



# Mitch McConnell

## Senate Majority Whip

### U.S. Senator for Kentucky

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#### STATEMENT OF SENATOR MITCH McCONNELL ON MATTERS OF FUNDAMENTAL FAIRNESS AND THE IRAQ DEBATE.

WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Senator Mitch McConnell today delivered the following statement on the Senate floor:

“Mr. President, I rise today to discuss a matter of considerable relevance to the debate about the war in Iraq and the recent Senate Report on the Intelligence Community. This report has illuminated a subject of considerable controversy and partisan criticism of the President.

“I also rise to speak about the importance of maintaining a basic standard of fairness in American politics.

“I’m talking about the controversy that erupted over the infamous “16 words” in the State of the Union Address that Senator Kerry, numerous Senate Democrats, and the media cited in accusations that the President misled the country into war.

“On January 28, 2003, President Bush told the American people that, “The British government has learned that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa.”

“When doubt surfaced about some – but not all – of the evidence supporting this claim, Joe Wilson – who had traveled to Niger to investigate an aspect of the intelligence – penned an op-ed in the *New York Times* accusing the Administration of manipulating intelligence.

“Not pausing for a full investigation, a partisan parade of Democratic Senators and Presidential candidates took to the streets to criticize the President and accuse him of misleading the nation into war.

”Sensing a scandal, the media pounced.

“NBC aired 40 reports on Wilson’s claims. CBS aired 30 reports, while ABC aired 18. Newspapers didn’t hold back either. The *New York Times* printed 70 articles reinforcing these allegations, while the *Washington Post* printed 98.

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“Pundits and politicians gorged themselves on the story.

“Joe Wilson rose to great fame on the back of this inflammatory charge: He wrote a book for which he received a five-figure advance, he was lionized by the Liberal Left, and he became an advisor to Senator Kerry’s presidential campaign, a campaign to which he is also a financial contributor.

“Of course, we now know Wilson’s allegation was false. And we know the chief proponent of this charge, Joe Wilson, has been proven to be a liar.

“After more than a year of misrepresentation and obfuscation, two bipartisan reports from two different countries have thoroughly repudiated Wilson’s assertions and determined that President Bush’s 16-word statement about Iraq’s efforts to procure uranium from Niger was well founded.

“In fact, the *real 16-word statement* we should focus on is the one from Lord Butler’s comprehensive report about British intelligence: “We conclude that the statement in President Bush’s State of the Union address... is well founded.”

“Let me repeat: “We conclude that the statement in President Bush’s State of the Union address... is well founded.” Those are 16 words to remember, Mr. President.

“It is now worth the Senate’s time to consider Mr. Wilson’s claims.

“**Claim #1** is Wilson’s assertion his Niger trip report should have debunked the State of the Union claim.

“On this bold allegation, the Senate’s bipartisan report included this important conclusion: *The report on the former ambassador’s trip to Niger, disseminated in March 2002, did not change any analysts’ assessments of the Iraq-Niger uranium deal. For most analysts, the information in the report lent more credibility to the original CIA reports on the uranium deal...*

“**Let me repeat:** *“For most analysts, the information in the report lent more credibility to the original CIA reports on the uranium deal...”*

”**Claim #2** is similarly egregious.

“According to the *Washington Post*, “Wilson provided misleading information to the *Washington Post* last June. He said then that he concluded the Niger intelligence was based on a document that had clearly been forged...” But “the documents...were not in U.S. hands until eight months after Wilson made his trip to Niger.” (Susan Schmidt, *Washington Post*, A9, 7/10/04)

“Predictably, this bombshell appeared on page A9. Page A9, Mr. President! After this story had previously enjoyed extensive coverage on Page A1.

“There were indeed document forgeries, but these documents were not the only evidence that convinced foreign intelligence services about Iraq’s efforts to purchase uranium.

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“Damningly, the former Prime Minister of Niger himself believed the Iraqis wanted to purchase uranium and according to the Financial Times: *“European intelligence officers have now revealed that three years before the fake documents became public, human and electronic intelligence sources from a number of countries picked up repeated discussion of an illicit trade in uranium from Niger. One of the customers discussed by the traders was Iraq.”*

“And the *Wall Street Journal* has reported that: *“French and British intelligence (services) separately told the U.S. about possible Iraqi attempts to buy uranium in Niger.”* (WSJ, 7/19/04)

“Mr. President, when the French corroborate a story that Iraq is seeking WMD, you’re probably in the right ballpark.

“Indeed, the Senate’s bipartisan report concluded that at the time: *“it was reasonable for analysts to assess that Iraq may have been seeking uranium from Africa based on CIA reporting and other available intelligence.”*

“**Claim #3** is Wilson’s repeated denial that his wife, Valerie Plame, a CIA analyst, never recommended him for the Niger trip.

“In his ironically titled book, *The Politics of Truth*, Wilson claimed: *“Valerie had nothing to do with the matter...She definitely had not proposed that I make the trip.”*

“The facts are, Mr. President, the bipartisan Senate Intelligence Report includes testimony that Plame *“offered up his name”* and quotes a memo that Plame wrote that asserts *“my husband has good relations with Niger officials.”*

“The *New York Times* recently reported that: *“Instead of assigning a trained intelligence officer to the Niger case, though, the C.I.A. sent a former American Ambassador, Joseph Wilson, to talk to former Niger officials. His wife, Valerie Plame, was an officer in the counterproliferation division, and she had suggested that he be sent to Niger, according to the Senate report.”* (NYT, 7/14/04)

”That story, Mr. President, can be read on Page A14.

