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Thursday, January 22, 1998

NEWS

ABC NEWS SPECIAL REPORT WHITE HOUSE BRIEFING

SAM DONALDSON / JACKIE JUDD, PETER JENNINGS

PETER JENNINGS: You know these allegations that President Clinton had an affair with at young White House intern, which also involve his close friend Vernon Jordan, and then is accused of having asked her to lie about it have very much consumed the Washington political establishment, so the President is again in potentially serious trouble.

We've interrupted regular programming because the President's spokesman, Mike McCurry, is about to hold his daily briefing for the

White House Press Corps, and the President, as you may also know, said yesterday and again today these stories involving Monica Lewinsky are not true. But for a variety of reasons, the matter will not rest.

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But what Ken Starr's office believes is this -- that the Lewinsky investigation is part of the broader investigation. That is looking into the question of whether this White House has obstructed justice by trying to silence witnesses who would be harmful to the President and to the administration. Silence them through hush money, offering them promotions, etc. And so that's how Starr will justify him taking over this aspect.

PETER JENNINGS: OK, Jackie, thanks very much. There was some tumultuous reception for Mr. Starr this morning when he came out.

This is different, as many people have noted today, because the President and his friend Vernon Jordan have been accused of supporting perjury -- the penalty for that might be five years -- and for obstructing justice, as well. And Mr. Jordan, one of the most powerful men in Washington, very close friend to the President, been at the President's side in all sorts of difficulties, is going to issue a statement at 3:30 this afternoon, and we'll be here to tell you what that is.

And here, finally, is a glimpse of the President today in a meeting with the Palestinian chairman Yasser Arafat at the White House, being asked again in person whether or not he's going to shed any light today on these allegations that he had an affair with this young woman and

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these allegations that he had an affair with this young woman and attempted to cover it up.

Pres. BILL CLINTON: The allegations are false, and I would never ask anybody to do anything other than tell the truth. Let's get to the big issues there about the nature of the relationship and whether I suggested anybody not tell the truth. That is false. Now, there are a lot of other questions that are, I think, very legitimate. You have a right to ask them, you and the American people have a right to get answers. We are working very hard to comply and get all the requests for information up here, and we will give you as many answers as we can as soon as we can at the appropriate time, consistent with our obligation to also cooperate with the investigations. And that's not a dodge. That's really what I -- I've talked with our people. I want to do that. I'd like for you to have more rather than less, sooner rather than later. So we'll work through it as quickly as we can and get all those questions out there to you.

PETER JENNINGS: Very difficult time for the President, very difficult time for the country. And we're going to continue our coverage of this story throughout the day on abcnews.com. We'll be here when Mr. Jordan makes his statement at 3:30. We'll have a complete roundup on World News Tonight.

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'm Peter Jennings in New York. Thank you for joining us.

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ut as Mike McCurry said at the end of that briefing, it is extremely difficult to get the nation's business done when so much of the nation is focused currently on this.

I'm Peter Jennings in New York. Thank you for joining us.

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