

WHY SETTLE THE WEN HO LEE CASE?

Apparently, Wen Ho Lee's civil suit charging the government abused his privacy rights is close to being settled.

Intensive settlement negotiations between former nuclear scientist Wen Ho Lee and the U.S. government are delaying – and may ultimately avert – action by the Supreme Court on appeals by reporters fighting to protect their confidential sources in the case.

The Lee case is viewed by the media as one of the most significant press-freedom battles of recent years. But yesterday, for the second time in two weeks, the court declined to act on the reporters' petitions.

It now appears that the court's lack of a decision may be linked to a May 16 letter to the court from Lee's attorneys, which said that "there have been recent settlement discussions" and that "resolution of the entire case may be imminent." USA Today first reported the letter.

This is actually remarkable news, with many possible implications for the Imperial Presidency. Apparently, the Bush Administration prefers to spend (presumably) a chunk of money to avoid any court rulings on this case. What kind of rulings were they fearing?