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MS. SMITH: (Strikes gavel.) Good afternoon and welcome to the National Press Club for our annual Speaker's Luncheon featuring the Gerald R. Ford Journalism award.

My name is Sylvia Smith. I'm the Washington editor of the Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette and president of the National Press Club.

I'd like to welcome Club members and their guests as well as those of you who are watching on C-SPAN. We're looking forward to today's speech and afterward I will ask as many questions from the audience as time permits. Please hold your applause during the speeches so that we have time for as many questions as possible.

I'd now like to introduce our head table guests, if they would stand briefly when their names are called. From your right, Bob Schieffer of CBS News and host of "Face the Nation;" Deborah Price, Washington correspondent for the Detroit News; Edwin Chen, chief White House correspondent for Bloomberg News; Peter Baker of The Washington Post, the Gerald R. Ford Foundation Journalism Award winner for coverage of the presidency; Dr. Henry Kissinger, former secretary of State under Presidents Nixon and Ford and a member of the Gerald R. Ford Foundation board of trustees; Jack Ford, chairman of the Gerald R. Ford Foundation and son of the president; Melissa Charbonneau of CBN News and vice chairwoman of the NPC speakers committee; and skipping over our speaker for a moment, Lynne Cheney, wife of the vice president; Ken Dalecki, freelance editor and member of the speakers committee who helped arrange today's luncheon. Thanks, Ken. Marty Allen, chairman emeritus of the Gerald R. Ford Foundation; Rick Atkinson of The Washington Post, the Gerald R. Ford Foundation Journalism Award winner for coverage of national defense; and Greta Van Susteren of FOX News.

(Applause.)

The National Press Club is honored to again host the Gerald R. Ford Foundation's presentation of its annual awards for outstanding reporting on the presidency and national defense. Our Club has enjoyed a long association with the Foundation and with the 38th president of the United States.

President Ford spoke at this podium a record 18 times, appearing before, during, and after his presidency. President Ford, who died late in 2006, is missed by many in this room -- members of the press who knew him, former members of his brief but historic administration, and other admirers.

We send special greetings to Mrs. Ford and welcome all of President and Mrs. Ford's children and grandchildren who are here with us today. Welcome.

One of our head table guests, Henry Kissinger, has said that President Ford was probably the most normal person ever to assume the presidency -- (laughter) -- probably because he didn't seek the office in the first place. (Chuckles.) The late Hugh Sidey of Time Magazine and a Club member said Ford was the only one of the many presidents he knew who genuinely liked reporters.

Ford truly believed that a free and unfettered press was vital to the preservation of our democracy. He established his journalism award program as one way to foster that conviction. Jack Ford, the late president's son and chairman of the Foundation, will now make the award presentation, assisted by Marty Allen, president emeritus of the Ford Foundation.

Mr. Ford and Mr. Allen?

(Applause.) MR. FORD: Thank you, Sylvia. Thank you, Vice President Cheney, Lynne Cheney, Dr. Kissinger, all the members of the Ford Foundation who are attending our annual meeting. It's a pleasure to have you all here.

Before I go into the awards portion of the program today, I just would like to pass along Mother's best wishes to each and every one of you. She's doing great. We just celebrated her 90th birthday. (Applause.) Thank you. We had the entire family there, and she was the grande dame of the whole affair and loving every minute of it. So --

Let me begin with the award for reporting on the presidency, and on behalf of the entire family, the Foundation, and our distinguished panel of judges, I am pleased to announce this year's winner of the Gerald Ford Prize for Distinguished Reporting on the Presidency, Mr. Peter Baker.

The Gerald Ford Prize for Distinguished Reporting on the Presidency judges unanimously chose Peter Baker to receive this prize for his 2007 reporting for The Washington Post. Peter is currently writing for The New York Times.

I'd like to read the judges' citation at this time: "Peter Baker has written an exceptionally trenchant appraisal of President George W. Bush in his last year in office. He has portrayed a beleaguered president with insight, clarity, and compassion, balancing accomplishments against goals and aspirations.

"Mr. Baker has given us an even-handed account of the odds that President Bush faced and the limited success of his initiatives. Beyond the dynamics of crisis and response, Mr. Baker presents to his readers the character of this president, a leader confident of his actions, at peace with himself, and secure in his unabiding faith.

