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Matthew Rycroft

From: Clare Sumner
Sent: 02 June 2003 20:39
To: Matthew Rycroft
Cc: Nicholas Cannon; Nicholas Howard
Subject: FW: PA - WMD/ Special Advisers

can you cover this in your future note

-----Original Message-----

From: Anthony Measures
Sent: 02 June 2003 15:01
To: Clare Sumner
Cc: Nicholas Howard
Subject: PA - WMD/ Special Advisers

Another Labour backbencher, Graham Allen, urged Parliament to set a deadline of August 20 by which weapons of mass destruction must be found. The allies would then have had the same amount of time - 110 days - to find the weapons as they gave to UN weapons inspectors.

Mr Allen said: "The allies have far easier conditions for their investigations. They can go anywhere in Iraq, and instead of obstructing them, Saddam's captured officials have every possible motive to lead them to any hidden weapons."

"If the allies cannot produce an internationally verified discovery by August 20, Britain can conclude that the terrible warnings before the war about the imminent threat from Saddam's weapons were totally wrong."

"Britain must then ask who was responsible. Did the British or American governments deliberately mislead their peoples, by inventing, exaggerating or suppressing the assessments they received from their intelligence services?"

"Or were those services fundamentally incompetent?"
For the Government to promise another dossier "would be like a card sharp promising us another chance to find the Queen of Spades", the MP for Nottingham North said.

"Only a thorough and independent inquiry can answer the vital questions."

"Until that inquiry happens the British Parliament and the British people will be unable to trust their Government or their intelligence services."

"If they are asked to make fresh sacrifices in war, or against terrorism, they will be entitled to refuse."

One Labour MP said the row was potentially "more serious than Watergate" if it transpired that Parliament and the public had been misled over going to war.

Malcolm Savidge, one of 73 MPs who have signed a Commons motion calling for the Government's evidence on WMD to be published in full, said: "The Prime Minister has got to understand the level of concern."

"After all, the sort of allegations that are being made, by very senior people now, are about as serious as they could be."

"I cannot conceive, in fact, of a more serious accusation than that Parliament and the people could have been misled into being brought into a war on false pretences."

"That to me is more serious than Watergate," the MP for Aberdeen North told BBC Radio 4's The World At One programme.

"It does concern me that we have the situation that, for example, this suggestion that weapons could be used within 45 minutes, we are now told it came from a single source."

"I would have thought it was absolutely incumbent upon the Prime Minister to have indicated to us that this came from a single, uncorroborated source. That's a terribly, terribly important issue."

Only if weapons were found which posed an "immediate clear danger to us" would people be satisfied that going to war had been right, Mr Savidge added.

"I find it strange what the Prime Minister said over the weekend because he seems to be implying that it's not now a priority to find these."

"I would have thought surely at a time when the country is in anarchy, if one of the great worries was that these could fall into the hands of terrorists."

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it should be our first priority to find these materials."

Embargoed to 0001 Tuesday June 3
SPIN DOCTOR NUMBERS SHOULD BE CAPPED, MPS RECOMMEND
PA News

The Government was under renewed pressure today to accept a legal cap on the number of "spin doctors" ministers can appoint.

The promised Civil Service Bill should include provisions to limit the number of ministerial special advisers such as the Prime Minister's communications director Alastair Campbell, the Commons Public Administration Committee said. It suggested that the actual numbers could be set at the beginning of each Parliament and approved by resolutions of both the House of Commons and the House of Lords.

It also called for a review of the Order in Council which gives the Prime Minister the right to appoint up to three special advisers with management powers over civil servants.

Currently Tony Blair has two - Mr Campbell and the Number 10 chief of staff Jonathan Powell.

The role of special advisers came under intense scrutiny in the wake of the row over Stephen Byers's former spin doctor Jo Moore, who suggested that September 11 was a good day to "bury" bad news for the Government. The latest proposals are included in a discussion paper by the committee which is drawing up its own proposed Civil Service Bill in a bid to pressurise the Government into bringing forward its own legislation.

The committee chairman, Tony Wright, said: "There is a pressing need for Parliament to play a more active role in helping to maintain ethical standards in the public service.

"A bill would make sure that long-standing public service principles like impartiality and integrity were underpinned by proper Parliamentary debate and discussion, and that proposed changes had a full airing."

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