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CBS News

FACE THE NATION

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GUESTS: Former Ambassador JOSEPH WILSON

**Representative ROY BLUNT, (R-MO)
House Majority Whip**

**Senator CHARLES SCHUMER, (D-NY)
Judiciary Committee**

**Senator LINDSEY GRAHAM, (R-SC)
Judiciary Committee**

**JAN CRAWFORD GREENBURG
The Chicago Tribune**

MODERATOR: BOB SCHIEFFER - CBS News

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**FACE THE NATION - CBS NEWS
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BOB SCHIEFFER, host:

Today on FACE THE NATION, Karl Rove and the mysterious leak. And the Supreme Court-- Who will the president nominate? Did presidential adviser Karl Rove reveal the name of a CIA secret agent to reporters? And if so, should he be fired? We'll get both sides from former Ambassador Joe Wilson, the agent's husband, and Congressman Roy Blunt, Republican of Missouri and longtime friend of Rove. Then we'll turn to the Supreme Court. How soon should a nominee be named? And should President Bush pick a minority or a woman to replace Sandra Day O'Connor? We'll ask two members of the Senate Judiciary Committee: Democrat Chuck Schumer of New York, and Republican Lindsey Graham of South Carolina.

Jan Crawford Greenburg of the Chicago Tribune joins in the questioning. And I'll have a final word on the White House mess that could have been avoided. But, first, the Karl Rove controversy on FACE THE NATION.

Announcer: FACE THE NATION with CBS News chief Washington correspondent Bob Schieffer. And now from CBS News in Washington, Bob Schieffer.

SCHIEFFER: And with us now Ambassador Joe Wilson and the House majority whip, Roy Blunt. Joining in the questioning this morning, Jan Crawford Greenburg.

Well, in this ongoing controversy over who blew the cover of CIA secret agent Valerie Plame, who is Mr. Wilson's wife, it came out this week that top White House strategist Karl Rove did at least talk about it with two reporters. But now a new set of anonymous sources have come forward to say that Rove learned about Plame from a reporter or another government official, not the other way around. And this morning the chairman of the Republican Party is saying the Democrats should apologize to Rove because this all vindicates him.

Well, Mr. Wilson, I'll give you the first shot at that. Do you--are you--do you think an apology is in order?

Ambassador JOSEPH WILSON: In 1999, this president's father said that those who would expose covert sources are the most insidious of traitors. Six years later, we have now documentary evidence that Mr. Rove gave my wife, a covert operative's, name to a reporter. A week after that documentary evidence has appeared, not a single Republican of national standing has stepped forward and said this is wrong, to my knowledge.

SCHIEFFER: He did not give her name, according to what we're now hearing. But he said he was aware of it and...

Amb. WILSON: He said, 'Wilson's wife.'

SCHIEFFER: Wilson's wife.

Amb. WILSON: Wilson's wife is Valerie Wilson. That is her name. She is Mrs. Wilson.

SCHIEFFER: Well, what about this suggestion this morning that the Democrats ought to apologize because they say this is a smear on Karl Rove.

Amb. WILSON: This is an issue of national security. Did somebody leak classified information, the name of the covert operative to a reporter? That's what this is all about. The former president called them the most insidious of traitors. Nobody has stepped forward from the Republican side and said this was wrong. They have tried to make this partisan. It is not partisan. It is national security.

Ms. JAN CRAWFORD GREENBURG (The Chicago Tribune): Ambassador, I am just not clear on something. The law actually covers and protects covert agents who served abroad within the last five years. So if these conversations took place in 2003, does that law protect your wife? Did she serve abroad as an agent since 1998?

Amb. WILSON: Well, I'm not a lawyer, first of all. But the CIA would not have frivolously referred this to the Justice Department if they did not believe a possible crime had been committed. The possible crime has now been investigated for two years by Mr. Fitzgerald and by the FBI. It's taken two years, despite the fact that the president himself instructed all of his employees to cooperate fully with the investigation.

Ms. GREENBURG: But...

Amb. WILSON: It's taken two years even though--it's taken two years and it's been litigated up to the Supreme Court before we finally are now getting some movement on this in this documentary evidence that is now being produced.

Ms. GREENBURG: But had she served abroad in the time period from...

Amb. WILSON: I would just tell you that she was covered according to the CIA, and the CIA made the referral.

