

GOP support for perjury waning

By Laurie Kellman
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Republican senators on Sunday said some of their colleagues may vote against removing President Clinton from office. House prosecutors, meanwhile, prepared to question Monica Lewinsky in a last-ditch effort to strengthen their case.

As Lewinsky waited at the Mayflower Hotel for her deposition Monday, cracks appeared in the unified Republican front on the perjury and obstruction charges against Clinton.

"The sense right now in just listening to members talk is that there are Republicans who either are not going to vote for perjury or the obstruction of justice" charge, Sen. Tim Hutchinson, R-Ark., said in a telephone interview.

Hutchinson declined to estimate how many might vote to acquit, but he indicated that getting even 50 votes for conviction in a chamber controlled by 55 Republican senators is in doubt.

"You would get much closer to getting a majority in the obstruction (charge) than on the perjury charge" as the case now stands, he said.

House prosecutors have shifted their focus to the obstruction charge on the assumption that even among Republicans who believe that Clinton lied under oath, there is questionable support for the notion that the untruths were serious enough to warrant the president's removal, according to a knowledgeable official who demanded anonymity.

To that end, two of the three witnesses prosecutors will question this week — presidential friend

Vernon Jordan and White House aide Sidney Blumenthal — go to the obstruction question, rather than the perjury charge.

And sources close to the committee have said that Rep. Ed Bryant of Tennessee, who will question Ms. Lewinsky, wants to elicit information on Clinton's efforts to conceal their affair from Paula Jones' lawyers and Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr's grand jury.

But even as senators widely believe they don't have the 67 votes needed to remove him from office, Clinton's battles are far from over.

Starr is considering seeking the president's indictment before Clinton's term expires. A legal source, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Sunday that Starr's view "for some time" has been that a sitting president is indictable.

Bipartisanship showed a glimmer of life again as the White House and senators of both parties expressed dismay at a report about Starr's thinking in The New York Times.

"There is just no end to what this man is willing to do to continue to pursue the president," said Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill.

"I think it's unfortunate because it gets in the way of our focus on what our constitutional obligation is," said Sen. Mike DeWine, R-Ohio, on ABC's "This Week."

But Clinton's most immediate concern is the final chapters of the Senate trial.

Senators on the Sunday talk shows showed other signs of cracks in the GOP's unity that muscled through Republican plans last week to continue the tri-

al and call witnesses.

Asked on NBC's "Meet the Press" how many Republicans would vote to convict Clinton on the perjury charge, Shelby, R-Ala. replied: "Not as many as a lot of people believe."

"I haven't polled anybody, but I hear a lot of people say that is the weakest" of the two charges. He added that the charge would draw "perhaps" fewer than 50 votes for conviction.

"A number of senators who believe that the president lied under oath but that his wrongdoing in that area does not constitute perjury because of the legal definition of perjury," said Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine.

One prospective presidential candidate issued a stern warning from conservative circles to Republicans up for re-election next year who vote against the articles of impeachment.

"Senators who vote to acquit just naturally will end up facing primary challengers," conservative activist Gary Bauer said on NBC.

Even with conviction apparently beyond reach, senators continued to search for ways to stop Clinton from walking away unpunished from the second impeachment trial in history.

A Republican proposal to pass a "finding of fact" that would state that Clinton lied under oath and impeded justice crossed party lines.

Senate Budget Chairman Pete Domenici, R-N.M., pushed for the plan as a way to "make the record clear for history and posterity that we have indeed not let this go unintended."

Columbia recovers from earthquake

By Jared Kotler
The Associated Press

ARMENIA, Colombia — Empty coffins were piled high in the stands of the local basketball arena Sunday that served as a makeshift morgue for victims of last week's devastating earthquake. The floor, which had received hundreds of corpses in previous days, was now clear.

Outside, a woman who had just identified her husband's remains sat on a curb weeping into a handkerchief.

With the arrival of bodies slowing to a trickle, exhausted morgue workers — many of whom had identified friends, relatives and co-workers — could finally take stock of a trying week at grief's epicenter.

Luz Patricia Rojas, who lowered a surgical mask to speak through a thick, lingering stench, said she had recognized one dead co-worker by his mustache and distinctively plump hands.

Rojas, a morgue worker, said she was overwhelmed on the first night of the tragedy and had to go for a walk to collect herself. "I cried and cried and cried," she said.

She also recalled examining a mother and baby who arrived locked in a tight embrace. Rojas imitated the scene by cradling an imaginary child in her hands, sheathed in rubber surgical gloves.

On the night the earthquake struck, the basketball court was filled with up to 300 bodies at a time. Two-thirds of the nearly 1,000 people killed in Colombia's earthquake arrived there.

Now, a humming refrigerator

truck keeps cool the handful of black plastic bags that contain the remaining unidentified victims of the magnitude-6 earthquake, which ravaged a coffee-growing area of western Colombia on Jan. 25.

Symbolic of a poorly managed relief operation, the 200 empty coffins in the Quindio state university arena had arrived after most of the dead had already been buried.

Because the coffins sat unnoticed for several days in a warehouse, many grieving relatives were forced to bury their dead in plastic bags.

For many morgue workers, getting flooded with corpses for the first few days was the hardest.

Not for Rojas.

"It's harder now because the cadavers arrive in a highly decomposed state or even dismembered," she said. "Now we're getting hands and sections of bodies."

For John Jaime Botero, a morgue doctor, the week's most excruciating moment was when morgue staff identified the body of a 20-year-old university student who had volunteered in several of their offices.

Cheers had gone up hours before when an erroneous news report declared the young woman was alive in the wreckage of a caved-in building.

"First came the tragedy, then the happiness of finding her alive, and then death," said Botero.

The earthquake has crippled areas surrounding Armenia, which was more than half destroyed. At least 200,000 people are homeless, thousands have fled to other

cities and health conditions are deteriorating due to food shortages, a lack of running water and electricity.

Looting by roving armed bands has been widespread, complicating the relief effort and prompting residents of many neighborhoods to grab handguns or machetes and form vigilante groups.

Order had generally been restored by Sunday, as the number of troops trucked into the area reached 6,000. A smattering of supermarkets, bakeries and restaurants were open, although the vast majority of Armenia's businesses remained shuttered, either due to damage or fear they would be looted.

The first public funeral Masses were held in several of the city's worst-hit neighborhoods, and relief crews began spraying city streets with chlorine to ward off infections.

At Uribe park, one of Armenia's most devastated neighborhoods, about 100 people knelt, closed their eyes and prayed. Almost every available inch of the park was covered with the tents and lean-tos of the suddenly homeless.

A Roman Catholic priest in white vestments tried to comfort the flock.

"We're a people destroyed materially, but we're putting our great trust in Jesus," the priest said. In the crumbled church on the park's edge, the stained glass image of the Virgin Mary was all that remained intact.

On Sunday, a Hungarian rescue team found two kittens alive in the rubble of what had been the 11-story Grancolumbia building. But no humans have been saved since Wednesday.

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