

CAMPAIGN TRAIL

A LOOK AT POLITICS IN THE ELECTION YEAR

First lady addresses speculations

■ **SESSIONS:** Mrs. Clinton denied that her meetings with Jean Houston had psychic or religious themes

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — Hillary Rodham Clinton mixed good-natured jest and no-nonsense denial Monday in trying to douse what she called "sensational" speculation about her meetings with a psychic researcher.

The first lady rejected suggestions that Jean Houston was her "spiritual adviser." And she said that sessions in which Houston coached her to hold imaginary conversations with Eleanor Roosevelt were merely an "intellectual exercise."

Mrs. Clinton opened her appearance at a Nashville conference on family issues by joking that she had just had an imaginary talk with Mrs. Roosevelt — "and she thinks this is a terrific idea." The friendly audience laughed appreciatively.

In a written statement, Mrs. Clinton was firm in her denial

that there were any psychic or religious overtones to the sessions.

"The bottom line is: I have no spiritual advisers or any other alternatives to my deeply held Methodist faith and traditions upon which I have relied since childhood," she said.

Then she added wryly, "And I do wonder what Eleanor Roosevelt might think of all this."

Mrs. Clinton met with Houston several times from late 1994 until March of this year, according to a new book that says Houston led the first lady through imaginary conversations with her hero, Mrs. Roosevelt, and Indian leader Mahatma Gandhi. Mrs. Clinton drew the line at a suggestion to converse with Jesus Christ, saying that would be "too personal."

The consultations with Houston and an associate, Mary Catherine Bateson, were described in "The Choice," by Bob Woodward, an assistant managing editor at The Washington Post. The book was excerpted at length in the Post and in Newsweek magazine.

In her statement, Mrs. Clinton said the women were among many Americans "from all walks of life who have interesting ideas or insights into what's happening in our country today."

She said they were helpful in the preparation of her best-selling book, "It Takes A Village," about child rearing.

She said she had publicly noted that she had held imaginary talks with Mrs. Roosevelt even before Houston suggested the idea, and described the conversations "as a way of discussing what Mrs. Roosevelt would think about the problems of contemporary society and how she would approach her role as first lady."

The White House seemed anxious to avoid embarrassing comparisons to Nancy Reagan's consultations with an astrologer.

Mrs. Clinton said she had engaged in hours of "freewheeling discussion" with Houston.

"While I have had a number of conversations with Jean Houston, it is simply not true that she is my spiritual adviser," she added.

Lawsuit against Clinton may be delayed

■ **COURT:** The sexual harassment suit may be addressed after Clinton leaves office

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court put Paula Jones' sexual harassment suit against President Clinton on hold Monday, sparing him the possibility of an embarrassing trial at the height of the presidential campaign.

The justices agreed to study whether the lawsuit should be delayed until Clinton leaves office.

They will hear arguments this fall or winter, precluding any trial in the meantime. A high court decision is expected sometime in 1997.

The court will hear Clinton's argument that presidents have "unique responsibilities" and almost never should have to face trial in private civil lawsuits while in office.

Clinton's lawyer, Robert Bennett, said on CNN's "Inside Politics" that the case dealt with the separation of powers and the presidency — "issues that I felt always had to be resolved by the Supreme Court."

Jones' lawyer, Joseph Cammarata, said the court's action "should not be any indication of how they are going to rule. The eventual decision is going to be a clear affirmation that we as American citizens are all

equal in the eyes of the law. No one is above the law."

Cammarata, who told reporters he informed Jones of Monday's action, said, "She feels that the president is a coward. ... Those were her words."

Jones' lawsuit alleges that Clinton propositioned her in a Little Rock hotel suite in 1991 while he was governor of Arkansas, but that she rejected his suggestion.

Clinton has denied ever having an encounter with Jones and has said he cannot recall ever meeting her.

Jones filed the lawsuit in May 1994 and is seeking more than \$700,000 in damages.

A federal judge in Arkansas ruled that a trial should be delayed until Clinton leaves office but that pretrial fact-gathering could begin.

The 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals decided in January, however, that the case could go to trial during Clinton's presidency.

In the appeal granted Monday, Clinton's lawyers said only "exceptional circumstances" should force a sitting president to face trial in a private civil lawsuit.

No other president has been compelled to do so, his lawyers said, adding that a trial could jeopardize the constitutional separation of powers between the judiciary and presidency.



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