Packwood Accused Of Sexual Advances

Alleged Behavior Pattern Counters Image

By Florence Graves and Charles E. Sheppard
Washington Post Staff Writers

Ask those who have worked for Sen. Bob Packwood about his treatment of women, and two portraits emerge.

One is the Oregon Republican's record as a leading advocate of women's rights during his 24 years in the Senate and his much-admired history of hiring women, promoting them and supporting their careers even after they leave his office. Women currently hold the most powerful posts on his staff.

The other is a side of Packwood, 60, that few who have experienced it or heard about it want to talk about. Since Packwood's earliest days on Capitol Hill, he has made unwonted sexual advances to women who have worked for him or with him, according to former staff members and lobbyists, including 10 women who, independently of each other, have given specific accounts of Packwood's behavior toward them.

The women, including six whose names and detailed allegations were given to Packwood, said his approaches were unwelcome and unreciprocated. In some cases, they said, the behavior took place when he had been drinking. Several said he was abrupt, grabbing them without warning, kissing them forcefully and persisting until they made clear that they were not interested or had pushed him away. No one said

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Asked about these accounts days before his reelection to a fifth term earlier this month, Packwood said none of them was true. Later, he provided statements intended to cast doubt on the women's credibility.

On Friday, however, he said in a three-paragraph statement to The Washington Post: "I will not make an issue of any specific allegation."

The statement also offered an apology: "If any of my comments or actions have indeed been unwelcome or if I have conducted myself in any way that has caused any individual discomfort or embarrassment, for that I am sincerely sorry. My intentions were never to purpose, to offend, nor to make anyone feel uncomfortable, and I truly regret if that has occurred with anyone either on or off my staff."

Jack Faust, a Portland lawyer and a close friend of Packwood's who has counseled him about how to handle the allegations, said Friday that Packwood "is admitting to some human flaws... You have armies of politicians trying to dodge this and that. He's accepting responsibility."

With all the information

A boy in the town of Vitez chases after his father as he helps his family prepare for the war

Children of War, Vitez, Bosnia

Young Bosnians Most Traumatized

By Mary Battiata
Washington Post Foreign Service

POSUSJE, Bosnia

By day, Admir Kaltak follows his mother around the refugee shelter looking like a small, anxious scarecrow.
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The women, including six whose names and detailed allegations were given to Packwood by The Washington Post, said his approaches were unwelcome and unreciprocated. In some cases, they said, the behavior took place when he had been drinking. Several said he was abrupt, grabbing them without warning, kissing them forcefully and persisting until they made clear that they were not interested or had pushed him away. No one said Packwood punished her for rejecting him, but several decided to leave their jobs within months. Several pointed out that Packwood was married when he approached them; he and his wife divorced last year after 27 years of marriage.

None of the women complained formally; some said they feared no one would believe them and that their careers might suffer.

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With all the information presented to Packwood by The Post, "denial is not credible," Faust said. "There's nothing to be gained in a denial. The best thing to do is accept it, not make an issue of it, and go back to work."

The Post first contacted Packwood's office about the allegations in October. Packwood was nearing the end of a tight, hard-fought race for reelection to the Senate against Rep. Les AuCoin (D). In response to the first inquiries, Packwood's chief of staff, Elaine Franklin, said the story was politically motivated. She called The Post's inquiry a "witch hunt" and said its reporters were harassing women all over Oregon.

The Post's first interview with Packwood took place on Oct. 29, with Franklin and Faust sitting in. Packwood described himself as a person who would not make advances. "I am so hesitant of anything at all that I just, I don't make any approaches," he said. "It is simply not my nature, with men or women, to be forward."

Packwood, who is the ranking minority member of the Senate Finance Committee, pointed to his record of hiring women and said if his office was an uncomfortable place to work, "why do they come to work here?"

He asked for time to review his office records and gather any information that might "tend to detract from the credibility" of the women identified to him. He and his staff then asked people who knew some of the women to write statements about them.

On Oct. 31, The Post informed Packwood that its reporting was not finished and that a story would not be ready before the election. Earlier that day and during the following nine days, Packwood sent The Post eight statements about three of the women. None dealt with the disputed incidents or offered any direct explanations about the women's motivations for making the allegations; some suggested some of the women were attracted to Packwood, might have invited his advances, or were untruthful. Several contained descriptions, potentially embarrassing to the women, about purported aspects of their sexual histories and personal lives.

During a telephone call to The Post Friday, Packwood said that he has no intention of releasing the statements publicly. "I don't intend to blow any of the women down," he said. "Those statements were not written for public consumption."

