Joseph Wilson, U.S. diplomat who spoke out against Iraq war, dies at 69

Santa Fe, September 29 (RHC)-- Joseph Wilson, a U.S. diplomat who questioned the central underpinning for the invasion of Iraq under former President George W. Bush, died on Friday at the age of 69, the New York Times reported.

Wilson's ex-wife, Valerie Plame, a former CIA officer now running for Congress, told the Times his cause of death was organ failure. Wilson died at his home in Santa Fe, New Mexico, the Times reported.

Wilson served in several diplomatic posts during a 23-year career that began in 1976. In 2002, the CIA asked Wilson to investigate claims that Iraq had attempted to buy uranium yellowcake, a nuclear material, from Niger. Bush, in his State of the Union address in January 2003, made a case for the Iraq war by saying the country's leader at the time, Saddam Hussein, had recently sought "significant quantities of uranium from Africa."

Wilson challenged that claim in an opinion piece published by the New York Times in July 2003, titled "What I Didn't Find in Africa." One week after Wilson's op-ed was published, Plame's work as a covert CIA operative was revealed by a Washington columnist, setting off an investigation into whether White

House officials leaked her identity as retribution for his public criticisms.

No officials were prosecuted for the leak, but a top aide to Vice President Dick Cheney, Lewis "Scooter" Libby, was convicted of lying to investigators.

Wilson wrote in a 2004 memoir that he felt a duty to publish the Times op-ed. "Time after time during the previous four months, from March to July, administration spokespeople had sloughed off the reality that the president of the United States had sent our country to war in order to defend us against the threat of the 'mushroom cloud,' when they knew, as did I, that at least one of the two 'facts' underpinning the case was not a fact at all," Wilson wrote.

Valerie Plame, whose marriage to Wilson ended in divorce in 2017, is running for a congressional seat in New Mexico.

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