

Linda Tripp to collect bonanza from Pentagon: \$595,000 payoff for Clinton tapes

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The former White House aide who played a critical role in the right-wing campaign to destabilize the Clinton administration, Linda Tripp, will collect a substantial payoff from the Bush administration, her lawyers announced November 3. Tripp will receive a one-time payment of \$595,000 from the Department of Defense, as well as a retroactive pay increase for 1998, 1999 and 2000, in returning for dropping two lawsuits against the Pentagon.

Tripp came to public notice after she befriended Monica Lewinsky, recorded their phone conversations about Lewinsky's relationship with Bill Clinton, and then peddled the tapes to right-wing Clinton haters, before turning them over to the Office of the Independent Counsel headed by Kenneth Starr.

It is a bizarre irony that a woman who became notorious for violating the confidence of a friend and illegally tape-recording conversations about intimate personal matters will now make a small fortune from a legal claim based on invasion of her privacy.

Tripp sued the Pentagon after officials in its information office, where she worked, leaked information from her personnel file to the *New Yorker* magazine. She filed a second lawsuit in 2001 after another Pentagon official revealed that she had applied for a Defense Department job in Germany.

In both suits the issue was a violation of the 1974 Privacy Act, which forbids government officials from releasing personal information about a US citizen without their consent. No actual damage was done to Tripp by either leak: in the more serious case, the *New Yorker* had discovered that Tripp had been arrested for suspicion of grand larceny as a teenager; Pentagon officials revealed that she had not reported this arrest on her security application. But she was not subject to any disciplinary action as a consequence.

Tripp was eventually fired by the Pentagon on January 20, 2001, the day Clinton left office and Bush was sworn in as president. This was not an act of vindictiveness by the outgoing administration, but the result of a provocation by Tripp herself, who did not hold a civil service job, but one requiring presidential appointment. All presidential appointees routinely submit their resignations when a new administration takes office, but Tripp refused to do so in order to compel the Clinton White House to fire her so she could portray herself as a victim.

Many other key figures in the right-wing campaign to drive Clinton out of office reaped their reward after Bush entered the White House. Theodore Olson, the leader of the right-wing clique of lawyers who backed the Paula Jones lawsuit, was named Solicitor General of the United States, while many of Starr's staff attorneys received White House and Justice Department positions.

But the Bush White House did not offer Tripp employment, despite her critical services to the anti-Clinton conspiracy, and despite her appeals on her personal web site for right-wing supporters to pressure the administration to get her a job. The administration fought her privacy lawsuit in the courts for two years.

There are two possible explanations for this cold-shouldering. The first was that in Tripp's case, mercenary motivations rather than right-wing ideology may have played the principal role. When she encountered Monica Lewinsky at the Pentagon she had already been seeking a lucrative contract for a book based on her gossipy behind-the-scenes look at the Clinton White House. Her contact with the anti-Clinton camp was through her book agent, longtime Republican activist Lucianne Goldberg.

According to at least one account, the Bush family

has a special enmity for Tripp, believing that she was a source for media reports that the elder President Bush was having an affair with a woman staffer. Tripp worked in the White House during the first Bush administration, and apparently was trying to coin gossip into gold there as well.

Whatever the specific reasons for the delay, the current administration ultimately backed away from its hard line on the Tripp lawsuit. Pentagon officials admitted that there was a violation of the Privacy Act, arguing only that the infraction was minor. The administration has now signed off on a deal that will compensate Tripp handsomely for services rendered.

During the period since her discharge from the Pentagon, Tripp has maintained close ties with extreme right circles. She made her first post-impeachment appearance at a national convention of FreeRepublic.com, a fascistic outfit that fervently backed impeachment and now is equally frenzied in its support for the war in Iraq.

Despite continual appeals for funds on her personal web site and claims to be on the brink of poverty, Tripp seems to be living comfortably. Early in 2002, she moved from her Maryland home to the town of Middleburg, Virginia, an enclave for high society and the super-rich that was once home to Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis and has numbered Paul Mellon, Robert Duvall and Liz Taylor among its residents.



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