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NATIONAL

NEWS FROM AROUND THE COUNTRY

Clinton fields questions, allegations about his role in Whitewater scandal

■ **PRESS:** The president defended the first lady and himself during a press conference

WASHINGTON (AP) — Addressing pointed questions about his wife, President Clinton said Thursday he will do "whatever is necessary" to clarify her role in the White House travel office firings and the tangled Whitewater affair.

Allegations about her conduct are "not the same thing as fact," Clinton said at his first major news conference in five months. He said Whitewater questions are "apparently part of the price" of his presidency, and he expressed sympathy for staff members facing big legal bills even though they are "completely innocent of any wrongdoing."

Clinton offered a rousing defense of first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton and expressed exasperation at suggestions that his administration has not cooperated fully with Congress and investigators.

While declaring that Mrs. Clinton should "fully answer" all questions, the president stopped short of saying she would testify before congressional committees. Repub-

lican lawmakers have suggested her testimony might be necessary.

When it comes to the Whitewater affair — involving a bungled real estate deal and a failed savings and loan — the allegations have "virtually always borne no relationship to the fact," he said. "An allegation comes up, and we answer it, and then people say, 'Well, here's another allegation, answer this.' And then, here's another allegation, answer this."

Separately, in an interview to be aired Friday night on the ABC-TV news program "20/20," Mrs. Clinton denied ordering the 1993 travel office firings despite White House documents portraying her as the architect of the dismissals. She said she only expressed concern "about the financial mismanagement that was discovered when the president arrived" in 1993.

"I think that everyone who knew about it was quite concerned and wanted it to be taken care of," Mrs. Clinton said. "But I did not make the decisions. I did not direct anyone to make the decisions."

Other documents suggest Mrs. Clinton was more active than she has acknowledged in representing the failed Arkansas thrift that is at the heart of the Whitewater affair.

Taking the same line as the president, she said she would do "whatever it takes to cooperate" with congressional investigators.

"At the end of the day the American public will know we have nothing to cover up," she said. "There is nothing that we have done that should be of any concern to anyone."

At his news conference, Clinton acknowledged that various investigations — including a sexual harassment suit filed by Arkansas Paula Jones — could bankrupt him. He said he felt badly that 20 years of his savings may be lost on legal expenses but said if he stays healthy, he'll be able to pay his bills and earn a pretty good living.

The president said taxpayers should not shoulder any of his legal costs.

Despite suggestions that Mrs. Clinton might be a liability in his re-election campaign, Clinton said the first lady will keep a high profile.

"I expect that she will continue to be an enormous positive force in this country," he said, likening Mrs. Clinton to Eleanor Roosevelt in that both first ladies were criticized "for many of the same reasons ... and from many of the same sources."

East Coast criminals kept indoors by snow

■ **CRIME:** Murder and theft rates have dropped in wake of record snowstorm

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — Crime is taking a snow day on the East Coast.

Police from Boston to Washington reported drops in almost all categories of crime since Sunday's blizzard. Philadelphia lasted 60 hours without a murder. New Yorkers waited three days before the killing resumed.

Officers did deal with a surge of emergency calls, but almost all involved car trouble or motorists fighting over scarce parking spaces.

The deterrent? A heaping pile of snow that smothered the East Coast and snowed in the criminals.

"We're thankful for any help we can get from God or man in our fight to reduce crime," Philadelphia Police Commissioner Richard Neal said Thursday. "And who knows? Maybe nature can teach people the senselessness of pitting man against man."

No homicides were reported in New York from early Sunday evening to late Wednesday night. The city averaged about three a day in 1995. Reports of robberies, burglaries, car thefts and other serious crimes also were down.

After the blizzard died and life began returning to normal, the murder rate rose. Four men, including a livery cab driver, were shot to death from 11:30 p.m. Wednesday to 9:20 a.m. Thursday in New York City.

In Philadelphia, where a record 30.7 inches of

snow fell, no one was killed from Saturday until late Monday, when Tammy Brown was caught in the crossfire of a drug shooting. Two more people have been killed since then.

"There was a hiatus there for about 60 hours," said Philadelphia Homicide Inspector Jerrold Kane.

Eight people were robbed in Philadelphia Wednesday. The normal total is 15 to 25 robberies, police said.

Violent crime in Washington also dropped 14 percent last weekend, deputy police chief Charles Bacon said. In Baltimore, serious crimes decreased by 23 percent in the first 10 days of January.

"Cops have always said that the weather is their best friend," said Sgt. Fred Seklecki of Holyoke, Mass., an industrial city with a high crime rate.

The storm also snowed in would-be thieves in smaller cities and towns.

Harrisburg, Pa., where 28 inches of snow fell, reported no burglaries since Sunday. Nearby York, which got 3 feet, had no muggings or car thefts.

"Everybody's too tired from shoveling. They don't have time to create mayhem," said Harrisburg police spokesman Randy King.

The snow also can keep smarter criminals indoors. Maj. Cornelius Hairston, a Baltimore public housing officer, said he knows from his 14 years on the force that criminals are wary of leaving tracks.

"These guys know it is hard for them to get away because of the snow prints," he said. "You can follow them to the suspect's home."

TV tabloid 'A Current Affair' is canceled

■ **TELEVISION:** Despite a recent increase in ratings, tabloid ends its nine-year

NEW YORK (AP) — Ka-chung! A Current Affair has been cut.

The granddaddy of syndicated news magazines, with its pyramid logo and wind-whistling intro, is calling it quits.

Despite improved ratings in a less tawdry format, Affair won't be returning for the 1996-97 season. Twentieth Television, the show's distributor, announced Wednesday.

"A Current Affair has had a

wonderful nine-year run and has been a tremendous asset to Twentieth Television," said Rick Jacobson, the company's president. "The show is as good as it's ever been right now."

However, Affair, the nation's first syndicated tabloid show and long the ratings leader, had in recent years slipped to No. 3 position behind the shows it inspired: *Hard Copy* and current front-runner *Inside Edition*.

In a highly competitive programming marketplace, the show's continued presence in certain key cities was in doubt. "It wasn't economically feasible to program under those circum-

stances," Jacobson said.

Even though this season's audience has grown from 3.24 million to 3.91 million households, the show remains in third place, despite efforts of co-executive producers John Tomlin and Bob Young to reposition it.

Tomlin and Young, who were with the show at its inception, returned last spring to mastermind its re-launch.

Pledging to "take out the sleaze" associated with the tabloid genre, they said they would no longer pay for interviews and announced a new emphasis on investigative stories.