

IS ISIKOFF LAUNDERING INFORMATION FOR KARL ROVE AGAIN?

As you'll recall from the Plame case, Michael Isikoff helped Karl Rove stay out of jail in at least three ways:

- After the WaPo published the damaging 1X2X6 article, Isikoff published an article appearing to—but not entirely—refuting it (Isikoff tried again in Hubris, claiming that the 1X2X6 story only got printed due to an editorial error, an attempt that Swopa quickly shredded).
- When he called Luskin for comment on the fact that Rove was Matt Cooper's source for Plame's identity, Isikoff (by his own admission) read Luskin the entire email from Cooper to his editor, alerting Rove's lawyer to everything that appeared in one of the main pieces of documentary evidence that incriminated Rove.
- Just before the inquiry, ~~Rove~~ someone at the White House prodded Isikoff to ask Woodward about his "bombshell," probably

forcing Woodward to come clean that Armitage had leaked Plame's identity to him in June 2003, thereby ruining what little value Armitage would have had in a perjury case against Rove.

Laundering information through journalists is a common Rove tactic. For example, someone conveniently launched a false campaign insinuating Ari Fleischer was one of the Novak's for Plame's identity; by coincidence (ha!) that campaign was launched the day that Luskin attempted to manage the revelation that Rove was one of Novak's sources. Even going way back to his days in Texas Rove laundered leaks through the press to attack Jim Hightower and Ronnie Earle.

But in recent years—certainly during the CIA Leak case—Isikoff has been one of Rove's key information conduits.

In the last couple of months, Rove seems to have been attempting—with no apparent success—to goad reporters covering the Siegelman case to serve as similar information conduits. His surrogates in the AL GOP tried to demand information from CBS and MSNBC about what evidence there is implicating Karl, all while refusing to give up their own information. More recently, Rove has launched a pissing contest with Dan Abrams, attacking Abrams' journalism, apparently in an attempt to force him to reveal information about evidence against him. Yet with Rove out of the White House, his ability to use journalists to his own ends seems to have diminished.

Except, perhaps, with Isikoff.

The other day, I noted that the news that the revelation of Bob Kjellander's discussions about firing Patrick Fitzgerald with Rove was an unsurprising move from Fitzgerald. By introducing it in court, it made the information

publicly available for others—like John Conyers—to use it for other purposes.

Fitzgerald's office (though not Fitzgerald personally) has just said to John Conyers, "Hey, I see you're still looking into politicized prosecutions. Well, here's a witness who can testify that a Rove crony was working with Rove to get Fitzgerald fired—just before Fitzgerald almost got fired." This adds another witness—like Dana Jill Simpson—who is willing to testify that Rove got personally involved in prosecutions affecting his political allies. But it also brings someone from the requesting side to the fore—someone who (unlike the GOP cronies in Washington who got John McKay fired and unlike the GOP cronies in NM who got Iglesias fired) is apparently willing (and presumably has already signed an affidavit to the effect) to testify that Karl Rove entertained these demands for firing seriously. Conyers will, undoubtedly, take a few days to respond (he's not so quick as Henry Waxman), but I imagine he will respond.

Sure enough, Isikoff reports today that Conyers is going to follow up on the tidbit coming out of the Rezko trial.

The House Judiciary Committee "intends to investigate the facts and circumstances alleged in this testimony," panel chairman Rep. John Conyers of Michigan said in a statement to NEWSWEEK.

Yup, Conyers was right on schedule with his three-days-longer-than-it-takes-Waxman schedule. Since all of this is so unsurprising, let me add another completely predictable detail. Isikoff includes in his story a description of precisely the kind of evidence Ata has against Rove.

A source familiar with Ata's testimony (who asked not to be identified talking about sensitive matters) said that Ata was meeting regularly with Rezko that fall. The two men shared a concern about Fitzgerald's ongoing probe of Illinois public officials. In one of those conversations, the developer allegedly told Ata that Bob Kjellander, a prominent GOP state lobbyist, was talking to Rove about getting rid of Fitzgerald. The reason: to "get a new U.S. attorney" who would not pursue the Illinois corruption probe, the source said. Ata, who has pleaded guilty to corruption-related charges and is now cooperating with the Feds, has no evidence that the conversation took place other than what Rezko allegedly told him, the source says.

I swear, somewhere on Isikoff's computer there's a file called "KeepRoveOutOfThePokey.dot." It reads something like this:

A source familiar with [insert name of witness against Rove in the current scandal]'s testimony (who asked not to be identified talking about sensitive matters) said that [insert summary of witness testimony]. [insert all details described in any legal documents; when possible, quote the pertinent phrases verbatim]. [insert clear description of whether or not witness has any direct evidence that implicates Rove].

I mean, Isikoff **must** have a template for this stuff, right? Otherwise, how would he be able to replicate these helpful leaks so precisely time and time again?

One more thing. I wonder why Isikoff quoted that bit from Conyers: "intends to investigate the facts and circumstances alleged in this testimony"? Was Isikoff probing for more

specific information there, too, such as whether Conyers already had some kind of evidence from Ata, or whether Conyers planned to bring Ata to testify?

Update: very very basic grammar fixed per danps.