

News from
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**Opening Statement for Joint Senate Democratic Policy Committee and
House Democratic Government Reform Committee Hearing On The
National Security Consequences Of Disclosing The Identity Of A Covert
Intelligence Officer**

Representative Rush Holt
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Chairman Dorgan, thanks to you and my colleague and friend, Representative Waxman, for convening this panel and for including me in these proceedings. I also want to thank our witnesses for being here today, who between them have decades of experience in our nation's intelligence services. They know better than anyone else the consequences of breaches of classified information, and the damage such breaches can cause, the mortal danger such breaches can place our Clandestine Services officers in.

Mr. Chairman, we're here today because at least one, and possibly several, Bush administration officials leaked the name of CIA officer Valerie Plame to columnist Robert Novak, TIME magazine reporter Matt Cooper, and at least four other journalists, according to published reports. This is a very important matter. Former President Bush, the current President's father, said that those who expose our human sources are "the most insidious of traitors." Ten former intelligence officers signed a letter calling the disclosure of this particular officer's identity "a shameful and unprecedented event in American history." It is an uncommon occurrence, and for good reason.

Intelligence is intended to save lives. Intelligence is intended to protect our national security. Intelligence is intended to be something that prevents us from going to war, and to help us win wars once they are begun. But to collect that intelligence, people have to take great risks. Our clandestine agents spend their careers operating under a false identity, frequently dealing with unsavory characters in dangerous places, all in the hope of finding that one piece of information that will help thwart the next 9/11 or bring a terrorist leader to justice. We do not often publicly acknowledge the extraordinary people who do this difficult and dangerous work, precisely because it would compromise their effectiveness. But as a group, I am sure that would not have it any other way. As a nation, we are indeed fortunate to still be able to find such people, America's shadow warriors.

It is a terrible thing when their effectiveness is lost through some accident. It is even worse when they are exposed by the counterintelligence people in another country. But worst of all, of almost unthinkable tragedy, is when a person would be exposed by a representative of his or her own government, someone who also took an oath to protect

classified information. And that, unfortunately, is precisely what happened to Ms. Plame. One or more officials of the Bush administration deliberately blew her cover.

Let's be clear about the consequences of this politically motivated gratuitous breach of national security. It put Valerie Plame and her family at potential bodily risk. Anyone who ever had lunch with Valerie Plame in a foreign country is now suspected by that country as having been fraternizing with an American spy. Foreign intelligence services are taking a fresh look at any American living in their country, regardless of whether they have connections with the U.S. embassy or expatriate community. And the men and women of our clandestine intelligence services have gotten a clear message from our Commander in Chief: contrary viewpoints are unwelcome, and traditional boundaries of national security will not be respected.

When this scandal broke, the President initially said that he would find and fire this person. Then a little bit later he said "It is going to be really hard to find the person." Now, the President says that he won't do anything while a criminal investigation is pending. And as we all know, he only resorted to this formulation after it became known that Rove had lied about his role in the leak in the first place.

Fortunately, the Constitution ensures that the President's failure to act does not constrain us. On July 14, Mr. Waxman joined me and 48 of our colleagues in offering a Resolution of Inquiry into this episode. Our legislation requires that the President, the Secretaries of State and Defense, the Attorney General, and the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency provide to the Congress all documentary materials—written or electronic—that pertain to the unauthorized disclosure of Ms. Plame's identity within 14 days of the passage of the resolution. In early 2004, the majority killed a similar measure in a closed-door meeting of the House Intelligence Committee on a party-line vote. Whether they will repeat their error this time remains to be seen, but I continue to hope that my colleagues will come to understand that the sooner the Congress addresses this issue, the better.

While Mr. Fitzgerald and the grand jury will be the final arbiters of who, if anyone, will be indicted with a federal crime in this matter, Congress did not surrender its prerogatives to investigate the executive branch's conduct in this matter the day Mr. Fitzgerald opened his investigation. Congress has a clear role to play in this matter, and that role is oversight. We already know that there are at least some potential ambiguities in existing legislation designed to protect the identities of our intelligence officers, ambiguities that Congress should examine and rectify as soon as possible. We also need to determine how and why information on Ms. Plame made its way into classified policy memo's sent to then-Secretary of State Powell and Undersecretary of State for Policy Mark Grossman. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on these and other issues.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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