SCHIEFFER: Well, Mr. Blunt, let's get your side of all this. Do you think apologies are in order?

Representative ROY BLUNT (Republican, Missouri; Majority Whip): Well, I do think we spend a lot of time in Washington saying things before they need to be said and then we spend a lot more time demanding apologies for whatever was said.

SCHIEFFER: Well, has Karl Rove done anything wrong, in your view?

Rep. BLUNT: You know, that's what the special prosecutor is looking at this will determine. Again, I think we're rushing to conclusions before--when we really actually assign somebody to find out the facts and find those conclusions. It does look like to me--and I'm not a lawyer, either, so neither the ambassador nor I are guilty of that one thing. It does look to me, from looking at the law, that the law may not apply here. That's what the prosecutor is supposed to decide. It certainly wouldn't be the first time that the CIA might have been overzealous in sort of maintaining the kind of top-secret definition on things longer than they needed to. You know, this was a job that the ambassador's wife had that she went to every day. It was a desk job. I think many people in Washington understood that her employment was at the CIA, and she went to that office every day. I think the--I think it's likely that that part of this problem will be

determined by the prosecutor, Mr. Fitzgerald, not to have met the standard of the law.

SCHIEFFER: Let me just interrupt here. Are you saying that the CIA took this too seriously?

Rep. BLUNT: I'm not saying that. What I'm saying is I think often the CIA classifies things as top secret that really don't need to be top secret. This could very well be a time when they have continued to call an agent a covert agent long beyond the time when she would have met the statute. This law was pa--was put in place in 1982 in specific response to a person in Greece being assassinated and another former agent giving up the names of lots of people who were in place at the time. That is, it's a law that's hard to violate because of that...

Amb. WILSON: Well...

Ms. GREENBURG: And...

Rep. BLUNT: ...and I don't think it probably was violated, but that's what...

Ms. GREENBURG: Well, could we go to...

Rep. BLUNT: ...Mr. Fitzgerald's supposed to be deciding.

Ms. GREENBURG: Well, could we go back to the ambassador in this? You declined to say whether she served abroad within five years of those conversations, but did anyone know that she was working at the agency or driving to Langley? Did her friends or neighbors? Did anyone know that your wife worked for the CIA.

Amb. WILSON: No. No.

Ms. GREENBURG: So what did they understand her occupation to be?

Amb. WILSON: Well, they understood her to be an energy analyst, an energy consultant.

Ms. GREENBURG: For a private...

Amb. WILSON: For a private corporation. That's correct.

SCHIEFFER: Congressman, what was Karl Rove trying to do here? We now know he was talking to some reporters about this. What were his motives here?

Rep. BLUNT: You know, I think in most cases, as I understand it, he was receiving calls from reporters. The one from Matt Cooper was supposed to be, I believe, about welfare reform. At the end of that conversation, the topic of whether the vice president sent the ambassador to Niger comes up, and Karl Rove, trying to make the point that even though the ambassador's op-ed piece had suggested that might have been the case, that it wasn't the vice president that made that determination but that the ambassador's wife was in the position where she may have been the person that recommended him. Now...

SCHIEFFER: Well...

Rep. BLUNT: ...that's trying to wave a person off a story, not trying to encourage a story. You've been on the other end of this conversation a lot more often than I have, Bob, and this is not trying to get a person to write a story, it's trying to get them not to write an inaccurate story.

Amb. WILSON: Can I just address the canard that somehow in all of this I had said that the vice president sent me out to Niger? Because that is one of the things that is going around. In my opinion piece, I said very specifically, 'In February of 2002 I was informed by officials at the Central Intelligence Agency that Vice President Dick Cheney's office had questions about a particular intelligence report.' The vice president later acknowledged on a program that, indeed, he had raised the question. That is taken as a task here, and the CIA then, at the operational level, determines the best way to answer it.

But again, let me go back to the essential issue here. This is a national security question. Whether the--whether it's a violation of the particular law to which you're referring or any other laws is something that Mr. Fitzgerald will decide. But loose lips sink ships. And in this case, a senior US government official, somebody sitting in the West Wing of the White House, was talking to reporters and he was giving up my wife's name.

Ms. GREENBURG: Well, now, let's go--Congressman, the White House...

Amb. WILSON: My wife's identity; pardon me.

