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# Clinton Impeached

## House Approves Articles Alleging Perjury, Obstruction

By Peter Baker and Juliet Eilperin  
Washington Post Staff Writers  
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President Clinton and the first lady watch Vice President Gore speak during a post-impeachment White House appearance. (Rick Bowmer — The Washington Post)

The House of Representatives impeached the president of the United States yesterday for only the second time in American history, charging William Jefferson Clinton with "high crimes and misdemeanors" for lying under oath and obstructing justice to cover up an Oval Office affair with a young intern.

At 1:25 p.m. on a day of constitutional drama and personal trauma, the Republican-led House voted 228 to 206 largely along party lines to approve the first article of impeachment accusing the Democratic president of perjury before a grand jury. Within the hour, lawmakers went on to pass another article alleging he tampered with witnesses and helped hide evidence, but rejected two other articles on perjury and abuse of power.

A solemn, all-Republican delegation led by Judiciary Committee Chairman Henry J. Hyde (R-Ill.) then marched across the Capitol to formally deliver the articles of impeachment to the secretary of the Senate, triggering what promises to be a trial like no other to determine whether the 42nd president will be removed from office. At the same time, scores of restive House Democrats piled into buses to drive up Pennsylvania Avenue and rally around their embattled leader at the White House.

Emerging from the Oval Office with first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton on his arm and Vice President Gore at his side, the president stood with his Democratic defenders and decried the partisan vote against him. Brushing aside calls for resignation, Clinton vowed to serve "until the last hour of the last day of my term."

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| Article One |     |       |
|-------------|-----|-------|
| Yes         | No  | Other |
| 228         | 206 | 1     |

Did Clinton commit perjury before the grand jury?

| Article Two |     |       |
|-------------|-----|-------|
| Yes         | No  | Other |
| 205         | 229 | 1     |

Did he commit perjury in the Paula Jones case?

| Article Three |  |  |
|---------------|--|--|
|               |  |  |

The historic votes in the grand chamber at the Capitol came just hours after the newly anointed House speaker, Bob Livingston (R-La.), called on Clinton to resign and then, abruptly and unexpectedly, took his own advice. "I must set the example that I hope President Clinton will follow," Livingston said, announcing he will step down because of the extramarital affairs he had reluctantly revealed on the eve of the impeachment debate.

| Yes | No  | Other |
|-----|-----|-------|
| 221 | 212 | 2     |

Did he obstruct justice?

| Article Four |     |       |
|--------------|-----|-------|
| Yes          | No  | Other |
| 148          | 285 | 2     |

Did he abuse his power?

Rarely has the capital been so whipsawed by events, as the nation's top leadership was left in disarray at the same time U.S. military forces mounted a fourth and final day of bombing runs against Iraq. Perhaps the last time a single day combined twin moments of history like this was Jan. 20, 1981, when Ronald Reagan was sworn in as president just minutes before 52 American hostages held in Iran flew to freedom.

Yet unlike that dramatic day, few in Washington found much to celebrate on Dec. 19, 1998. What started out as an indiscreet dalliance with Monica S. Lewinsky, an 18-month series of casual sexual encounters and racy telephone calls, had unleashed the full force of a constitutional crisis. Now, the impeachment and pending trial of a president who remains popular with the public may redefine the relationship between executive and legislative branches for decades to come. And shellshocked lawmakers found themselves struggling to make sense of a new politics of turmoil that, to different degrees and for different reasons, has claimed Clinton, Livingston and retiring Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.).

"This is all so overwhelming," said Rep. Michael N. Castle (R-Del.), one of the moderates who tried unsuccessfully to find a bipartisan compromise to impeachment but ultimately supported one of the articles calling for Clinton's removal. "There have been so many bombshells you can barely turn your back."

In his six-minute address on the South Lawn, outside a White House bedecked for Christmas in just six days, Clinton blamed a toxic Washington for his plight. "We must stop the politics of personal destruction," he said. "We must get rid of the poisonous venom of excessive partisanship, obsessive animosity and uncontrolled anger. That is not what America deserves."