"I don't want to make an issue of it," he said. "I want to go about my business and not make a controversy."
for [The Post] to consider."

In an interview last Tuesday, Packwood had said the statements had been assembled quickly because The Post had asked for a prompt response. "This was hardly something they had a long time to work on," Packwood said. "I sent them on to you roughly as we got them."

The hastily produced statements had become a source of contention among some of Packwood's friends and former aides who did not want Packwood, in trying to defend himself, to appear to be smearing the reputations of the women who had been identified to him. In the past week, friends counseled Packwood privately to acknowledge his behavior, according to Faust.

Faust said it took several weeks for Packwood to accept what he was being told. "His first stage was denial, then recognition," Faust said.

One former colleague and close friend of Packwood's, who said he had discussed the allegations with the senator over the past several weeks, said Packwood now "understands the importance and implications" of his behavior. "I think at this point in time, he is saddened by it all. I think his ownership of the problem is real."

Faust said that "it would be totally inconsistent" for Packwood, given his standing as a longtime supporter of women's rights, to mount an aggressive attack on the women who had spoken up. Packwood has championed such issues as abortion rights, the Equal Rights Amendment and family leave. He has raised millions of dollars for his campaigns through nationwide appeals to women who support his legislative efforts; feminist leader Gloria Steinem signed a fund-raising letter for his 1980 campaign.

The National Abortion Rights Action League has consistently endorsed him. "We owe a great deal to him," said Kate Michelman, NARAL's executive director.

Packwood was an early backer of the Capitol Hill Women's Political Caucus's policy on sexual harassment, signing soon after the document was circulated in spring 1991. The policy lists examples of sexual harassment, including unwanted physical contact, unsolicited flirtations and dirty jokes. Fifty-seven senators have signed it.

The Senate, along with the House of Representatives, has exempted itself from federal law prohibiting sexual harassment, although its rules broadly prohibit discrimination based on sex. A new Senate office on employment practices, which began operating this summer, would not disclose how many, if any, complaints of sexual harassment it has received. The office was established following sexual harassment allegations by Anita F. Hill against Clarence Thomas during Senate hearings on his Supreme Court nomination last year. The only previous avenue for complaint was the Senate Select Committee on Ethics.

Earlier this year, the committee declined to investigate allegations that Sen. Brock Adams (D) had committed sexual improprieties with eight women, saying no one had filed a complaint about Adams's conduct while he was a senator. The Seattle Times reported the women's accounts, but did not name them to Adams or in the newspaper. Adams, who said the allegations were untrue, later decided not to run for reelection.

The allegations about Packwood do not reflect the experiences of some other current and former Packwood employees, who said in interviews that they never saw him make any unwanted advances nor heard anyone complain that he had.
Mimi Weyforth Dawson, who worked as Packwood's press secretary and chief of staff between 1973 and 1981, said Packwood, more than anyone she has ever worked for, recognizes women as professionals and gives them opportunities that other employers do not. In an interview before Packwood's statement of apology, she called the allegations "rubbish."

Dawson is one of several women who went from Packwood's office to high-level posts elsewhere. President Ronald Reagan tapped her for a seat on the Federal Communications Commission in 1981, where she served for six years.

Her views were echoed by Henrietta S. Fielek, who served in top positions on Packwood's staff from the late 1970s to the late 1980s. Fielek, now director of public affairs at the Department of Education, said she had heard rumors about Packwood's conduct before joining his staff but saw nothing to substantiate them. Such rumors, she said, are "cheap talk on Capitol Hill."

The rumors had circulated in both Washington and in Oregon for years, but had not surfaced publicly. The Post's inquiry began in early October after Florence Graves, a freelance journalist, contacted the newspaper with information that she had gathered while reporting an article for another publication about sexual harassment on Capitol Hill in the wake of the Clarence Thomas hearings. Graves was hired on a contract basis to work with Post staff members on the story.

When first contacted by The Post, those who said Packwood had made sexual advances to them were reluctant to talk about their experiences for a newspaper article. Eventually, several agreed to allow their names to be used in the interviews with Packwood, and four consented to be identified in print if others agreed as well.

In addition to these women, three former staff members and a lobbyist decided not to be identified publicly or to Packwood because, they said, they were worried that they could suffer professionally or financially if they challenged the conduct of a senior senator or appeared disloyal in a city, Washington, that puts a premium on loyalty.

