

Senators debate authority to nullify Packwood election



WASHINGTON (AP) — Senators sharply questioned whether they could nullify Sen. Bob Packwood's election because of allegations that he won by lying to the media about his sexual behavior.

"How could senators possibly make this assessment?" Rules Committee Chairman Wendell Ford asked, after the committee was urged Monday to determine whether Packwood's alleged misstatements changed the outcome of the vote.

The committee heard oral arguments from lawyers arguing for and against petitions by more than 250 Oregon voters seeking to oust Packwood from the Senate.

The committee adjourned without making an immediate ruling.

Challengers, represented by attorney Katherine A. Meyer, contended Packwood defrauded voters by lying to reporters — thereby delaying until after the election any news stories about his unwanted sexual advances.

Nearly two dozen female employees and acquaintances now have accused him of making such advances over two decades.

The challengers also accused Packwood of trying to intimidate these women into silence by threatening to expose intimate details of their sex lives.

"Mr. Packwood stole the Nov. 3 election," Meyer told the committee in asking for a full investigation of his conduct. "Mr. Packwood has for years enjoyed strong support from women's rights groups. There can be no reasonable doubt," she said, that the women would have been offended if they learned of his conduct before election day.

Packwood attorney James F. Fitzpatrick argued that neither the senator nor his staff lied about his conduct, but responded cautiously to specific questions asked by the media. He said Packwood did not control the timing of news stories nor did he intimidate any of the women.

Fitzpatrick urged the Senate not to adopt "a radical new procedure" that would "put the Senate in the business of conducting fraud trials based on statements made in the heat of the campaign."

He contended that a 1969 Supreme Court case limited the Senate's authority to review elections. He said the Senate could only review allegations of fraud "that deal with the voting process itself, ... stuffing ballot boxes and dead people voting. This case is far afield."

The arguments were separate from an

ethics committee investigation of Packwood's actual conduct, but Packwood's opponents in both cases are trying to kick him out of the Senate.

Sen. Ford, D-Ky., wrestling with how to determine what influenced an election's outcome, said, "public opinion polls have to be ruled out" because they're inaccurate.

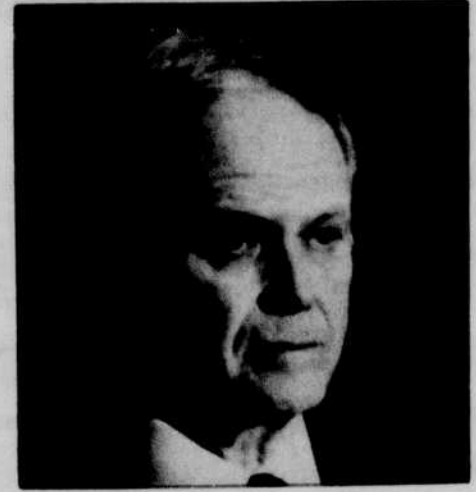
"How can the Senate determine whether a single event or fact determined the outcome?" he asked Meyer.

Meyer disagreed that polls should automatically be ignored. She said one poll, taken shortly after Packwood was elected to a fifth term last November by 78,000 votes, was valid — and showed many voters would have changed their minds if they had known about the allegations before voting.

The committee's ranking Republican, Sen. Ted Stevens of Alaska, asked Meyer, "Do you think we can be the judge of campaigns? How far back in the campaign process does this power go?"

Meyer responded, "The conduct that the candidate engages in shortly before an election is an important part of the process. I read the electoral process as encompassing the campaign."

Committee member Thad Cochran, R-Miss., said in a written statement he favored dismissing the complaint



Sen. Bob Packwood

because the election was not contested and the Oregon secretary of state declared Packwood duly elected.

"In absence of an election contest challenging the election result ... this committee should not consider substituting any finding of its own for the decision reached by the voters," he said.

Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., said she was concerned the petitioners' argument "really opens Pandora's box for this body."

School gun bill faces opposition in conservative House

SALEM (AP) — The Oregon Senate's recent approval of a bill to make it a felony to take guns into schools underscores the sharp split between urban and rural Oregon.

Despite being watered down in committee, the measure drew heavy opposition from most of the Senate's rural Republican members. It faces an even tougher fight in the more conservative House.

Political analyst Bill Lunch said he was not surprised by the amount of antagonism the measure, SB334, generated in the Senate.

"For urban legislators, guns are

a symbol of crime and violence," Lunch said. "For rural people, guns are associated with the freedom to go out in the fields hunting, to be free of restraints which they associate with cities."

"It's a part of a larger debate over differences in lifestyle and values in urban areas vs. rural places," said Lunch, who teaches political science at Oregon State University in Corvallis.

Land-use planning and state regulation of natural resources are other areas of sharp disagreement between lawmakers from cities and their colleagues from rural areas, he said.

More than 40 percent of Ore-

gon's population lives in the Portland area. Outside the cities of Eugene and Salem, each with 100,000 residents, most of the rest of the people live in or around towns scattered around the state.

No one is more keenly aware of the urban-rural split than Sen. Jeannette Hamby, the chief sponsor of the gun bill, who lives in the Portland suburb of Hillsboro.

Bowing to opposition from rural lawmakers and the National Rifle Association, the Republican legislator agreed to water down the bill by limiting it to schools and adjoining property. The original version of the bill made it a

felony to bring a firearm within 1,000 feet of a school.

As it's now written, the bill elevates possession of a gun on school grounds from a misdemeanor to a felony. Guns and other weapons would be confiscated.

At the suggestion of House Speaker Larry Campbell, Hamby now is considering supporting amendments that would further weaken the bill.

She said the Eugene Republican called her to his office last week to talk about the gun bill. "He said to me, 'Let's talk about my eastern Oregon folks,'" Hamby said.

By that, she said, Campbell was referring to concerns that a parent or student driving with a gun in a gun rack could be charged with a felony by parking in a school lot.

Hamby said she is now willing to see the bill amended in the House to allow students to carry unloaded weapons in their locked cars and trucks during hunting season.

Opposition from rural areas is just one of the elements in the debate over the measure, said House Majority Leader Greg Walden, who is from the small agricultural community of Hood River.

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