

NOVAK'S JULY 7 MEETING

Credit where it's due. Tom Maguire hits all the right notes about this Novak book excerpt, save one. He notes that Novak's story has a way of changing with the seasons.

Interesting.Â This old post has the Novak version before he was willing to name Armitage; here is Novak (post- "Hubris") rebutting Armitage's version.

There are subtle shifts in the story – now we are told that "Hementioned her first name, Valerie", a detail not presented earlier.

I love the way righties note how changeable Novak's story is—yet they always seem to fall for his most ridiculous lines. Like about how, when he referred to Valerie Plame as a covert Agent, he really meant she was running a Congressional campaign in Wyoming (no really—he did say that once—you think he's got former Congressmen from Wyoming on his mind)?

Oh wait. This is a credit where it's due post. Sorry. Maguire also points out that Novak's cover story about Fran Townsend is changing too.

OK, we have had that before – the prevailing version as told by Murray Waas has been that the Townsend column came out on July 10; Rove defended her to Novak at length on the 8th or 9th, and then Novak slipped in a question about Wilson's wife and Karl responded with "Iheard that, too".

But now Novak tells us that the Townsend column was written on July 7.Â Hmm – in that case, what did he and Karl find to talk about on July 8 or 9?Â Or had Rove "heard that, too" in a chat with Novak on the 7theven before Novak met with

Armitage?

Well done, Maguire. Posts like these are why you're a respectable Plameologist.

But Maguire misses one point. A big one. An awfully big one. You see, Novak says he was reporting on Townsend on July 7, before (Maguire accepts Novak here) he called Rove. Maguire points out how that may or may not challenge Novak's cover story about calling Rove to talk about Townsend. But he doesn't do the obvious—like asking who, if not Rove, Novak was talking to about Townsend on July 7. I'll remind you of this passage in Murray Waas' story on this issue (which Maguire links but apparently doesn't re-read that closely).

The senior staff in the Office of the Vice President adamantly opposed Townsend's appointment. The staff included two of Cheney's closest aides: Libby, then the chief of staff and national security adviser to the vice president; and David Addington, who at the time was Cheney's counsel but who has since succeeded Libby as chief of staff.

Among other things, Libby and Addington believed that Townsend would bring a more traditional approach to combating terrorism, and feared she would not sign on to, indeed might even oppose, the OVP's policy of advocating the use of aggressive and controversial tools against terror suspects. One of those techniques is known as "extraordinary rendition," in which terror suspects are taken to foreign countries, where they can be interrogated without the same legal and human-rights protections afforded to those in U.S. custody, including the protection from torture.

Libby's opposition to Townsend was so intense that he asked at least two other

people in the White House to obtain her personnel records. [my emphasis]

Now who do you think Novak might have been talking to on July 7? Who do you think might have seeded the Townsend story that she was a Democrat and shouldn't be hired? Golly. I can't even begin to guess. And mind you, Novak would have to have been talking to someone intimately involved in the 16 words controversy, because that's why he brings this up in the first place. And according to his (changing) testimony, the 16 words was precisely what he spoke to Libby about.

Good thing we know that Libby and Novak would have been forthcoming about it if they had had a meeting on July 7, huh?

Two more nitpicky points. First, I'll reiterate my point that if Novak initiated his question to Armitage by saying, "Joe Wilson never worked at the CIA," it still raises the question of why he believed that, when Wilson's resume (or Who's Who entry, since Novak claims to be a fan) wouldn't be enough to make that claim. He wouldn't know that, definitively, unless someone with clearance had told him.

And lastly, this is, necessarily, unmitigated bullshit.

When I went to my office Monday, July 7, 2003, Joe Wilson was not in the forefront of my mind. Frances Fragos Townsend was.

The reason this is clearly bullshit is because Novak is simultaneously (at least as of February) arguing that the reason he called Wilson an "asshole" to Wilson's friend on July 8 is because he was so pissed at how rude (ha! some fierce pot-calling here) Wilson was on Meet the Press, on July 6. Novak has basically argued (for the sake of pretending he didn't speak to someone before he spoke to Armitage) that he was obsessed with what an asshole Wilson was from

the time Novak ran into him in the Green Room to the time he ran into Wilson's friend on the street. That is, he was fuming about that asshole Joe Wilson from July 6 to July 8.

Which is it, Novak? Were you fuming for two days straight? Or did you speak to someone on July 7—someone who wanted Townsend fired, like Scooter Libby—who told you Wilson was an asshole?