One of these former aides said she had warned Packwood years ago that his behavior would damage him someday. Another said she still was haunted enough by her decision to remain quiet after quitting the office that she wrote a letter to Anita Hill after the Thomas hearings.

The letter, a copy of which she provided to The Post, praised Hill for having more courage than the former Packwood aide. "My disillusionment with a man and a position I had previously held in such high regard overwhelmed me," she wrote. "I suppose somehow I felt I did something wrong." She did not identify Packwood by name in the letter.

Packwood was one of two Senate Republicans to vote against Thomas's confirmation. Packwood said at the time that he objected to the nominee's legal theories. He did not take a position on Hill's testimony.

Packwood separated from his wife, Georgie, in early 1990, and later cited irreconcilable differences in filing for divorce. Asked in late October about allegations of unwanted sexual advances by her former husband against female employees, Georgie Packwood said: "I have been aware of these allegations for many years. It does not come as any surprise to me."

She declined to amplify, saying only, "I'm very regretful that this sort of thing will be in print, for our children's sake."
Early Days in the Senate

The earliest account of Packwood's unwanted advances goes back to 1969, when he first arrived in Washington. Thirty-six years old, he was the youngest member of the U.S. Senate.

Julie Williamson was a 29-year-old legal secretary who had worked long hours during the 1968 campaign. After the election, Packwood hired her for his new Senate office in Portland, Ore. She was on the telephone there one afternoon in early 1969, she said in interviews this fall, when Packwood walked in and kissed her on the back of the neck. "Don't you ever do that again," she said she told him.

Williamson said Packwood then followed her into an adjoining room, where he grabbed at her clothes, pulled on her ponytail and at one point, stood on her toes. "He couldn't get the girdle off and I kept struggling and he just gave up," said Williamson, now 53 and a Democratic political consultant who supported AuCoin this fall. "I was really frightened."

Williamson said she quit her job within weeks.

Asked in the Oct. 29 interview about Williamson's account, Packwood said it was totally untrue. "I would have no reason to approach her," he said. But in a subsequent interview, he said he had recalled that he and Williamson had discussed a "continued warm personal relationship" during that period, but that the notion "passed like a summer storm."

Williamson recalled a conversation with Packwood after the incident, but said it involved only her effort to get the senator to explain "why he came after me."

Packwood provided a written statement from Ann Elias, a close friend who also knew Williamson and whose husband, James A. Elias, had run the 1968 Senate campaign. The statement said that Elias believed Williamson had wanted a romantic relationship with Packwood.

Elias's statement does not mention that Williamson, upset and agitated, came to Elias's apartment in 1969 to tell her that Packwood had made advances that day. Elias acknowledged the visit in an interview; she said she did not include it in her statement because she was not asked for any details.

Elias said she does not think Williamson did anything to invite Packwood's behavior. But, Elias said, Williamson's "tone and demeanor" in subsequent conversations, though nothing Williamson explicitly said, left her with the impression that Williamson might entertain the idea of romance with Packwood.

Williamson's husband in 1969, Douglas C. Myers, said that an "upset" Williamson told him about the incident hours after it happened. Two other Williamson friends confirmed in interviews that she told them of Packwood's advances at the time.

Jean McMahon, then about 30, approached Packwood's office in the mid-1970s about working for the senator at his Oregon office in Portland. Packwood arranged for McMahon, who was working in Salem as an editor at the Oregon Department of Education, to meet him in his motel room during a visit to the capital city. There, she said, the two discussed her drafting a speech for him.

Several weeks later, following telephone calls to check on her progress with the speech, Packwood asked her to meet him again, this time in a motel room on the Oregon coast where he was staying during an annual conference for the state's moderate Republicans, McMahon said.

McMahon, who now sells insurance and investments on the East Coast, said she now believes she was

naive in agreeing to meet Packwood in his room. He was alone both times when she arrived, she said. The second visit "ended up in one of those classic unpleasant situations where it was obvious he had other ideas on his mind and didn't want to talk about the speech. . . . I can remember being chased around the table and being grabbed and kissed once."

She said she tried to leave as quickly as she could. "There didn't seem to be any way to calm him down and get him back to what I thought we were going to do," she said. "The feeling I remember is of him trying to get power over me both physically and psychologically." She said she later contacted members of Packwood's staff about the speech she was drafting and was told they had no knowledge of it.

One friend and McMahon's husband -- her boyfriend at the time -- said in interviews that she told them about Packwood's advance soon after. Another friend, Stephen Jolin, a communications management consultant in Portland, said she told him about a year later.