Ms. GREENBURG: The identity. The White House said flatly--the spokesman, Scott McClellan, said Karl Rove was not involved. Was that deliberate or was he not knowing what he was talking about? How do you respond to that?

Rep. BLUNT: You know, actually, I'm not familiar with that quote. I thought you were going to say that the White House said that if the law was violated here, they'd take appropriate action. I believe that's still their point of view. I think Karl Rove and the White House have been totally cooperative with the prosecutor looking into this. And my belief is that the law probably was not violated, but we'll find out.

SCHIEFFER: Well, Congressman, I want to go back to when you said you thought the CIA may have been taking this a little too seriously. Do you think everybody is making too much of this? The ambassador sits here and says this is a matter of real national security, and yet we see that the White House--nobody from the White House is going out to talk about this. They've sort of turned it over to the chairman of the Republican Party. You've been good enough to defend Karl Rove. Is this something we ought not to take seriously? Is it just one of these Washington flaps? Or how would you assess all this?

Rep. BLUNT: Well, you know, sitting here by the ambassador, I don't want to suggest his view of this, but obviously this is more important to him because it affects him and it affects his wife in a way that I think probably does go well beyond the real impact that this discussion should have had. This has gone on way too long. There's a prosecutor out there who's looking at this, whose job it is to come to conclusion. And when the ambassador and Senator Schumer or when Howard Dean or when Mrs. Clinton, Senator Clinton, when Senator Kerry call for Howard--for the resignation of Karl Rove, I think that's just more of what goes on in Washington all the time,

instead of letting things run their course, let the process work like it should work, and then see what action needs to be taken and deal with the much--with the important things going on right now that we need to be thinking about today.

SCHIEFFER: Well, do you think the president's credibility has been hurt by all this?

Rep. BLUNT: I don't think the president's credibility has been hurt.

SCHIEFFER: The White House credibility?

Rep. BLUNT: I--you know, we'll have to see what the special prosecutor says, but I think they will come back and say that no law was violated.

SCHIEFFER: Well, but I mean, I go to the point that the spokesman was saying that Karl Rove was not involved here, and he described these charges are ridiculous. Obviously it goes beyond that, it seems to me.

Rep. BLUNT: Well, I think spokesmen need to be very thoughtful about what they say and be sure that their credibility is sustained. I don't know the exact question that--what--whichever White House spokesman this was that was asked, but you do need to be sure that you're answering the question the right way.

SCHIEFFER: Do you believe Karl Rove deserves an apology?

Rep. BLUNT: Do I believe Karl Rove deserves an apology? I think from all these people in the last week that have rushed to say his security clearance should be taken away and all these sorts of things really just divert the discussion from the things that senators and congressmen should be doing, have done a a disservice to the country.

Ms. GREENBURG: Ambassador.

Amb. WILSON: In, I believe it was June 2004, at Sea Island, Georgia, the president in response to a question about whether he would fire somebody if he found that they had leaked this information said yes. The president is the man who prides himself on keeping his word. I do believe it's a question of trust with the American people. I also believe--and I've said this repeatedly--that the president should fire Karl Rove. I believe that before this new documentary came out, this documentary evidence came out, because I believe that using the West Wing of the White House to be engaged in a smear campaign is an outrageous abuse of power.

SCHIEFFER: All right. Gentlemen, I think we have to leave it there. Obviously, there's more to talk about. We'll be back in a moment to talk about the Supreme Court with two members of the Senate Judiciary Committee. We'll also ask them about this situation, coming up.

(Announcements)

SCHIEFFER: And we're joined now from Clemson, South Carolina, Republican Senator Lindsey Graham. And with us from New York, Democratic Senator Chuck Schumer.

Senator Schumer, let me ask you the question first. Ken Mehlman, the chairman of the Republican Party, is suggesting today that Democrats owe Karl Rove an apology because what has come out this week has clearly vindicated him. And you just heard Congressman Blunt, who is one of Karl Rove's friends, say that perhaps the CIA took all of this too seriously. What is your reaction to that?

Senator CHARLES SCHUMER (Democrat, New York; Judiciary Committee): Well, you know, I talked to George Tenet. I had called originally for this investigation to be launched because I was just outraged that the name of an agent was leaked for whatever reason. That's against the law and shouldn't be done. And I called George Tenet a few days after and spoke to other CIA officials. They were furious. They were not furious from a political point of view, they were furious from an agency point of view that that isn't done.