"We compliment Mr. Baker on his diligence in finding, interviewing, and using respected and relevant sources. We find both his reporting and his writing to meet the highest standards of informative and responsive journalism."

Peter, please come forward to receive your award.

(Applause.)

MR. BAKER: Thank you very much for this today. I'm not a public speaker, so I won't bore you with very much. I would like to thank the Ford family and everybody associated with this amazing organization today. This is a prize that people who cover the White House value so much because it is given by people who understand what the presidency is all about, and that's what we try to do every day from the briefing room and the pools and the back of Air Force One and the press charter. My parents are here. I'd like to thank them real quickly -- (inaudible) -- Ted and Martha Baker. They encouraged me to be a reporter from a very young age. My editor, Bill Hamilton from The Washington Post, thank you for being here, Bill. And my wife, Susan Glasser, who is the best journalist, best editor, best friend anybody ever had. I very much appreciate their being here today.

(Applause.)

President Ford, before he passed away, wrote an op-ed piece for The Washington Post that I remembered and wanted to cite today real quickly before sitting down. It was upon the death of Hugh Sidey, a journalist who had known him and covered him for so long.

He wrote, I thought, something that stuck with me. He wrote that journalists understand and need to understand the necessarily -- a necessarily adversarial relationship that often exists between those in power and those who report on their activities. But he wrote about Mr. Sidey that along with the ability to pierce official secrecy went an empathy that enabled him to see the White House and its occupants first and always as very human beings. And that's something I've always tried to remember, and I hope we all do as we report on people in power here in Washington.

Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

JACK FORD (President, Gerald R. Ford Foundation.): For our second award of the afternoon, I'm pleased to announce this year's winner of the Gerald R. Ford Prize for Distinguished Reporting on National Defense, Mr. Rick Atkinson, also writing for The Washington Post.

The judges are pleased to report the selection of Rick Atkinson of The Washington Post as the winner of the 2007 Gerald R. Ford Prize for Distinguished Reporting on National Defense. Mr. Atkinson's series of articles, "Left of Boom," brought clarity to the U.S. effort to defeat IEDs, a complex issue and one that's become a critical factor in the Iraq conflict.

The judges felt Mr. Atkinson delivered an original perspective, great depth of analysis, and a wealth of investigative research to the topic, spanning the spectrum of tactical, strategic, and organizational and technology challenges. The panel concluded that his series illuminated these issues not only for the general public, but for public officials as well.

Overall, the articles tell a cogent (sic) story of conflict in the 21st century, a continued race between offense and defense, technology and countermeasures.

It offered a singular degree of readability, interweaving views from top military strategists, to bomb technicians on the (long walk ?) to Iraq's witnesses on the ground. The judges commend Mr. Atkinson for a timely, impressive and well-written work.

Mr. Atkinson, please step forward.

(Applause.)

MR. ATKINSON: Thank you very much for that. Thank you to the Ford family and to the Foundation. It's a great honor.

I feel like I'm here a bit under false pretenses because I consider myself -- and have for a long time, to be a recovering journalist. I'm mostly historian these days. I write books. I'm not the real deal, like my friend and colleague Peter Baker, and so many of you in this room.

Last year, between books, I went back to The Washington Post, where I've worked off and on for 25 years -- mostly off, in recent years, and I was looking for some way, within that six-month span, to take a look at the war in Iraq in a way that I felt would capture the war in an original and fresh way.

And an episode that I had been involved in, peripherally, had stuck in my mind since it happened on March the 29th, 2003. And that's when a suicide bomber, driving a

taxicab on Highway 9, north of Najaf, detonated 100 kilos of plastic explosive in the trunk. It killed four soldiers from the 3rd Infantry Division.

At the time, I was not far away with the 101st Airborne Division. I was an embedded reporter with then Major General Dave Petraeus. And I will never forget the look on Dave Petraeus' face when he was told that morning that four soldiers had been killed by a road-side bomb, essentially. That was the beginning, in Iraq, of a spate of bombings that eventually, to this date, have claimed 1,700 American lives, including a soldier who was killed yesterday.

