

# News Digest

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## Reno reopens King assassination case

Limited review called for falls short of widow's hopes for a national commission

WASHINGTON (AP) — Attorney General Janet Reno reopened the investigation of the 30-year-old assassination of civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., focusing on two allegations of a conspiracy beyond James Earl Ray.

The limited review announced Wednesday stops well short of the national commission sought by King's widow, Coretta Scott King. Nevertheless, King welcomed the probe "as a first step towards revealing the truth."

"I hope this inquiry will open a wider investigation of all pertinent leads," said King, whom Reno consulted for months and informed of the decision Tuesday night.

"When this is accomplished, our family and the American people will at last have the satisfaction that all relevant evidence has been fully examined," King said.

In a brief written announcement, Reno said, "We hope this review will provide answers to new questions that

have been raised about a tragedy that still haunts our nation." She promised a report on the findings.

Despite a narrow initial focus on separate allegations by a retired FBI agent and a former Memphis, Tenn., bar owner, "the evidence gathered by the inquiry will be followed wherever it may lead," the Justice Department said.

In meetings last spring with Reno and President Clinton, King and her sons had sought a national commission, armed with power to grant immunity in return for testimony.

The family has expressed doubts about the official version that James Earl Ray, acting alone, shot King on the balcony of a Memphis, Tenn., motel April 4, 1968. Ray died in prison this year serving a sentence for killing King, but he had long ago disavowed his initial confession and spent years futilely seeking a new trial.

The review will be conducted by civil rights division lawyers, aided by criminal division attorneys, under the

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**JERRY RAY**  
brother of James Earl Ray

leadership of Barry Kowalski, who successfully prosecuted the Los Angeles police officers who beat black motorist Rodney King in an episode caught on a video camera by a bystander.

The King family also said it had concerns about the FBI investigation and the actions of its former director, J. Edgar Hoover.

Justice officials cautioned that the federal government might not be able to prosecute any allegations, even if proved true by the investigation, because the statute of limitations on the

basic federal crime in the case — conspiracy to deprive King of his civil rights — ran out 25 years ago.

There was no federal murder charge available for the King case in 1968. Tennessee's murder law has no statute of limitations, and any evidence Justice turns up could be turned over to state prosecutors, officials said.

One of Ray's brothers, Jerry Ray, said Wednesday he hopes a special prosecutor, and not officials in the Justice Department, conducts the review. "If the FBI does it, they'll say James done it and he's a racist," he said.

## Russians fail to assure stability for markets

MOSCOW (AP) — Russia's acting prime minister tried to reassure investors Wednesday after bonds plunged in value under a drastic plan to restructure Russia's enormous debts, but markets continued to fall.

The ruble also dove again as Central Bank support for the currency faltered, forcing the suspension of trading at the interbank exchange for a second day in a row.

The ruble weakened by 5 percent, trading at 8.26 rubles to the dollar in contrast to 7.86 rubles on Tuesday.

President Boris Yeltsin signed the decree on restructuring the country's \$40 billion foreign debt, a day

after terms of the plan were revealed. The terms announced late Tuesday confirmed creditors' fears that they would sustain heavy losses.

Investors whose bonds have matured will have the option of trading them either for long-term, dollar-denominated paper with a very modest return, or much higher-yielding paper denominated in rubles.

Even as he pledged to try to limit the damage to investors, Acting Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin was careful to dissociate himself from the restructuring decision.

"I would like people to understand us correctly. This decision was predetermined. In actual fact, our task was only to formulate it, and we could not do otherwise," he was quoted as saying by the ITAR-Tass news agency.

"Our top priority now, my personal task, is to soften its negative influence on stock markets and investors."

Foreign investors have already been leaving Russia in droves, and the losses they will sustain under the restructuring — in some cases receiving just 17 cents for every dollar they invested, according to some analysts — will discourage many from returning anytime soon.

Russia will feel the loss of foreign investment keenly. Some analysts predict the country will be shut out of international commercial borrowing for several years.

Stocks plummeted 6.4 percent in early trading Wednesday, with the Russian Trading System index falling to 82.87 points from 88.38 Tuesday.

Moscow residents lined up outside some banks to try to withdraw their deposits.

"I've got no confidence left in the government, of course. You can't even buy hard currency now," said a woman who identified herself only as Julia.

Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov said he was ready to talk with Chernomyrdin about a coalition government. But he warned that the Communists would demand a say in the prime minister's program to cope with the economic crisis.

## Clinton advisers brace for impeachment call

WASHINGTON (AP) — Bracing for a likely impeachment report, some of President Clinton's political advisers want to send Congress a separate version to counter Kenneth Starr with evidence from the president's defense team.

