

Prosecutors question Lewinsky

By Larry Margasak
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Clinton's lawyers on Monday offered Monica Lewinsky an apology "on behalf of the president" for the difficulties the impeachment investigation has caused her. They turned down the chance to ask any questions during the sworn testimony forced by House prosecutors.

The deposition of the former intern took place behind closed doors in the Mayflower Hotel's presidential suite, but was videotaped for senators weighing the impeachment charges.

Rep. Ed Bryant, R-Tenn., spent about four hours posing questions on behalf of the House prosecution team that fought to persuade the Senate to summon Ms. Lewinsky. Her testimony closely tracked her earlier account to a federal grand jury, according to sources familiar with the testimony who commented only on condition of anonymity. The sources were not associated with the House prosecution team and worked outside the White House.

Bryant himself would not discuss the substance of the questioning, which lasted far less than the eight hours set aside by the Senate, but he said he "felt it was a productive session."

Four senators sat in on the session as referees but would give no details later because they are bound by a Senate admonition not to discuss what they observed. The rest of the Senate is expected to review the videotape as early as Tuesday as part of the trial to remove Clinton from office.

Presidential friend Vernon Jordan will be questioned on Tuesday and White House aide Sidney Blumenthal on Wednesday in depositions in a private room at the Capitol.

At one point in Monday's session, private presidential attorney Nicole Seligman read a statement that apologized to Ms. Lewinsky "on behalf of the president for all the trouble the investigation and impeachment trial

had caused her," one of the sources said.

Seligman and the two other Clinton attorneys who attended the session posed no questions of the former intern, according to several sources.

The president's team had planned not to ask questions if the lawyers felt the prosecutors had broken no new ground, said several Democratic sources familiar with the preparations.

Away from the session, presidential lawyers were more aggressive, filing a new complaint with a federal judge against Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr in connection with a weekend story in The New York Times that reported Starr had concluded a grand jury could indict Clinton before he left office.

David Kendall, a private lawyer representing Clinton, said he was asking a federal court to require Starr to show why he and his staff "should not be held in contempt for improper violations of grand jury secrecy."

Starr said in a statement that he was "deeply troubled" by the news story and announced he was "launching an internal investigation to determine whether anyone in this office improperly disclosed the information to the Times."

After senators view the tape — available for their viewing at four Capitol sites — excerpts could end up being shown as part of the trial, which will resume Thursday. Or senators could vote to bring Ms. Lewinsky to the floor for live testimony about her relationship with Clinton and attempts to conceal it, a less likely development.

Ms. Lewinsky's recollection of Clinton's actions and words are crucial to the Senate's consideration of several matters: her affidavit in the Paula Jones civil lawsuit falsely denying a sexual affair with Clinton, the job search after she appeared on the Jones witness list and the retrieval of presidential gifts by Clinton's secretary.

Sources familiar with Bryant's questions said he covered a wide

range of issues that have been of interest to House prosecutors, including the former intern's conversations with the president around the time she was emerging as a witness in the Jones case.

Ms. Lewinsky answered calmly, at times clarifying the dates of specific conversations and events but tracking her grand jury testimony closely, those sources said.

The House team promised in advance to shun intimate questions about the sexual affair.

Outside the Mayflower Hotel, Lewinsky lawyer Plato Cacheris declined to comment on any aspect of the questioning. Asked whether she was being compelled to remain in Washington, he replied, "Nope."

The chances were slim for any bombshells at Monday's session since Ms. Lewinsky would risk her immunity deal with Starr by saying anything that was inconsistent with her grand jury testimony.

If senators decide that viewing the videotapes provides all the information they need, they can proceed to closing arguments in the perjury and-obstruction case and meet the goal of ending the trial by Friday, Feb. 12, or sooner.

In previous votes on procedural matters, Democrats have demonstrated more than enough strength to block conviction and removal of the president by the required two-thirds vote.

Indeed, some Republicans have questioned the strength of the House case alleging grand jury perjury, raising the possibility that charge may not receive even a majority.

Republican Sen. Mike DeWine of Ohio and Democratic Sen. Patrick Leahy of Vermont were in charge of the Lewinsky deposition and empowered to rule on objections to keep the proceeding moving.

Ms. Lewinsky, who is staying at the hotel, was questioned in the same suite where she was interviewed more than a week ago by three House prosecutors — including Bryant.

Officials press for an end to ODOT bashing

By Amalie Young
The Associated Press

SALEM — A business lobbyist urged lawmakers Monday to stop bashing the state transportation department and start fixing crumbling roads and bridges.

"It's time to move on," John Watt, who represents southern Oregon business interests, told the House Transportation Committee.

However, a House leader said that despite last week's deadly tunnel collapse, the House won't approve a gas tax or other additional funding for the transportation agency until it gets its financial house in order.

"ODOT has been given a lot of chances to prove itself," said House Majority Leader Steve Harper, R-Klamath Falls.

Further, Harper said a bill to help legislators decipher ODOT's complex budget likely will be approved by the House transportation panel Wednesday and sent to the full House for debate.

Last week's collapse of the Sunset Tunnel on busy U.S. Highway 26 from Portland to the Oregon Coast killed a longtime ODOT worker and underscored the de-

cay that characterizes many of Oregon's roads and bridges.

The 1997 Legislature refused to approve a gas tax hike in part because of the perception that ODOT is bloated and wasteful. Similar criticism is being aired this year as lawmakers consider a 6-cent-a-gallon gas tax increase.

But Watt, a former Republican House member from Medford, said that economic development in southern Oregon is being hampered by a lack of money for new roads and repairs of existing ones.

"Call it selfish, but it really is important to have dollars for new roads," Watt told the Transportation Committee.

ODOT Director Grace Crunican said Monday she's frustrated because her agency has tried to satisfy lawmakers by implementing recommendations that came out of several independent audits of ODOT.

Crunican said the accountability measure the House Transportation Committee is ready to pass doesn't take those changes into account, but merely reshuffles ODOT's budgeting process.

"We're coming close to micro-

management when, in fact, managers have already turned things around," Crunican said. "This bill is being written as though none of that happened."

But Rep. Bob Montgomery, chairman of the House Transportation Committee, said HB2478 isn't so much about accountability as it is about making sure lawmakers can read and understand ODOT's budget.

"Everyone knows our roads need repair, we just want to make sure our dollars are spent wisely," the Cascade Locks Republican said.

Meanwhile, one of ODOT's staunchest critics, Sen. Marylin Shannon, said Monday she doesn't want last week's death of 49-year-old ODOT worker Dennis Edwards to become the focus of the debate over Oregon's transportation needs.

"His life is worth a lot more than debate over a 6-cent gas tax increase," the Brooks Republican said.

Meanwhile, ODOT employees on Tuesday planned to travel by caravan to Canby to attend the funeral of their fallen co-worker.

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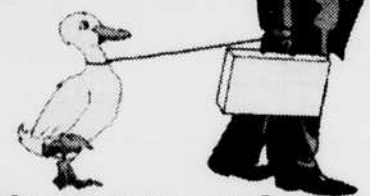
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