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Richardson didn't have post to offer Evidence doesn't support his statments on
 Lewinsky
 Bill Sammon
 THE WASHINGTON TIMES

U.N. Ambassador Bill Richardson, contrary to what he told Congress last month, did not have an opening on his staff when he offered to hire Monica Lewinsky last October, according to informed sources and documents obtained by The Washington Times.

Mr. Richardson, who was recently confirmed as President Clinton's new energy secretary, planned to create a new position to accommodate Miss Lewinsky's desire for employment in New York City, said sources at the United Nations, the State Department and on Capitol Hill. He panicked when the scandal broke in January and scrambled to find a slot that he could claim had existed long before he interviewed Miss Lewinsky, the sources said.

Despite Mr. Richardson's repeated, sworn assertions, he did not take the position until after independent counsel Kenneth W. Starr served him with a subpoena demanding all documents relating to the job offer. Mr. Starr is trying to determine whether the offer was aimed at distancing Miss Lewinsky and keeping her quiet about her relationship with Mr. Clinton.

"I've heard all this speculation before," said Mr. Richardson's chief of staff, Rebecca Cooper. "Luckily, what allows me to go to sleep at night is knowing that none of this is true."

Mr. Richardson did not return telephone calls, but during his confirmation hearing on July 22, he told the Senate panel that the job he offered to Miss Lewinsky was a low-level, \$30,000 position in

New York. After she turned it down, the job was given to U.N. employee Paul Aronsohn, a senior staffer who has handled such high-level issues as nuclear disarmament and the U.N. arrears controversy.

Mr. Aronsohn, who has worked in the U.N.'s political section for four years, is paid substantially more than \$30,000 and was transferred to Washington weeks before Mr. Richardson's testimony, Miss Cooper said.

Explained his spokesman, Calvin Mitchell: "The ambassador is not a personnel officer. He is not to sit in front of the Senate and answer questions off people's personnel files. And he described, in his mind, what the job was to him and how it was perceived and how it was going to function."

Nonetheless, the discrepancies raise serious questions about the veracity of sworn testimony by Mr. Richardson, who until now has been a peripheral figure in the Lewinsky scandal. They also suggest that Mr. Richardson took steps to conceal special treatment he afforded a

man who yesterday began telling a grand jury about her relationship with the president.

AN 'EXISTING SLOT'?

Monica Lewinsky was not a household name when Mr. Richardson was asked by White House Deputy Chief of Staff John Podesta to interview "this person" in October, the ambassador testified.

"He did not even know her name when he asked me to interview her," Mr. Richardson testified. "I did not know her name."

The request originated with Betty Currie, the president's personal secretary, who relayed it to Mr. Richardson through his friend, Mr. Podesta, according to testimony by Mr. Richardson before the Energy and Natural Resources Committee.

But Mr. Richardson agreed to interview the former White House intern in his Watergate apartment at 7:30 a.m. He left in the middle of the interview, leaving Miss Cooper and an assistant to finish up, so he could go to the White House for a meeting.

Within a week, Mr. Richardson instructed his staff to offer the job to Miss Lewinsky. After taking some time to think about it, she declined.

In offering Miss Lewinsky a job, Mr. Richardson did not follow hiring procedures normally used at the U.S. Mission at the United Nations, which include advertising a position and recruiting several qualified candidates. Within hours after the scandal broke on Jan. 21, reporters demanded to know whether such procedures had been followed.

Miss Cooper and Mr. Mitchell responded by publicly stating that if Miss Lewinsky had accepted the job offer, she would have been a "schedule-C" employee, or political appointee. On Jan. 26, five days after the scandal broke, Mr. Richardson's office issued an "administrative instruction" to all employees that said "the usual procedures" for hiring and reassigning "do not apply" to political appointees.

Mr. Mitchell said this week he does not know whether the instruction represented a departure from previous policy.

"Everyone from the highest official to the lowest mail clerk instantly knew this was about Monica Lewinsky," said one source close to the case. "I mean, this just came out of nowhere. It was obvious that Richardson's people were trying to retroactively cover their tracks."

