

Starr's latest assault on Clinton is backfiring

by Jeffrey Steinberg and Edward Spannaus

On March 9-10, Grand Inquisitor Kenneth Starr and his team of Justice Department career prosecutors were facing an existential crisis, in their four-year drive to destroy the Presidency of William Jefferson Clinton. Over the previous weekend, James McDougal, a pivotal, albeit highly discredited witness against the President, had died of a heart attack, in the Federal prison medical center in Fort Worth, Texas, creating a hole in Starr's already pathetically weak case against the President.

David Brock, once the most ferocious of the Clinton attack-dogs at the Richard Mellon Scaife-funded, and Hollinger Corporation-directed *American Spectator*, had publicly issued an apology to the President for his participation in a politically motivated smear campaign against him, an apology which called into question the reliability of some other important witnesses against Clinton, including several Arkansas state troopers who are shared assets of Starr and the Paula Jones legal team.

EIR's just-published exposé of the "Get Clinton" propaganda salon—run out of the home of former Justice Department official Theodore Olson in posh Great Falls, Virginia—had seriously damaged Starr's credibility among a growing stratum of average Americans, and among Washington, D.C. political insiders.

And a growing number of Congressional Republicans, painfully aware that the "Monica Lewinsky affair" had only enhanced President Clinton's popularity with the American public, began back-tracking from their unabashed support for the Starr effort. This back-tracking was evident in statements by Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott (R-Miss.) and Senate Judiciary Committee member Arlen Specter (R-Pa.) on the March 8 Sunday television talk shows.

Having survived the two-front assault of the Lewinsky

affair and the British-Israeli effort to draw him into a pointless military confrontation with Saddam Hussein, President Clinton was, furthermore, taking the political offensive, preparing new peace initiatives in the Middle East and showing the kind of leadership in the renewed Balkan crisis that had unhinged his London political enemies in the past.

While there is no transcript available of the secret deliberations of March 9-10 at the Office of the Independent Council, circumstantial evidence suggests that the Starr team determined to launch a counter-offensive, aimed at swamping the President, once more, with lurid allegations of sexual misconduct and perjury that would seize domination of the front pages of the press, and put Starr's almost fatally derailed attack on the Presidency back on track.

As was the case in mid-January 1998, when the "Lewinsky eruption" first occurred, Starr's plan of attack involved coordination between the Office of the Independent Counsel and the Paula Jones legal team:

- On Thursday, March 12, Kathleen Willey was chauffeured to an appearance at the Federal courthouse in Washington, D.C. by a team of Starr prosecutors, where she testified before the Clintongate grand jury. The same day, CBS News "60 Minutes" announced that Willey would be giving an exclusive interview on Sunday, March 15.

- On Friday, March 13, Paula Jones's attorneys dumped 700 pages of material in Federal court in Little Rock, full of lurid details, charging a broad pattern of sexual misconduct by Clinton. To believe the fantasm of charges contained in the Jones filing, would be to believe that the President spent most of his waking hours stalking women—not attending to the duties of Governor of Arkansas, and, later, President of the United States.

- The following day, March 14, the American media duti-

fully regurgitated, with little comment or independent corroboration, all of the filth spread against the President.

- On Sunday, March 15, with a great deal of advance promotion, “60 Minutes” aired a 45-minute segment, largely made up of the interview between Kathleen Willey and Ed Bradley, in which the Virginia Democratic Party fundraiser charged that she had been the victim of a sexual assault by President Clinton inside the White House.

A witness ‘beyond reproach’?

Even before Kathleen Willey’s “60 Minutes” interview was broadcast, the almost-uniform line was going out in the news media: “This one is different. Kathleen Willey is very credible. She’s not part of the right-wing conspiracy. She has no reason to lie.” And, by the next morning, the national media were in a frenzied attack upon the President, making no effort to even review the veracity of the Willey tale.

But, within days, Willey’s story, and her credibility, began to crumble. It has now come out that Willey has given contradictory testimony in previous legal proceedings, that she is heavily in financial debt, that an arrest warrant was issued for her in late 1993 for harassing an attorney who represented clients whom her husband had defrauded, and that she kept up a friendly relationship with Bill Clinton long after the alleged harassment incident, which she claims left her feeling angry and betrayed.