And now what we've found, Bob, is we have not found that Karl Rove has violated the law. We have found that he talked about the name of this agent, referring to her not using the name but who her husband was, which is the same thing as using the name. Well, that doesn't violate the law necessarily. That's for Prosecutor Fitzgerald to find out. But it does violate something called the Non-Disclosure Agreement that every White House official is asked to sign. That Non-Disclosure Agreement says, from what you it read here, it seems pretty clear that Karl Rove violated it. And so his security clearance ought to be suspended or revoked.

You know, every child knows you tell someone a secret once and they reveal it, you don't tell them another secret. And this Non-Disclosure Agreement, unlike the statute, it doesn't matter whether you were told by a press person first or some other people knew it, you can't give up this information to anybody or confirm it unless the information is declassified. So Rove ought to have his security clearance revoked now, and it's for the president to decide whether he should stay on. You give the president some latitude in terms of who his advisers are. But he ought to be treated just the same as any other federal employee...

SCHIEFFER: OK.

Sen. SCHUMER: ...who violates this agreement.

SCHIEFFER: Well, let's give Senator Graham a chance to react to that very same thing. Do you agree with Senator Schumer or disagree, Senator Graham?

Senator LINDSEY GRAHAM (Republican, South Carolina; Judiciary Committee): I totally disagree. The bottom line here is the concept of disclosing a CIA operative is a serious national security matter. That's one thing. There's a statute that prevents that. There's no evidence that Karl Rove did that. Mr. Wilson is, at best, disingenuous when he tries to tell the American people he didn't have a political agenda. He's been attacking the president constantly. The op-ed piece gave anybody the impression, who wanted to read it, that the vice president somehow was involved in sending him over there. I think the administration has the absolute right and obligation to correct the misimpression. Karl Rove didn't call anybody, they called him. I think this is all politics. There's no evidence that he's done anything criminally wrong, and the American people are taking it for what it is, politics.

Ms. GREENBURG: Senator Schumer, you had a press conference this week with Ambassador

Wilson. And this morning, Ken Mehlman said that he can't imagine a Republican senator, if the tables were turned, having a similar press conference. Is this politics now at this point?

Sen. SCHUMER: No. And, you know, that's what they're trying to do because they're sort of in a box. The White House spokesperson says Rove or Scooter Libby had nothing to do with it in today's paper. It's mentioned maybe Scooter Libby mentioned things. But the issue here is not Mr. Wilson. He, whether you like him or not--I happen to like him--is not the issue. The issue is did somebody in the White House leak the name of an undercover agent, violating the law? That's for Mr. Fitzgerald to find out. And all these diversionary attacks by the White House aren't going to change that because Fitzgerald--and I had lobbied very hard for an independent prosecutor, which Deputy Attorney General Comey appointed--he's going to get to the bottom of this.

SCHIEFFER: Let me ask both of you about the other big story, and that is this nomination to the Supreme Court to replace Sandra Day O'Connor. Do you think this needs to be done sooner rather than later, Senator Schumer? And also, do you believe the president ought to share with those of you who will confirm this next nomination the list of people that he's considering before he names a nominee?

Sen. SCHUMER: Those are both good questions, and the answer to both is yes. I think the president has to get us a name by August 1st, if we're going to meet the goal of having someone in place by October 1st. And that's because you need about a month to actually just do all the research, look at the nominee's entire history, their writings, their philosophy, etc. And then when we get back around Labor Day, the hearings will take two weeks and probably the floor debate will take two weeks. So I find it very difficult to figure out how we can do this before--by October 1st if we don't get a name by August 1st, so I hope the president will give us a name by August 1st.

Second, the consultation has gone--has been a great first step. They've called a whole lot of senators and Senator Reid and Senator Leahy, along with Senator Frist and Specter, went to the White House. But to be really successful and real, it has to take the second step. The president this week should offer some names, three or four names, of the people he's considering, and bounce them off key Senate leaders of both parties. This is what President Clinton did when he had two vacancies on the Supreme Court. He talked to Senator Hatch. And it worked extremely well. To simply have perfunctory phone calls...

SCHIEFFER: OK.