And it seemed to me that the road-side bomb -- the improvised explosive device, the IED, was the signature weapon of this war, much as the machine gun was in World War I, or the laser-guided smart bomb was in the Persian Gulf War. And that if you could understand the cycle of measure, countermeasure, counter-countermeasure that's been going on in Iraq since 2003, and in Afghanistan since 2002, it would provide a lens for looking at the war. In many ways it's -- it's a metaphor for the war. It goes to the issues of preparation, or lack of preparation; innovation, their's and ours; and just, finally, the metaphor "Left of Boom" was conceived early on in the Iraq war by officials who were trying to get a handle on the rising tide of IEDs. Last summer there were 3,000 a month -- more than 3,000 a month in Iraq alone.

And they began to think of a continuum, a spectrum. And the "boom" was the blast of the bomb. And if you were "Right of Boom," you were trying to mitigate the effects of the blast -- through better body armor and other kinds of mitigating devices. And for - - now, six years, starting in Afghanistan, the effort has been to move "Left of Boom," which is an effort to prevent the detonation, to do all the things that are necessary to prevent the bomb from going off. So, that's where the title comes from.

I'd also like to thank the same people that Peter thanked, actually. Bill Hamilton was my editor on this; Susan Glaser is not my wife, but she was -- (laughter) -- the assistant managing editor for national news, she was a great supporter and believer of this project. And I thank them very much. It was a pleasure and honor to work with them, as it always is when I go back to the Post. Thanks again.

(Applause.)

MS. SMITH: Congratulations Rick and Peter. It's been a pleasure to read your articles over the years, and I hope you both keep writing a lot.

It's also a pleasure to have Vice President Cheney at our podium again. He's participated in the Gerald Ford Foundation's Journalism Award Program in three of the last four years, a fitting tribute to his years as Ford's chief of staff.

Two years ago, in his remarks at this event, he reminded us of a unique episode in American government, the year President Ford decided to personally brief the media on budget proposal -- on his budget proposal, rather than having the budget director do it.

Cheney described it this way, "It was a moment without parallel in the last 50 years, and he was superb."

Vice President Cheney is constantly in the news, even when he would prefer not to be. (Laughter.) Most recently, he features in a tell-all book by former Bush presidential press secretary, Scott McClellan. McClellan accuses the administration he once served of misleading the American public in initiating the Iraq war, a policy decision strongly advocated by the vice president.

McClellan's book has been -- has been widely criticized by other former Bush administration officials, and this morning columnist and Club member, Bob Novak, added his critique, writing that the book reflects a "partisan Democratic mantra." Perhaps Vice President Cheney will also give us a book review. (Laughter.)

VICE PRES. CHENEY: (Off mike.) Not likely.

(Laughter.)

MS. SMITH: (Laughs.) McClellan calls the vice president in the book, "the magic man" for his ability to get what he wants in the Bush administration. But the last time he was at our head table, Mr. Cheney had a different label. He arrived unannounced at a Press Club luncheon last November, at which his wife, Lynne Cheney, talked about her book, "Growing Up in Wyoming." At Mrs. Cheney's request, the vice president's seat at the end of the head table was reserved for Richard Hunter. (Laughs.)

Anyway, ladies and gentlemen please welcome the vice president of the United States, Richard Cheney.

(Applause.)

VICE PRES. CHENEY: Well, thank you very much. Thank you, Sylvia. Congratulations to Rick Atkinson and Peter Baker for the awards.

It's always a pleasure to be back at the Press Club, and a chance to spend some time as well with the Ford family -- with Susan, Mike, Jack and Steve, and their families as well. President Ford's brother, Dick is with us today, and we're glad he could be here. Seeing all of them brings back many good memories of President Ford. And also, obviously, thoughts of Betty Ford who, at age 90, remains one of the most admired women in America.

(Applause.)

Let me also acknowledge all the distinguished guests at the head table, especially Marty Allen, my fellow trustee at the Foundation; and good friend Henry Kissinger. I'm pleased to be here as we reflect on the legacy of Gerald Ford, and once again present awards in the name of journalism, related to the presidency and national security. And

I'm delighted to see Bob Schieffer of CBS News here, who covered Gerry Ford when I was working for him.

