

Kenneth W Starr



The Hon Kenneth W Starr with Baroness Thatcher, Chairman of the Advisory Council of the Institute of United States Studies, University of London

Little has been said in public by Kenneth Starr since he submitted his report to the US House of Representatives, on 9 September 1998, containing 'substantial and credible information that President William Jefferson Clinton committed acts that may constitute grounds for impeachment'. It was therefore something of a coup for London University that Mr Starr agreed to give a lecture entitled 'Ethics in Government: the Presidency and the Independent Counsel', sponsored by the Institute of United States Studies and the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies in association with the *Daily Telegraph*.

Kenneth Starr is an impressive speaker, and he delivered a fluent address which combined his own experiences with a critical appraisal of the role of independent counsel within the legal and political framework of the US (see News, p. 15). The lecture was held at the Logan Hall, Institute of Education, on 28 September and attracted a large audience.

At the age of 53 Mr Starr has a brilliant legal career behind him, being once the youngest judge ever named to the US Court of Appeal for the District of Columbia Circuit, and serving as the Bush administration's Solicitor General. Impressive academic credentials, which include a doctorate from Duke University, are combined with depth of experience as a practising lawyer. He is a partner in Kirkland & Ellis in New York City, where his key areas of practice are commercial litigation, appellate litigation and anti-trust law.

On the personal front, he is married with three children and enjoys a contented domestic life. He is the son of a minister, and is himself a devoted Christian.

His decision to accept the role of independent counsel surprised many who assumed that his next major career move would be to the Supreme Court. There was also the matter of Mr Starr's history of opposition to the legal status of independent counsel – an office he believes to be unconstitutional, although the Supreme Court declined to take this view in a recent decision.

Mr Starr's period as independent counsel has done nothing to change his original opinion, and has if anything strengthened it by confirming to him that the very independence of the office renders it ineffective. He believes that the separation of powers ensures that a US president can be held to account when necessary by traditional means, triggered by the pressures of public opinion. Ironically, it was pressure of public opinion that caused Mr Starr's appointment as a means of overcoming the ordinary American's instinctive mistrust of state institutions – and a lack of general willingness to enforce his conclusions that enabled President Clinton to stay in office.

Few people in American public life can have faced as much criticism through the media as Mr Starr, who was variously portrayed as being vindictive, politically biased, obsessive and publicity-seeking. The man himself comes over as an affable personality who thinks carefully before articulating his views. His record indicates that he can be determined and persistent, but there is nothing in his delivery or demeanour to suggest that zealotry lurks beneath the surface as some of his critics insist. 

Julian Harris

Senior Information Officer, IALS

EDUCATION AND APPOINTMENTS

Born Vernon, Texas, 21 July 1946. Admitted to Bar 1973, California; 1979, Virginia and District of Columbia. Education: George Washington University (AB 1968), Brown University (AM 1969), Duke University (JD 1973). Counsellor to US Attorney-General, 1981–83; Circuit Judge, US Court of Appeals, District of Columbia Circuit, 1983–89; US Solicitor General, 1989–93.