On Feb. 2, a team of inspectors from the State Department's Office of Inspector General (OIG) showed up at Mr. Richardson's New York offices to conduct a routine audit of management practices. They immediately told U.N. employees that the mission's political branch was significantly understaffed, especially in comparison to the understaffed press office, according to OIG spokeswoman Tamara Alkner.

Nonetheless, while the inspectors were still conducting their audit at the New York offices in February, Mr. Aronsohn was

Explicitly transferred from the political section to the press section, Miss Faulkner said.

"OIG was surprised during the inspection when an officer was transferred out of the overworked political section and assigned to .

. . . outreach programs" in the press office, the team of inspectors wrote in a report that was issued in May. "This was done even though the press and public affairs section already has 12 employees, several of whom specialize in public outreach.

"The move does not make sense organizationally, because it created a duplication in outreach responsibilities. There is also the question of the impact of the move on the already overstretched political section."

During his testimony before the Senate committee, Mr. Richardson said there was "no relationship whatsoever" between creation of a public outreach job in the U.N.'s press section and his decision to offer that job to Miss Lewinsky.

"It was an existing slot," Mr. Richardson testified. "It was not created for anybody."

He added: "This position was created way before I established my tenure at the United Nations, so it was with prior ambassadors to the United Nations. It was an existing slot."

Sen. Frank H. Murkowski, chairman of the committee, said: "Who, if anyone, now holds that particular position?"

"The position is held by Paul Aronsohn," Mr. Richardson said.

"And he was offered the position after Ms. Lewinsky?" the Alaska Republican said.

"Yes," Mr. Richardson said. "He was offered the position in January. And he assumed the position."

Mr. Richardson did not explain why the job was not offered to Mr. Aronsohn until three months after it was offered to Miss Lewinsky. Nor did he attempt to reconcile his assertion that the slot existed before October with the OIG's assertion that the slot was not transferred from the political office to the press office until February.

'A FUNGIBLE SLOT'

Miss Cooper and Mr. Mitchell gave complex, convoluted explanations of the Lewinsky job offer, often contradicting themselves and each other. For example, at one point during a lengthy interview, Miss Cooper said: "The job that I wanted to fill was one that never existed." At other times she insisted Mr. Richardson was correct when he testified the job had previously existed.

"It's a fungible slot," Miss Cooper said. "You can trace a slot, you can't say this person held that particular position because position has evolved."

Nonetheless, Miss Cooper offered the following explanation:

Miss Lewinsky was actually not offered the slot now held by Mr.

Aronsohn, Miss Cooper said. She was actually offered a separate slot in the media wing that had been occupied by a secretary named Regina Griego, who departed around the time Miss Lewinsky was interviewed.

Miss Cooper said she split Miss Griego's job into two new slots - one to handle clerical duties, which included answering phones, and another to handle "public outreach" duties.

Miss Griego's clerical duties were taken over by a "contract secretary" who was moved from New York to Washington, Miss Cooper said. The slot for Miss Griego's "public outreach" duties remains unfilled to this day, Miss Cooper said.

When Mr. Aronsohn was transferred from the political section to the press section in February, his slot was also transferred, Miss Cooper said. Thus, he was able to take over Miss Griego's public outreach duties - which had been offered to Miss Lewinsky - without actually filling the slot that had been designated for that purpose.

In essence, according to Miss Cooper, the position that Miss Griego vacated was the same position that Mr. Aronsohn filled - and the same one that was offered to Miss Lewinsky. Still, she acknowledged the job descriptions for Miss Griego and Mr. Aronsohn, which she refused to disclose, are as dissimilar as "apples and oranges."

Asked why this was not explained by Mr. Richardson to the Senate committee, Miss Cooper said: "It's such a nuance. What the senators were focused on - I mean, I gotta tell you . . . you're kind of getting into things that are really splitting hairs."

Government personnel experts scoffed at the notion that Miss Griego - who had enough clerical duties to keep the secretary who replaced her occupied on a full-time basis - was replaced by the far-more-experienced Mr. Aronsohn.

