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Bush hails 'darn good' uranium intelligence

President Bush said that intelligence about Iraqi uranium transactions was 'relevant' in January, but that it was later found to be unreliable

By Howard Witt
Chicago Tribune (KRT)

WASHINGTON — Defending the quality of his administration's pre-war intelligence on Iraq, President Bush said Monday that an assertion he made in his State of the Union address that Iraq had tried to buy uranium from Africa for a nuclear weapons program was "relevant" at the time he said it.

"I think the intelligence I get is darn good intelligence. And the speeches I have given were backed by good intelligence," Bush told reporters after a White House meeting with United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan.

"The speech that I gave was cleared by the CIA," Bush said. "... Subsequent to the speech, the CIA had some doubts. But when ... they looked at the speech, it was cleared."

Bush's remarks did little to quell the controversy over his Jan. 28 speech, in which, as part of his effort to build a case for toppling Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, he stated that "The British government has learned that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa."

Last week, the White House admitted that some of the intelligence underlying Bush's charge — documents purporting to show nuclear transactions between Iraq and the West African nation of Niger, later determined to have been forged — was unreliable and the sentence should not have been included in a presidential speech. CIA Director

George Tenet, acknowledging that his agency had earlier raised doubts about the intelligence, took responsibility for the CIA's failure to strike the remarks from a draft that his officials reviewed.

But other senior administration officials are now arguing that the Africa allegation might yet prove true, and in any case was merely a small part of Bush's case for war, which rested on the urgent threat Bush said that Saddam posed because of his pursuit of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons. Despite extensive searches, U.S. forces in Iraq have not yet discovered any such weapons.

"This revisionist notion that somehow this is now the core of why we went to war, a central issue in why we went to war, a fundamental underpinning of the president's decisions, is a bunch of bull," White House spokesman Ari Fleischer said.

But leading Democrats are demanding a formal probe into how the disputed Africa assertion made it into Bush's speech, as well as the larger question of whether the White House inflated allegations about Iraq's weapons programs to justify U.S. military intervention.

"If it were an inconsequential part of the case, the fact that it was included becomes even more troubling, and the conduct of those who included it becomes even more difficult to justify," said Rep. David Obey of Wisconsin, the top Democrat on the House Appropriations Committee.

But Fleischer insisted: "As far as the president's concerned, he's moved on ... I think the bottom has gotten to."

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Man allegedly invented child to get Sept. 11 aid

A New York man took \$190,000 of relief aid for losing his son in terrorist attacks, but prosecutors say he eerily invented that son

By Barbara Ross and Bill Hutchinson
New York Daily News (KRT)

NEW YORK — Cyril Kendall of Queens still insists his son died in the World Trade Center attacks — even as prosecutors say he's a lying scam artist who ghoulishly invented the son to rip off \$190,000 in relief aid.

The 54-year-old man's trial got started Monday with jury selection and a prosecutor asking to introduce Kendall's rape conviction and pattern of filing fraudulent lawsuits as evidence.

"He consistently puts his own interest above society," prosecutor Diana Florence told Manhattan Supreme Court Justice Ronald Zweibel. "He'll create documents when it's convenient, lie when it's convenient. He created a son."

The Richmond Hill, Queens, father of 12 swears he last saw his son Wilfred, 29, when he dropped him off for a job interview at the towers shortly before the attacks.

But after Kendall, who faces 20 years in prison if convicted, received \$190,867 in aid from Safe Horizon

and the Red Cross, police accused him of lying.

Kendall, originally from Guyana, told cops he didn't report his son missing until Oct. 1, 2001, because his son was here illegally.

He said he decided to seek a death certificate after hearing then-Mayor Rudy Giuliani on TV promising no repercussions for reporting undocumented workers lost in the disaster.

"He lost his son, and now he's being terrorized again by the criminal justice system, which is saying his son didn't exist," said Kendall's attorney Dawn Florio, who vowed to call witnesses to testify that the son did exist.

Kendall's wife, Doreen, backed her husband's story Monday, saying Wilfred was a child from a previous relationship.

But Florence said the alleged scam is one of a string pulled by Kendall. She said he filed bogus lawsuits, lied about his education and raped a minor.

Zweibel barred Florence from using Kendall's rape conviction during the trial, but he will let her bring up details of his lawsuits if he takes the stand.

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