

## **Dems Urge Probe of Iraqi Uranium Claim**

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WASHINGTON (AP) - Democrats pressed for deeper investigation of pre-war U.S. intelligence efforts Tuesday after the White House admitted President Bush had erred in his State of the Union speech when he said Saddam Hussein had tried to buy uranium in Africa.

As weeks have passed with the American search turning up no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, criticism has been building concerning assertions the administration made as justification for the war.

"This is a very important admission," said Senate Democratic Leader Tom Daschle of South Dakota. "It's a recognition that we were provided faulty information. And I think it's all the more reason why a full investigation of all of the facts surrounding this situation be undertaken."

Sen. Carl Levin of Michigan, the ranking Democrat on the Armed Services Committee, also said that the development underscored a need for more investigation.

"The reported White House statements only reinforce the importance of an inquiry into why the information about the bogus uranium sales didn't reach the policy-makers during 2002 and why, as late as the president's State of the Union address in January 2003, our policy-makers were still using information which the intelligence community knew was almost certainly false," Levin

said.

Michael Anton, a spokesman for the White House's National Security Council, said in a statement, "We now know that documents alleging a transaction between Iraq and Niger had been forged."

Anton also said the documents were not the sole basis for Bush's contention in his speech that "the British government has learned that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa."

The spokesman said that when Bush made the speech in January, there was other intelligence indicating that Iraq had tried to acquire uranium from several countries in Africa. This other information, however, was not detailed or specific enough to prove such a contention, he said.

"Because of this lack of specificity, this reporting alone did not rise to the level of inclusion in a presidential speech," Anton said. "That said, the issue of Iraq's attempts to acquire uranium from abroad was not an element underpinning the judgment reached by most intelligence agencies that Iraq was reconstituting its nuclear weapons program."

On June 8, national security adviser Condoleezza Rice, too, had said on NBC's "Meet the Press" that Bush was wrong when he said the British government had learned that Iraq had sought uranium from Africa to build weapons.

"No one in our circles knew that there were doubts and suspicions that this might be a forgery," she said. "Of course, it was information that was mistaken."

The latest White House statement followed assertions by an envoy sent to Africa to investigate allegations about Iraq's nuclear weapons program. The envoy, Joseph Wilson, said Sunday that the Bush administration manipulated his findings, possibly to strengthen the rationale for war.

Several investigations are under way in Congress, but Democrats said much more was needed.

Rep. Janice **Schakowsky** of Illinois called for an independent, non-congressional inquiry.

"Did the Bush administration knowingly deceive us and manufacture intelligence in order to build public support for the invasion of Iraq?" she asked. "Did Iraq really pose an imminent threat to our nation?"

Democratic lawmakers hoping to replace Bush in the White House were vehement. Calls for more investigation came from Sens. Bob Graham of Florida and John Kerry of Massachusetts and Reps. Richard Gephardt of Missouri and Dennis Kucinich of Ohio.

"George Bush's credibility is increasingly in doubt," Graham said. Gephardt asserted, "This president has a pattern of using excessive language in his speeches and off-the-cuff remarks."

Said Kerry, "The Bush administration doesn't get honesty points for belatedly admitting what had been apparent to the world for some time - that emphatic statements made on Iraq were inaccurate."

A British parliamentary commission also has been questioning the reliability of intelligence about Iraq trying to obtain weapons of mass destruction.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair insisted Tuesday that he was right to go to war and that weapons of mass destruction would be found in Iraq.