

APPROVED FOR RELEASE DATE: 11-04-2010 BACK TO Table Of Contents

< Previous

Next

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35. CIA confirms Ventura meeting occurred

Tim Pugmire, Minnesota.PublicRadio.org, 3 January 2008

The St. Paul Pioneer Press offered a sneak peek Thursday Jesse Ventura's forthcoming book "Don't Start the Revolution Without Me." In one excerpt, Ventura describes a post-inaugural meeting with CIA agents. He also claims a CIA operative was on the state payroll. Even a Ventura confidant is questioning the account. But the surprising revelations are at least partially true.

St. Paul, Minn. -- Shortly after taking office in 1999, Jesse Ventura writes he was asked to attend a meeting at the state Capitol. He says 23 CIA agents were waiting for him in a basement conference room.

Ventura's account of the meeting is detailed in an advance copy of his new book, which is scheduled for release in April. He claims the agents' questions focused how he campaigned for office, or as Ventura writes "how had the independent wrestler candidate pulled this off?"

Memories can fade after nine years, but a meeting with 23 CIA agents is something that might stand out. John Wodele, who served as Ventura's director of communications, said the meeting was news to him.

"I don't recall any indication that the governor had met with a CIA agent," he said. "Now, that doesn't mean it didn't happen. But I was not aware of it.

Turns out there actually was a Ventura meeting with the CIA in 1999. CIA Spokesman George Little confirmed the event today in a written statement, but he offered few details.

Little said that "on occasion CIA officers meet with senior state government officials, as they did in this case, to discuss issues of mutual interest."

Little shed less light on another revelation in Ventura's book. The former Independence Party governor says he was "stunned to learn that there is a CIA operative inside every state government. Ventura says the Minnesota operative was a deputy commissioner, who was working with a dual identity.

In response to a question about Ventura's claim, Little wrote, "I wouldn't think of CIA officers as being in state governments. They're federal employees."

John Wodele said it would seem unusual that a CIA agent would be working in state government.

"If that did happen, I'm not aware of it," he said. "And I guess that would be that way it should be. I think the CIA is supposed to operate that way, where directors of communication are not made aware."

CIA operations primarily focus on the collection and analysis of information about foreign threats to the United States. Domestic matters fall into the jurisdiction of the FBI.

Former Republican U.S. Sen. Dave Durenberger is questioning Ventura's claims. Durenberger, who spent eight years on the Senate intelligence committee, says he never heard of CIA operatives in

state governments or agents grilling new governors.

"I cannot think of a reason why either the details of, or his personal experiences with how he got elected would do anything for understanding threats to the United States and to our national security policy presented by foreign agents," he said. "It doesn't jibe. Unless Jesse had another life that he either wrote about in this book or has yet to disclose to us prior to becoming our governor. It sort of like blows even my imagination to think of how this could be a reality."

CIA finances and personnel are classified. But Durenberger said he thinks the agency would be stretched to assign operatives to every state capitol and send 23 agents to attend the same meeting

It's unclear whether the current administration has any dealings with the CIA. Brian McClung, a spokesman for Gov. Tim Pawlenty, said the governor talks on occasion with diplomatic, defense and intelligence officials. But he said Pawlenty does not comment on matters relating to intelligence.

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[Back To Table Of Contents](#)

[< Previous](#) [Next](#)