



BLOG | Posted 03/16/2007 @ 1:32pm

Valerie Plame Speaks--Finally--About CIA Leak Case

Okay, can we finally get rid of one of the Libby Lobby's key talking points--that Valerie Plame Wilson was not an undercover CIA employee? This should be one outcome of the House oversight and government reform committee hearing on Friday, at which Valerie Wilson spoke for the first time at length about the leak case.

From the start of this scandal, confederates of the Bush White House (and backers of the war) have tried to diminish the significance of the administration leak that outed her as a CIA officer (as both legal and national security matters). Conservatives insisted she was not a clandestine officer doing anything important and that her employment at the CIA was either no big secret or no secret at all. A brief sampling:

* On September 29, 2003, former Republican Party spokesman Clifford May wrote that the July 14, 2003 Robert Novak column that disclosed Valerie Wilson's CIA connection "wasn't news to me. I had been told that--but not by anyone working in the White House. Rather, I learned it from someone who formerly worked in the government and he mentioned it in an offhand manner, leading me to infer it was something that insiders were well aware of."

* On September 30, 2003, *National Review* writer Jonah Goldberg huffed, "Wilson's wife is a desk jockey and much of the Washington cocktail circuit knew that already."

* On October 1, 2003, Novak wrote, "How big a secret was it? It was well known around Washington that Wilson's wife worked for the CIA....[A]n unofficial source at the agency says she has been an analyst, not in covert operations."

* On July 17, 2005, Republican Representative Roy Blunt ☀, then the House majority

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CAPITAL GAMES

DAVID CORN



Washington--a city of denials, spin, and political calculations. They may speak English there, but most citizens still need an interpreter to understand its ways and meanings. **DAVID CORN**, the Washington editor of *The Nation* magazine, has spent years analyzing the policies and pursuing the lies that spew out of the nation's capital. He is a novelist, biographer, and television and radio commentator who is able to both decipher and scrutinize Washington.

In his dispatches, he takes on the day-by-day political and policy battles under way in the Capitol, the White House, the think tanks, and the television studios. With an informed, unconventional perspective, he holds the politicians, policymakers and pundits accountable and reports the important facts and views that go uncovered elsewhere.

Check out David Corn's new book, co-written with Michael Isikoff), *Hubris: The Inside Story of Spin, Scandal, and the Selling of the Iraq War*. (Crown Publishers). For information, visit his personal blog at davidcorn.com.

Photo Credit: Michael Lorenzini

leader, said on *Face the Nation*, "This was a job that the ambassador's wife had that she went to every day. It was a desk job. I think many people in Washington understood that her employment was at the CIA, and she went to that office every day."

* On February 18, 2007, as the Libby trial was under way, Republican lawyer/operative Victoria Toensing asserted in *The Washington Post*, "Plame was not covert."

Anyone who has read *Hubris: The Inside Story of Spin, Scandal, and the Selling of the Iraq War*, by Michael Isikoff and me, would know (as we disclosed for the first time) that Valerie Wilson was the undercover operations chief for the Joint Task Force on Iraq of the Counterproliferation Division, a unit of the agency's clandestine operations directorate. (See my piece, "What Valerie Plame Really Did at the CIA," here.) Both the book and the article reported that she had traveled overseas--undercover--within the five years before her name appeared in the Novak column.

There was other evidence--official evidence--that she had been a covert officer at the CIA. When special prosecutor Patrick Fitzgerald indicted Libby in October 2005, he said that Valerie Wilson's employment at the CIA was classified information. (He repeated that at the trial.) And in a January 2004 letter to Democratic Representative John Conyers ☀, the CIA noted that the Valerie Wilson's CIA employment status was "classified information."

Now comes the victim of the leak. Testifying to the committee, Valerie Wilson reported that the CIA still prohibits her from saying much about her CIA career. (The agency has held up the publication of her memoirs, claiming at one point that she cannot acknowledge working for the CIA prior to 2002.) But Plame was able to tell the committee, "I was a covert officer." She said she helped to "manage and run operations." She noted that prior to the Iraq war she had "raced to discover intelligence" on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. "I also traveled to foreign countries on secret missions," she said under oath, "to find vital intelligence." She said these trips had occurred within the past five years. She added that she could "count on one hand" the number of people outside the CIA who knew of her employment at the agency: "It was not common knowledge on the Georgetown cocktail circuit." She also explained that a covert officer at the CIA is "just like a general" who may spend time commanding troops in Afghanistan and then return to the Pentagon before heading off to another theater: "Covert operations officers, when they rotate back for temporary assignment in Washington, are still covert."

Before she testified, Representative Henry Waxman ☀, the committee chairman, read an opening statement in which he said that Valerie Wilson had been a "covert" officer" who had "served at various times overseas" and "worked on the prevention of the development and use of weapons of mass destruction against the United States." Waxman noted that the CIA had cleared this statement. And during the questioning period, Democratic Representative Elijah Cummings ☀ reported that General Michael Hayden, the CIA director, had told him, "Ms. Wilson was covert."