Willey said on “60 Minutes” that she had gone to see Clinton on Nov. 29, 1993, because of her desperate financial straits. In her deposition in the Paula Jones case two months earlier, Willey testified that she had told Clinton “we were having a financial crisis and my husband had asked me to sign a note for a large amount of money.”

But, when she was questioned about the events of that day during a 1995 deposition, Willey testified that she had not had *any* conversations with anyone in Washington about her financial troubles. And in sworn answers to written interrogatories in 1995, Willey stated that she “did not talk with anyone at the White House about the money, the paper, or the threats.”

On top of this, a former longtime friend of Willey’s, Julie Hiatt Steele, has made public an affidavit executed in mid-February, in which Steele describes how Willey asked her to lie to a *Newsweek* reporter to corroborate Willey’s later story that she had been “groped” by Clinton. In spring of 1997, Willey called Steele and asked her to meet with *Newsweek* reporter Michael Isikoff. Willey “told me that she needed my help to corroborate a story she had just told Mr. Isikoff,” Steele states, adding that Willey wanted Steele to say that Willey had come to Steele’s house immediately upon her return from Washington, and that Willey had told her that President Clinton had made sexual advances to her. “She repeatedly assured me that any discussion with Mr. Isikoff would be ‘off the record’ and that it would be all right if I lied to him.”

Just a few days before Willey’s March 15 “60 Minutes”

interview, her lawyer was in discussions with a book publisher about her proposed autobiography. Her lawyer Daniel Gecker was asking \$300,000 for Willey’s story—the same amount he was seeking from the supermarket tabloid, the *Star*. “It seemed to be a number that he was sort of fixated on,” said the *Star* editor.

Moreover, the White House has released a set of letters and notes, which show a continuous stream of correspondence from Willey to Clinton or his office, both before and after the alleged “groping” incident. Two days after the alleged sexual advances, Willey phoned for Clinton and left a message, the note of which said: “Kathleen Willey — she called this morning and said you could call her anytime.” Less than one month after the alleged incident, on Dec. 22, 1993, Willey wished Clinton a “wonderful Christmas” and thanked him for the opportunity to work in the White House.

The correspondence includes Willey inviting Clinton to an engagement party for her daughter in September 1995—hardly the way one would respond to a sexual predator. Most of the handwritten notes, up through late 1997, are signed: “Fondly, Kathleen.”

Willey’s legal problems

The people who were defrauded by Kathleen Willey’s late husband, Edward Willey, Jr., say that Kathleen Willey still owes them about \$400,000. In 1993, faced with IRS tax liens of over \$500,000, Ed Willey, a zoning lawyer, took \$274,000 from a condemnation trust fund being held for clients. In desperation, he and Kathleen signed a promissory note on Nov. 15, 1993, promising to pay the full amount two weeks later. His body was found in a wooded area on Nov. 30, 1993, supposedly a suicide.

The creditors sued Kathleen Willey for the full amount, and she was ultimately held liable for it by Virginia’s highest court. According to one of the creditors, Richmond produce dealer Anthony Lanasa, she has not paid any of the money. “I ain’t got a nickel yet,” Lanasa is quoted as saying. “She did everything she can to evade me, and she knows she owed it. She had a life insurance policy [and] she gave it to her kids so she wouldn’t have to pay me.”

According to court papers, what happened was this: To avoid having her share of the proceeds of the life insurance policy attached by creditors, Willey “disclaimed” the benefits, which then went to her children—who are using the funds to support her. Lanasa and his sister claimed that this was a fraudulent transfer of funds, but the Virginia Supreme Court ruled that under the Virginia statute in question, it was lawful. However, it is quite possible that Willey still faces an IRS investigation or other legal problems, arising out of the transfer of the insurance proceeds, and the fact that she is nevertheless drawing from those funds in what she claims are “loans.” This could well have been a point of legal vulnerability, used to persuade Willey to cooperate with Federal prosecutors and to change her story to make accusations against the President.