

SCOTTIE MCC'S CHRONOLOGY: SEPTEMBER 29

In this post, I showed that Scottie McC should have suspected that Rove was lying at least by September 27, when it would have become clear that Rove had already been less than forthcoming about his conversations with Bob Novak and when it should have become clear that, after finding out the identities of the 2 SAOs alleged to have leaked Valerie Wilson's identity to 6 journalists, Mike Allen immediately called Rove for comment.

Which brings us to September 29, the day when Bush told Scottie McC that Rove "didn't do it."

Before I start, let me point out that Scottie McC presents several events that happened on September 29, most of which he doesn't place in chronology within that day. These are (in the order I'm guessing they occurred):

"That morning the Washington Post was reporting that the Justice Department had opened a criminal investigation into the disclosure of Plame's identity."

[Between 7:00 and 7:30 AM] Bush told Scottie that "Karl didn't do it ... He told me he didn't do it."

"Andy [Card] replied that he had not heard anything new [about the investigation], and as far as he knew we had yet to hear from the Justice Department."

[simultaneous with the Bush-Card-McClellan meeting, but necessarily viewed afterwards] "Joe Wilson, appearing on ABC's Good Morning America, was backing away from his previous assertion that Rove had been responsible for leaking his wife's identity."

However, Wilson also asserted that he believed Rove 'at a minimum condoned the leak.'"

"I checked with Rove that day to confirm that he'd neither leaked nor condoned leaking Plame's identity. He assured me that was correct."

Two things about this chronology. First, by putting the GMA Wilson comments and the Rove question before his account of the Bush-Card-McClellan meeting as he does in his book, Scottie McC suggests he had one more reason to believe Bush when he told him Rove hadn't leaked Plame's identity—that even Joe Wilson was backing off the allegation. But since GMA airs at 7:00, precisely when Scottie McC says he was meeting with Bush, it's unlikely he saw Wilson's comments until after **both** the Bush-Card-McClellan meeting **and** the senior staff meeting (which took place immediately afterwards). We know, however, that Scottie McC saw the GMA comments before his 12:18 press briefing, because he mentions Wilson in the briefing. That's just one small detail that might make Scottie McC's acceptance of Bush's statement more credible.

Also, note how Scottie McC states that the WaPo had reported "that morning" that DOJ had opened a criminal investigation. As I pointed out in my last post, that's just meaningless. Not only had the WaPo also reported the day before—on September 28—that "At CIA Director George J. Tenet's request, the Justice Department is looking into an allegation that administration officials leaked the name of an undercover CIA officer to a journalist," but on September 26, NBC had also reported the investigation (and at least two outlets had referenced the NBC report in stories on September 27). In other words, Scottie McC suggests that the White House had just received its first report of the investigation on the same day that Scottie McC and Bush discussed how to respond to press inquiries about it.

By mentioning the September 29 WaPo article before he discusses the Bush conversation, Scottie McC suggests that he and Bush were responding to news of the investigation itself. But they had had that news for two days by that point. More likely, they were responding to the September 28 article—the one that seemed to implicate Rove directly (and which Scottie McC had reason to believe—based on Allen’s apparent knowledge—did so even more directly). Also, by suggesting that the White House received its first notice of the investigation on the date when Bush made these comments, it pretends that the Rove-Bush conversation and the Bush-Scottie conversation couldn’t be an attempt to coordinate a cover story, because it pretends they hadn’t already known about the investigation for two days.

With that in mind, read Scottie McC’s description of the meeting.

"Hey Scott," the president said good-naturedly. "What’s on the press’s mind today?"

"The reports of a Justice Department investigation into the leaks of Valerie Plame’s name," I said, knowing his question was just pro forma since he, like all of us, was well aware of the topic du jour. "I want to talk to you about it before I gaggle."

"Karl didn’t do it," the president reflexively said, referring to his senior adviser and chief political strategist, Karl Rove. The "it" clearly meant disclosing Plame’s identity to reporters. He was holding on to the armrests and leaning back in his chair behind the desk. He seemed to be in fairly good spirits.

"I know ..." I began, not realizing the president had more to say.

"He told me he didn’t do it," the president continued, cutting me off

midsentence.

[snip]

Then the president glanced toward Andy [Card], who had raised his hands above his waist and was now gesturing down with both to indicate to the president that he should keep quiet and stop talking about what was fast becoming a sensitive subject.

"What?" the president said, looking at Andy with a slight hint of irritation in his voice. "That's what Karl told me."

"I know," Andy said. "But you shouldn't be talking about it with anyone, not even me."

[snip]

"I talked to Karl too," I continued, as I looked back to the president. "He said the same thing to me."

"Does the press think he did it?" the president asked.

"I've already told them he didn't," I responded. "But I'm sure they will ask again today." I mentioned the Sunday story in the Washington Post, which said that two top White House officials had called at least six Washington journalists to disclose Plame's name and current position at the CIA.

I didn't delve further into the president's conversation with Karl, in part because of Andy's unease. But I assumed from his comments that he had asked Karl earlier that morning whether or not he was one of the two sources. It seemed to be fresh on his mind, and I felt confident about defending Karl, since the president too had received assurances from him.

Now, obviously Scottie admits that Bush was probably thinking of the 1X2X6 article—as I’ve argued he probably was. But by presenting the chronology as he does, he minimizes the degree to which Scottie McC **should** have had a well-grounded reason to believe Rove had been directly implicated to Allen and Bush probably did too. Scottie McC also invents the least incriminating chronology for the Bush-Rove conversation—that Bush had read the 1X2X6 article and only then asked Rove about it—without considering the possibility that Rove came to Bush to broach the subject after he learned the article would appear on September 27. Furthermore, Scottie McC interprets Andy Card’s attempts to quiet Bush (reminiscent of Libby shushing David Addington when he spoke about insta-declassification and CIA records on spouses) as an attempt to get them to stop talking about it—and not, as the gesture suggests, an attempt to get Bush to lower his voice so no one else heard it.

So let’s review the critical chronology:

September 16: Rove tells Scottie McC he wasn’t one of Novak’s sources

September 26: NBC leaks news of investigation

September 27: Allen calls Rove, implying Rove is one of the 2 officials implicated in the 1X2X6 article; Rove tells Scottie McC a different story than he told him on September 16, admitting he talked to Novak, but denying he confirmed Plame’s identity

September 28: The WaPo reports the 1X2X6 story

September 29: George Bush tells Scottie McC that "Rove didn’t do it"

It looks a whole lot less innocent and a whole lot more like an attempt to order Scottie McC to publicly exonerate Rove when you look at the

chronology that way, doesn't it?