

BUSH'S JULY 7, 2003 DISCUSSION ABOUT WILSON

One thing DOJ redacted in this document—the most highly protected part of the document—was Cheney relaying what was said about Joe Wilson at a meeting with Bush, probably on July 7, 2003.

When Fitzgerald asked Cheney whether he ever spoke about Wilson with Condi Rice, Andy Card, and Karl Rove, Cheney answered this way:

The Vice President advised that it was probable that he discussed Joe Wilson at some point with National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, but he had no recollection of discussing Valerie Wilson at all with her. He advised his thoughts were the same regarding Presidential Chief of Staff Andrew Card—he probably would have discussed Joe Wilson with Card, but not Valerie Wilson. He said the same held true for Presidential Advisor Karl Rove—he probably discussed Joe Wilson with Rove, but would not have discussed Valerie Wilson with him.

The Vice President went on to explain his reason for believing he possibly discussed Joe Wilson with the latter three individuals. The Vice President stated that after he receives his 7:00 a.m. briefing at his residence from the CIA briefer, he travels to the White House where he joins the President for a daily CIA briefing which the President receives from either DCI Tenet or DDCI McLaughlin. Chief of Staff Card and Dr. Rice are also present for these briefings, along with a Presidential briefer from the CIA. Normally, when the CIA's briefing is completed, the four, who are sometimes joined after the

briefing by Mr. Rove, will discuss a wide range of topics. At some point in time, after the Wilson issue had become public, the Vice President recalls [two lines redacted].

The Vice President said he could not recall exactly when he had this discussion and who was present for it, but it may have been at one of the morning meetings. He said that it was possible he had the discussion with the President prior to the publication of Wilson's editorial on 7/6/03, but it probably occurred afterwards. It may have occurred early on Monday, 7/7/03 although he stated that he would not have discussed it with the President on Sunday, 7/6/03, the day when he returned to Washington from Wyoming. Additionally, the Vice President had no recollection of discussing Wilson's wife at any time with the President.

DOJ has exempted the redaction claiming Presidential Communication. In their filing on the interview, they wrote,

The presidential communications privilege protects certain confidential communications with the President pertaining to his conduct of his Office. In this case, the privilege protects portions of the FBI report, see page 12, lines 9-11, ... because they summarize a confidential conversation between the Vice President and the President.

So to review, Cheney admitted to talking to Condi, Card, and Rove about Wilson, by rather circuitously (!?!?) admitting that something was said about Wilson while they all met, possibly on the morning of July 7, 2003.

Now, I'll come back to this admission—probably many many times.

But just to fill out the chronology a little, here's an exchange Fitzgerald had with Libby about events of that morning during Libby's March 5, 2004 grand jury appearance.

Q. And on July 7th, do you recall if at the 6:45 briefing in the morning you and the Vice President asking Craig Schmall about Mr. Wilson and the circumstances of his trip?

A. I don't, but it makes sense because the article had come out the day before.

Q . And do you recall if at the senior staff meeting at 8:45 that day whether or not Karl Rove and others discussed that we needed to get a message out about Mr. Wilson, which is that the administration and the Vice President in particular, did not send him to Niger and that his report did not resolve the issue?

A. That sounds right. There was a day – I recall a day or maybe two when Karl spoke about it at the senior staff meeting. In one of them, I made some notes about it. I don't recall the date, but that would – it was right in that day – it was within a day of that, if it wasn't that day.

[snip]

Q. And I believe if we checked, it might be at 9:36 that morning that Ari Fleischer, in a press gaggle, made the points that the Vice President did not request the trip, or know about it, or get briefed on the results.

A. That actually sounds right, sir.

Q. And thereafter, after the 6:45 briefing with the CIA briefer, and the senior staff meeting, and then Cathie Martin's e-mail, and Ari Fleischer's press gaggle, you then went to lunch

with Mr. Fleischer about noon?

So Cheney and Libby asked Schmall (for at least the third time) about Wilson's trip. Then Cheney went into a briefing, then meeting, with Bush, Condi, Card, and Rove. And then Rove went into the senior staff meeting talking about how they had to push back against Wilson. Cathie Martin wrote up some talking points reflecting Rove's comments. And then Libby told Ari Fleischer about Plame's identity.

It's just a mere five hours from Cheney and Rove's conversation with Bush to Libby telling the White House Press Secretary that Plame was a CIA officer.