

LARRY JOHNSON

(with Michael Grimaldi and Brent Cavan)

I appreciate the chance to appear before the Democratic Policy Committee today to discuss the outing of a clandestine officer of the Central Intelligence Agency by two officials in the Bush Administration. Who those people are remains unknown but there is no dispute that columnist Robert Novak cited Bush officials as his sources. You will notice my statement carries the names of Michael Grimaldi and Brent Cavan. They cannot appear today but share the sentiments and views expressed in this statement. We all served with the wife of Ambassador Joseph Wilson and are outraged by the irresponsible actions of two people in the Bush Administration.

We slogged through the same swamps on patrols, passed clandestine messages to our agents during exercises, survived a simulated terrorist kidnapping and interrogation, kicked pallets from cargo planes, completed parachute jumps, and literally helped pick ticks off each other after weeks in the woods at a CIA training facility. We knew each other's secrets. We shared our fears, failures, and successes. We came to rely on each other in a way you do not find in normal civilian life. We understood that a slip of the tongue could end in death for those close to us or for people we didn't even know. We were trained by the best, to be the best. We were trained by the Central Intelligence Agency.

Even our Agency trainers may not fully appreciate what they created some eighteen years ago. Our joint training experience forged a bond of trust and a sense of duty. It is because of this bond of trust that we and two other colleagues, all former intelligence officers, appeared on ABC's Nightline to speak out on behalf of the wife of Ambassador Joseph Wilson, a sensitive undercover operative outed by columnist Robert Novak. The Ambassador's wife (we decline to use her name here) is a friend who went through the same Agency training with us. We acknowledge our continued obligation after all these years to protect each other and the intelligence community and the information we used to do our jobs (largely because we have friends, like Mrs. Wilson, who continue to serve). We are speaking out because someone in the Bush Administration seemingly does not understand this, although they signed the same oaths of allegiance and confidentiality that we did.

Many of us have moved on into the private sector, where this Agency aspect of our lives means little, but we have not forgotten our initial oaths to support the Constitution, our government, and to protect the secrets we learned and to protect each other. We still have friends who serve overseas. We protect them literally by keeping our mouths shut unless we are speaking amongst ourselves. We understand what this bond or the lack of it means.

Clearly some in the Bush Administration do not understand the requirement to protect and shield national security assets. Based on published information, we can only conclude that partisan politics was perceived as more important by staff in the Bush Administration. Someone or some few set aside their moral and legal obligations to

protect clandestine officers and security assets to pursue political retribution.

We're testifying to offer Mrs. Wilson our moral support and our prayers for her safety and her future. We also want to send a clear message to the political "operatives" responsible for "outing" Mrs. Wilson. Such action was treacherous, if not treasonous. Such action was taken with utter disregard for the dangerous times in which we all live. Such action has allowed the less attractive aspects of politics to supercede the Government's responsibility to protect the citizens of this nation and the individuals who serve in difficult, dangerous covert capacities.

This has set a sickening precedent. The "senior Administration officials" who did this have warned all U.S. intelligence officers and the Intelligence Community that any one individual may be compromised if providing information or factual analysis the White House does not like. A precedent, as one colleague pointed out during our brief television appearances, allows you to build a case based on previous legal actions and court decisions. It's a slippery slope if it lowers the bar.

Ambassador Wilson's views on Iraq or his political affiliations are irrelevant. Political differences serve as the basis for the give and take of representative government. He is a private citizen and can say what he likes. What is relevant is the damage caused by the exposure of Ambassador Wilson's wife as a covert CIA intelligence officer. This was a deliberate political act intended to exact retribution for Wilson's public expression of his views.

It is shameful on one level that the White House uses the news media to levy attacks on Ambassador Wilson. But the attacks go beyond the White House. We also have seen craven partisan proxies, a junior Congressman from Georgia for example, used to continue the assault. The efforts to discredit Ambassador Wilson have included questioning his competence to conduct an investigation in Niger and suggesting that his wife's covert status is of little value because she was "a low-level CIA employee". If Wilson's comments or analysis have no merit, why does the White House feel the need to launch such a coordinated attack? Why drag his wife and family into it? Why rationalize "low-level CIA employees" as unimportant?

The Intelligence Community must be shielded from politicization. The outing of Mrs. Wilson's true identity is an unfortunate symptom of the poisonous partisan politics that have infected Washington. Both Democrats and Republicans share responsibility for this mess. On the one hand we have seen judges nominated by President Bush, who have the approval of the American Bar Association, vilified as extremists by Democrats because they oppose abortion. On the other hand we have seen Republicans attack Ambassador Wilson and his wife because they made campaign contributions to Al Gore. The tit for tat must stop.

Beyond damaging the career of our colleague, the unnamed sources for this leak have put many other people potentially in harm's way. Other clandestine officers may have been protected by the same front company used by Mrs. Wilson. Foreign sources of

information, i.e. spies and unwitting foreigners who met with Mrs. Wilson could also be at risk. Many foreign intelligence services use incarceration, torture, and murder to great advantage in finding out what they want to know. If left unpunished, this cowardly act will not only hinder our efforts to recruit qualified individuals into the clandestine service, but it will have a far-reaching, deleterious effect on our ability to recruit foreign intelligence assets overseas. Who in their right mind would ever agree to become a spy for the United States when we cannot even protect our own undercover officers? If we will not protect our own people how can we reassure foreigners that we will safeguard them?

Republicans and Democrats agree that better human intelligence is vital to prevent future terror incidents. The goal of gathering better human intelligence will never be achieved, unless incidents like this are dealt with firmly and decisively.

We believe that President Bush has been a decisive leader in the war on terrorism. We believe that Congress has been a constructive collaborator of the President in that war. The outing of our colleague confronts both the President and the Congress with a choice. To sit by passively doing nothing or to make a strong, bipartisan declaration that national security and intelligence matters must be kept out of the muddy waters of politics. While the FBI investigation and Justice Department prosecution is the right path to take in seeking the truth behind this leak, the President must do more to ensure that his immediate staff and advisors get the message. It is up to the President to restore the bonds of trust with the Intelligence Community and the "low-level employees" who do the work of human intelligence gathering.

We joined the CIA to protect our country from foreign countries, tyrants, and terrorists who use torture and murder to achieve their ends. They followed the rule of force, not the rule of law. We now find ourselves with an administration in the United States where some of its members have chosen to act as tyrants. As loyal Americans and registered Republicans we implore President Bush to move quickly and decisively against those who, if not apprehended, will leave his Administration with the legacy of being the first to allow political operatives to betray the public trust.