The late Hugh Sidey, who's been mentioned here frequently today, is another great journalist who was a friend for many of us over the years. And some years ago he set forth the best criteria I've ever seen for reporting and commentary on the presidency: "The dimensions of the presidential burden," he wrote, "awe anyone who watches closely. Any comment on the man who has the courage to seek, and the skill to serve in the presidency is, in a way, presumptuous. And yet the office needs and demands constant examination and discussion. The challenge is to be diligent in the pursuit of the facts; and then to be calm in their consideration; and finally, to be fair in their application," end quote. It can also be said that those who report on the presidency will always have an eager audience. Americans have an inherent interest in the office first held by the man we call "the father of the country," who won the job twice with the vote of every single member of the Electoral College. Members are a patriotic -- Americans are a patriotic people, and we look to each president as a guardian of great institutions and high ideals. Just

The office itself is the center of action and responsibility in the federal government, and because its powers are vested in a single individual, the man in the job inevitably becomes an object of fascination. I remember the first time I saw the Oval Office, now nearly 40 years ago. I'd come to Washington as a Congressional fellow with plans to spend 12 months working on Capitol Hill, and then finish my Ph.D. dissertation and return to the University of Wisconsin and an academic career.

As part of the orientation for the fellowship, we were given a special tour of the West Wing, including the Cabinet and the Oval Office.

We stopped at the threshold of the Oval -- and I can still picture the green rug, the heavy gold braid flags and the tall leather chair of Lyndon Baines Johnson. Off to the side was a big cabinet with terminals for the Associated Press and United Press International so the president could read the news as it came off the wires. Also there was a long wooden console with three TV sets so that he could watch all of the networks simultaneously. Things are different now, of course. (Laughter.) With the internet and all the cable outlets, these days in the West Wing you can watch more than 60 different channels. I wonder where President Johnson would find room for that many TVs. (Scattered laughter.)

I'm sure I had many thoughts while I was standing there in that doorway back in 1968, but I was incapable of imagining that time and chance would bring me back into the West Wing so often over the decades, whether as a bottom-rung staff aide, chief of staff, Cabinet member, congressman or vice president. Taken together, experiences like these give you a deep appreciation for the duties and the pressures of the presidency, a taste of both victory and defeat, a valuable sense of perspective when the road gets rough, and an understanding that personal character is a decisive factor in any presidency.

With the exception of my current office, the job that brought me closest to the president was, of course, as chief of staff. It's in the nature of that position to spend innumerable hours with the president ensuring he gets all of the information he needs to make decisions, managing his time, trying to minimize the frustrations of his job. The chief of staff is there for all the high profile activities, from flights on Air Force One to summit meetings, to state dinners. But he's also there at all hours of the day for the less pleasant work -- putting out the fires, resolving turf battles, managing crises, delivering bad news. It's a job that takes every ounce of your mental and physical energy. In my case, I worked too hard, slept too little, smoked too many cigarettes. But it's also a job I love due mainly to the tremendous respect and affection I had for the president I served, Gerald R. Ford.

Tonight, Lynne and I will be going to a dinner gathering of the Ford Foundation -- as many of you will -- an annual event that's been taking place for many years. Up until just a few years ago, both President Ford and Betty came to these dinners along with their children. I am not aware of any other administration in which the First Family, Cabinet officers and White House Staff have maintained such close personal ties or have met for occasions of this kind for so many years. But there's still a good degree of warmth and camaraderie among those of us that were associated with President Ford. We rightly believed we were part of something very special.

The Ford presidency may have been just 895 days but, as Dr. Kissinger has aptly pointed out, Gerry Ford encountered enough challenges in that short time to fill two full terms in office. We were proud to call him our leader. He was a kind-hearted, fair-minded, even-keeled sort of man. Though he'd spent 25 years in the legislative branch, he also proved to be a natural executive who wouldn't hesitate to make decisions.

There's going to be an aircraft carrier named after Gerald Ford, and it's fitting because he was a Navy man and because he had a lot of experience in riding out storms. One of the toughest decisions was also one of the earliest when he announced the pardon of Richard Nixon. For that he was attacked from every conceivable angle. His judgment, his timing, his intelligence, his motives, his personal integrity, all of these were called into question. His public approval rating sank dramatically, but the president had made his decision carefully and he had put the interest of the country first. He kept his head about him even when it seemed that many others in Washington were losing theirs and blaming it on him. With the passing of time of course, voices were lowered, temperatures cooled, and the consensus now is that Gerald Ford did the right thing. Indeed, he lived to see that consensus change, and he handled that, too, with quiet grace and dignity.

