

Senate Dems Put Cheney, White House, on Notice

Here are excerpts of the press conference by Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.), Sen. Richard Durbin (D-Ill.), and Sen. Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.), which followed a closed policy luncheon on Nov. 8, 2005.

Senator Reid: There's a dark cloud hanging over the White House. It's really a storm cloud.

The Vice President, who gets his authority from the President, sadly is in the middle of that storm.

The manipulation of intelligence to sell the war in Iraq; Vice President Cheney's involved in that.

The White House energy policy that puts big oil ahead of the American consumer: Vice President Cheney is behind that.

Leaking classified information to discredit White House critics: the Vice President is behind that.

Halliburton, contracting abuse—the list goes on and it goes on.

Certainly, America can do better than that.

Today, in a letter, we're calling on President Bush and Vice President Cheney to send a clear message to everyone at the White House: Leaking our national security secrets is a serious crime and should not be condoned.

We're asking President Bush to avoid following in the footsteps of his father, who pardoned six men—some were convicted, some were indicted in the Iran-Contra scandal.

We're demanding President Bush make a commitment to the American people that he will not pardon Scooter Libby, who was involved in this mess, nor will be pardon anyone involved in this mess.

Unless a pardon is ruled out by President Bush, the American people will certainly not learn the truth.

No one is above the law—Scooter Libby, Vice President Cheney, or President Bush. . . .

Senator Durbin: We stood before you a week ago, having made a motion for a closed session. The objective of that motion was to make sure the American people knew the truth; that we completed the investigation in the Senate Intelligence Committee so that we could learn once and for all whether any elected official, whether any member of this Administration, misused intelligence information to lead the American people to believe we had no choice but to invade Iraq.

This letter that we're sending today to the White House, making it clear that the President should not pardon Mr. Libby or anyone else involved in the leaking of classified informa-

tion, is another step to make sure the American people learn the truth.

That is the bottom line. We owe the truth not only to the people we represent, we certainly owe it to our soldiers and their families.

People with their lives on the line every single day for this country deserve to know the truth. We're going to come before the American people today, and in the future, to make certain that the truth is served.

Senator Schumer: . . . [W]e are asking that the president make a commitment that Scooter Libby not be pardoned for a very simple reason: We want to make sure that he tells the whole truth, and nothing but, with the prosecutors. We want to make sure that truth comes out.

And the letter that we have written makes one thing very clear: Being a high official in the White House should not entitle you to a get-out-of-jail-free card. Plain and simple.

The issue here is very simple. We need to get to the bottom of this. We believe that there is a whole lot more; whether that meets a criminal standard or not is up to prosecutor Fitzgerald.

. . . And we defer to what he wants to do. But in order to make sure that the truth come out, all of it, the whole truth, nothing but the truth, Scooter Libby should not be pardoned.

We are also asking that the White House tell the American people if there have been any discussions about pardon. We want a commitment that there be no pardon, but we want to know if that has been discussed with Scooter Libby or anyone else as well.

Q: Can you talk about how your calls for investigation are different from the letter that Senator Frist and Speaker Hastert sent today to . . . the chairman of the two committees.

Reid: Well, let me say this. The first I heard about this was just a few minutes ago. It's my understanding that Senator Frist and the speaker have called for a bicameral investigation as to what went on with all these secret prisons, and who leaked the information about the secret prisons, costing the American people some \$4 billion.

This is kind of interesting. I have said on many occasions, I'll say again, this government has been in existence for 216 years, and the Congress has worked very well over those years because we've had something called congressional oversight.

If there's a problem, we have the committees that are set up. We have a chairman and we have a ranking member, and they do investigations. It has not been done in this Administration, or rarely.

So I would think, if the speaker and the majority leader in the Senate are interested in this, they should join with us in getting to the bottom of what went on in bringing this country to war.

We already know that the aluminum tubes were a figment of someone's imagination. Yellowcake, secret training of terrorists by the Iraqis, secret meetings in Europe, weapons of mass destruction, was all manipulated, made up.

