White House Won't Rule Out Pardon

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WASHINGTON (AP) -- The White House on Tuesday declined to rule out the possibility of an eventual pardon for former vice presidential aide I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby. But spokesman Tony Snow said, for now, President Bush is satisfied with his decision to commute Libby's 2 1/2-year prison sentence.

"He thought any jail time was excessive. He did not see fit to have Scooter Libby taken to jail," Snow said.

Snow said that even with Bush's decision, Libby remains with a felony conviction on his record, two years' probation, a $250,000 fine and probable loss of his legal career. "This is hardly a slap on the wrist," Snow said.

U.S. District Judge Reggie Walton, who sentenced Libby to prison, declined Tuesday to discuss the case or his views on sentencing. "To now say anything about sentencing on the heels of yesterday's events will inevitably be construed as comments on the president's commutation decision, which would be inappropriate," the judge said in an e-mail.

With prison seeming all but certain for Libby, Bush on Monday spared the former chief of staff to Vice President Dick Cheney. His move came just five hours after a federal appeals court panel ruled that Libby could not delay his prison term. The Bureau of Prisons had already assigned Libby a prison identification number.

Snow was pressed several times on whether the president might eventually grant a full pardon to Libby, who had been convicted of lying and conspiracy in the CIA leak investigation. The press secretary declined to say anything categorically.

"The reason I'm not going to say I'm not going to close a door on a pardon," Snow said, "Scooter Libby may petition for one."

"The president thinks that he has dealt with the situation properly," he added. "There is always a possibility or there's an avenue open for anybody to petition for consideration of a pardon."
Bush's decision was sharply criticized by Democrats. Republicans were more subdued, with some welcoming the decision and some conservatives saying Bush should have gone further.

"The president's getting pounding on the right for not granting a full pardon," Snow suggested.

Asked whether Cheney had weighed in on the decision to commute Libby's sentence, Snow said, "I don't have direct knowledge. But on the other hand, the president did consult with most senior officials, and I'm sure that everybody had an opportunity to share their views."

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