History looks with favor on such a man, and it's gratifying to see that his reputation has only grown in the 31 years since he left office and the 17 months since he was laid to rest. Gerald Ford once said, "As president, my primary concern must always be the greatest good of all the people of the United States who serve, and I am. As a man, my first consideration is to be true to my own conscience and my own convictions." To me, those words remain a superb and timeless standard of presidential responsibility. I have

witnessed it often and at close quarters, and I saw it first in President Gerald R. Ford. I miss my friend and I'm certain I wouldn't be vice president today had it not been for the opportunities he gave me all those years ago.

As I've noted on past occasions, Gerry Ford was a forgiving and a very patient man, so naturally he got along fine with the news media. (Laughter.) And if President Ford were here today, I know what he'd say to me, "Congratulate the award recipients, don't talk too damn long and answer some questions." (Laughter.) So that's what I'll do right now. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

MS. SMITH: Thank you very much --

VICE PRES. CHENEY: You've got questions, Sylvia.

MS. SMITH: -- I do have questions, but if it's alright with you, I'll sit down here so I'm not behind you. Scott McClellan describes a Governor Bush who governed from a bipartisan perspective and a candidate Bush who promised to change the political culture in Washington. He says that that quality and that promise disappeared after the 2000 election, and he says yours was the hand behind it. Setting aside McClellan's speculations about your influence, do you think it's possible in this day and age for a president to govern as Bush did in Texas and to fundamentally change the partisan hostilities that permeate discussions in Washington?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: Well, I haven't read Scott McClellan's book. I don't plan to read Scott McClellan's book any time soon. (Laughter, scattered applause.) You know there's a lot made of how difficult it is to operate in Washington and how partisan it gets at times and how intense the battles get, but one of the things that I think I've taken away from my now nearly it'll be 40 years in August since Lynne and I arrived in Washington, is that, you know it's -- if you go back and you'd look -- have the perspective of time and the benefit of being a student of history -- that as difficult as it may be now in terms from a partisan standpoint, I can remember the Watergate years and all that that entailed from the standpoint of both the challenges in terms of the way the system had to respond to what was, I think, the most difficult constitutional crisis we'd faced since the Civil War. And certainly, I would say in terms of trying to match up the degree of partisan dialogue and disputes that we have now with that period of time, this doesn't look nearly as tough.

MS. SMITH: So we're just remembering it wrong?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: Well, or we've got a lot of people who comment on it and don't have the benefit of having been there 40 years ago. (Laughter.) Henry remembers.

MS. SMITH: Are we ill-served by that kind of conflict or is this just the expression of raw democracy?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: I don't know. I'd like to think about it. This is a contentious process. These are institutions that we are uniquely blessed with due to the wisdom and the farsightedness of the founding fathers. It is a time very contentious but, my goodness, if you think about the periods that we've come through before it is difficult to draw the conclusion that somehow this is the most difficult. And I think about what Abraham Lincoln faced during the Civil War or the problems that James Madison had to deal with in the middle of the War of 1812. Lynne was reading a passage to me the other night about how the secretary of war kept telling James Madison the British will never come to Washington, and the next thing he knew, they burned it down. (Laughter.)

So I think we have to be a little cautious about drawing these kinds of sort of broad generalizations based upon -- well, I don't know how many people's views are involved on that. But I'm very cautious about making those kinds of sweeping generalizations.

MS. SMITH: You said you don't want to comment on McClellan's book, of course. But what is your view about these tell-all books in general -- about -- that are written by former administration officials? Are they largely self-serving or do they offer a view of policy and power that's otherwise not available to people?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: I thought Bob Dole got it about right. (Laughter, applause.)

MS. SMITH: Good line. (Laughter.)

With the benefit of hindsight, do you wish Congress had been more insistent in requiring answers to questions about the war aftermath, the plans for reconstruction, the estimates of casualties and the cost and the duration?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: Well, I -- you know, would argue -- and we don't have time for me to go into it here today. I mean, I think it's no surprise that I believe that what we did in connection with a global war on terror -- Afghanistan, Iraq -- was sound policy. It was the right thing to do. I believe that with every fiber of my being. It has been difficult, without question. It's very difficult when you embark upon those kinds of enterprises to be absolutely precise in terms of how long they'll last or what exact course they'll follow.

