

Libby Trial: Cheney Closely Involved in Handling Fallout over Iraq Intelligence

VP's Former Communications Director Was 'Irritated' She Wasn't Talking to Reporters

Jan. 25, 2007 — Testimony in the trial of I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby on Thursday revealed that Vice President Dick Cheney was closely involved in handling press inquiries concerning President Bush's claims in 2003 that Iraq was trying to procure uranium.

Prosecutor Patrick Fitzgerald sharply questioned Catherine Martin, Cheney's former communications director, about internal White House deliberations on the Iraq-Niger controversy and how the administration would respond to press inquiries about claims made in President Bush's 2003 State of the Union address.

"His name is Joe Wilson. ... His wife works over here," a CIA spokesman told Martin on June 11, 2003, about an ambassador whose trip to Niger caused a public relations disaster for the White House and the CIA, she testified on Thursday.

Interest in the Iraq-Niger issue increased after several press reports indicated Wilson was sent on the mission after questions were raised on the issue from the Office of Vice President Cheney.

Valerie Wilson was a CIA officer married to former ambassador Wilson, who criticized the administration about intelligence leading up to the war in Iraq. Her name was published by political columnist Robert Novak on July 14, 2003 almost a week after Wilson's op-ed was published in the New York Times.

The prosecution contends that Libby was collecting information from State Department and CIA officials about an unnamed ambassador in a column published in early May 2003. Libby was eventually told by Marc Grossman, then Undersecretary of State for policy, and Robert Grenier, Iraq Issues Manager at the CIA that the Ambassador was Wilson and that his wife worked at the CIA.

Martin testified that after Libby, Vice President Cheney's former Chief of staff, had a June 11, 2003, telephone call with an official at the CIA she was in communication with then-CIA spokesman Bill Harlow to work on the issue.

"He was very helpful ... pleasant," Martin said of her first conversation with Harlow.

