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CNN CROSSFIRE

Bush Makes Homeland Security Part of Cabinet; Interview With FBI Whistle-Blower Robert Wright

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ANNOUNCER: CROSSFIRE. On the left, James Carville and Paul Begala. On the right, Robert Novak and Tucker Carlson.

In the CROSSFIRE tonight, President Bush's latest prescription to cure what ails U.S. intelligence gathering.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Well, this is a great success for the American people (UNINTELLIGIBLE) Tom Ridge movement.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: To have the Office of Homeland Security only be a figurehead makes no sense. To give that office cabinet status is a first step, but it's not enough.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

ANNOUNCER: As we wait for the president's prime-time address, Senators Robert Torricelli and Kit Bond step into the CROSSFIRE.

This FBI agent's so upset with this because he's taken the bureau to court.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Until the investigative responsibilities for terrorism are removed from the FBI, I will not feel safe.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

ANNOUNCER: Tonight, a CROSSFIRE exclusive. FBI agent and whistle-blower Robert Wright takes questions from the left and right.

Ahead on CROSSFIRE.

From the George Washington University, James Carville and Robert Novak.

JAMES CARVILLE, CO-HOST: Welcome to CROSSFIRE. Tonight, we'll speak with an FBI agent who's doing more than blowing his whistle. He's suing his bosses. But the big news is President Bush's decision to create a cabinet-level Department of Homeland Security. The new agency will consolidate the work of more than 100 government organizations. It creates a clearinghouse of intelligence information and will broaden the government's policy to improve border and airport security.

(APPLAUSE) NOVAK: All right. OK, don't forget, you know what you're not supposed to forget? In case you've forgotten, President Bush's address to the nation is at the top of the hour. Coming up, James and I will duke it out over the new homeland security cabinet seat. But next, you'll meet an FBI whistle-blower, who's having a hard time getting media attention for his story.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

CARVILLE: Welcome back to CROSSFIRE. On Capitol Hill today, FBI agent Coleen Rowley complained her agency's bureaucracy is full of risk aversion road blocks to investigations and endless and needless paper work. Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee praised her as a patriot. FBI special agent Robert Wright was not on Capitol Hill today, even though he says the bureau repeatedly and intentionally blocked his attempts to identify and neutralize terrorists.

In our crossfire exclusive, he joins us from Chicago. And here in Washington is his attorney, Larry Klayman of Judicial Watch.

(APPLAUSE)

NOVAK: Mr. Wright, your charges against the FBI are really more disturbing, more serious than Ms. Rowley's. Why is it do you think that the -- you have been ignored by the media, ignored by the congressional committees, and no attention's been paid to your allegations?

ROBERT WRIGHT, FBI SPECIAL AGENT: I don't know the true reasons for that. But other people I've talked to since we did the press conference last week have indicated that there may be a perception out there that because I put this manuscript together, I may be trying to profit off of all of this. And that's just not the case.

NOVAK: Tell me which -- why is it, if you can explain to the people, because your story has not been heard -- what is the basis for your allegation that they intentionally disrupted your efforts to go after the terrorists? What was the reason for that, do you believe?

WRIGHT: It's hard to explain, but basically, it just comes down to job security is what it was. And a lot of people won't understand that. But as the details do come out in the future, they will understand.

NOVAK: Do you think it's the old story, and I've seen this by some of your colleagues in the FBI -- that it's just a problem between people in the agency having long range investigations, and those who want to arrest and bring people to justice? And they felt that if you were to actually apprehend these terrorists, and bring them to justice, it would spoil the long-range investigation? Is that what the basis of the problem is?

WRIGHT: Pretty well, that's it. That's it. It's -- you know, if you identify and locate criminals, and lock up the suspected known terrorists for criminal violations that they are doing to further their terrorism activity, if there's a long-term investigation open, that investigation would get closed down on the intelligence side.

NOVAK: Do they have a point there or do you think not?

WRIGHT: Do they have a valid point there?

NOVAK: Yes.

WRIGHT: Based on my own experience, no way.

NOVAK: Why is that?

WRIGHT: I just think that if there's a means to take down a known and suspected terrorist in this country, you do it. It doesn't matter if you do it on the intel or the criminal side. To constantly and continually to ignore the criminal activity that's taking place in this country by many of these terrorist groups and the financial empires that they had built, is just not right. And if you can find the criminal means, if they're using criminal means to further the terrorism activity, go after them for the criminal activity they're conducting, money laundering, bank fraud, anything.

CARVILLE: You said that earlier that you suspect one of the reasons that you're not being called before the Hill, and not being taken seriously, is that people think if you're profiting from this. And you say that you're really not. Is that correct?

WRIGHT: That's correct. After I was taken off of the terrorism investigation in August of 1999, I realized that the incompetency, basically, international terrorism unit back at FBI headquarters, was going to allow the terrorism units to continue to expand their enterprises within this country to help finance terrorism in here and abroad.

CARVILLE: Now you're writing a book about this (UNINTELLIGIBLE), is that correct?

WRIGHT: Well -- but I actually did. That's the thing. I started in August of 1999. And on September the 10, all but the last three pages were finished. Go ahead.

