

Wilson Stands Up to Cheney Smear Tactics

by Lawrence K. Freeman

The Vice President and his Cheneyac supporters are in a desperate flight-forward to discredit Ambassador Joseph Wilson, in an attempt to circumvent indictments expected by the end of this Summer from the grand jury investigating the deliberate “outing” of Wilson’s wife, Valerie Plame, as a CIA agent. The proceedings could lead to the Vice President or members of his staff being charged with violating Federal statutes. Wilson has made clear that he will not back down from the truth, even in the face of a torrent of vicious personal attacks launched against him and his wife since the release of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence Report in early July. According to Wilson, the “smear attacks” are intended to distract attention from the fact that the White House used the Iraq-Niger uranium “yellow cake” claim in President Bush’s 2003 State of the Union speech to whip up support for war against Iraq, even after being told by the CIA that the yellow cake claim “was weak”; and to protect those responsible for exposing the identity of his wife. The July 20 *Wall Street Journal* editorialized that Prosecutor Patrick Fitzgerald, who is conducting the Plame investigation, “should fold up his tent.” This reveals the cause for the diatribes against Wilson: *the potential for criminal indictments that could drive Cheney out of office and sink President Bush’s chances for re-election.*

On July 15, Wilson rebutted Sen. Pat Roberts (R-Kans.), Chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, who has served as a Cheney attack-dog on the committee to protect the Vice President from the Plame criminal investigation. In his letter to co-chairmen Senators Roberts and Jay Rockefeller (D-W.Va.), Wilson refutes the first conclusion by Roberts: “*The plan to send the former ambassador to Niger was suggested by the former ambassador’s wife, a CIA employee.*” If this were true, then various legal maneuvers would be used to try to absolve the “leaker,” most likely from Cheney’s office, of criminal acts. Thus, Roberts is proffering their defense strategy. Wilson’s letter continues as follows:

Excerpt from the Wilson Letter

That is not true. The conclusion is apparently based on one anodyne quote from a memo Valerie Plame, my wife, sent to her superiors that says, “My husband has good relations with the PM [prime minister] and former Minister of Mines (not to mention lots of French contacts, both of whom could possibly shed light on this sort of activity.” There is no

suggestion or recommendation in that statement that I be sent on the trip. Indeed it is little more than a recitation of my contacts and *bona fides*.

The [false] conclusion is reinforced by comments in the body of the report that a CPD [Counterproliferation Division] reports officer stated that “the former ambassador’s wife ‘offered up his name’ ” (page 39) and a State Department intelligence research officer stated the “meeting was apparently convened by [the former ambassador’s] wife who had the idea to dispatch him to use his contacts to sort out the Iraq-Niger uranium issue.”

In fact, Valerie was not in the meeting at which the subject of my trip was raised. Neither was the CPD reports officer. After having escorted me into the room she departed the meeting to avoid even the appearance of a conflict of interest. It was at that meeting where the question of my traveling to Niger was broached with me for the first time and came only after a thorough discussion of what the participants did and did not know about the subject. My *bona fides* justifying the invitation to the meetings, were the trip I had previously taken to Niger to look at other uranium-related questions, as well as 20 years of living and working in Africa, and personal contacts throughout the Niger government. Neither the CPD reports officer nor the State analyst were in the chain of command to know who, or how, the decision was made. The interpretations attributed to them are not the full story. In fact, it is my understanding that the reports officer has a different conclusion about Valerie’s role than the one offered in the “additional comments.” I urge the committee to reinterview the officer and publicly publish his statement.

It is unfortunate that the report failed to include the CIA’s position on this matter. If the staff had done so it would undoubtedly have been the same evidence as provided to *Newsday* reporter Tim Phelps and Knut Royce in July 2003. They reported that on July 22 that: “A senior intelligence office confirmed that Plame was a Directorate of Operations undercover officer who worked ‘alongside’ the operations officer who asked her husband to travel to Niger. But he said she did not recommend her husband to undertake the Niger assignment. ‘They [the officer who did ask Wilson to check the uranium story] were aware of who she was married to, which is not surprising,’ he said. ‘There are people elsewhere in government who are trying to make her look like she was the one who was cooking this up, for some reason,’ he said. ‘I can’t figure out what it could be.’ ‘We paid his [Wilson’s] airfare. But to go to Niger is not exactly a benefit. Most people you’d have to pay big bucks to go there,’ the senior intelligence officer said. Wilson said he was reimbursed only for expenses.” (*Newsday* article “Columnist Blows CIA Agent Cover,” dated July 22, 2003).

In fact, on July 13 of this year, David Ensor, the CNN correspondent, did call the CIA for a statement of its position and reported that a senior CIA official confirmed my account that Valerie did not propose me for the trip.