

History, Be My Judge

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By Al Kamen

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House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) wrote a constituent last year that he was "happy to say that" he and Christina F. Jeffrey, who Gingrich fired as House historian for remarks she made about the Holocaust, "are still friends."

Boy, will he be surprised to find out that his good buddy intends to sue him today for a cool \$22 million and change. Her suit, to be filed in federal court here, accuses him of breach of contract, "slander, defamation, and intentional infliction of emotional distress."

Gingrich hired Jeffrey, a political science professor from Georgia's Kennesaw State College, on Jan. 3, 1995. He fired her a week later after it was disclosed that in 1986 she had criticized a Holocaust course for not presenting "the Nazi point of view."

The ill-chosen statements caused an uproar then, although a Georgia Jewish organization concluded that allegations she was a Nazi sympathizer were a "bum rap." Still, several House Democrats raised the old controversy last year. Gingrich quickly fired her, promised severance pay, another job and out-of-pocket expenses, but never came through, she says.

Once again, the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith said the Nazi canard was "entirely unfounded and unfair."

Jeffrey says she felt "besmirched and betrayed by an unsavory coalition" that included Gingrich, his press secretary Tony Blankley "and a gang of his political enemies," namely Reps. Charles E. Schumer (D-N.Y.), Maxine Waters (D-Calif.) and Barney Frank (D-Mass.). (Now there's a Dream Team.)

Jeffrey says she and her husband didn't want to sue them but the couple got nowhere in more than a year's negotiations with Gingrich ally Rep. John Linder (R-Ga.) for payments of expenses—we're talking maybe \$30,000—and a House resolution clearing her.

"But I am suing for defamation and contract violations because my small case is symptomatic of the megalomania and shameless mendacity that benight the political scene in the nation's capital."

Hey, that's what gives this town that certain charm.

Starr Picks Up D'Amato's Billing Records Torch

■ Independent counsel Kenneth W. Starr apparently feels Senate Whitewater committee Chairman Alfonso M. D'Amato's investigation into the mysterious appearance of first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton's law firm billing records was not good enough.

Back in February, D'Amato (R-N.Y.) sent interrogatories or legal questionnaires to about 100 people who were in the White house residence from July 20 to Aug. 15 last year. That's when Carolyn Huber, director of personal correspondence for the Clintons, says she found the records.

So D'Amato sent the questionnaires, to be filled out under oath, asking visitors—apparently including Hollywood types, politicians, FOBs, FOHs and possibly some FOCs (Friends of Chelsea)—if they had been in the third floor "Book Room" where the records were found. They were asked if they had seen anyone in the room, seen the documents, seen anyone with the documents and so forth.

Must be that D'Amato hasn't cracked the case because Starr's office is now sending FBI agents around the country to reinterrogate people, even those who swore under oath that they never saw the documents, were never in the room and don't really like the Clintons.

This time, the agents are armed with copies of the records and a residence floor plan they wrestled from the Secret Service. For now, they are not going after "the minors," as one agent put it, but that policy is under debate. Some of those kids are pretty precocious, after all.

Word is the agents are also asking about other mysterious documents, such as those taken from Vincent Foster's office after his death. The agents ask if the guests have ever been in Foster's office, in former White House counsel Bernard Nussbaum's office, in the office of Margaret A. Williams, the first lady's chief of staff.

The agents are being thorough. Even asking that old reporter's question: "Is there anything we haven't asked you that we should have?"

Why the E-Mail Missed Oblivion

■ Another mystery may be close to being solved. House officials say they're still looking into how the e-mail of Rep. Owen B. Pickett (D-Va.) and that of a half-dozen other lawmakers was sent back to them instead of being deleted.

It appears the House Information Resources e-mail system, which services both sides of the aisle, was getting deluged with e-mails from the public during the government shutdown. About a thousand messages got misplaced in the system instead of getting deleted. Then, while new hardware and software were being installed recently, the messages somehow were interpreted by the system to be returned to the members, not deleted.

"They were sitting in an old niche that they liked," said spokesman James A. Davison. Then they moved.

Entertaining the 'Pain of Downsizing'

■ Guess who's coming to breakfast? AT&T Chairman Robert Allen, who collected \$16 million in compensation in a year in which he sacked 40,000 employees and is emerging as the '90s poster boy for executive greed, is one of the 100 or so business leaders invited to join President Clinton and members of his economic team for a breakfast Thursday to discuss, you guessed it, "corporate citizenship."

White House spokesman Michael McCurry says Allen "is someone who knows the pain of downsizing. We want a cross-section of corporate leaders."

Cowan Trading Two Hats for One

■ Geoffrey Cowan, director of the Voice of America, is heading back to California to be dean of the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Southern California, which includes the school of journalism. He's leaving in early 1997. Meantime, he's now director, not acting director, of the International Broadcasting Bureau, an indication that he's not exactly winding down.