CARVILLE: But I just want to get to the charge that you said that (UNINTELLIGIBLE) as profiteering. Are you going to accept any money for this book?

WRIGHT: That's the difficulty I'm having right now, to be honest with you. I...

(CROSSTALK)

CARVILLE: ... I do it all the time.

WRIGHT: James is a multimillionaire, but let's get to the point here is that Bob, I know as his counsel, followed all the FBI rules and regulations.

CARVILLE: We're just asking is he going to keep -- is he going to take the money for the book.

LARRY KLAYMAN, JUDICIAL WATCH: (UNINTELLIGIBLE) rather than coming forward, he asked the FBI for clearance. And they don't want him to reveal what went on. And they're very close to people on the Hill.

NOVAK: Mr. Wright, there's was one incident you talk about that upset you very much about a fellow FBI's agent's refusal to put a wire on a suspect. Can you tell us about that?

WRIGHT: I'm sorry, can you repeat that?

NOVAK: There's an incident that you talk about, about a fellow FBI agent's refusal to put a wire on a suspect. Can you tell us about that?

WRIGHT: Only that what was in my statement. And I fully stand by that statement. The bottom line...

NOVAK: Tell us about that.

WRIGHT: What it came down to was that a subject of a terrorism investigation contacted an FBI agent in another division, who happened to be a Muslim, to ask if he could talk to him regarding my investigation, because he had been subpoenaed to appear in Chicago to answer some questions. And the Muslim agent initially agreed to do it. But within an hour changed his mind and said he would not wear a wire against another Muslim.

He said, and the quote was "a Muslim doesn't record another Muslim." And what concerns me is that this individual was working international terrorism investigations, and refusing to do the sworn duty that he swore he would do.

CARVILLE: Agent Wright, you said that one of the reasons, I'll go back and ask you again, that people are not taking you seriously is the issue of profiteering. Will you accept money for this book that you wrote?

(CROSSTALK)

WRIGHT: That's not the issue.

CARVILLE: Well, no, let me just ask the question. He brought it up. I didn't bring it up. He brought -- no, he raised the issue.

KLAYMAN: Well, people are taking him seriously. We've been in contact with several senators on Capitol Hill. Senator Arlen Specter, Senator Leahy. We've been in contact...

CARVILLE: Well, then Larry, why is Rowley up there with 100 cameras and you're here on CROSSFIRE?

KLAYMAN: And that was the point I was making was that Ms. Rowley decided that she was (UNINTELLIGIBLE) FBI regulations. She did the right thing. She's a whistle-blower. Bob is waiting to get clearance from the FBI to talk fully. He can't talk about the investigation.

NOVAK: We're out of time. But I just got to ask one question. And I want a brief answer. Did you feel the letter you got from the FBI about a week ago, talking about criminal action, was a threatening letter?

WRIGHT: It was an attempt to keep me from talking publicly about what's in this manuscript. And the important thing to know is September 11 was a horrible event. And that's what is being focused on now. But this manuscript covers much more than September 11. It is the catalyst for why September 11 was allowed to happen, and why it's going to happen again. And it's not only the FBI's problem. You also have the Internal Revenue Service that's at fault in this, the Department of Agriculture, and the INS.

KLAYMAN: Let's thank the line agents for doing their job. They were pure to the American people. The supervisors were not.

NOVAK: Thank you, Mr. Klayman. Thank you, Agent Wright.

(APPLAUSE)

President Bush's address to the nation is coming up. But first, in round six, James Carville and I take off the gloves and take on each other. And in fireback, a viewer who thought Republicans were for shrinking government.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

NOVAK: Welcome back to CROSSFIRE. Time for round six. With the president's speech coming up, James, I thought Senator Kit Bond

had a real point. He called it a rope-a-dope. You people have been saying that the president has wasted all this time, eight months. He hasn't put together a cabinet level department, putting all these agencies together. Finally, after all this time, he puts it together. They said it's too fast. He was too hurried. He didn't think it all carefully. That's just politics, isn't it?

CARVILLE: First of all, as early as October, Senator Lieberman was calling for this. Now we're told that the president started doing this in April. We don't know -- I think it's a good idea. I congratulate him for following the leads of Democrats who have said that he had to have this. And I think the president's shown that he can follow the leadership of people like Senator Lieberman, Senator McCain, people that have been calling for this kind of thing.

And (UNINTELLIGIBLE), but before they act on it, they've got to be sure that this thing is completely thought out.

NOVAK: You think he's going to name Tom Ridge as the secretary?

CARVILLE: Presumably so, but I don't know. He's never told me...

NOVAK: I think it's up the in the air then.

CARVILLE: Do you think it's a good idea?

NOVAK: I hate to see all that power in one group, because I'm a real conservative, who is worried about an aggregation of government power.

CARVILLE: So you (UNINTELLIGIBLE) fought it?

NOVAK: I haven't decided yet.

CARVILLE: You haven't decided, but...

NOVAK: But unlike you, I can't make up my mind on something I haven't seen.

CARVILLE: Oh, so -- but you may be against it?

NOVAK: I might.

CARVILLE: All right.

NOVAK: All right.

Don't leave. President Bush's speech is just minutes away. And one of our viewers has fired back a thought about something she thinks is more important than balancing the budget. What could that be?