

# Oval Office's power may be reduced following year of battles, scandal, trial

WASHINGTON (AP) — When the next occupant settles into the Oval Office in January 2001, he or she may feel the power of the presidency subtly reduced by the distant events of The Year of Lewinsky.

Kenneth Starr's tireless investigation of President Clinton, the president's pursuit of losing legal gambits, the House's vote to impeach — all nibbled away at presidential power, constitutional scholars say.

The erosion began even earlier, with the Supreme Court's unanimous decision on May 27, 1997 that

Paula Jones could bring her sexual harassment lawsuit against a sitting president. That led to the deposition in which Clinton denied ever engaging in sexual relations with Monica Lewinsky.

Some scholars view this weakening of the office as part of a natural pendulum swing away from powerful presidents who have dominated the 20th century. Others lament the whittling away of power.

"It's probably too early to know what, if any, lasting effects this tawdry episode will have on the

presidency," historian Alan Brinkley of Columbia University said.

For instance, the Clinton White House went to court in the heat of the expanding scandal to press a series of constitutional questions that future presidents may wish had been left alone.

Trying to block grand jury subpoenas to some of his closest advisers and bodyguards, Clinton claimed lawyer-client privilege, executive privilege and a special privilege covering Secret Service officers. He lost them all. The courts ruled the Secret

Service privileges did not extend to the attorney-client privilege solved in the face of a subpoena seeking evidence of a possible criminal offense. Executive privilege could be invoked by the needs of the president.

"The Clinton administration almost recklessly litigate each of these remote possibilities," said law professor John Garvey, who represented four of the neys general opposition to the Service privilege.

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