

NEWS DIGEST

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Lawyer: Case is all semantics

White House special counsel says House Republicans went too far

WASHINGTON (AP) — A White House lawyer Wednesday dismissed the charge that President Clinton lied before a grand jury as nothing more than "arguments over semantics" and accused House Republicans of drawing conclusions more extreme than those of Kenneth Starr. "It is hard to take the charges seriously," the lawyer told senators.

White House special counsel Gregory Craig opened a second day of defense arguments by urging senators in the impeachment trial to read the grand jury testimony and "see the president is truthful."

Craig denounced the impeachment article that accuses Clinton of perjury before a grand jury last August as "really bad ... legally, structurally and constitutionally."

"If you convict and remove President Clinton on the basis of these allegations, no president of the United States will ever be safe from impeachment again," Craig said. Craig argued that House prosecutors had wrongly tried to criminalize "utterly meaningless" conflicts in testimony.

For example, Craig said the House prosecutors were wrong to argue that Clinton had lied under oath when he told the grand jury that he engaged in intimate contact and sexual banter with Monica

Clinton under fire

Lewinsky "on certain occasions" in 1996 and 1997 when Lewinsky was a White House employee. She testified the activity began in late 1995 when she was still an intern.

"There is simply no way that a reasonable person can look at this testimony and conclude or agree with the managers that it is a 'direct lie.' What message do the managers send to America and to the rest of the world when they include these kinds of allegations as reasons to remove this president from office?" Craig asked.

"It is hard to take the charges seriously, when in each case they boil down to arguments over semantics," he added. The president was out of Washington on Wednesday, lobbying for policies he introduced in his State of the Union speech Tuesday night.

One prominent Republican, former presidential candidate Pat Robertson, said today that Clinton had "hit a home run" in his speech and dashed any possibility that he would be convicted at the impeachment trial.

"From a public relations standpoint, he's won."

"It is hard to take the charges seriously, when in each case they boil down to arguments over semantics."

GREGORY CRAIG
White House special counsel

... They might as well dismiss this impeachment hearing and get on with something else, because it's over as far as I'm concerned," Robertson said on "The 700 Club" television show.

Before the defense resumed its rebuttal, senators met privately in party caucuses. Republicans emerged sounding more certain they will seek to call at least some witnesses during the trial to resolve conflicts in testimony.

"This all doesn't need to go beyond mid-February, even with the deposition of witnesses," said John Czwartacki, the spokesman for Majority Leader Trent Lott.

Kosovo fighting continues despite NATO warnings

SIPOLJE, Yugoslavia (AP) — Serb forces battled ethnic Albanian rebels in northwestern Kosovo on Wednesday as both sides ignored NATO warnings to halt the fighting. At least two guerrillas were killed and a Serb mother and her two children were reported injured.

The deaths came in a gunbattle that broke out near Kosovska Mitrovica, 25 miles northwest of Pristina, the capital of the separatist province. There were no reports of Serb casualties.

Each side blamed the other for starting the fighting. Serb police said the Kosovo Liberation Army rebels began shooting when officers entered a nearby village to search for guerrillas who wounded five policemen two days earlier.

Reporters saw the bodies of two ethnic Albanians, including one covered with ammunition belts with a machine gun at his side. The other was carrying a pistol.

Rebels said they opened fire after Serb forces shelled the nearby village of Vraganica. Dozens of frightened ethnic Albanian civilians fled the fighting aboard horse-drawn carts.

Serbian media reported a Serb mother and her two children were

injured before dawn Wednesday when a mortar exploded on their home in a village near here. A 14-year-old girl was reported to be in serious condition.

In Brussels, Belgium, NATO's supreme commander, Gen. Wesley Clark, and German Gen. Klaus Naumann admitted they made little progress during more than seven hours of talks Tuesday with Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic.

Clark told alliance ambassadors Wednesday that Milosevic showed "no flexibility."

With diplomacy making little headway, NATO's policy-making body, the North Atlantic Council, ordered the USS Enterprise, currently in the Aegean Sea, to steam into the Adriatic Sea and moved an eight-vessel Mediterranean naval force to Brindisi, Italy.

The council also reduced the notice to pilots and others for carrying out airstrikes from four to two days.

In London, British Prime Minister Tony Blair said that Milosevic "risks a rapid military response from NATO" if he fails to abide by the Oct. 12 ceasefire, which temporarily ended seven months of fighting.

Omaha officer cleared in 1997 shooting death

OMAHA (AP) — A second grand jury has exonerated Omaha police officer Todd Sears in the traffic stop shooting death of Marvin Ammons.

The jury returned its verdict Wednesday, which found no probable cause that criminal conduct contributed to Ammons' death.