Republicans, queasy themselves about the quickly shifting personal code of conduct for politicians, echoed the general sentiments, although they were quick to add that the president had only himself to blame for turning private foibles into public misconduct. If he truly cared about the nation's well-being, they said, Clinton would put the larger good ahead of his own needs and follow Livingston's lead.

"He understood what this debate was all about," Majority Whip Tom DeLay (R-Tex.) said of the would-be speaker, his voice quavering and his eyes teary as he took the floor shortly after Livingston's speech. "It was about honor and decency and integrity and truth."

In contrast to Livingston's "private acts," Hyde called Clinton a "serial violator of the oath" to tell the truth. "Equal justice under the law, that's what we're fighting for," he said. "And when the chief law enforcement officer trivializes, ignores, shreds, minimizes the sanctity of the oath, then justice is wounded, and you're wounded, and your children are wounded."

The votes that followed made Clinton the only chief executive other than Andrew Johnson to be impeached by the House and forced to defend his presidency in a trial where Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist will serve as presiding officer and all 100 senators will sit as silent jurors. Under the Constitution, conviction and removal from office requires a two-thirds vote, meaning 67 senators would have to support his ouster.

Like Johnson, who escaped the ultimate political punishment by a single vote in 1868, Clinton could hang on to power. With Republicans controlling the Senate 55 to 45, few in either party anticipate that enough Democrats would cross party lines to convict Clinton. Yet a trial heralded the prospect of months more of the

unseemly political crisis that has polarized and paralyzed Washington since the Lewinsky scandal broke on Jan. 21.

Even if he is acquitted or forestalls a trial through some sort of plea bargain-style deal, the House action ensured that Clinton will go down in history not as the transformational leader he once hoped to be, but as a scandal-tarred president whose administration was hobbled either by his own fatal flaws or by an all-out partisan assault, depending on who does the writing.

Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott (R-Miss.) yesterday began preparing for a trial. "Senators will be prepared to fulfill their constitutional obligations," he said. But he did not outline any schedule, noting that Clinton could file motions or other pleadings before a trial commences. "The timing will depend greatly on the president and his lawyers," Lott said.

Senate Minority Leader Thomas A. Daschle (D-S.D.) called the impeachment vote a "sad day for all Americans" and rejected calls for Clinton's resignation. While "the behavior of the president in this matter was deplorable" and merits punishment, Daschle said, "we cannot allow any president – Republican or Democrat – to be forced from office by a party-line vote in the House of Representatives."

Clinton and his allies still hope to avert a Senate showdown through some sort of agreement in which Congress would censure him for his admitted transgressions while allowing him to serve out his term through Jan. 20, 2001. Such an alternative was blocked in the House yesterday by Republican leaders who called it unconstitutional. Democrats tried to force a floor vote through a parliamentary maneuver, but were rejected on a 230 to 204 vote. To protest, Democrats staged a brief walkout as voting began on Article I of the impeachment resolution.

Republicans derided censure as illegitimate, with Hyde calling it "impeachment lite." Impeachment was the remedy envisioned by the Constitution for Clinton's misdeeds, GOP leaders insisted.

"If our country looks the other way, our country will lose its way," said Rep. J.C. Watts (R-Okla.).

The country has tried to look the other way throughout an extraordinary year that made Monica Lewinsky a household name and left an indelible mark on American politics.

Then a 22-year-old White House intern from Beverly Hills, Lewinsky came to be the president's on-and-off mistress in November 1995. A year ago, she became a witness in the Paula Jones sexual harassment lawsuit against Clinton when attorneys for the former Arkansas state clerk were seeking evidence of a pattern of sexual misbehavior by the president. Onetime friend Linda R. Tripp taped Lewinsky talking about conspiring with Clinton to lie in the case and turned the recordings over to independent counsel Kenneth W. Starr.

