Julie Hiatt Steele to fight Starr's indictment

Jerry White
21 January 1999

Julie Hiatt Steele told a federal judge Tuesday that she was "absolutely not guilty" of the charges brought by Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr of obstruction of justice and making false statements. Following her not guilty plea Steele told reporters outside the Alexandria, Virginia courthouse that she would fight the Independent Counsel's indictment with "every last breath in my body."

On January 7 Starr's grand jury charged Steele with three counts of obstruction of justice and one count of making false statements, charges which carry a maximum sentence of 35 years in prison. Steele was targeted by Starr after she submitted an affidavit in the Paula Jones sexual harassment suit, and subsequently gave testimony before Starr's grand juries in Washington and Virginia, that undermined charges against Clinton made by her one-time friend, Kathleen Willey.

Willey, a former White House volunteer, told *Newsweek* magazine in August 1997 that President Clinton had made an unwanted sexual advance towards her in 1993. Steele initially told *Newsweek* reporter Michael Isikoff that Willey told her of the incident shortly after it happened. Steele quickly recanted her story, telling Isikoff that she had been asked by Willey to lie. Steele's recanting undermined the Independent Counsel's plans to include Willey's charges as part of his impeachment report to the House of Representatives.

Steele's attorney, Nancy Luque, said she would seek the dismissal of the case because it was incorrectly filed in Virginia. She said Starr wanted to avoid dealing with the federal courts in the District of Columbia where he suffered a setback when his case against Webster Hubbell, a longtime friend of the Clintons, was thrown out by a federal judge. Luque also charged Starr with a conflict of interest stemming from his numerous contacts with lawyers in the Paula Jones case before he was appointed to investigate the Clintons.

Luque said Starr's office has spent more than a year and $1 million to indict Steele. The legal harassment included dragging Steele's brother and daughter, as well as a former lawyer and accountant, before the grand jury and the subpoenaing of her tax records, bank records, credit reports and telephone records. Starr's investigators even threatened to challenge the legality of the adoption of her eight-year-old son.

The indictment included a chilling threat to democratic rights and free speech. As one example of her "obstruction of justice" Starr cited Steele's appearance on the "Larry King Live" television program, where she refuted Willey's story.

Starr timed the indictment to send a clear message to potential witnesses in the Senate impeachment trial. In effect he was warning Monica Lewinsky, Vernon Jordan, Betty Currie and others that they too could be indicted and face long jail sentences if they do not testify as the Independent Counsel wants.

Following her court appearance Tuesday Steele told Larry King, "I think we all need to think about our First Amendment rights, and I think we better think about this being our country. These were rights that we thought we had, and we want to keep."

The 52-year-old single mother told the interviewer that since "this nightmare began" she has not worked and has been forced to incur large credit card debts to pay bills and raise her son. However, she said defiantly, "I will not go to jail. I will be vindicated. I will fight. I am not guilty. I will not be taken from my child, nor he from me, nor the rest of my family hurt in that way. That's not going to happen. Not in this country."

US District Judge Claude Hilton has set Steele's trial date for March 30.

© World Socialist Web Site

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site