

Accusers get funds for defense



NORTHWEST

WASHINGTON (AP) — Some have become media celebrities and others want to be known only as "an aide," "a lobbyist," or "a high school intern." But together they're calling themselves "the Packwood 26," women who accuse Sen. Bob Packwood of sexual assault or harassment.

The women were to be the beneficiaries last Wednesday night of a Washington fund-raiser scheduled in their honor, with each guest contributing \$26.

A women's group even is selling T-shirts with the slogan: "I believe Anita and the Packwood 26."

It refers to Oklahoma law Professor Anita Hill's allegations of sexual harassment against Clarence Thomas, who narrowly won Senate confirmation to the Supreme Court in 1991 despite the accusation, which he denied.

The shirts also bear the names of women who agreed to be identified, those who worked for the Oregon Republican, lobbied him or otherwise made his acquaintance.

The women say they need financial help to prepare a case before the Senate Ethics Committee — which has been conducting a preliminary investigation of Packwood's behavior for nearly a year.

The panel said it will decide late next month whether to intensify its investigation.

The women want their attorneys, who are not charging them fees, to be reimbursed for expenses if the panel has public hearings.

These are the same women who now say they had no idea, when they were suddenly grabbed or kissed somewhere between the late 1960s and early 1980s, that Packwood had acted the same way toward others.

"My husband said, 'Bob Packwood wouldn't have done that, you must be mistaken,'" Julie Williamson said last week.

Williamson is no longer married to the man who had that reaction in 1969. She says Packwood pulled her ponytail, stood on her toes, grabbed at

'Ten years ago, there was nothing that would be done about it. We must tell our stories. And we must support ourselves when we do it.'

— Mary Heffernan, accuses Packwood of harassment

her clothes and tried to remove her girdle.

Packwood, at a news conference last December, apologized for his behavior toward his accusers. But he has consistently refused to discuss any of the individual accusations.

Packwood has hired a Washington lawyer, James Fitzpatrick and has established a legal defense fund.

The ethics committee has spent most of the year gathering information and conducting interviews with the women. The panel has tried to contact nearly everyone who worked for the senator since his election to the Senate in 1968.

Williamson and other women said in interviews this week that the committee asked them for every minute detail of the alleged incidents.

Committee investigators "asked me to draw a map of the office, asked how I walked into a dead end. They asked what I was wearing. They asked how long (the incident) was," she said.

Now a political consultant, Williamson said she normally makes \$100,000 a year. But this year, she said, clients have dumped her and one told her pointedly, "You're too hot" to hire.

Mary Heffernan, who works for a women's advocacy group, said that during a visit to Packwood's office in the early 1980s, the senator grabbed her arms and kissed her.

"I never said a word" after the incident, she recalls. "Ten years ago, there was nothing that would be done about it. But there were two things I learned. We must tell our stories. And we must support ourselves when we do it."

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