The result 11 months later was a pair of impeachment articles charging that Clinton "has betrayed his trust as president and has acted in a manner subversive of the rule of law and justice" in trying to impede Jones's suit and Starr's resulting criminal investigation.

Article I alleged that Clinton committed perjury when he testified before Starr's grand jury via closed-circuit television hookup from the White House on Aug. 17. While he acknowledged the Lewinsky affair he had denied in his Jones deposition, he insisted they never engaged in "sexual relations" because they did not have intercourse. Implicitly conceding that Lewinsky performed oral sex on him, Clinton denied that he ever touched her in intimate ways that would have been covered by the definition of sex used by Jones's lawyers.

Article III alleged that Clinton obstructed justice both in the Jones case and the Starr investigation by encouraging Lewinsky to file a false affidavit denying their affair, arranging a job for her with the help of friend Vernon E. Jordan Jr. at a time she could be a damaging witness against him and coaching Oval Office secretary Betty Currie to agree that he and Lewinsky never had sex and never were alone.

"The article of impeachment is adopted," Rep. Ray LaHood (R-Ill.), serving as presiding officer of the proceedings, intoned after each passed.

But the House decided to split the difference, opting not to pass Article II, which alleged that Clinton committed perjury in his Jan. 17 Jones deposition, or Article IV, which charged that he abused the power of his office by lying under oath in response to 81 questions posited by the Judiciary Committee during its impeachment inquiry.

While members proclaimed they cast votes of conscience, unfettered by pressure from party leaders, they displayed remarkable party solidarity. Only four Republicans opposed all four articles, while five Democrats voted for at least one of them.

Article I passed 228 to 206, with five Republicans, including Maryland's Constance A. Morella, crossing party lines to vote no and five Democrats, including Virginia's Virgil H. Goode Jr., offsetting them by voting yes.

Article II was rejected at 1:42 p.m. on a 229 to 205 vote, with 28 Republicans bucking the party line. Article III was adopted 17 minutes later, 221 to 212, without help from eight Republicans who supported Article I but picking up one who did not. And Article IV failed at 2:15 p.m. as a third of the Republican caucus joined Democrats in voting it down 285 to 148.

Rep. Paul McHale, (D-Pa.), who supported all but the final article, said afterward that he would have preferred to vote to censure the president, but with that option blocked, "I came to the conclusion a president for whom I voted twice had broken the law."

Rep. Christopher Shays (R-Conn.), who said a few days ago he was rethinking his opposition to impeachment, voted no after all, following a Friday meeting with Clinton. "I believe that the impeachable offenses have not been proven and that the proven offenses are not impeachable," Shays said. "But they are close."

In addition to Shays and Morella, the Republicans who voted against Article I were Amo Houghton (N.Y.), Peter T. King (N.Y.) and Mark Edward Souder (Ind.). In addition to McHale and Goode, the Democrats supporting it were Ralph M. Hall (Tex.), Charles W. Stenholm (Tex.), and Gene Taylor (Miss.).

Those same Democrats also voted for Article III, as did Souder. But this time, Republicans Sherwood L. Boehlert (N.Y.), Phil English (Pa.), Nancy L. Johnson (Conn.), Jay Kim (Calif.), Jim Leach (Iowa), John M. McHugh (N.Y.), Ralph Regula (Ohio) and Castle switched to no votes.

The split decision could shape the future meaning of "high crimes and misdemeanors" set forth as the standard for impeachment in the Constitution. With so little precedent, future presidents and lawmakers may look back and conclude that perjury in a civil lawsuit does not rise to an impeachable offense and lying to Congress does not amount to abuse of power. On the other hand, perjury or other misconduct in a criminal investigation has been defined as an offense serious enough to contemplate eviction from the White House.

The House schism also could affect the impeachment case against

Clinton as it goes to trial. In eliminating the president's testimony in the Jones case as a basis for impeachment, the House essentially knocked out the underlying offense on which the charges stemming from his grand jury testimony were based.