So I would suggest that the speaker and the majority leader

of the Senate join with us in finding out about that.

Q: Would you support this investigation into the leaks. . . .

Reid: My first response would be: Why don't we have the committees of jurisdiction take a look at it? Let them do it first. This is only [a] play to the press; that's all this is.

We already have the structure set up to take a look at that. I know it was embarrassing for the President to be in South America and have to respond to questions about American torturing prisoners. And he denied it, and I hope that it's accurate.

But I'm sure that's an embarrassment to them. They're trying to change the direction of what's going on here a little bit.

Reid: [In response to an off-mike question]. That there's no torture going on? Well, that's why we have, going on right to our right here, an amendment that has been offered by Senator Levin to take a look by an independent, bipartisan commission, a blue-ribbon commission, to find out what went on, just in Iraq and around Afghanistan and a few other places, as to . . . what took place regarding torture, terrorism, this prison investigation.

The Republicans have fought us every step of the way on this. I think we need to get to the bottom of it. The American people deserve to know whether America, this country of ours which stood above all other countries has—and we hope continue, certainly, to stand above all countries as being a protector of human rights, civil rights.

I would hope that we haven't been involved in torture. But that's why we need Senator Levin's investigation to go forward.

Q: Senator, do you believe that the White House is about to make a move to pardon Scooter Libby? Do you have reason to believe that?

Reid: I know that about an hour ago, or whenever McClellan had his press briefing for the day, he refused to respond to that question. He refused to respond to the question.

I think it speaks volumes. And it would be very simple for the president to say, "I am not going to pardon Scooter Libby or anyone else connected with the mess."

Now remember, we have a moving target here. First of all, the President said anyone involved with this will no longer be in the White House. And then he changed, when he found Rove's involvement, and I assume Libby's involvement, he knew by that time. He said, "I will get rid of them when they are convicted of a crime."

We have a moving target here now.

I think it would be really good for the White House, for the country, if the President simply said, "I will not pardon anyone involved in this mess," and I used that word purposely.

Q: Mr. Leader, do you think that the President should be on record ahead of time saying who he may or may not pardon in any case? . . .

Reid: . . . When we have a special prosecutor who has already, in his estimation, discovered obstruction of justice,



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Sen. Harry Reid singled out Vice President Dick Cheney as being at the center of all the problems now plaguing the Administration, and called on President Bush to pledge not to pardon anyone in his Administration who may be guilty of wrongdoing.

perjury, I think certainly that he should come forward.

It's what the American public needs. We have a President who the American public simply have lost confidence in. This would help restore some of that confidence, and I think that's good for all America.

Q: Senator Reid, you said no one is above the law, not Libby, not Cheney. Do you have reason to believe the Vice President in any way violated the law?

Reid: . . . [T]he answer is no, I have no information. . . . But all I know is that anything dealing with intelligence, last five years, has gone through the funnel that's located at the desk of the Vice President.

We all know that . . . Senator Roberts hasn't moved on this for a number of reasons. But the most glaring reason is that the Vice President has not given him permission to go ahead with the investigation that he committed to. . . .

Dems to Bush: No Pardons For Convicted Officials

Here is the Nov. 8, 2005 letter to President Bush from Senate Democratic leaders Harry Reid (Nev.), Dick Durbin (Ill.), Debbie Stabenow (Mich.), and Chuck Schumer (N.Y.).

Dear Mr. President:

The indictment of I. Lewis Libby, Vice President Dick Cheney's Chief of Staff, marks the first time in 131 years that a senior White House official has been charged with a crime while still serving in the White House. The charges, while not yet proven, are extraordinarily serious and deeply disturbing.

Although it is too early to judge Mr. Libby guilty or innocent of these particular charges, it is not too early for you to

reassure the American people that you understand the enormous gravity of the allegations. To this end, we urge you to pledge that if Mr. Libby or anyone else is found guilty of a crime in connection with Patrick Fitzgerald's investigation, you will not exercise your authority to issue a Presidential pardon.

