

February 6, 2004

**SCHAKOWSKY: BUSH ADMINISTRATION'S MISSTATEMENT OF THE DAY -
LEAK OF IDENTITY OF CIA OPERATIVE**

WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) issued today's "Bush Administration's Misstatement of the Day" on the "unlawful exposure of a CIA officer's identity last year." She is the wife of Joe Wilson, a former Ambassador, who was critical of the Bush Administration's rush to war with Iraq.

According to a Washington Post, October 10, 2001, article, President Bush said: "*I want Congress to hear loud and clear, it is unacceptable behavior to leak classified information when we have troops at risk.*" However, according to Insight Magazine's 2/17/04 edition:

Federal law-enforcement officials said that they have developed hard evidence of possible criminal misconduct by two employees of Vice President Dick Cheney's office related to the unlawful exposure of a CIA officer's identity last year. The investigation, which is continuing, could lead to indictments, a Justice Department official said.

According to these sources, John Hannah and Cheney's chief of staff, Lewis "Scooter" Libby, were the two Cheney employees. "We believe that Hannah was the major player in this," one federal law-enforcement officer said. Calls to the vice president's office were not returned, nor did Hannah and Libby return calls.

Below is the full story:

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Cheney's Staff Focus of Probe

By Richard Sale □

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The strategy of the FBI is to make clear to Hannah "that he faces a real possibility of doing jail time" as a way to pressure him to name superiors, one federal law-enforcement official said.

The case centers on Valerie Plam, a CIA operative then working for the weapons of mass destruction division, and her husband, former ambassador Joseph Wilson, who served as ambassador to Gabon and as a senior U.S. diplomat in Baghdad in the early 1990s. Under President Bill Clinton, he was head of African affairs until he retired in 1998, according to press accounts.

Wilson was sent by the Bush administration in March 2002 to check on an allegation made by President George W. Bush in his State of the Union address the previous winter that Iraq had sought to buy uranium from the nation of Niger. Wilson returned with a report that said the claim was "highly doubtful."

On June 12, Washington Post reporter Walter Pincus revealed that an unnamed diplomat had "given a negative report" on the claim and then, on July 6, as the Bush administration was widely accused of manipulating intelligence to get American public opinion behind a war with Iraq, Wilson published an op-ed piece in the Post in which he accused the Bush administration of "misrepresenting the facts." His piece also asked, "What else are they lying about?"

According to one administration official, "The White House was really pissed, and began to contact six journalists in order to plant stories to discredit Wilson," according to the New York Times and other accounts.

As Pincus said in a Sept. 29 radio broadcast, "The reason for putting out the story about Wilson's wife working for the CIA was to undermine the credibility of [Wilson's] mission for the agency in Niger. Wilson, as the last top diplomat in Iraq at the time of the Gulf War, had credibility beyond his knowledge of Africa, which was his specialty. So his going to Niger to check the allegation that Iraq had sought uranium there and returning to say he had no confirmation was considered very credible." □

Eight days later, columnist Robert Novak wrote a column in which he named Wilson's wife and revealed she was "an agency operative on weapons of mass destruction." Since Plame was working undercover, it exposed her and, in the opinion of some, ruined her usefulness and her career. It also violated a 1982 law that prohibits revealing the identity of U.S. intelligence agents.

On Oct. 7, Bush said that unauthorized disclosure of an undercover CIA officer's identity was "a criminal matter" and the Justice Department had begun its investigation into the source of the leak.

Richard Sale is an intelligence correspondent for UPI, a sister wire service of Insight magazine.