C., who are recovering from alcohol abuse themselves. He said he has found more solace in the three than he did when he sought professional help 12 years ago.

The meeting is the third of several scheduled visits with timber industry leaders. Packwood met with Southern Oregon Timber Industries Association in Medford Monday, and with industry officials in Bend Tuesday morning.

Thom Alberti of the Eugene Peace Works said allowing the Senate Ethics Committee decide Packwood's fate "is kind of like letting a jury of weasels decide whether or not a weasel will be let in the henhouse."

David Oaks said he's tired of Packwood's concessions to the timber industry.

Moshe Immerman said Packwood has "breached the trust of the public."

"Bob Packwood's constituency is not the Senate, but the people of Oregon," Immerman said.

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