Rep. Barney Frank (Mass.), a senior Judiciary Democrat, argued that weakens the case because the issues in the grand jury testimony were so narrow. "No other lies are now relevant," Frank said. "By losing that perjury, they have lost most of what they had talked about. In the grand jury, he basically told the truth. Now the argument is over the details."

Frank added that the obstruction case is weak, because Lewinsky specifically told the grand jury no one instructed her to lie or offered her a job to keep quiet.

But Republicans viewed the obstruction of justice charge as a linchpin of their case and predicted the passage of the two articles would provide them with enough evidence to make a compelling argument to the Senate.

"At the end of the day, the president of the United States is impeached," said Rep. Charles T. Canady (R-Fla.), who with Hyde will serve as one of 13 "managers" or prosecutors in the Senate trial. "I don't think it's going to have a big impact on the way the case is presented.

While it became evident days before that at least one article would pass as moderate Republicans one by one came out in favor of impeachment, yesterday's floor debate had a raw quality as members, shocked by Livingston's self-immolation, dispensed with the programmatic speeches of Friday's session and spoke extemporaneously.

Livingston acknowledged Thursday night that he had "on occasion strayed from my marriage," while contrasting his indiscretions from Clinton's by noting that he never engaged in an affair with a subordinate on his staff or testified about his "personal relationships" under oath. Democrats did not buy the distinction and deemed the revelation to be an example of Republican hypocrisy in the Clinton case.

So a hush fell over the chamber when Livingston took the floor in the morning for his first public comments since his admission, which was forced by inquiries from Hustler magazine. Livingston made the case for impeachment, saying, "We're not ruled by kings or emperors and there is no divine right of president." And he said if Clinton truly believed a Senate trial would distract the nation for months, as he has said, then the president should "resign your post."

That triggered an angry wave of catcalls on the Democratic side of the chamber, where members began calling out, "No! No!" Rep. Maxine Waters (D-Calif.) banged her open palm on the table in front of her and, along with several others, began shouting, "You resign! You resign!"

Then, to their surprise, he did just that. "I'm willing to heed my own words," Livingston said. Not only will he not stand for election as speaker when the next House is sworn in come January, he said, he will give up his seat in six months.

"I was prepared to lead our narrow majority as speaker and I believe I had it in me to do a fine job," he said, "but I cannot do that job or be the kind of leader I would like to be under these circumstances. So I must set the example that I hope President Clinton will follow."

The announcement was that rare moment in modern politics that involved no polls and no advance warnings. And it instantly

transformed the day's deliberations, casting a pall over the House and adding emotional gravity to the subsequent speeches by both Republicans and Democrats. But as Republicans tried to shame Clinton with Livingston's decision, Democrats pivoted within minutes and tried to turn the speaker-to-be's resignation into a rallying cry against the intrusion of personal frailties into politics. One after another, Democrats took the microphone and implored Livingston to reverse himself, lest he give in to what one called "sexual McCarthyism."

Minority Leader Richard A. Gephardt (D-Mo.) tore up the speech he had written and, in a powerful address that drew members from both sides of the aisle to their feet, praised Livingston as a "worthy and good and honorable man," calling his move "a terrible capitulation to the negative forces" that are tearing at the body politic. "I pray with all my heart that he will reconsider this decision," Gephardt said.

A silent Livingston nodded acknowledgment of the applause.

Livingston's abdication may have chastened some lawmakers into restraining their rhetoric on the floor, but it also robbed much of import from the House vote.

"What's happened has just squeezed the life out of what will be the most important vote anyone here will ever cast. There's no drama," said Rep. Earl Blumenauer (D-Ore.). "It's like another nerve gas, a pathogen in this medicine chest of toxic politics. . . . It continues a pattern here that this is all smaller than life. War, impeachment, the second speaker biting the dust, but I don't think you see the grand moment."

*Staff writer Amy Goldstein contributed to this report.*

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