It is crucial that you make clear in advance that, if convicted, Mr. Libby will not be able to rely on his close relationship with you or Vice President Cheney to obtain the kind of extraordinarily special treatment unavailable to ordinary Americans. In addition you should do nothing to undermine Mr. Fitzgerald's investigation or diminish accountability in your White House. A pardon in these circumstances would signal that this White House considers itself above the law.

We also urge you to state publicly whether anyone in the White House, including White House Counsel Harriet Miers or Vice President Cheney, has already discussed the possibility of a pardon with Mr. Libby. Particularly given that the American people are still in the dark about what precisely transpired in the White House with respect to the CIA leak, it would be highly inappropriate if there were such discussions going on behind the scenes.

Swift public action on your part will make clear that you take seriously perjury and obstruction of justice at the highest levels of our government, and that you meant what you said about bringing honor and dignity to the White House. We eagerly await your response and hope that you will announce your intentions promptly.

Rockefeller Specifies Investigation Targets

Sen. Jay Rockefeller, a Democrat from West Virginia, issued the following press release on Nov 7.

Today, the Vice Chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (SSCI), Senator John D. (Jay) Rockefeller IV, outlined key remaining issues that must be addressed in order to produce a thorough, prompt and credible Phase II report.

First and foremost, we cannot allow the delay in proceeding with Phase II to compromise the quality of the investigation, and the report. We must apply the same standards of professionalism that was used to produce the first report, which dealt exclusively with the quality and objectivity of prewar intelligence assessments.

The Phase II report must encompass all five aspects of Phase II that were laid out in the committee's press release on Feb. 12, 2004.

The committee must be prepared to interview witnesses, including but not limited to individuals in the White House, the Office of the Vice President, as well as other senior policy

makers. We also must have the ability to interview individuals in the Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy. If the committee is denied testimony or documentation, we must be prepared to issue subpoenas.

On the issue of the use of intelligence, charts comparing public statements with what the intelligence community published does not alone tell the story. To determine whether statements were substantiated by the intelligence is going to require analysis and context. If necessary, we may need to conduct interviews and request supporting documents. And, we must understand the flow of intelligence information back and forth between policy makers and intelligence agencies.

We must undertake this responsibility seriously. The credibility of the committee is at stake.

Vice Chairman Rockefeller identified the following areas of concern that still require review by the committee:

Since the President's January 2003 State of the Union speech and Secretary Powell's February 2003 United Nations speech represent major public statements using intelligence to support the war, the committee must address issues related to them that were not examined in the July 2004 Phase I report, specifically: 1) the use of al-Libi information that the DIA had discounted; 2) new revelations on the source known as Curveball; and, 3) the Office of the Vice President's input to the CIA for Secretary Powell's United Nations speech, which the National Journal reports was withheld from the SSCI on direction of Vice President Cheney and Scooter Libby.

On the issue of the intelligence activities by the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, the committee needs to interview Douglas Feith and other officials in his office, and demand all outstanding documents. As was agreed to by the Chairman, the committee must address press reports on the alleged intelligence-related meetings that took place overseas with officials from this office, and whether these activities were authorized and coordinated with the Intelligence Community.

On the issue of the Iraqi National Congress (INC), the committee needs to interview INC officials, including Ahmed Chalabi. The committee must also interview current and former officials at the Office of the Vice President, including Scooter Libby and John Hannah, and at the Office of the Secretary of Defense, including Douglas Feith and William Luti, which the INC, in its June 2002 letter to the Senate Appropriations Committee, claims directly received intelligence information from the INC.

On the issue of post-war findings on Iraq WMD (Kay/Duelfer Report) and links to terrorism, the committee needs to tell the story of the Iraq Survey Groups reports, including testimony of Kay and Duelfer before the SSCI, and the CIA retrospectives on these issues. The committee needs to examine recent information about al Qaeda operatives Zarqawi and al-Libi. This section cannot be cursory and should tell the complete story of how the post-war findings contrast with pre-war assessments.