Last year, a grand jury met for three weeks and indicted Sears on a manslaughter charge. However, a judge threw out that indictment in November, citing misconduct by an alternate juror.

Sears also was cleared in an internal police investigation and returned to regular duty after the indictment was dismissed.

Ammons was shot in the early morning hours of Oct. 26, 1997, during a snowstorm that left much of the city without power. Sears and his partner, Troy Kister, had been called to an area of north Omaha to investigate a traffic accident and disturbance.

The officers encountered Ammons standing outside his car. Sears told investigators that Ammons reached for a handgun clipped to his waist. The police account said the gun and its holster were found near Ammons' right hand.

A civil lawsuit filed by Ammons' family is still pending.

Muslims accuse Denny's

HELENA, Mont. (AP) — Denny's restaurant workers may have deliberately slipped bacon and ham into the meals of two Muslims who had requested no-pork dishes, an investigator with the Montana Human Rights Bureau says.

"The fact that the ingredients for these meals are packaged separately and do not contain any pork products ... implies that these products were placed in the food intentionally," according to the investigator's report.

Two Muslims, Abdussalam Sipes and Clarence Watson, had filed a religious discrimination complaint with the bureau, seeking an apology and \$1 million each. The investigator's report was made public this week by an Islamic organization.

A lawyer for Denny's, which has been dogged by charges of racism for years, did not return calls. The manager of the Billings restaurant, Richard Graves, denied the incident was intentional.

Sipes, whose religion forbids the eating of pork, said in an interview Tuesday, "My soul was poisoned." Watson said he had to purge himself by vomiting the meal and was unable to read the Koran or pray for 40 days.

The accusations arose from a March lunch at which the men asked that their meals be prepared in separate skillets to avoid contamination

"My soul was poisoned."

ABDUSSALAM SIPES
Muslim

by pork.

Sipes said he noticed pieces of ham hidden in the food and complained. The manager offered them another dish, but Sipes said that when he inspected it, he found a strip of bacon buried underneath.

"They're claiming it's a giant coincidence that ham — not once but twice — found its way into both of their meals," said the men's attorney, Jeff Ferguson. "They're saying it was a comedy of errors."

Denny's, based in Spartanburg, S.C., settled a \$46 million discrimination suit in 1994 filed by black Secret Service agents who complained they were denied service at a Maryland restaurant.

The restaurant chain recently launched a \$2 million anti-racism campaign consisting of a series of TV commercials.

Denny's employees are now also required to undergo anti-discrimination sensitivity training.

World and Nation DATELINES

■ Egypt Iraqi opposition group turns down U.S. support

CAIRO (AP) — A prominent Iraqi opposition group on Wednesday turned down support offered by President Clinton for efforts to oust Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, saying accepting American help would hurt their cause.

Despite the rejection from the Tehran-based Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq, two other groups — the London-headquartered Iraqi National Congress and the Jordan-based Iraqi National Accord — welcomed the American offer.

■ China Entrepreneur sentenced for cyberspace dissent

SHANGHAI (AP) — China extended its crackdown on dissent into cyberspace for the first time Wednesday, sentencing a software entrepreneur to two years in prison, for giving e-mail addresses to dissidents abroad.

Lin Hai, 30, was convicted of subversion in a case that highlighted China's conflicting efforts to promote Internet use for business and education at the same time it is stamping out political activity.

Subversion is among China's most serious crimes and is normally used against political dissidents.

■ Guatemala Women raped on trip called to testify

ESCUINTLA (AP) — Four U.S. women who were raped while on a college trip were in Guatemala on Wednesday to testify against three men charged in the 1998 attack.

The women were among 13 students and three faculty members from St. Mary's College in St. Mary's City, Md., who were traveling in Guatemala as part of a study tour last January. Gunmen forced their bus to stop, robbed the passengers and raped the women in a field.

■ Indonesia Christian, Muslim gangs battle after rioters kill 17

JAKARTA (AP) — Police fired warning shots into the air Wednesday to keep apart rival Christian and Muslim gangs after two days of rioting in northern Indonesia left at least 17 people dead.

The mobs were enraged by reports that mosques and churches had been set on fire on Ambon Island, 1,450 miles northeast of Jakarta, the country's capital.

The official Antara news agency said at least 100 people had been badly injured and more than 30 houses burned in the main city, Ambon.

■ India Experts to assess plot used to bomb embassy

NEW DELHI (AP) — U.S. counter-terrorism experts have arrived in India to assess what police say was a plot by Osama bin Laden to bomb the U.S. Embassy and two consular offices, an embassy spokeswoman said Wednesday.

Police have arrested four people, including a Bangladeshi man accused of working for Pakistan's intelligence agency, according to newspaper reports in New Delhi.

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