

BUB BARR
4
TRENT LOTT

COLUMN LEFT/
BILL PRESS

Widow's Tale Is Last Straw for Clinton

■ Kathleen Willey is believable.
The president owes the country
an explanation of his behavior.

I believe Kathleen Willey.

She's no lounge singer, trying to become famous. She's no disgruntled state employee, trying to get even. She's no teenage groupie, trying to score, big time.

Kathleen Willey is a mature woman. A woman wearing pearls. A mother. A widow. A Democrat who was devoted to Bill Clinton and his politics. A woman with no agenda, other than, it seems, finally telling the truth.

Yes, there are holes in Willey's story, enough holes to cause serious doubts. Why did Willey volunteer to work for Clinton even after he allegedly made his first "chicken soup" pass at her? Why did she take a paying job in the White House and continue to work for the president after that Oval Office encounter? Why did she send him at least 10 letters, several signed "fondly," during her White House tenure? Why would she write in December 1994, "Take heart in knowing that your No. 1 fan thinks of you every day"?

Yes, there are holes in Willey's story. But her account of that November 1993 meeting, told so convincingly on "60 Minutes" Sunday, still holds up. Especially in the context of so many other stories, told by so many other women.

I believe Kathleen Willey. And I believe it's time for Bill Clinton to come clean.

So far, both prongs of the White House strategy have been working. First prong: Keep the president quiet, busy about presidential business and above the fray. That strategy has been so successful largely because most Americans are tired of hearing about White House sex scandals. After all, the economy is booming, why rock the boat?

Second prong: Attack Ken Starr. That strategy, too, has been hugely successful, largely because Starr is such a clumsy, thin-skinned, zealous persecutor that he has played right into Clinton's hands. Faced with a thousand possible leads, Starr will pursue each and every one. The only time he ever said no was the one time he should have yes, last year, to a one-way ticket to Malibu.

But no matter how successful, so far, the White House strategy has now run out of gas. Willey siphoned every last drop out of the tank. True or not, and I believe it is, her

**'Willey did more damage to
Clinton in 45 minutes than Starr
has done in four years.'**

performance on "60 Minutes" was so impressive that it gave the president's opponents what they've yet to come up with on their own: a credible witness. She became the first of Clinton's accusers to go on national television and tell her whole story. Gennifer hasn't; Paula hasn't; Monica hasn't. She was the first deemed

all, the economy is booming, why rock the boat?

Second prong: Attack Ken Starr. That strategy, too, has been hugely successful, largely because Starr is such a clumsy, thin-skinned, zealous persecutor that he has played right into Clinton's hands. Faced with a thousand possible leads, Starr will pursue each and every one. The only time he ever said no was the one time he should have yes, last year, to a one-way ticket to Malibu.

But no matter how successful, so far, the White House strategy has now run out of gas. Willey siphoned every last drop out of the tank. True or not, and I believe it is, her

**'Willey did more damage to
Clinton in 45 minutes than Starr
has done in four years.'**

performance on "60 Minutes" was so impressive that it gave the president's opponents what they've yet to come up with on their own: a credible witness. She became the first of Clinton's accusers to go on national television and tell her whole story. Gennifer hasn't; Paula hasn't; Monica hasn't. She was the first deemed believable enough to be granted an interview on "60 Minutes." And, of all the women whose names have been kicked about in the sex stories, she was the first whom the American public got to judge for themselves. They saw her. They heard her. They believed her.

Willey did more damage to Clinton in 45 minutes than Starr has done in four years. Not legal damage. Willey never claimed sexual harassment. And she is too remotely connected to Paula Jones or Monica Lewinsky to assist either case.

No, Willey did not hurt Clinton legally, but she did severely wound him politically. After millions of Americans heard her story, the president became less believable, less likable and less able to carry out the duties of his office.

Like many Democrats, I thought the president could ride this one out. No longer. After Willey, the old contain-and-attack strategy won't work anymore. Neither will the daily, almost incoherent denials by Clinton's attorney, Bob Bennett. There's only one person who can save Clinton's skin now, and it's Clinton himself.

Whatever the forum—whether it's an exclusive interview with Peter Jennings, or an appearance on "Larry King Live," or a follow-up on "60 Minutes," or an address from the Oval Office. Whatever the forum, it's time for Clinton to speak out. It's time for Clinton to tell his side of the story. It's time for an explanation to the American people. And maybe even an apology.

Apparently the president has a problem dealing with women. Apparently his actions have been, on more than one occasion, not illegal, but improper. Or at least perceived and received as such by women. Clearly he has a reputation for reckless behavior.

If there is an explanation, only the president knows it. If there is an apology due, only the president can give it. And soon. Before the next Kathleen Willey comes along.

Bill Press, a former chairman of the California Democratic Party, is co-host of CNN's "Crossfire."

**Robert Scheer's column will
appear Wednesday.**

COLUMN RIGHT/
GEORGE F. WILL

The Charge of Recklessness Sticks at Last

■ Willey's believability washes earlier Clinton accusers with a presumption of truth.

