

Grand jury tapes: Cheney surprised by Libby's claim

NBC newsman Russert denies talking about CIA operative in 2003

By PETE YOST
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON

Vice President Dick Cheney seemed surprised in 2003 when told where his chief of staff had learned the identity of CIA officer Valerie Plame.

"From me?" Cheney asked, tilting his head, according to the grand jury testimony of the aide, Lewis "Scooter" Libby, who is on trial on charges of perjury, obstruction and lying to the FBI.

Libby's account of the conversation came near the end of nearly eight hours of audiotapes of his 2004 grand jury testimony that prosecutors finished playing at his trial Wednesday.

Libby describes finding in his own handwritten notes a reference to Cheney saying in mid-June 2003 that the wife of war critic Joseph Wilson worked at the CIA. The reference by Cheney was more than a month before Plame was outed in a newspaper column.

Libby told the grand jury that before finding the note, at the start of the criminal investigation into the leak of Plame's name, he had thought it was NBC newsman Tim Russert who first told him about Wilson's wife.

Under questioning before the grand jury by Special Counsel Patrick Fitzgerald, Libby said he went to Cheney with the new information.

Libby said that before reading his own notes, he had told Cheney he first learned the information from Russert. And he wanted to set the record straight with his boss, he said.

"He didn't say much, something about 'from me?'" Libby told the grand jury. The vice president "tilted his head, something he does commonly, and that was that," Libby recalled.

Libby's conversation with Russert took place a few days before Plame's CIA identity was publicly disclosed in a column by Robert Novak.

Now that the tapes are finished, "Meet the Press" host Russert testified late



Tim Russert, the Washington bureau chief of NBC News and host of "Meet the Press," arrives at U.S. Federal Court in Washington on Wednesday to testify in the Lewis "Scooter" Libby perjury trial.

Wednesday afternoon that he didn't talk to Libby in 2003 about Plame. "That would be impossible," Russert said. "I didn't know who that person was until several days later."

That discrepancy is at the heart of

Libby's case. Libby is accused of lying to authorities investigating the leak of Plame's identity.

Libby said Russert told him back in 2003 "all the reporters know" that Wilson's wife also worked for the CIA.



Austrian Interior Minister Guenther Platter, right, listens to Harald Gremel from the Central Division for Combating Child Pornography on Wednesday in Vienna, Austria. The division announced that it has busted a major international pornography ring involving more than 2,360 suspects from 77 countries.

Internet experts: Child porn rings difficult to track

More than 2,360 from 77 countries accused of paying to watch illicit videos

By BRIAN BERGSTEIN
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

VIENNA, Austria

The numbers behind an international child pornography bust Wednesday were themselves disturbing: Nearly 2,400 suspects from 77 countries allegedly paid to view videos depicting sexual abuse online. But the nature of Internet traffic makes it sadly unsurprising that people would figure they could hide so much hideous material.

Finding and stamping out such content "is needle-in-a-haystack work," said Carole Theriault, a security consultant with Sophos PLC in London.

Austrian authorities said an employee of a Vienna-based Internet file-hosting service approached his national Interior Ministry last July with word that he had noticed the pornographic material during a routine scan.

The videos showed "the worst kind of child sexual abuse," said Austrian Interior Minister

Guenther Platter, citing the rape and sexual abuse of girls and boys younger than 14.

Lead investigator Harald Gremel said the videos were online for at most a day before they were discovered. The Austrian Internet service employee blocked access to the videos while recording the computer addresses of people who tried to download the material.

Within 24 hours, investigators recorded more than 8,000 hits from 2,361 computer addresses in 77 countries around the world, including the United States, according to Gremel.

In another sign of the ring's international tentacles, Gremel said investigators believe the videos were shot in Eastern Europe and uploaded to the Web from Britain. A link to the videos was posted on a Russian Web site, and hosted on a server in Austria. Some of the material was free, but the Russian site charged \$89 for access for a "members only" section, Gremel said.

Poll: Americans still dislike Cuban leader

Sixty-two percent want U.S. to re-establish diplomatic relations with island nation

By ANNE GEARAN
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON

In nearly equal measure, Americans say they don't like Cuban President Fidel Castro but do want the United States to re-establish regular diplomatic relations with the communist island nation after 46 years of estrangement.

Less than half of those polled think Cuba will become a democracy after the 80-year-old revolutionary leader dies or permanently steps aside. However, 89 percent in The Associated Press-Ipsos poll say they think Cubans will be better off or about the

same when Castro is gone.

"It's probably not very likely in the short term," Kelly Shanley, 29, of North Haven, Conn., said of prospects for a democratic shift. "I just hope for the citizens of Cuba that it's something that's realized in the next few decades."

Castro has appeared to be in failing health for six months and has temporarily shifted power to his younger brother, Raul.

Rumors have been rampant about his ailments and how long

he can survive.

The poll suggests the Cold War animosity that has defined U.S.-Cuba relations for nearly a half-century may be fading.

Although U.S. administrations from left to right have called Castro a dictator and a tyrant and have spent millions trying to undermine him, 27 percent of poll respondents said they hadn't heard enough about Castro to form an opinion.

The poll showed 64 percent of respondents had a very or somewhat unfavorable opinion of Castro, the revolutionary leader who has said he will be a Marxist-Leninist until the day he dies.

"He hasn't done much for his country. The country has not pro-

gressed," said Shiraz Damji, 61, of Woodland Hills, Calif.

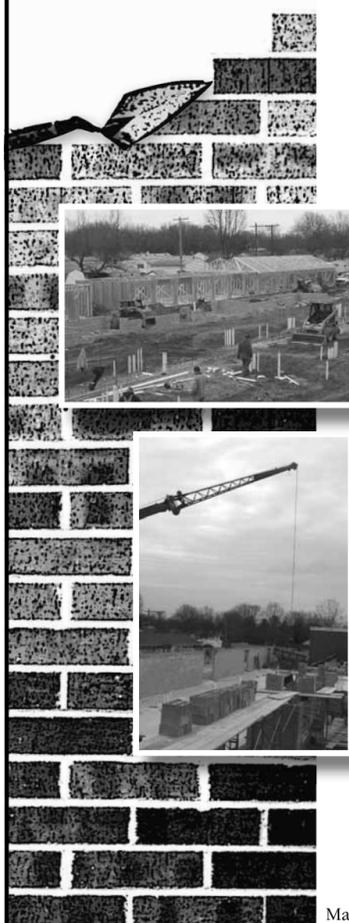
Castro got slightly better reviews from younger people — 60 percent of those under 35 had an unfavorable view of Castro while 66 percent of older people felt that way — and younger people were more likely to reserve judgment about him.

A large majority of people, 62 percent, said the United States should re-establish diplomatic ties with Cuba.



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