

# News Digest

TUESDAY, MARCH 10, 1998

PAGE 2

## Lott urges Clinton to tell 'whole truth'

■ The senator also advises Starr to conclude his work in the investigation.

WASHINGTON (AP) — Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott Monday urged President Clinton to do by ending the "stonewalling" and telling "the whole truth" about his relationship with Monica Lewinsky.

He also said the administration should stop its "smear tactics" against independent counsel Kenneth Starr.

"I today call on the president to come forward. Tell the American people what has happened in these cases, particularly the Lewinsky case," Lott, R-Miss., told reporters.

"What is the whole truth? Tell that to the independent counsel, call off his attack dogs, get this behind us so that we can go on with the people's business."

Lott had come under fire by House Speaker Newt Gingrich, R-Ga., and other Republicans over the weekend after saying Starr should accelerate the long-running Whitewater investigation into the president's private land dealings and allegations he had an affair with former White House intern Lewinsky

and covered it up.

Monday, Lott told a packed Capitol meeting room Starr "is doing a great job under very difficult circumstances." He criticized Clinton and the White House for hindering Starr's work with "stonewalling and smear tactics and attack methods being used by his attorneys and by his allies."

Lott said he hoped Starr would wrap up his work "sooner rather than later" because of the effect it is having.

"It is beginning to have an impact on the presidency, on the president and on his ability to deal with many very important issues for the future of our country — from Social Security to what's going on in Iraq to now what's going on in Kosovo," Lott said.

He offered few specifics about how Clinton's problems were affecting those issues, but said, "I think maybe there would have been more communication, particularly by the president himself."

Lott acknowledged that during a conversation over the weekend with Gingrich, the speaker asked him, "What was your thinking" when he called on Starr to quickly complete his work.

Earlier, Sen. Arlen Specter, R-Pa., criticized Lott's comment that Congress take the less drastic course of censuring the president if Starr cannot prove Clinton engaged in anything illegal.

"I don't think a censure resolution would be worth a tinker's dam," Specter said on "Fox News Sunday." "I don't think the Congress is in the business of censuring the president," a move that would have no legal ramifications.

One option for Starr, if he does not find credible evidence that Clinton obstructed justice or otherwise broke the law, is to report his findings to the House and let it decide whether to begin impeachment hearings.

If there is credible evidence, Specter said, "so be it." But "I don't think there ought to be an impeachment proceeding brought unless there is an open-and-shut case. America cannot stand the trauma of an impeachment matter unless it is cut-and-dry."

Rep. Bill McCollum, R-Fla., a member of the Judiciary Committee responsible for impeachment proceedings, said hearings would be necessary if it's proved Clinton lied under oath or

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TRENT LOTT  
senate majority leader

obstructed justice.

But, he added, "Ken Starr could just as easily report to the Congress in a few weeks that he does not have the evidence, and that will be the end of it."

Most Republicans have tried to stay out of the fight between the White House and Starr over the methods and extent of the independent counsel investigation.

But differences came to the surface this weekend when Lott suggested that Starr "show his cards" and wrap up the investigation. He also proposed that Congress consider a resolution to censure the president if it lacks the evidence to move on impeachment.

Specter backed Lott's comments on the pace of Starr's investigation. "I think a gentle nudge by Trent Lott is a

good thing."

But other Republicans were openly critical. House Speaker Newt Gingrich on Saturday said Starr should consider the needs of justice, not public relations, in carrying out his duties. Sen. Fred Thompson, R-Tenn., said while "we'd all like to see it over with one way or another ... we need to leave him alone and let him do his job."

"I don't know what Senator Lott has in mind," former Education Secretary and conservative leader William Bennett said Sunday on NBC's "Meet the Press."

"Ken Starr is down, he's being kicked by every Democrat from here to California, and Trent decides to throw something on him too. Doesn't seem to me to make much sense."

## El Nino apparent cause of '98 winter weather records

WASHINGTON (AP) — The first two months of 1998 were the warmest and wettest on record for the continental United States, according to a report Monday from government weather watchers, who predicted El Nino will bring more of the same for March and April.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration reported the national average temperature in January and February was 37.5 degrees Fahrenheit, compared with the normal 32.1 degrees. The previous record, set in 1990, was 37.0 degrees.

An average 6.01 inches of rain fell, beating the record of 5.7 inches set in 1979. Normally, 4.05 inches fall during the first two months of the year.

