

Statement By Senator Tom Harkin
Democratic Policy Committee Hearing On Intelligence Leaks
October 24, 2003

I want to thank the Chairman for holding this important hearing and I want to thank all of the witnesses for coming here today.

Fully 101 days have passed since Robert Novak's column, based on White House sources, exposed the identity of a CIA undercover agent. After prodding from the CIA and Sen. Schumer, it wasn't until two months later, on September 23, that the Justice Department officially launched its investigation. But even then, Justice failed to notify the White House until four days later to preserve all records relating to the matter.

So up to that point, there hadn't been a lot of press or publicity. Things were unfolding slowly. But this changed dramatically 27 days ago when the Washington Post reported that a senior administration official said that before Novak's column ran, two "senior White House officials" called at least six journalists and disclosed the identity and occupation of Joseph Wilson's wife.

And what has happened over the last 27 days? Well, not a lot from the White House, except some joking around about this matter by the President, and a generally blase attitude, summed up in Mr. Bush's statement that, well, we may never find out who the leakers are.

This is unacceptable. That Post article came out on a Sunday. On Monday morning, the President should have demanded answers from his staff. He should have called his senior staff members in the Oval Office, and asked them, one by one, if they were involved in the leak of the CIA agent's name to the media. He should have laid down the law and resolved this matter immediately.

Instead, Bush has joked about the leak. He nonchalantly speculated that the leaker may never be found. And then he allowed the matter to drop from sight.

Of course the message in all of this is clear. It is a calculated wink and nod. Mr. Bush is communicating that what the leakers did is not a matter of utmost gravity, not a matter of national security, and the leakers will be protected.

Clearly, this Administration has a double-standard. Since the September 11 attacks, it has rightly stressed the critical importance of human intelligence in tracking down terrorist groups and their leaders. Until this leak of a CIA covert agent's identity, the Administration quickly cracked down on anyone - including Senators - who leaked classified information to the press.

But if the purpose of a leak is to discredit or intimidate an Administration critic, well, that's another story entirely. In that case, national security be damned.

So Mr. Chairman, this hearing is incredibly urgent and important. The White House and the

Justice Department need to know that we are going to pursue this matter relentlessly. We are going to keep the pressure on Justice to conduct an exhaustive investigation. And we are not going to let up until the leakers are identified and punished.

Time and again, we are told that intelligence - specifically, human intelligence - is playing a critical role in the war on terrorism. The “senior White House officials” who blew the cover on this CIA agent, also compromising her contacts and sources, have done grave harm to our country. They must be brought to justice.