Such a move would be designed to provide Clinton's Democratic allies on Capitol Hill with ammunition to argue against starting impeachment proceedings in the Monica Lewinsky case — and to influence public perceptions.

The idea has been "batted around" and passed on to Clinton's lawyers by political advisers, one senior administration official said.

A second official said the report could be written like a dissenting report during a congressional investigation, evaluating the same evidence but coming to different conclusions.

The officials, both of whom commented only on condition of anonymity, cautioned that no decisions have been made and that it is unclear how Clinton's lead private attorney, David Kendall, views the idea. Kendall was out of town Wednesday and unavailable for comment.

Advisers note that there are

other options for putting forth information helpful to Clinton, such as press briefings, release of documents and interviews with aides or even the president himself.

Starr, the independent counsel, is expected to deliver a report to Congress as early as next month that would outline possible impeachable offenses in the Lewinsky case, including perjury, obstruction of justice and abuse of the power of the presidency. Clinton's defenders are likely to respond soon after.

At issue is whether Clinton lied under oath in the Paula Jones sexual harassment lawsuit and tried to obstruct the lawsuit and subsequent criminal investigation by concealing the nature of his relationship with Lewinsky.

Last week, Clinton ended seven months of public denial by acknowledging he had an inappropriate relationship with Lewinsky and had misled both his family and the country.

But the president told a grand jury that his denial of "sexual relations" with Lewinsky under oath last January was legally accurate even though he had engaged in sexual contact with her, legal sources said.

## La Vista man gets life sentence

PAPILLION (AP) — A La Vista man convicted of dousing his estranged wife with gasoline, setting her on fire and watching her burn was sentenced Wednesday to life in prison.

Francis Seberger, 40, convicted at trial of first-degree murder, was sentenced by a three-judge panel in Sarpy County District Court.

Prosecutors had sought the death penalty for the arson that severely burned Debbie Seberger, 34. She was burned over 80 percent of her body and died at the St. Elizabeth Health Center's burn unit in Lincoln a month after the attack May 31,

1997. Seberger's attorney argued that his client's life should be spared because he was despondent over his divorce and drunk at the time of the killing. Attorney Greg Pivovar said Wednesday that the sentence was the best his client could hope for.

Prosecutor Patricia Bramhall said she did not know why the judges did not impose the death penalty.

The Sebergers' 13-year-old daughter, Nicole, had written the court asking that her father's life be spared. She was in court for the sentencing.



## Supreme Court to rule on 2000 Census polling

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Clinton administration is pressing for a Supreme Court ruling on the use of modern polling techniques it contends will better account for minorities and city dwellers in the 2000 Census.

The solicitor general has appealed a federal court ruling barring use of statistical sampling for the national head count and will ask for Supreme Court review, the Justice Department said in a statement Wednesday.

The census is used to determine how many congressional seats each state gets. Billions of dollars in federal funds also are allocated on the basis of how many people live in each state and city.

A more accurate count would be expected to benefit Democrats, because those normally missed in the Census belong to that party's constituencies.

House Republicans sued over administration plans to use sampling, claiming it violates the constitutional requirement for an "actual enumeration" of the population. A federal court panel ruled Monday that the sampling plan violates the Census Act.

Sampling is a basic tool of pollsters and marketers that makes estimates based on what is already known about a given population.

## Man pleads guilty to Beanie Baby scam

MEDINA, Ohio (AP) — A man accused of operating a Beanie Babies scam that cheated people in 19 states, including Nebraska, has pleaded guilty to theft.

Eldred Proctor, 58, and his wife received between \$80,000 and \$100,000 by advertising to sell rare and retired versions of the popular beanbag toys, David Sheldon, a Medina County assistant prosecutor, said Tuesday.

Proctor took the orders — including \$5,356 from a Nebraska man and \$980 from a Florida resident — but never sent the toys. The couple returned all but about \$15,000.

Proctor said he had cancer and needed money for medical treatments.

He pleaded guilty Monday to three counts of theft involving the scam. He also pleaded guilty to theft of welfare benefits and illegal use of food stamps.

His wife, Arlene Proctor, 55, pleaded guilty to the same charges in April, Sheldon said.

Both are to be sentenced Sept. 28 in Medina County Common Pleas Court and face a maximum penalty of 2½ years in prison.

Sheldon said there were about 90 victims in 19 states. The states are Minnesota, West Virginia, Illinois, Ohio, Texas, Nebraska, Florida, California, Virginia, Connecticut, New York, Montana, New Jersey, Oklahoma, Washington, Michigan, Georgia, Missouri and Massachusetts.

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