"It was a low-level position that paid around \$30,000," said Mr. Richardson, who added later in the hearing: "Again, it was a low-level position."

Still later, he emphasized: "This was a position that was not a very high-level position."

Miss Cooper said "Paul Aronsohn makes much more" than what Miss Lewinsky was offered, and was recently given a significant pay raise. She also said he gets other compensation that Mr. Richardson was not able to offer Miss Lewinsky, but refused to be more specific.

Mr. Mitchell, while acknowledging Mr. Aronsohn's salary is a matter of public record, refused to disclose it to The Washington Times. Mr. Aronsohn also refused to tell a reporter how much he makes.

Paul Aronsohn's now feeling a little bit down because he feels everyone now perceives him as the guy who got the job Monica was handed down," Miss Cooper said. "Well, Paul has far more experience in that and he shouldn't view himself that way. People who held this job previously shouldn't regard themselves as the people who held the Monica slot. The job has evolved."

4 NEW YORK SLOT

During his hearing, Mr. Richardson took pains to emphasize the importance of keeping the job in question in New York, even after it was shifted from the political section to the press section. The job had been considered by Miss Lewinsky primarily because she wanted to move from Washington to New York.

Mr. Richardson went so far as to contradict Mr. Murkowski when the senator suggested the ambassador had "transferred an employee out of the political section in New York to assist your chief of staff in Washington, D.C. with outreach programs. Is this the case?"

"That is not correct," Mr. Richardson said. "An employee was taken out of the political section in New York - this was a political appointee - and placed under the supervision of my chief of staff in New York. So the position was moved to a New York position for purposes of outreach.

"The purpose of this position was to build constituency groups and business support for our efforts. But the position was in New York. The position was held - is held by an individual by the name of Paul Aronsohn, who is a very good employee who is doing the work."

Later in the hearing, Mr. Richardson said his desire for a New York-based outreach employee predated his meeting with Miss Lewinsky.

"We wanted it way before we even thought of her," Mr. Richardson said. "Move it to New York, because that's where most of the business and constituency groups are. And we stand behind our decision - we filled the position."

But according to Miss Cooper, Mr. Richardson had transferred Mr. Aronsohn from New York to Washington in early July. She said the ambassador would have explained this to the senators "had they followed up on it. It's really splitting hairs at this point. I mean, I think I would have been annoyed if I were a committee member and Ambassador Richardson digressed into: 'Well, right now he's in Washington because he didn't want to sign a year lease [in New York] and his wife is looking to move here.'"

She added: "The job description you can do from just about anywhere, as long as you have instant lines of communication."

JOBS FOR SILENCE?

Mr. Richardson's re-emergence in the Lewinsky scandal refocuses attention on one of the central aspects of the case - whether Mr. Clinton and his associates tried to buy her silence through the promise of jobs. After turning down Mr. Richardson's offer, Miss Lewinsky was offered a job at Revlon in New York, thanks to the intercession of presidential friend Vernon E. Jordan Jr., who is on Revlon's board of directors.

Although Miss Lewinsky was interviewed for a job in the White House press office in May 1977, most efforts at finding her a job were oriented toward New York. According to Lucianne Goldberg, who has listened to tapes of Miss Lewinsky talking with mutual friend Linda R. Tripp, the former White House intern was under the impression that Mr. Clinton wanted her in New York, not Washington,

as to be farther away from any investigation of their relationship.

Summing up the controversy over Miss Lewinsky's job offer at the U.N., Miss Cooper said: "All the allegations that people try to suggest, for example, that we created the job just for Monica, that doesn't hold up. Because regardless of Monica and prior to me ever knowing that Monica Lewinsky was ever going to ever be anyone in the newspaper, I continued to have that need and I filled it."

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Photos (A&B, color), A) Private entrance: Monica Lewinsky prepares to enter the courthouse with reporters kept at a distance.; B) U.N. Ambassador Bill Richardson; C) U.N. Ambassador Bill Richardson testifies last month at his Senate confirmation hearings for the energy secretary post., A) By Karen Ballard/The Washington Times; B) NO CREDIT; C) By Kenneth Lambert/The Washington Times

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