

Public information

President Clinton will provide videotaped testimony concerning his ties to Lewinsky

WASHINGTON (AP) — Amidst a maelstrom of legal maneuvering, President Clinton agreed Wednesday to break six months' silence and provide videotaped testimony regarding his relationship with former White House intern Monica Lewinsky.

The session under oath with Whitewater prosecutors was set for Aug. 17 — with the president's attorneys present.

Senior aides said Clinton is prepared to stick by his denial of any sexual relations with Lewinsky. If so, his testimony could conflict with Lewinsky's. Legal sources, insisting on anonymity, say she told prosecutors this week they had sexual relations and discussed ways of concealing it.

Among a drumbeat of developments, these sources provided new details of Lewinsky's potential testimony.

The sources said Lewinsky is prepared to explain why she returned gifts from Clinton to the White House last December, furthering prosecutors' investigation of obstruction of justice. In addition, Lewinsky was said to have provided a dress to prosecutors as some sort of evidence. Reports of such a garment, frequently denied and ridiculed by her attorney, circulated last January when Lewinsky first came under investigation.

Senate Judiciary Chair Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, said independent counsel Kenneth Starr apparently is examining Clinton for three possible crimes — perjury, causing someone else to commit perjury, and obstruction of justice.

"We're now in the closing throes of this," Hatch said. "... It's in everybody's interest to get this over with."

Clinton's arrangement with Starr averted an unprecedented presidential appearance under subpoena before a federal grand jury where witnesses appear without counsel. Starr agreed to withdraw the subpoena to accommodate Clinton, and the president will delay his Martha's Vineyard vacation to testify. His testimony, under oath, will be made available to the grand jury.

At the U.S. courthouse, Linda Tripp, the woman whose secret tape recordings of Lewinsky prompted the investigation, spoke publicly for the first time, presenting herself as a common citizen and lashing out at her critics from the White House to Hollywood.

"I have been vilified for having taken the path of truth," Tripp, visibly shaking, said after wrapping up eight days of grand jury testimony.

"I have been maligned by people who have chosen not to tell the truth and who know they are not telling the truth," she said.

Tripp, who worked inside the Clinton White House and now works for the Pentagon, said that between 1993 and 1997 she learned of "actions by high government officials that may have been against the law" and became fearful.

"The things I witnessed concerning several different subjects made me increasingly fearful that this information was dangerous, very dangerous to possess," she said explaining why she approached prosecutors in Jan-

uary with 20 hours of telephone tapes she secretly made of her conversations with Lewinsky.

Press Secretary Mike McCurry was asked whether the president would prefer to testify before or after Lewinsky, replying only, "You'd have to ask his attorney that. I don't know."

Meanwhile, a potential conflict between Tripp and Lewinsky's account emerged. Sources familiar with Lewinsky's account say she is prepared to testify that she authored the so-called talking points she handed Tripp on Jan. 14 that suggested possible testimony in the Jones lawsuit.

Lewinsky has told prosecutors, the sources said, that no one from the White House assisted the effort and the document was mostly a compilation of things she had previously discussed with Tripp. But Tripp on Wednesday adamantly denied any role in the talking points.

"I have testified to the fact that I had nothing, let me repeat, nothing to do with preparing the so-called talking points. Allegations to the effect that I contributed to or assisted in any way with the creation of the talking points are as illogical and as they are patently false," Tripp said.

Legal sources told The Associated Press on Wednesday that Lewinsky has offered prosecutors testimony explaining why she returned gifts from Clinton. Lewinsky's testimony could be pertinent "to an issue of obstruction of justice," one source said, declining to be more specific.

The sources familiar with Lewinsky's account said the former intern will explain why the gifts were returned to presidential secretary Betty Currie shortly after Lewinsky was subpoenaed last December to testify in the Jones' case.

The sources stopped short of saying if Lewinsky would directly implicate Clinton in some way. But the one source said Lewinsky's testimony would make clear that only Clinton, Lewinsky and Currie knew about the gifts and before they "somehow got back to the White House, somebody had to say something."

The announcement of the deal for Clinton's testimony unfolded in theatrical fashion as the president's private attorney, David Kendall, emerged from the White House to provide first word.

"In an effort to achieve a prompt resolution of this entire matter, the president will voluntarily provide his testimony on Aug. 17, 1998 to the Office of Independent Counsel, as he has on prior occasions," Kendall said.

On Capitol Hill, anticipation grew that a possible impeachment report may soon be sent by Starr.

"This is not a discussion about sexual propensities or sexual peccadilloes," Hatch said. "Obstruction is a very serious thing."

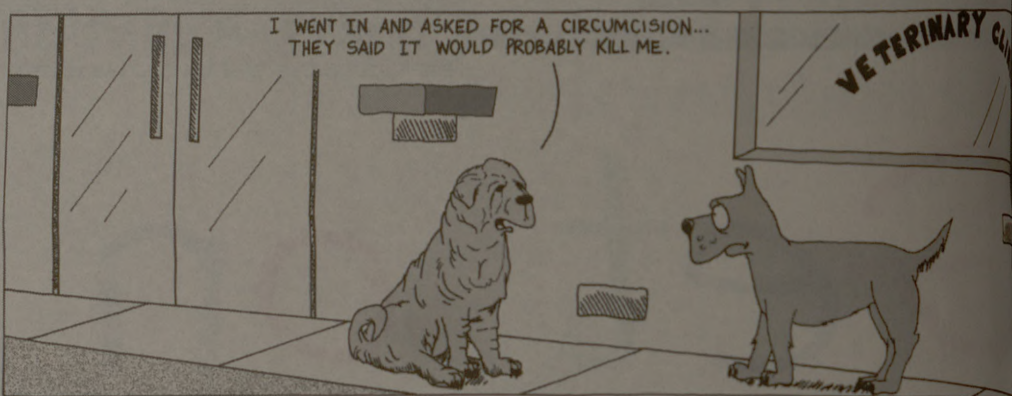
Noting that Starr's investigation already has cost \$40 million, Sen. Patrick Leahy of Vermont, the senior Democrat on Hatch's committee, was blunt: "Wrap this sucker up."

“We’re now in the closing throes of this. It’s in everybody’s interest to get this over with.”

— Orrin Hatch
Senate Judiciary Chair

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