I said, "Hillary, he had insomnia. He couldn't sleep so he went for a drive." She started screaming and cussing and slammed down the phone. I got on the phone and called him, and I said, "Governor, Hillary's up." And he said, "Oh my God. Oh God. Oh God." And he came back in the back gate probably five to 10 minutes later.

—Arkansas state trooper Roger Perry, under oath.

With Kathleen Willey's "60 Minutes" appearance, the crisis of Bill Clinton's presidency reached an adult moment, and the mental mechanics of agnosticism became yet more difficult. What kind of person can continue the intellectual contortions necessary to sustain doubt about who is lying, Clinton or the dozens of people that he, through his helpmate and hirelings, implies are engaged in a vast, orchestrated campaign of lying?

Willey's painful appearance drew dignity from her patent reluctance and her grown-up incredulity about Clinton's crudity at the time and his continuing mendacity. The measured words spoken Sunday night were by someone who not even Clinton's taxpayer-funded smear squads will characterize as a "Clinton-hater" from the bowels of the "vast right-wing conspiracy." Willey's words cannot be dismissed as "rumors" (as Clinton's lawyer Bob Bennett dismissed much of the testimony taken by Paula Jones' lawyers, including the words of trooper Perry, above).

Willey's words moved the focus of the crisis beyond Clinton, who apparently is a developmentally arrested adolescent, and beyond the taxpayer-funded chest-thumping White House boys professing belief in their stonewalling employer. And it moved the focus beyond Monica Lewinsky and her age-appropriate attorney-consort, William Ginsburg, desperately seeking airtime and adulthood together.

The focus is now on the American public. Of course, Clinton must decide whether to continue casting himself as first victim, against whom an amazingly disparate and growing group of people are risking prosecution by telling the damndest lies under oath. However, the public has a more

of trooper Perry, above).

Willey's words moved the focus of the crisis beyond Clinton, who apparently is a developmentally arrested adolescent, and beyond the taxpayer-funded chest-thumping White House boys professing belief in their stonewalling employer. And it moved the focus beyond Monica Lewinsky and her age-appropriate attorney-consort, William Ginsburg, desperately seeking airtime and adulthood together.

The focus is now on the American public. Of course, Clinton must decide whether to continue casting himself as first victim, against whom an amazingly disparate and growing group of people are risking prosecution by telling the damndest lies under oath. However, the public has a more

'[Willey's interview] moved the focus beyond Monica Lewinsky and . . . William Ginsburg, desperately seeking airtime and adulthood together.'

important decision to make: Whether it still thinks that Clinton's "private" behavior ("private," but probably discussed by Eskimos; "private," but germane to Paula Jones' civil rights lawsuit) and the lies he tells about that behavior are irrelevant to his public stature.

One judgment can no longer be evaded: If Willey is truthful, Clinton is a perjurer. So if she is truthful, he is probably not the sort who would flinch from suborning perjury or obstructing justice. Thus a backward-rolling tide, a presumption of truthfulness, washes over an enormous and expanding mound of testimony. Some of it is perhaps pertinent primarily to a judgment about the Clintons' vulgarity. But grave judgments about possible abuses of power should be colored by knowledge of the kind of people at issue, people who for more than five years have been saying such things as: Trust us, it really was an innocent bureaucratic mistake that caused 800 FBI files—all concerning Republicans; what a coincidence—to wind up in the hands of people unavowed even by the standards of the Clinton White House.

Sunday night, the nation received another lesson in the power of sight and sound to magnify the power of printed words. Reading her deposition and seeing her recapitulation of it are quite different experiences. Some who have heard the tapes Linda Tripp made of Monica Lewinsky say that it is as hard to doubt the truth of Lewinsky's words as it is to doubt the truth of Willey's.

The scandal's momentum will grow with the pursuit of such questions as: Did Democratic Party contributor Nathan Landow send an aircraft, as Newsweek reports, to bring Willey to see him? If so, for what purpose, with whose knowledge?

Cleansing the White House of Clinton, the lamest duck in the history of the presidential aviary, is less important than expunging two anodyne assumptions held by many Americans: That there can be merely trivial public consequences from presidential corruptions, particularly if they pertain to behavior the public chooses to call private, and that the duty of a president to obey the law varies inversely with the Dow Jones average.

For a few years, America probably can function fairly well, at least absent a foreign crisis, with a ridiculous president. We seem embarked on that constitutional experiment. Meanwhile, Jennifer Flowers has rendered an appropriately dismissive judgment on Clinton. "You'd think the boy would learn." The boy.

George F. Will writes a syndicated column in Washington.

'[Willey's interview] moved the focus beyond Monica Lewinsky and . . . William Ginsburg, desperately seeking airtime and adulthood together.'

important decision to make: Whether it still thinks that Clinton's "private" behavior ("private," but probably discussed by