“**Claim #4** is Wilson’s allegation that the CIA warned the White House about the Niger claim and that the White House manipulated intelligence to bolster its argument for war. Wilson charged: *“The problem is not the intelligence but the manipulation of intelligence. That will all come out despite (Sen.) Roberts’ effort to shift the blame. This was and is a White House issue, not a CIA issue.”* This reckless charge by Wilson was, we know, repeated by many of the President’s critics.

”Of course, it’s not true.

“The Senate Intelligence Report determined the White House did not manipulate intelligence, but rather that the CIA had provided faulty information to policymakers. And the *Washington Post* recently reported that *“Contrary to Wilson’s assertions... the CIA did not tell the White House it had qualms about the reliability of the Africa intelligence.”* (Susan Schmidt, *Washington Post*, A9, 7/10/04)

“Again: Front page news on Page A9.

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“According to the *New York Times* and the Senate Intelligence Report, Joe Wilson admitted to Committee staff that some of his assertions in his book may have, quote, “involved a little literary flair.”

“Mr. President, “Literary flair” is a fancy way of saying what ordinary people shooting the breeze on their front porches all across America call by its real name: a lie.

“So, Mr. President, the truth is Joe Wilson did not expose the Administration; in fact, he has been exposed as a liar.

“He misrepresented the findings of his trip to Niger, he fabricated stories about recognizing forgeries he never saw, he falsely accused the White House of manipulating intelligence, and he misrepresented his wife’s role in promoting him for the mission.

“Joe Wilson’s false claims have been exposed, but the networks aren’t rushing to correct the story. Will NBC correct the 40 times it ran Wilson’s claims, will CBS correct the 30 times it ran Wilson’s claims, will ABC correct the 18 times it ran Wilson’s claims?

“To be sure, a few networks and newspapers have noted the Senate Intelligence Report’s conclusions, but where is the balance? Where are the lead stories? Where are the banner headlines? In short, where is the fairness?

“Sadly, that’s the state of political coverage in this election year. Screaming charges about the President made on A1, repudiation of the charges on A9, if they are made at all. Is that fair?

“And what of the political campaigns? It’s a small wonder the Democrat candidates for President and their supporters aggressively picked up the Wilson claim. After all, the media was driving the train, so why not hitch a ride?

“However, now that Wilson’s false claims have been exposed, shouldn’t a basic sense of fairness prevail? Shouldn’t the partisans admit they were wrong, too?

“For example, some of my colleagues in the Senate should ask themselves if it’s now appropriate to distance themselves from Joe Wilson’s distortions. Speaking on this floor on March 23, the Minority Leader praised Wilson and accused the Administration of retaliating against him: *“When Ambassador Joe Wilson told the truth about the administration’s misleading claims about Iraq, Niger, and uranium, the people around the President didn’t respond with facts. Instead they publicly disclosed that Ambassador Wilson’s wife was a deep-cover CIA agent.”*

“Just last month, Senator Daschle noted:

*“Sunlight, it’s been said, is the best disinfectant. But for too long, the administration has been able to keep Congress and the American people in the dark... **other serious matters, such as the manipulation of intelligence about Iraq, have received only fitful attention.**”*

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“I hope my friend from South Dakota will acknowledge the inaccuracy of his statement, and allow the sunlight to shine on Ambassador Wilson’s fictions.

“Senator Kerry welcomed Wilson onto his campaign team of advisors, and his campaign hosts Wilson’s website, which carries a disclaimer that it is “Paid for by John Kerry for President, Inc.”

“The Kerry/Wilson website includes a collection of articles by and about Joe Wilson that propound his baseless allegations against the Bush Administration, which I don’t have time to go into today. Suffice it to say that showcasing Wilson’s discredited views should at least be met with some acknowledgement that he was wrong all along.

“Perhaps we can learn a thing or two from the recent episode involving Sandy Berger.

“Berger, an advisor to President Clinton and Senator Kerry stepped down from the Kerry campaign. He’s under investigation for removing and possibly destroying classified documents being reviewed by the 9/11 Commission.

“Were I to engage in a little “literary flair”, I might say it seems Sandy walked out of the National Archives with some PBDs in his BVDs, and some classified docs in his socks.

“At any rate, I think it’s appropriate – and politically wise – for him to leave the Kerry campaign.

“It’s clear Senator Kerry approved of Mr. Berger’s departure. He should certainly ask the discredited Mr. Wilson to leave the team as well.

“So Mr. President, I close with a simple observation. I believe vigorous political disagreements are the heart of a strong democracy. When our debates are rooted in fact, impassioned political disagreement makes our country stronger.

“I also believe Americans value fundamental fairness, and deserve a news media that reflects this value. How is it fair to report an accusation with blaring Page One headlines and around-the-clock television coverage and not give a slam dunk repudiation of the charge the same kind of attention?

“Mr. President, we’ll watch over the next few days to see if fundamental fairness will be met, and if those who championed Mr. Wilson’s charges will set the record straight.”