"These are the patterns one would typically expect during a strong El Nino event," said Ants Leetmaa, director of NOAA's Climate Prediction Center.

While the precipitation and tem-

peratures in January and February beat records for the first two months of any year since such measurements were first recorded 104 years ago, this winter didn't set a new record when December was included.

According to NOAA, the December-through-February period was the second-warmest and the seventh-wettest on record.

The agency also said it expected the recent temperature and precipitation patterns to continue through March and April and much of the nation to experience warmer than usual temperatures this summer.

El Nino is a periodic warming of the eastern Pacific Ocean, accompanied by changes in air pressure over the ocean, that can change weather patterns over much of the world.

Its causes remain mysterious, but government forecasters accurately predicted its arrival and impact for the first time this season.

## OPEC faces internal strife as oil prices drop markedly

LONDON (AP) — Oil prices plunged Monday to levels unseen in nearly four years, as traders decided OPEC won't try any quick fixes for the depressed market.

The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries was considering holding an emergency meeting next week, but Saudi Arabia's oil minister, Ali Naimi, seems to have shot down the idea. He says he won't cut the kingdom's production only to lose market shares to other OPEC members who are pumping more than they agreed.

The main question now hanging over the market: How low will the price of oil have to go before one of the two protagonists in the latest internal OPEC squabble — Saudi Arabia or Venezuela — will blink?

"I'm sure there is a level below which they cannot continue the status quo," said Manouchehr Takin, a senior oil analyst at the Center for Global Energy Studies in London. "When it gets to a really critical stage, they will get together. What level of pain can they endure?"

Takin was not making any bets on what the magic number might be for the 11-nation OPEC. He predicted current prices would force some small operators in places like Texas and Oklahoma to shut down high-cost, low-volume oil wells, however.

Brent crude oil to be delivered in April fell 47 cents a barrel, to \$13.12, late Monday afternoon on the International Petroleum Exchange in London.

Light sweet crude oil to be delivered in April was off 48 cents at \$14.43 a barrel on the

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Center for Global Energy Studies

New York Mercantile Exchange. On Friday, the spot month contract in New York had plunged below \$15 per barrel for the first time since April 1994.

Oil prices have been sinking since OPEC decided in November to increase its stated output ceiling by 10 percent — just as world demand for crude was slowing because of the Asian economic crisis. A relatively mild winter in parts of the United States also has reduced demand for home heating oil.

In the past, Saudi Arabia has acted as a "swing producer" within OPEC, adjusting its own massive production to stabilize often volatile global markets.

Naimi told the state-run Saudi press agency Sunday he will not do this "only to find out that other countries, especially those who do not adhere to their quotas, flood the market, undermine prices and take our valuable customers."

Saudi Arabia, he said, has "abandoned once and for all the role of swing producer."

Venezuela is by far the biggest quota-buster in OPEC, but oil minister Erwin Arrieta said last week that his country won't cut production by even one barrel.

Although several of the group's smaller players are clamoring for cutbacks, they may have to wait to see whether the Saudis or the Venezuelans back down first in the face of sharply lower revenues that will prove devastating to all the oil producers.

Libyan oil minister Abdalla Salem el-Badri said last week the crisis has cost the organization some \$8 billion in lost oil revenues.

In Baghdad, a senior Iraqi official said Iraq would not attend the OPEC meeting.

Iraq has been barred from freely exporting oil since its 1990 invasion of Kuwait. Under a special program, the United Nations has allowed it to sell limited quantities of crude to buy food and other needed goods for its 22 million people.

The Iraqi official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said his country would not reduce its U.N.-authorized pumping because it had to "produce and produce" to feed its people.

Iraq's Foreign Minister Mohammed Saeed al-Sahhaf was in New York to discuss a U.N. plan to expand the oil-for-food program so Iraq may sell \$5.2 billion worth of oil over six months, instead of the current \$2.1 bil-

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The Daily Nebraskan (USPS 144-080) is published by the UNL Publications Board, Nebraska Union 34, 1400 R St., Lincoln, NE 68588-0448, Monday through Friday during the academic year; weekly during the summer sessions. The public has access to the Publications Board.

Readers are encouraged to submit story ideas and comments to the Daily Nebraskan by calling (402) 472-2588.

Subscriptions are \$55 for one year.

Postmaster: Send address changes to the Daily Nebraskan, Nebraska Union 34, 1400 R St., Lincoln, NE 68588-0448. Periodical postage paid at Lincoln, NE.

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