

THE TOWNSEND CAMPAIGN

Summary: In this post, I argue that Murray Waas' latest argument is not, as some suspect, a rehashed Rove leak. Rather, it comes very close to asserting that Libby had leaked a different smear story to Bob Novak at about the time of the Wilson leak. This suggests, I argue, that it is very likely that Novak's first leak came from OVP, if not from Libby himself.

Well, Typepad's long downtime today has prevented me from commenting on the new Waas piece in a timely manner. But it means I get to comment on it with the benefit of reading others' opinions on the piece. I've got to say though, I disagree with the opinion of many that this is a story floated by the Rove camp to try to exonerate him. Rather than pointing toward a Rove excuse, I think Waas almost—but not quite—has a story sewn up that points very clearly at OVP. The degree to which this exonerates Rove is just secondary. Indeed, I think Waas' article clearly suggests that the remaining mysteries all point to Cheney's office.

Waas spends a good deal of time explaining that Novak called Rove on July 9 to talk about Frances Fragos Townsend, not to talk about Plame.

Instead, the voluminous material on Rove's desk — including talkingpoints, related briefing materials, and information culled from confidential government personnel files — involved a different woman: **Frances Fragos Townsend**, a former senior attorney in the Clinton administration's Justice Department whom **President Bush** had recently named to be his deputy national security adviser for combating terrorism.

Bush had personally assigned Rove to help counter what the president believed to be a "rearguard" effort within his own administration, by persons unknown, to discredit Townsend and derail her appointment, according to White House documents and accounts given by former and current officials.