Sen. SCHUMER: ...and say to each of these senators, 'Who do you like?', is not what should be done because the president is the nominator. That's what...

SCHIEFFER: All right. Let's see what Senator Graham--Senator Graham...

Sen. GRAHAM: Yeah.

SCHIEFFER: ...do you think the president is going to do this quickly and should he share names?

Sen. GRAHAM: Number one, about the process, I agree with Chuck, it's going very well thus far. The president's done two good things, Bob, early on. He's called senators in a serious way. Senator Byrd's been called. And he gives the president an A-plus with consulting with the Senate. Number two, he stood up against special interest attacks that were mounting against Gonzales, even though Gonzales hasn't been named. The president says, 'Wait a minute. This is my friend. I'm not going to sit on the sidelines and watch you smear my friend.' That's been good for the country, and I hope our Democratic friends will do that if the left gets out of bounds when a name's floated.

About a short list--one of the things that I don't think the president is going to do is give anyone a veto right over his selection process. Whether or not he shares a few names with individual senators may happen. It may not. But one thing that's different between now and President Clinton's presidency, President Bush's nominees in the recent past have been treated very poorly, been called Neanderthals. There's a very partisan atmosphere in the past about how you treat nominees, and I don't think that's gonna--that matters in this process. I don't know if there's the level of trust to share names. I hope there will be in the future.

Ms. GREENBURG: Senator...

Sen. SCHUMER: Bob, I agree with Lindsey that it's partisan and it sh--and it would be a lot better. We Democrats want a consensus nominee, and one of the best ways to bring about that consensus--the president doesn't have to--and no one should have a veto. That's his to nominate. But to actually bounce names off of some key Republican and Democratic senators, get their views, could help avoid the kind of conflict that we've seen with some of the previous judges, where the president didn't consult at all.

SCHIEFFER: Jan.

Ms. GREENBURG: Senator Schumer, you've suggested there's going to be a war, no matter what. You've been quoted saying that, as have other Democrats. Does that send a signal to the White House that it may not need to reach a consensus nominee and, perhaps, nominate someone as conservative as possible since there's going to be a battle no matter what?

Sen. SCHUMER: Well, that's absolutely false. I have said over and over again, publicly, till I'm blue in the face, that we want a consensus nominee and we want to support a nominee that the president chooses. You know, we know that the president's nominee is going to be a conservative. No question. President himself is a conservative. But it can be a Sandra Day O'Connor type conservative, thoughtful, willing to see the other side, pragmatic, or it can be someone way, way off the deep end, and I'm hoping that there can be a consensus nominee. The blog that reported that did not report it correctly.

SCHIEFFER: All right.

Sen. SCHUMER: I didn't say there'd be a war in any case. I said only if the president chooses someone way off the deep end, the Democrats wouldn't roll over. Everyone knows that.

SCHIEFFER: All right. Senator, the clock has run out. Thank you, both, for being with us this morning.

I'll be back with a final word in just a second.

Sen. GRAHAM: Thank you.

(Announcements)

SCHIEFFER: Finally, some personal thoughts on today's discussion.

Instead of appointing a special prosecutor, what if the president had just called in his top people in the beginning of all this and said, 'Folks, we have a problem here. I need to know who's been talking to Bob Novak, and I need to know today by the end of business'? That's what presidents used to do, and they're usually pretty good at finding out when they really want to know.

Not many people had the nerve to lie to Lyndon Johnson when he looked them in the eye, and Richard Nixon figured out early on who Deep Throat was, and now we know from Woodward and Bernstein that on that one Nixon was right.

Instead, this White House did what it usually does when challenged: It went into attack mode, called charges that the White House had leaked the name ridiculous, and allowed the controversy to boil until a special prosecutor had to be appointed. Now two years and millions of tax dollars later, the president's trusted friend and strategist Karl Rove has emerged as the top suspect, and we're left to wonder: Can anything said from the White House podium be taken at face value, or does the White House just deny automatically anything that reflects badly on it?

This could and should have been dealt with inside the White House long before it reached the special prosecutor level. Instead, the president's people followed the modern public relations rule, 'Never admit a mistake, just do what is necessary to kill the story before it kills you,' which often works. What they are learning, though, is that when that involves tearing down the character of your critics, it can also be very dangerous business.

That's it for us. We'll see you next week right here on FACE THE NATION.