

'Mean machine' at Justice won't tolerate honest critic Local comment

photo

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BY VALERIE A. CONVERTINO

Valerie Convertino

What a shame the administration of President George W. Bush isn't as tough on terrorism as it is about exacting revenge upon honest citizens who speak out against its policies.

Take the witch-hunt against my husband, former U.S. Attorney Richard Convertino, who successfully prosecuted a Detroit terrorism sleeper cell. He then voiced his frustrations with the ineffectiveness of the U.S. Justice Department's handling of terrorism cases and has endured almost three years of retaliation at a cost to American taxpayers of several million dollars.

The "mean machine" is out of control and refuses to admit it, especially when there is a whistleblower lawsuit still pending that Rick filed against members of the Justice Department, including former Attorney General John Ashcroft. Regardless of his years as a star prosecutor with the Justice Department, the government has subpoenaed Rick's high school, college and law school records.

What's next? Will they subpoena a list of books he has checked out from the library or the movies we rent for family movie night?

The government refuses to issue subpoenas to look into the billions of dollars that are unaccounted for in the Iraq war, but it will subpoena Rick's high school records. Apparently, you can steal from the government but you can't speak out against its policies.

Distinguished career diplomat Joe Wilson would agree with that assessment since his wife was "outed" as a CIA operative after he publicly disagreed with the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

Due to the government's ability to extend indefinitely the claim of an "ongoing investigation," the DOJ has successfully blocked Rick's lawsuit as well as the investigation conducted by the Office of Special Council. The final step -- I hope -- is the current grand jury investigation that led to Wednesday's indictment.

Most people don't realize that during grand jury proceedings the prosecutor gets to present one-sided information and opinions with no obligation to present any information that may exonerate the person under investigation. With such power, it would be unethical and malicious to use the grand jury system to indict someone just to destroy his reputation.

Knowing Rick as I have for more than 27 years, his sense of honor would never have allowed him to remain silent when there is incompetence or injustice, especially when the circumstances have grave consequences for our entire country. I also know they are wasting

time and taxpayers' money that should be directed to fighting terrorism.

The Justice Department has forgotten that Rick was the go-to guy when the department or the FBI had a tough case. He would take it out of a sense of duty, even though it sometimes meant being six months away from his young family; and his record of outstanding evaluations, number of awards and commendation letters support all of this. He has undergone at least three extensive background checks and had a high-level security clearance when he left Justice. In addition to his cases, Rick represented the United States at law enforcement seminars in Kazakhstan and Bulgaria.

Although Rick was subpoenaed to testify in front of the U.S. Senate about his case, he was reluctant at that time to discuss all of the difficulties and problems within the Justice Department. However, Rick must air the Justice Department's dirty laundry to protect himself.

I have to keep reminding myself that it isn't our country that is persecuting us; it is the people who happen to be in power right now, and that can change.

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