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FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS STAFF

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SUBJECT Bob Woodward Discusses VEIL

SONYA FRIEDMAN: He spilled the beans about Watergate. He came under fire for his book about the death of actor John Belushi. His latest book is also being criticized. It's called "VEIL: The Secret Wars of the CIA." And at the center of the storm, Woodward's four-minute interview with former CIA Director William Casey.

But it's a month now since the book's release. Some of the initial fallout has settled, perhaps. And the Pulitzer Prize-winner joins us today.

I have been really looking forward to meeting you. Your integrity as a reporter proceeds you, in terms of reputation. But so does the continuing shadow of doubt about a lot of things that you write about. There always seems to be a firecracker exploding around you. How do you feel about that?

BOB WOODWARD: Well, I think it means I'm doing my job. Namely, that it often contradicts -- what I write often contradicts the press-release version of reality. And so, of course, people who have been putting out lies are going to say, "Oh, no. That's not true." But it stands the test of time, as all of the books and the journalism have demonstrated.

FRIEDMAN: The issue, the central issue of substantiating material. You know, in the Watergate book it was Deep Throat. And nobody ever found out who Deep Throat is, and whether or not that was a figment of anyone's imagination. Now it's the Casey interview. Nobody can substantiate that.

It's not possible, is it, that there's a little...

WOODWARD: Well, I had lots of interviews with Casey. And it's a matter of record at the CIA that those interviews took place. They are not challenging me. And a number of news organizations have broadcast or published stories saying that the government realizes I did interview Casey in his hospital room during that period.

FRIEDMAN: Why do you think there's so much controversy about that, then? I mean why medical reports that come out and say it would be impossible for Casey to speak to you at that time? Or his wife saying this is a pack of lies? Even Reagan saying that?

WOODWARD: Well, first of all, these people have a vested interest in trying to not let people focus on the issue of the book -- namely, what the conduct of the government has been, what happened in Casey's CIA for six years. And if you look at what's in the book, I think it's very much of a story of government going off the tracks, too much secrecy.

The CIA is terribly important. That is the institution that can prevent us from getting into war, or get us into war. And I think war is the biggest calamity that can come to this nation. And so journalists and authors have to watch what the CIA is doing.

FRIEDMAN: But there is a turning point in the book. And if everyone agrees that you were in the hospital room, I'm not sure what your feeling is about his words, "I believed," or what you heard as "I believed." Demonstrating that...

WOODWARD: No, what he said. That's what he said. There's no question about that.

FRIEDMAN: Demonstrating, however, that he was cogent at the time, answering the question that you asked, for a man who was very ill.

WOODWARD: As evidence, it's not something you could present in court as conclusive. If you had been there, which I wish you were, you would have seen, on a personal level, it was that kind of human communication that has absolute authority.

FRIEDMAN: Why would somebody like the Director of the CIA select you as a confidant?

WOODWARD: He didn't select me. I was assigned to cover the CIA for the Washington Post. I had sources in his agency, in other departments throughout Washington. I was finding out about his top secret documents, his secret wars, covert operations. We

were writing about. He tried to shape the stories. Sometimes he tried to, successfully, talk us out of running stories.

FRIEDMAN: That is amusing. I mean if I must say, it sounds as though the man who would not want you to write anything about him, once you start to begin this, actually formed a relationship with you.

WOODWARD: Well, of course. As he told me once, everyone always says more than they're supposed to. You know that. I know that, as a journalist. People talk. They want to justify themselves. They want to explain their side. Hallelujah! I'm glad people do. I was willing to listen.

I think if Casey were alive and read "VEIL," he would say he got his side across.

FRIEDMAN: Is there a secret government running this country?

WOODWARD: Well, I think that's the essential issue. I don't think it's running this country. I think Casey and the Reagan White House were running the CIA in a way that was terribly dangerous.

Look at all of the covert wars that are disclosed in that book. Look when you get into the nitty-gritty of how this government goes around secretly killing people. Look at how the Iran arms sales started in a secret operation that Casey set up with the Saudi intelligence service to kill leading terrorist in Beirut. When they couldn't kill him, they killed 80 innocent people. Imagine if somebody drove a truck-bomb into some apartment complex here in the United States and killed 80 innocent people. There would be an uproar.

FRIEDMAN: When you put something like this between the covers of a book and people begin to read it, is your goal to shake their confidence in the American system or in this Administration? What is the goal?

WOODWARD: Just the opposite. It is to explain what the government is doing.

Going back to Watergate, going stories, books on that, the Supreme Court, this about the CIA, 15 years of experience, government is dangerous. Government is a concentration of power. Whenever that concentration of power is secret, when it's kept away, and when they narrow, as they repeatedly did in the Reagan White House, the number of people involved in the discussions and the decisions, they make serious mistakes. And it's done in the name of this country. We're defined by -- this country's defined

internationally by who we decide to go war against, whether we bomb them openly or whether we do it secretly.

FRIEDMAN: In light of your answer to that question, it has been suggested that you and Ben Bradlee actually sat on certain stories, that they were news stories, but that you saved them or held them back. And fellow journalists feel that that really is a very compromised position you've put yourself in.

WOODWARD: No, I don't believe so. And look at the record. We ran dozens of stories in the Washington Post about these things. The book amplifies and has more detail and has new information. But that's the nature of doing something like this.

FRIEDMAN: Do you feel in any way, though, in writing this, that you compromised this country's security?

WOODWARD: No, I don't. Some people have said so. I think they're wrong. I think that in writing a book like this, in explaining to people what's being done in our name, you can't be general; you've got to be specific. And there's no laundered version of the reality of death in secret war.

FRIEDMAN: Is it that Americans have a right to know and that they need to know some things that are not being made public to them? Is that your...

WOODWARD: Do you remember the Vietnam War and what a trauma it was to this country?

FRIEDMAN: Sure.

WOODWARD: Well, the CIA is the front line, the first line of defense in the world for us. And if their analysis and their reasoning and if the people in there are good and honest, we can stop war, not start war.

FRIEDMAN: Well, we're about to start a whole new era of the Iran-Contra hearings and the consequences. Lawrence Walsh, the special prosecutor, may be asking for a number of indictments. What do you think we're going to find out now, beyond your book, beyond what we already know, that may shake us up again, or perhaps affirm for many that what the government did was right and that the ends justify the means?

WOODWARD: Well, I don't think people believe that the ends justify the means. I think if you take a poll on that and you sit down and really talk to people, they will scream at you and say, "No. We cannot conduct our foreign policy or run our government that way."

I think there is a lot unknown. We just have a story in the Washington Post this morning about the report that will come out from the Iran-Contra Congressional Committees saying they didn't answer many of the key questions; that, in a sense, they got rolled and deceived by many of the witnesses and by the government.

FRIEDMAN: Well, we'll stay tuned and we'll find out.

I want to thank you for being with us today.