Will Toensing, Novak, May, Blunt, Goldberg and others admit they got this wrong? Perhaps even apologize to Valerie Wilson for misinforming the public about her clandestine public service? At the least, they should stop repeating the canard she was not a covert officer. (Victoria Toensing, this means you.)

At the hearing, other aspects of the leak affair were discussed. Valerie Wilson noted she

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certainly didn't know if any of the administration officials who disseminated information about her (Libby, Karl Rove, Dick Cheney, Richard Armitage) realized she was undercover. But she added, "They should have been diligent in protecting me and other CIA officers." She explained that many employees of the CPD--where she worked--are covert, suggesting that Cheney and Libby (who both knew she was employed in that division) should have been careful in handling information about her.

One lingering question in the leak scandal is how much damage was done by the disclosure of her CIA connection. Her career as an operations officer was derailed. But were past or present operations blown? Specific sources and contacts endangered? Wilson testified that the CIA did a damage assessment but did not share it with her.

Wilson also addressed the issue of whether she dispatched her husband, former Ambassador Joseph Wilson, on his February 2002 trip to Niger, where he concluded there was not much to the allegation that Iraq had been uranium-shopping there. For years, White House allies have tried to dismiss the importance of Wilson's trip by suggesting he was not qualified for the mission and had been sent (perhaps on a nepotistic junket) by his wife. They have pointed to a Senate intelligence committee report that suggested Valerie Wilson was instrumental in sending him. Before the House committee, she testified that she did not have the authority to dispatch her husband on such a trip, that a coworker had the idea to send Joe Wilson (who years earlier had taken on a similar assignment for the Counterproliferation Division), and that she had merely been asked to write a note confirming her husband's credentials. She also said that a colleague was misquoted within the Senate intelligence committee report (saying she had proposed her husband for the trip) and that this colleague subsequently was prevented by a superior from sending the committee a memo correcting the record. In other words, her husband's detractors have overplayed this angle. (By the way, much of this story was reported in *Hubris*.) Democrats on the committee said they would ask the CIA for a copy of the smothered memo.

After Valerie Wilson, who left the CIA in early 2006, finished, Waxman declared, "We need an investigation. This is not about Scooter Libby and not just about Valerie Plame Wilson." Waxman was right in that the Libby trial did not answer all the questions about the leak affair, especially those about the roles of Bush administration officials other than Libby. How did Cheney learn of Valerie Wilson's employment at the Counterproliferation Division and what did he do with that information? How did Karl Rove learn of her CIA connection? How did Rove manage to keep his job after the White House declared anyone involved in the leak would be fired? (Rove confirmed Armitage's leak to Novak and leaked information about Valerie Wilson's CIA employment to Matt Cooper, then of *Time*.) What did Bush know about Cheney's and Rove's actions? What did Bush do in response to the disclosure that Rove had leaked and had falsely claimed to White House press secretary Scott McClellan that he wasn't involved in the leak?

Representative Tom Davis, the senior Republican on the committee, seemed rather unhappy about the prospect of a committee inquiry and noted that Fitzgerald already had investigated the leak for years. Fitzgerald's mission, though, was to determine if a crime had been committed. Not all wrongdoing in Washington is criminal. Valerie Wilson's presence at the hearing was a reminder that White House officials (beyond Libby) engaged in improper conduct (which possibly threatened national security) and lied about it--while their comrades in the commentariat spun away to distort the public debate.

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The world's most famous CIA officer finally had her say in public. Her testimony showed that critical parts of the leak story remain unknown. Given that she and her husband are pursuing a civil lawsuit against the leakers (Rove, Libby, Armitage, Cheney and others), that she is battling the CIA to publish her memoirs, and that Waxman is considering mounting a congressional investigation, the tale of the CIA officer outed into the cold is not yet done.

DON'T FORGET ABOUT HUBRIS: THE INSIDE STORY OF SPIN, SCANDAL, AND THE SELLING OF THE IRAQ WAR, the best-selling book by David Corn and Michael Isikoff. Click [here](#) for information on the book. *The New York Times* calls *Hubris* "the most comprehensive account of the White House's political machinations" and "fascinating reading." *The Washington Post* says, "There have been many books about the Iraq war....This one, however, pulls together with unusually shocking clarity the multiple failures of process and statecraft." Tom Brokaw notes *Hubris* "is a bold and provocative book that will quickly become an explosive part of the national debate on how we got involved in Iraq." Hendrik Hertzberg, senior editor of *The New Yorker* notes, "The selling of Bush's Iraq debacle is one of the most important--and appalling--stories of the last half-century, and Michael Isikoff and David Corn have reported the hell out of it." For highlights from *Hubris*, click [here](#).



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Two points...