Packwood said in the interviews that he did not remember McMahon and does not use speechwriters.

In early 1976, Paige Wagers was a 21-year-old college graduate with a new job as a mail clerk in Packwood's Washington office. At the bottom of the staff hierarchy, she was surprised when Packwood invited her into his office once to play bridge with two top aides, she recalled in recent interviews. Soon after, Packwood buzzed her on the interoffice phone and asked her to come to his office.

She said Packwood locked the door behind her and then embraced her, running his fingers through her hair and forcefully kissing her on the lips. She said he told her how much he liked her wholesome good looks. "It was very clear that it was a sexual thing," she said. "It was very hard to get him to let go of me."

Wagers said she pulled away and talked her way out of his office. After the incident, she said, a Packwood aide told her that such advances had occurred before and advised her not to go into his office alone. Wagers said she ignored two more invitations from Packwood to come to his office. Within a few months, she said, she took another Capitol Hill position.

Wagers, a Republican who admires Packwood's legislative record, said she had a second encounter with Packwood around 1981. She was working for the Labor Department and ran into Packwood in one of the Capitol's subterranean passageways. Packwood seemed interested in her work, and Wagers said she felt proud that she now had a job that enabled her to talk about issues at a higher level with her old boss. But as they walked along a corridor, she said, Packwood abruptly opened a door and ushered her into an unmarked private office.

Packwood shut the door, immediately kissed her and reached out to push pillows off a sofa, she said. Wagers said she pulled away and "I made it clear in the nicest way possible that I wasn't interested."

Wagers said she felt betrayed by Packwood and stupid for allowing herself to be caught in the same situation a second time. She expressed frustration at how she was treated. "You don't feel like you're going to be taken seriously," she said. "You are going to be given opportunities only because you're cute."

In his initial interview with The Post, Packwood said he remembered Wagers, but "there's no event with Paige," either in 1976 or 1981.

Five of Wagers's former colleagues and friends said they remembered Wagers telling them about one or the other of the two incidents close to the time they occurred.
Wagers said friends in Washington had advised her not to complain at the time, saying that she, rather than Packwood, would suffer. "That's the way Washington is. You have to build, you can't have enemies, you can't be discredited from the time you come in," said Wagers, who is now studying for a master's degree in social work and works part time as a dance instructor. But, she said, "you know it happened to you . . . and that it's right to say what happened. But because only the two of you were in the room, there is no way you can prove it. You're vulnerable. You're totally out on a limb."

After-Hours Encounter

Former Packwood staff members said the senator worked hard, often beginning his workday at sunrise. They said he sometimes drank wine or beer by dinner time and some said he did not handle the alcohol well, losing his temper or becoming forward with women.

Packwood disagreed. "I don't think my basic nature changes" with alcohol, he told The Post.

Packwood’s use of alcohol was mentioned in several of the women's accounts. One woman, who agreed to be identified to Packwood but not to be named in this article, described an incident in early 1982, when she was a 21-year-old clerical employee on Packwood’s Senate staff.

When she stopped by his office to leave some papers one evening, she said, Packwood invited her in, expressing pride in her plans to return to college. She was surprised and pleased, she said, that he even knew her name.

Packwood was drinking wine and offered her some. The former employee said she declined, but agreed to his invitation to sit down. Feeling uneasy, she said, she stayed far from his desk, refusing an invitation to come closer.

Then, she said, "he walked over to me and pulled me out of the chair, put his arm around me and tried to kiss me. He stuck his tongue in my mouth."

The former employee said she "squirmed" out of Packwood’s grasp, left the office immediately and hurried to her home on Capitol Hill, leaving her purse and coat at her office despite the winter cold. Two friends interviewed by The Post confirmed that the woman had told them about Packwood's advances shortly afterward.

"I was embarrassed, insulted and feeling like an idiot . . . for ever thinking he thought I was important," she said. She avoided Packwood, she said, and left his office that spring.

She filed no formal complaint, she said, because she thought "I wasn't important enough for anybody to believe. . . . I didn't know where to turn. I didn't know who to complain to, and he would probably just deny it, have me fired, and that's all that I needed at that time."

In the Oct. 29 interview, Packwood said he didn't remember the woman, although he confirmed after checking his records that she had worked for him. "I can't find anybody that knows her," he said.

