

SCOTTIE'S BRIEFING

I'm going to continue my discussion of Scottie McC's chronology. But first I want to look closely at how Scottie McC describes his September 29 press briefing, and what the briefing actually includes.

Here's what Scottie McC claims to have cleared with Bush in the early morning September 29 conversation (in addition to the "Karl didn't do it" claptrap described in this post).

I then turned the conversation to the approach I was planning to take with the White House press corps later in the morning at the gaggle and in the afternoon briefing.

[snip]

"I plan on saying you believe the leaking of classified information is a serious matter, and that it should be looked into and pursued to the fullest possible extent," I said to the president. "And that the Department of Justice is the appropriate agency to look into it. And I don't plan on going too far beyond that."

"Yeah, I think that's right," the president replied. "I do believe it's a serious matter. And I hope they find who did it."

"And Andy, I am still good to say that nothing has been brought to our attention to suggest White House involvement, beyond what we have read in the papers, right?" I asked.

"I do not know of anything," Andy responded. "And last I heard from Al, he did not either," he added, referring to Al Gonzales, the White House counsel and longtime Bush loyalist from Texas.

And here's what he cleared with him between his gaggle and his briefing.

Card and Gonzales had already assured me they knew of no White House involvement in the disclosure of Plame's identity.

[snip]

I'd visited with [the President] before the briefing to make sure he was fine with my saying in response to questions that he would fire anyone involved in the leaking of classified information, specifically the identity of Valerie Plame.

And here's one last detail of what he says he said—though he doesn't claim he got Bush to approve it first.

I reiterated that the president expected everyone in his administration to adhere to the highest standard of conduct, and that no one would have been authorized to leak the identity of Wilson's wife.

And here's the briefing in question for your viewing pleasure.

No One Would Be Authorized

Let's start with the last bit first, Scottie's assertion that he said "no one would have been authorized to leak the identity of Wilson's wife." I was struck by Scottie's assertion since we are now at the place where we know Bush did authorize the leak of some information, perhaps or perhaps not including Valerie Wilson's identity. It seemed, when I first read it, an attempt to retrospectively distance Bush from a leak that appears to have been done with his implicit—though perhaps not explicit—authorization.

But Scottie's right—he did say that, once. Almost word for word.

No one would be authorized to do such a thing.

I find it telling, though, whom he said it to: Helen Thomas, in response to the question,

Scott, has anyone – has the President tried to find out who outed the CIA agent? And has he fired anyone in the White House yet?

It was the first thing out of his mouth in the briefing, and he did not repeat it again. I find that telling because it's almost the only question that directly asks about outing a CIA officer.

Classified Information

The rest of his responses about leaking information mostly refer to classified information, not outing a CIA spy. But look at how he refers to this classified information. He repeatedly questions whether or not Valerie Wilson (who is never named) really was a covert agent.

And I've seen different statements in the media reports from, the CIA hasn't confirmed or denied that this was a covert agent for the CIA;

[snip]

Q He does not know whether or not the classified information was divulged here, and he's only getting his information from the media?

MR. McCLELLAN: No, we don't know – we don't have any information that's been brought to our attention beyond what we've seen in the media reports.

[snip]

I've seen the media reports and in one report I saw that the CIA had neither

confirmed or denied that this individual was a covert operative for the CIA.

But for much of the briefing, Scottie refers very specifically to Bush's opposition to leaking classified information.

The President believes that if someone leaked classified information of this nature, that it should be looked into.

[snip]

Q But isn't the President concerned when there is a leak of this magnitude, that could threaten someone's very life?

MR. McCLELLAN: I think I addressed that earlier. Absolutely, the President believes that this is a serious matter when you're talking about the leak of classified information. The leak of classified information, yes, you're absolutely right, can compromise sources and methods.

As I noted in 2005, this all looks like a very technical denial. It would be serious, Bush thinks, if someone leaked classified information. Back then, this appeared to be an effort to deny that Valerie was covert. But given the hindsight of knowing that Cheney was apparently insta-declassifying stuff to leak to journalists, they may have been working with the understanding that Valerie wasn't covert because Cheney had insta-declassified her identity.

Which is why I think it rather significant that the only time Scottie McC said "no one would be authorized" to do something was when he was asked—by Helen—who outed a CIA agent.

Remarkably, everything Scottie McC said on September 29, 2003 (except for his exoneration of Rove) is consistent with what he says now: leaking classified information is serious but that Bush would not have authorized the leak of a CIA Agent's identity. Of course, now Scottie

McC admits that Cheney and Libby leaked information by declassifying it, but Scottie McC claims he didn't learn that until April 2006.

When Did You Talk to Karl?

It's worth noting that Scottie McC lies outright when asked whether he had spoken to Rove the previous weekend (after news of the 1X2X6 story came out).

MR. McCLELLAN: And, again, I said I didn't — it is not something I needed to ask him, but I like to, like you do, verify things and make sure that it is completely accurate. But I knew that Karl would not be involved in something like this.

Q And that conversation that you had with Karl was this weekend? Or when was it?

MR. McCLELLAN: I'm sorry? No, I've had conversations with him previously. I'm going to leave it at that.

Perhaps Scottie McC didn't think the "no" in response to the question "was this weekend" implied that he had not spoken to Rove over the weekend, when he now reports he had. But it sure seems to me that Scottie McC deliberately tried to hide the fact that had spoken to Rove in relation to the 1X2X6 story.

Did Karl Have the Information?

Finally, there's Scottie McC's curious response to questions about whether or not Karl had the information—Valerie Wilson's covert identity—when he spoke with people about this issue.

Q I have one other follow up. Can you say for the record whether Mr. Rove possessed the information about Mr. Wilson's wife, but merely did not talk to anybody about it? Do you know whether for a fact he knew —

MR. McCLELLAN: I don't know whether or not — I mean, I'm sure he probably saw the same media reports everybody else in this room has.

Q When you talked to Mr. Rove, did you discuss, did you ever have this information, could you have talked to him?

MR. McCLELLAN: We're going down a lot of different roads here. I've made it very clear that he was not involved, that there's no truth to the suggestion that he was.

I find the response curious because according to Scottie McC, Rove had told him just **two days before** he got asked these questions that he had not had the information when he spoke to Novak.

Rove got in touch with my trusted deputy Claire Buchan, letting her know he'd received an email inquiry from Mike for the story.

[snip]

Claire spoke with Rove before I returned to the White House in the staff vans. I arrived back at my office sometime after 1:00 P.M., and a short time later got the rundown from her.

She informed me that Rove had volunteered to her that Novak had called him about Plame. He hadn't confirmed Plame's CIA status because he didn't know about it

I replied in bewilderment, "Karl spoke to Novak?"

[snip]

He repeated to me what he had told Claire earlier in the day: "He [Novak] said he'd heard that Wilson's wife

worked at the CIA. I told him I couldn't confirm it because I didn't know."

Why, if Rove had just told Scottie McC that he didn't know of Valerie Wilson's covert identity when he spoke to Novak on July 8 or 9, was Scottie McC unwilling to pass that information on to the press corps? Didn't he believe Rove? And if so, then why did he exonerate Rove publicly?

The Final Tally

For fun, here's my tally of what Scottie McC did say in his briefing:

"Leaking of classified information is a serious matter:" 6 mentions

"DOJ is appropriate entity to investigate this:" 35 mentions

"Bush hopes they find the person:" 3 mentions

"No evidence White House was involved:" 30 mentions

"If anyone leaked this, Bush will fire them:" 2 mentions

"The CIA has not confirmed she was covert:" 3 mentions

"The White House hasn't been told anything by DOJ:" 7 mentions