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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

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Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman
Chairman, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform Hearing on Disclosure of CIA
Agent Valerie Plame Wilson's Identity and White House Procedures for Safeguarding
Classified Information
March 16, 2007

Today, the Committee is holding a hearing to examine how the White House handles highly classified information.

In June and July 2003, one of the nation's most carefully guarded secrets — the identity of covert CIA agent Valerie Plame Wilson — was repeatedly revealed by White House officials to members of the media.

This was an extraordinarily serious breach of our national security. President George W. Bush's father, the former President Bush, said — and I quote — “I have nothing but contempt and anger for those who ... expos[e] the name of our sources. They are, in my view, the most insidious, of traitors.”

Today, we will be asking three questions: (1) How did such a serious violation of our national security occur? (2) Did the White House take the appropriate investigative and disciplinary steps after the breach occurred? And (3) what changes in White House procedures are necessary to prevent future violations of our national security from occurring?

For more than three years, a special prosecutor, Patrick Fitzgerald, has been investigating the leak for its criminal implications. By definition, Mr. Fitzgerald's investigation had an extremely narrow criminal focus. It did not answer the broader policy questions raised by the release of Ms. Wilson's identity. Nor did it seek to ascribe responsibility outside of the narrow confines of the criminal law.

As the chief investigative committee in the House of Representatives, our role is fundamentally different than Mr. Fitzgerald's. It is not our job to determine criminal culpability. But it is our job to understand what went wrong, to insist on accountability, and to make recommendations to prevent future abuses.

We begin this process today.

This hearing is being conducted in open session. This is appropriate, but it is also challenging.

Ms. Wilson was a covert employee of the CIA. We cannot discuss all of the details of her CIA employment in open session.

I have met with General Hayden, the head of the CIA, to discuss what I can and cannot say about Ms. Wilson's service.

My staff has also worked with the agency to ensure these remarks do not contain classified information.

I have been advised by the CIA that even now, after all that has happened, I cannot disclose the full nature, scope, and character of Ms. Wilson's service to our nation without causing serious damage to our national security interests.

But General Hayden and the CIA have cleared these following comments for today's hearing.

During her employment at the CIA, Ms. Wilson was under cover.

Her employment status with the CIA was classified information prohibited from disclosure under Executive Order 12958.

At the time of the publication of Robert Novak's column on July 14, 2003, Ms. Wilson's CIA employment status was covert.

This was classified information.

Ms. Wilson served in senior management positions at the CIA, in which she oversaw the work of other CIA employees, and she attained the level of GS-14, step 6 under the federal pay scale.

Ms. Wilson worked on some of the most sensitive and highly secretive matters handled by the CIA.

Ms. Wilson served at various times overseas for the CIA.

Without discussing the specifics of Ms. Wilson's classified work, it is accurate to say that she worked on the prevention of the development and use of weapons of mass destruction against the United States.

In her various positions at the CIA, Ms. Wilson faced significant risks to her personal safety and her life.

She took on serious risks on behalf of her country.

Ms. Wilson's work in many situations had consequences for the security of her colleagues, and maintaining her cover was critical to protecting the safety of both colleagues and others.

The disclosure of Ms. Wilson's employment with the CIA had several serious effects.

First, it terminated her covert job opportunities with CIA.

Second, it placed her professional contacts at greater risk.

And third, it undermined the trust and confidence with which future CIA employees and sources hold the United States.

This disclosure of Ms. Wilson's classified employment status with the CIA was so detrimental that the CIA filed a crimes report with the Department of Justice.

As I mentioned, Ms. Wilson's work was so sensitive that even now, she is still prohibited from discussing many details of her work in public because of the continuing risk to CIA officials and assets in the field and to the CIA's ongoing work.

Some have suggested that Ms. Wilson did not have a sensitive position with the CIA or a position of unusual risk.

As a CIA employee, Ms. Wilson has taken a life-long oath to protect classified information, even after her CIA employment has ended.

As a result, she cannot respond to most of the statements made about her.

I want to make clear, however, that any characterization that minimizes the personal risk Ms. Wilson accepted in her assignments is flatly wrong.

There should be no confusion on this point.

Ms. Wilson has provided great service to our nation and has fulfilled her obligation to protect classified information admirably.

We are confident that she will uphold it again today.

That concludes the characterizations that the CIA is permitting us to make today.

To those comments, I want to add a personal note

For many in politics, praising the troops and those who defend freedom is second nature.

Often it's heartfelt ... sometimes it's cynical.

Almost always, we don't really know who they are. We know they're out there, but they are abstract heroes.

Two weeks ago, we finally met some of them face to face when our committee visited Walter Reed. Every member was appalled at what we learned. Our treatment of the troops didn't match our rhetoric.

Thankfully, Mrs. Wilson hasn't suffered physical harm.

But she too has been one of those people fighting to protect our freedom. And she, like thousands of others, was serving our country bravely and anonymously.

She didn't ask to have her identity revealed. But it was ... repeatedly. And that was an inexcusable breach of the responsibility our country owes her. Once again our actions haven't matched our rhetoric.

I want to thank Mrs. Wilson for the tremendous service she gave to our country and recognize the remarkable personal sacrifices that she and countless others have made to protect our national security.

You and your colleagues perform truly heroic work and what happened to you not only should never have happened, but we should all work to make sure it never happens again.