Members of Congress spend much of their time listening to the representatives of special interest groups and lobbyists promoting legislation. Packwood, because of his support for women's issues, met periodically with representatives of groups favoring abortion rights. One activist who met with him every few months during the late 1970s and early 1980s was Mary Heffernan, who founded the Oregon chapter of NARAL and then served as the national organization's Washington-based field director.
Packwood had shown particular interest in Hefferman, writing her parents in Maine a flattering letter about her efforts. She believed in his importance to abortion rights strongly enough to donate money to him and help coordinate volunteers for his 1980 reelection campaign.

On one visit to his office in the early 1980s, she said in a recent interview, Packwood grabbed her arms and kissed her. She said she stopped him. "If I hadn't been strongly opposed to it, I feel certain he would have made more serious advances then or later," she said.

She did not tell anyone at the time what had happened, partly because she was embarrassed, said Hefferman, now executive director of the Women's Foundation of Oregon in Portland.

Hefferman said she believes Packwood "genuinely respects the intelligence that women bring to their work." But she said she was troubled by the imbalance of power in their relationship. She did not feel she could afford to alienate a key senator. "For me, abortion rights were on the line," she said. "What would be the outcome if I called him on the carpet?"

In his initial interview with The Post, Packwood said he never kissed Hefferman, whose work he said he admired. "I thought she was a solid person," he said. "I have nothing but good memories of her."

Sexually Explicit Jokes

The atmosphere in Packwood's Capitol Hill office could be casual and friendly, but one staff member found herself uneasy with the senator's joke telling.

In fall 1989, Maura C. Roche, a 22-year-old college intern, sat in Packwood's inner office, watching a videotape on abortion rights. The issue was one of particular concern not only for Packwood but for Roche, whose mother, Nancy Roche, presides over a statewide coalition of women's groups, the Women's Rights Coalition in Oregon. Packwood, who was working late on a budget bill, had walked through the suite that evening offering his staff drinks from the wine-in-a-box that he kept in the office. He came back to his desk and after the tape ended, Roche said, he pulled out a binder and read several sexually explicit jokes to her.

"I couldn't believe it... I didn't know what I should do. I just sat there and took it," said Roche, now public affairs director for Planned Parenthood in Oregon, a job that she said often involves getting help from Packwood and his staff.

Roche said she eventually excused herself from the room. At the time, she said, she considered Packwood's comments "tacky" but not in any way an advance. Today, a year after the Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas hearings, she said, she considers the jokes to have been "very degrading to women."

Packwood said he did not remember Roche or the incident.

About a year later, Packwood and several staff members were having dinner and drinks at the nearby Irish Times bar. Packwood had a lengthy political conversation with a female aide; the two had struck up a friendship during the preceding months based on their interests in music and books, exchanging occasional notes and cassette recordings.

Packwood recalls that he was trying to convince her that night that he could depend on support from organized labor in his reelection campaign. They returned to the office, he said, because he wanted to show her how many labor contacts he had in his extensive filing system.
The woman told friends afterward that Packwood abruptly kissed her in the office. She ran out of the building, crying, according to the account she gave friends. She remained on Packwood's staff for more than a year, continuing to work directly with the senator. No other incidents occurred; her notes to him became less frequent.

The woman declined requests for interviews last month but said Friday that she would not dispute the friends' accounts. Three friends spoke to The Post on condition that they not be identified.

Asked about this account, Packwood said he did not kiss the staff member. He and his aides provided several statements that questioned her truthfulness. Packwood later produced copies of nine notes that the woman wrote to him over two years, saying "somebody would not write these kind of letters" if they were upset about his behavior.

Conflicting Reactions

Over the past few weeks, as reports of The Post's inquiries have circulated, some former Packwood staff members said they felt torn between the instinct to protect their old boss, a senator whose legislative record they respect, and a responsibility not to protect actions they could not condone.

"People who found his behavior objectionable also found compelling reasons to remain in his service," said a man who has been both a friend and aide of Packwood's. "They respected him on other levels and found the work important."

But another former aide, who said she repeatedly had to rebuff Packwood, said his actions had jeopardized all he had stood for. This woman, who spoke on condition she not be identified, said she finally left the office because he did not curb his behavior.

"He couldn't seem to help himself," she said. "I cannot tell you how many people sat down with him and said, 'You are going to come to a bad end. All your career's work on women's issues and on progressive issues is going to turn to dust.'"

**GRAPHIC:** PHOTO, SEN. BOBPACKWOOD (R-ORE.), LONG RECOGNIZED AS A CHAMPION OF WOMEN'S ISSUES, AT HIS CAMPAIGN HEADQUARTERS IN PORTLAND ON ELECTION NIGHT. AP