1. "It was not common knowledge on the Georgetown cocktail circuit."...."not common"....or "totally unknown on the circuit"? There's a semantic difference. The latter represents that NOBODY knew of her covert status; the former indicates that SOME people knew it, but it wasn't "common knowledge". Maybe she meant the latter...but it's semantic wiggle-room.
2. "Valerie Wilson noted she certainly didn't know if any of the administration officials who disseminated information about her (Libby, Karl Rove, Dick Cheney, Richard Armitage) realized she was undercover.".....so she basically admitted by her reckoning, there was NO violation of the IIPA by the White House.

Sorry, but this (plus Fitzgerald shying away) doesn't seem to be the "John Dean" moment that people wanted.

Posted by MASK 03/16/2007 @ 1:43pm | [ignore this person](#)

What amazes me is the two individuals following Ms. Plame. One was a career government worker who is Director of the Whitehouse Security department who stated that there was **NO investigation** of the leak as required by the own Whitehouse rules. **NO ONE** had security clearances revoked. No investigation at all. This does not pass the smell test. The leak of classified information was a know act by the highest levels of the Whitehouse.

"I have nothing but contempt and anger for those who betray the trust by exposing the name of our sources. They are, in my view, the most insidious of traitors." George H.W. Bush, April 26, 1999

Posted by COPROGRESSIVE 03/16/2007 @ 1:50pm | [ignore this person](#)

Mask:

You are off on your points.

1. She was rebutting a point with a negative. The point being that it "was common knowledge." She was saying only that it was NOT - i.e. that claim is inaccurate. She otherwise testified that she could count on "one hand" the number of people outside the CIA who knew her role - one of those being her husband.

2. Her state of mind is not at issue and what she knew is not authoritative on the issue. She is not admitting that no crime was committed only that the intent and knowledge elements could not be shown through her knowledge.

Posted by HMAN23 03/16/2007 @ 1:55pm | [ignore this person](#)

Wow - Toensing has changed her tune.

Blaming the CIA for not doing enough to protect Plame/Wilson.

And the focus on issues like intent and knowledge.

Posted by HMAN23 03/16/2007 @ 1:59pm | [ignore this person](#)

Posted by HMAN23 03/16/2007 @ 1:55pm

I think your two counterpoints are not only accurate, but obvious.

And Mask is smart enough to know it.

Posted by DRHAMMER 03/16/2007 @ 2:19pm | [ignore this person](#)

Wow - Toensing has changed her tune. Posted by HMAN23 03/16/2007 @ 1:59pm

And Mask is smart enough to know it. Posted by DRHAMMER 03/16/2007 @ 2:19pm

Toensing is a Whitehouse apologist. Twisting and turning trying to spin this all away from the Whitehouse.

DR, you're joking, right?

Mask - The Nattering Nabob of Negativity.

"Don't quote me on this. Sometimes the truth is so precious, it must be accompanied by a bodyguard of lies." Donald Rumsfeld -- A.K.A. Ronald Dumbsfeld - Secretary of War

Posted by COPROGRESSIVE 03/16/2007 @ 2:33pm | [ignore this person](#)

It's also time to finally peel the "ignorance" label off George Bush. It seem unlikely that he was completely ignorant of all the underhanded dealings of his staff.

He shouldn't only be "held accountable" for what happened under his watch, he should also be exposed for full knowledge and culpability of these "impeachable/traitorous" acts.

Let's stop treating George Bush as a complete idiot and realize that he may only be half idiot and the other half perhaps a devious, immoral, nasty, bully who is easily led to seek revenge against anyone who searches for the truth.

It's not just Cheney and Rove. The true villains are the troika of Bush, Cheney, and Rove.

Posted by BOHDAN YURI 03/16/2007 @ 2:42pm | [ignore this person](#)

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Posted by HMAN23 03/16/2007 @ 1:55pm

HMAN...

1. She could rebutt it by saying "no, Congressman, it was NOT 'common knowledge on the Beltway circuit'....nobody unauthorized except my husband would know."....but she didn't. And WHO were those "other four fingers"? Family...or friends...or cocktail drinkers?

2. Re-read the IIPA....intent and knowledge are PART of it. If you or I off-handedly revealed Valerie Plame's status...we couldn't be prosecuted. Intent is inherent in the law....she, the victim and a person who is claiming authority to speak on covert statuses and revelations there of, just said that no violation of the IIPA occurred in her view.

In other words....she just became a DEFENSE witness.

Posted by MASK 03/16/2007 @ 2:44pm | [ignore this person](#)

This just in from the fair and balanced news source ... Plame's testimony is in the small print section ... the headlines include something about Anna Nicole and a bus driver who *might be a terrorist* ... plus the latest on the hiccupping teen.

Didn't want you all to miss anything while you indulge in this non-story here.

Posted by MYPARADIGM 03/16/2007 @ 2:44pm | [ignore this person](#)

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