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 against testimony WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The head of the Secret Service has warned prosecutor that forcing his agents to testify in the White House sex-and-perjury probe will result in the death of a president, the Washington Post reported on Thursday. The Post quoted sources familiar with the discussions as saying that Secret Service Director Lewis Merletti warned independent counsel Kenneth Starr that an assassination would be inevitable in the future because presidents would keep agents at a distance out of fear of losing their privacy. The issue of whether Secret Service agents are covered by a privilege protecting them from questioning will be aired in a rare open hearing before U.S. District Judge Norma Holloway Johnson on Thursday morning. Starr wants Secret Service agents who guarded President Bill Clinton to testify about their knowledge of allegations that the president had a sexual relationship with former White House intern Monica Lewinsky and urged her to lie about it. Clinton has denied the allegations. The Post also quoted sources "close to the situation" as saying that Clinton had filed a sealed notice that he would appeal Johnson's decision last week dismissing an attempt by two presidential aides to claim executive privilege. White House spokesman Jim Kennedy declined comment on reports about the appeal, saying the matter was under seal in federal court. Charles Bakaly, spokesman for Starr's office, also declined comment on a sealed matter. Merletti, who served on the details of Presidents Ronald Reagan, George Bush and Clinton during his 24-year tenure with the Secret Service, made his case against agents testifying in recent meetings with Starr and Justice Department officials. During private meetings, sources told the Post, Merletti argued that trust and proximity were crucial to protecting a president. Even a few feet of extra distance could keep an agent from being close enough to stop a bullet, he reportedly said. In outlining his arguments, Merletti ran through instances of assassination attempts and produced rare photographs of John Kennedy's fateful 1963 motorcade through Dallas, where agents were not standing on running boards on the back of his car when shots rang out because Kennedy several days earlier ordered them not to. SO, THE CURRENT DIRECTOR OF THE SECRET SERVICE HAS CHOSEN TO USE THE TRIED AND TRUE "JFK AS SCAPEGOAT" TACTIC TO SUIT HIS PURPOSE. THIS IS UNTRUE, AND HE KNOWS IT. By contrast, Secret Service officials displayed pictures of agents standing right next to Reagan during a 1981 assassination attempt, allowing them to push him immediately into a car and evacuate him before he was hit by more than a single bullet. NO ARGUMENT HERE, BUT THIS IS REALLY A MOOT POINT: I AM PRETTY SURE JFK'S AGENTS WERE UP TO THE TASK AT LOVE FIELD AND ON FOOT. THIS IS REALLY APPLES AND ORANGES HERE. PART TWO: THE FEDS SPRING INTO ACTION

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