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Novak: Rove confirmed Plame's identity

Columnist reveals cooperation in probe, won't name first source

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WASHINGTON (CNN) -- White House political adviser Karl Rove was one of Robert Novak's sources for the 2003 disclosure of a CIA operative's identity, the syndicated columnist wrote Tuesday.

Novak said Rove confirmed information from another source, whose identity Novak is still keeping under wraps.

But he said special prosecutor Patrick Fitzgerald knows the source's identity, and Novak said he does not think that person will be charged with unmasking now-former CIA agent Valerie Plame.

He also wrote that prosecutors have told him his role in the investigation is over.

"I have been subpoenaed by and testified to a federal grand jury. Published reports that I took the Fifth Amendment, made a plea bargain with the prosecutors or was a prosecutorial target were all untrue," Novak wrote in a column released for publication Wednesday.

Rove is President Bush's chief strategist and serves as a deputy White House chief of staff. The White House declined comment on Novak's account Tuesday evening.

In July 2003 the conservative syndicated columnist and former CNN commentator identified Plame as "an agency operative on weapons of mass destruction" in a column about her husband, Joseph Wilson, a former career diplomat and critic of the intelligence underlying the invasion of Iraq.

Novak has remained tight-lipped throughout much of the leak probe, which was disclosed in September of that year.

Novak wrote Tuesday that he has cooperated with investigators while trying to protect sources who have not yet revealed themselves publicly. Fitzgerald's office has known who his sources were,



Bob Novak, shown in a file photo, has kept mum on his role in the CIA leak.

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"independent of me," for most of the time the investigation has been under way, Novak added.

Novak's initial disclosure -- attributed to "two senior administration officials" -- triggered a criminal probe that resulted in last year's indictment of Lewis "Scooter" Libby, who at the time was Vice President Dick Cheney's chief of staff.

Libby resigned and has pleaded not guilty to the charges of perjury, obstruction of justice and lying to investigators.

"In my sworn testimony, I said what I have contended in my columns and on television: Joe Wilson's wife's role in instituting her husband's mission was revealed to me in the middle of a long interview with an official who I have previously said was not a political gunslinger," Novak wrote.

"After the federal investigation was announced, he told me through a third party that the disclosure was inadvertent on his part."

Fitzgerald spokesman Randall Samborn declined comment on the matter and would not say when the special prosecutor would have any further statement on the status of his probe.

Wilson has accused the Bush administration of effectively ending his wife's career in retribution for his public questioning of the administration's claim that Iraq was seeking to obtain from Africa uranium for nuclear weapons.

Novak: CIA confirmed identity

Knowingly disclosing the identity of an undercover intelligence agent can bring a federal prison term of up to 10 years under the 1982 Intelligence Identities Protection Act.

Novak wrote Tuesday that none of his sources have been indicted.

The Libby indictment stated that Rove, identified as "Official A," had discussed Plame's identity with Novak. But Rove's lawyer Robert Luskin said in June that Rove had been informed that he would not face charges in connection with the probe.

Novak said a third source, CIA spokesman Bill Harlow, confirmed Plame's identity.

Harlow was not available for public comment on Novak's latest account. But a former intelligence official said Harlow did not know what Plame's position at the CIA was at first and that he tried to talk Novak out of publishing her name when he did find out, making it clear the disclosure could be damaging.

Novak has said his recollection of their conversation differs.

The CIA tapped Wilson, a former ambassador to Gabon, for a 2002 trip to Niger to investigate reports that Iraq had tried to restart its nuclear weapons program using uranium from that central African country.

He returned to report that the claim was unlikely and later publicly questioned whether the administration had "twisted" intelligence in its argument for war.

President Bush included the Niger allegation in his 2003 State of the Union speech, delivered just weeks before the invasion of Iraq. But the White House was forced to disassociate itself from the claim after Wilson's disclosure.

Novak reported that his sources said Plame had suggested sending her husband to Niger.

Libby told a grand jury that Bush had authorized the release of classified information to

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rebut Wilson, which Cheney's office considered a "direct attack" on the credibility of the White House, according to court papers released in April.

In May prosecutors released handwritten notes from Cheney, written on The New York Times article in which Wilson went public, questioning whether the Niger trip was a "junket" arranged by his wife.

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