

CONDI IGNORES DOUBTS ON THE 16 WORDS

Given that Henry Waxman has been threatening to subpoena Condi to answer precisely the same question that Robert Wexler asked today yesterday, I would guess that Condi has practiced her answer. And, unfortunately, the ability to filibuster is one of Condi's greatest skills—Condi frankly got the best of Wexler here (and sadly, Wexler didn't ask her the doozy question—why she approved the 16 words in the SOTU after Tenet had warned her strongly against the Niger claim in October 2002).

If you look at this whole exchange, Condi gets away with defending her integrity in several ways:

- By eliding the difference between consensus judgments and challenges to it (in other words, Condi successfully ducked Wexler's question about burying those challenges)
- By shifting from the decisions she made about intelligence to the decisions others did
- By ignoring the whole question of leaks to the press (Scooter Libby testified that Condi was the chief leaker in the A1 Cut-Out strategy, for example, which suggests Condi repeatedly leaked insta-declassified information to

people like Judy Miller so
it would become the dominant
story)

But I'm particularly interested in Condi's
successful efforts to still—almost five years
after the Valerie Wilson leak—pawn the blame off
on the CIA:

RICE: Congressman, I am sorry, I sat
through the briefings for the Congress
and for the Senate, done by the
intelligence community. We were there to
provide policy advice, but either George
Tenet or John McLaughlin or others gave
those briefings.

And, Congressman, the American people
were told what their intelligence
community as a whole believed to be the
assessment concerning Iraq's programs.

Condi suggests that if Congress and the American
people got bad information, it's George Tenet's
and John McLaughlin's fault.

Which is why—in addition to asking Condi why she
approved the 16 words in the SOTU—Wexler didn't
bring up this briefing:

On October 2, 2002, the Deputy DCI
testified before the SSCI. Senator Jon
Kyl asked the Deputy DCI whether he had
read the British white paper and whether
he disagreed with anything in the
report. The Deputy DCI testified that
"the one thing where I think they
stretched a little bit beyond where we
would stretch is on the points about
Iraq seeking uranium from various
African locations. We've looked at those
reports and we don't think they are very
credible. It doesn't diminish our
conviction that he's going for nuclear
weapons, but I think they reached a
little bit on that one point. Otherwise
I think it's very solid."

The British White Paper, of course, was the source for the 16 words in the SOTU. And John McLaughlin—who Condi says never presented any challenges to the Iraq intelligence—sure challenged precisely the intelligence that formed the basis for the 16 words.