

Editorial

Throw the Bums Out

Syndicated columnist Robert Novak weighed in on Sept. 14 with his own account of former Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage's role in leaking the identity of former CIA clandestine officer Valerie Plame, charging that Colin Powell's deputy had gone out of his way to "out" the wife of Ambassador Joseph Wilson. While Novak's account of his private discussion with Armitage may prove accurate, it says nothing about the underlying subject of Special Counsel Patrick Fitzgerald's probe: Was there a politically driven policy decision at the White House to expose Valerie Plame? And if so, who was responsible?

Given that the issue of the impeachability of both President Bush and Vice President Cheney has become Topic Number One in Washington over the past few weeks, the Plame affair takes on new significance.

Some things are clear, even without access to any of the privileged grand jury and Special Counsel records. First, there were a number of senior Bush Administration officials who participated in the feeding frenzy of leaks against Ambassador Wilson and Valerie Plame—including Vice Presidential chief of staff Lewis Libby and White House deputy chief of staff Karl Rove. This was a concerted campaign, not the action of a single individual.

Second, *EIR*'s own sources had reported many months ago that the first Executive Branch meeting on Joe Wilson had taken place in March 2003 in the Office of the Vice President—prior to the U.S. invasion of Iraq. The occasion was the United Nations Security Council testimony by Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei, head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). ElBaradei revealed that the purported Niger government documents, "proving" that Saddam Hussein had been seeking large quantities uranium from the African state, were shoddy forgeries. Within 24 hours of the ElBaradei testimony, Joe Wilson appeared on CNN and suggested that the White House review its own files, because they would show that they knew a year earlier that the Iraq-Niger uranium plot reports were dubious at best. The Wilson TV appearance, on the eve of the U.S. invasion, set off alarm bells, according to *EIR*'s sources, and the Cheney-led witchhunt was on.

According to a recently published book by *News-*

week's Michael Isikoff and *The Nation's* David Corn, Valerie Plame was not merely a CIA "non-official cover" (NOC) officer. At the time of the Iraq invasion, she was an important figure in the Counterproliferation Division of the Directorate of Operations, in charge of operations for a special Iraq Task Force, charged with recruiting assets with first-hand knowledge of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. By the time of the ElBaradei testimony at the UN, Plame was in charge of a large team of CIA officers, who had been recruiting assets inside Iraq and Iran. In short, she was one of the best-informed officials in the intelligence community about what was really going on inside Iraq, and the indications are that the CIA—despite intense pressure from Cheney and Libby—was not buying into the idea that Saddam's Iraq was brimming with WMD.

The leak to Novak did serious harm to the U.S. intelligence community's counterproliferation efforts, beyond the fact that it wrecked the career of an important young CIA officer, who has now left the Agency.

Which brings us to what may emerge in the weeks ahead as the "smoking gun" of the entire affair: Dick Cheney's copy of the *New York Times* July 6, 2003 column by Joe Wilson, "What I Did Not Find in Africa," complete with handwritten notes from the Veep. We hope that Special Counsel Fitzgerald will grill the Vice President on the events surrounding that annotated article—including the precise date when he scribbled his comment about the Wilson Niger trip being a "junket arranged by his wife."

Given the pile-up of charges against the President and Vice President, the question of Cheney's role in the "Get Joe Wilson and Valerie Plame" affair may very well rise to the level of high crimes and misdemeanors. Under any circumstances, the need to get to the bottom of the Wilson-Plame affair remains a priority—even in the wake of the Armitage revelations.

It is our belief that we have reached the point that the impeachment of Bush and Cheney passed from a partisan issue to an issue of vital national security for our Constitutional Republic. As Lyndon LaRouche states in this issue of *EIR*, it is high time that American patriots mobilize behind the demand: Throw the bums out!