

# US independent counsel issues Travelgate report: an ignominious end to another anti-Clinton scandal

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On October 18 Independent Counsel Robert Ray released his final report on the White House travel office investigation. “Travelgate,” as it has come to be known, concerned the role of Bill and Hillary Clinton in the May 1993 firings of seven White House employees responsible for making travel arrangements for reporters who travel with the president.

As in the recently released report on the Whitewater land deal, the independent counsel had to acknowledge that there was no evidence to support the criminal prosecution of Hillary Clinton or anyone else in the Travelgate affair. Despite this finding, the report was written in such a way as to impugn the character of the First Lady and cast her in the worst possible light, characterizing her testimony as “factually false.”

The report is a continuation of the politically motivated attack on the Clinton administration orchestrated by the Republican right wing and supported and promoted by the media. The travel office investigation was encouraged by Congressional Republicans who accused the White House of “heavy-handed” tactics in the dismissals, and contended that pressure exerted by Hillary Clinton on her husband's staff led to an improper Justice Department investigation of the travel staff members.

Ray announced his decision in June not to indict Mrs. Clinton in connection with the travel office firings, but waited until less than three weeks before the November 7 national elections to publish his 400-page report on the case. Hillary Clinton is campaigning for the US Senate in New York in a close race against Republican candidate Rep. Rick Lazio. The timing of the report's publication can only be interpreted as a politically calculated move to damage her campaign.

The Travelgate report comes on the heels of the independent counsel's September 20 announcement on the Whitewater investigation. The Office of the Independent Counsel spent six years and over \$50 million investigating President and Mrs. Clinton's involvement with the land deal, but was forced to conclude that there was insufficient evidence to charge them with any criminal acts. If anything, the Travelgate investigation constitutes an even more flagrant abuse of power by the independent counsel.

Ray's modus operandi is essentially identical to that of his predecessor, Kenneth Starr. It is the classic formula for a witch-hunt—people are targeted for political reasons; certain actions are cited, which in and of themselves are not illegal; allegations, rumors and charges are then bruited about in the media, creating an atmosphere of scandal, if not criminal activity. The targeted individuals are then dragged into a highly public investigation and asked embarrassing questions under oath. The purpose of all of this is to catch them in some misstatement, no matter how trivial, which can then be labeled as false or even perjurious. The optimal aim is to legally frame them, or, at the very least, tarnish their reputation and damage them politically.

Thus, in the Monica Lewinsky scandal, Bill Clinton could not be prosecuted for his involvement in consensual sexual activity, so Starr's office pursued him for allegedly lying about it under oath. In the Travelgate affair the Clintons could not be prosecuted for dismissing travel office employees, as the president has the right to hire and fire them. So the independent counsel sought to ensnare Hillary Clinton for lying about her role in the dismissals, not for her actions per se.

In an attempt to come up with some prosecutable offense on the part of Mrs. Clinton, the independent counsel subpoenaed 125 witnesses and issued 89 subpoenas seeking the production of documentary evidence, forcing the handing over of 55,000 pages of documents. But even with all this Ray had to conclude that he could not prove beyond a reasonable doubt that Hillary Clinton's statements were “knowingly false” when she denied any role in the dismissals. Although she testified that she expressed her concerns about the travel office workers to White House staffers, she maintained that she had no decision-making role in the dismissals, and Ray was unable to produce any witnesses or evidence to prove otherwise.

True to form, the *New York Times* has chimed in to back up the independent counsel. In an editorial on October 20 the *Times* editorialists wrote, “Judging from the voluminous public record, Mr. Ray's decision to drop the case is legally sound. Judging from the same record, his characterization of Mrs. Clinton's account of her role in the matter also seems on the mark.”

The *Times*' comments are in keeping with its role throughout Whitewater and the impeachment drive against Clinton. It has sought to legitimize the smear tactics of the right-wing opponents of the Clinton administration, and defended the actions of the Office of the Independent Counsel—under Kenneth Starr and now Robert Ray.



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