But I think, based on reflection, my view is that 10 or 15 years from now, it'll be clear that going in and liberating 50 million people in Afghanistan and Iraq and closing down the terrorist camps where people were being trained to attack the United States and going after not only terrorists, but state sponsors of terror and those who provide them with ever-deadlier technologies -- taking down the Libyan nuclear program, the A.Q. Khan nuclear proliferation network, getting rid of Saddam Hussein as well as the Taliban regime in Afghanistan -- all of those, in my estimation, were very sound and extremely important things for us to do and the world's better off because we did them.

Now we can get into the debates and discussions about various facets of the policy or how it was pursued. That's legitimate. We do that all the time. We're still doing it. I just finished reading Rick Atkinson's book "Day of Battle." And we're still arguing about the Italian campaign of 1943. So I expect that we ought to have and will have discussions about this. But I -- I'm prepared to argue that what we've done has in fact been good, solid, sound policy and America is safer for it. There's a reason why we've gone nearly seven years without another attack like 9/11 and it's because of the policies we've put in place, the tough decisions the president made, the skilled performance of people in intelligence, law enforcement and in the military that have taken the battle to the enemy. And it's been absolutely the right thing to do.

MS. SMITH: Aside from it being the right policy, do you -- are you comfortable with the amount of discussion about the aftermath beforehand?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: Well, as I said, there -- I think it was a lot of debate and discussion, certainly within the administration. Any suggestion that this was not carefully considered is just wrong. It's made by people who weren't in the meetings I was in. And I -- you know, to sort of buy that approach, you'd have to accept the proposition that it was a mistake, and I don't accept that proposition.

MS. SMITH: An interview earlier this year with -- about troop surge -- or the success of the troop surge -- Martha Raddatz pointed out that recent polls showed that about two-thirds of Americans say the fight in Iraq is not worth it. Your answer was, "So?" Which you then amplified this way, "You can't be blown off course by polls." Do you wish you had answered that question differently and does it matter if the public disagrees sharply with the wisdom of the war?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: No. I -- when I said, "So," the point was, "What's the question, Martha?" Martha had made the statement. She didn't ask a question.

I think the point is a valid one. I think it's very important to remind people and that -- I've tried to reference that in my remarks today -- presidents have to make decisions that are oftentimes unpopular. If they're making the tough calls and if they're addressing the difficult issues, they are going to sooner or later be unpopular.

If your goal and objective is to be loved 75 (percent) or 80 (percent) or 90 percent of the time, you're in the wrong line of work. Presidents get paid to go make those tough calls and tough decisions. I've worked for some like George Bush and Gerry Ford, who obviously did exactly that. And I -- the point I made when I was talking with Martha is that you simply cannot be in a position where you respond weekly or monthly or daily to the fluctuations in the polls in terms of what kind of policy you're going to set. You do not want a president who's going to govern that way. And you get to vote every four years on who gets to be president. You have to go out and earn the right to be president -- make those decisions -- and that's, I suppose, one of the reasons we have limited terms and why we go through that process every four years.

I think, though, from the perspective of the presidents we admire most and the ones who've been -- in many respects contributed the most to the success of this republic for the last 200-and-some years are those who've been willing to make those tough decisions and not be governed by the polls, but rather be governed by what they believe is in the best interest of the nation. That's why we elect them. That's what I think the good ones have done. If you're going to look only at poll ratings as the measure of what constitutes good presidents and bad ones, I think you'd come up with a very different ranking than the history would warrant.

MS. SMITH: But doesn't it make sense that something as huge as a war should have public support? And how does the White House cope with the fact that this war has become very unpopular?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: Well, what about Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War? You know, we look at where Abe was in the summer of 1864 when, after years of struggle, hundreds of thousands of casualties -- what turned the campaign around in 1864 between he and McClellan was when Sherman took Atlanta. And that worked, obviously, to make it possible for him to succeed in -- to be elected to his second term. But can you imagine what the United States would've been like if McClellan had won that race -- a very popular, very attractive guy instead of Abraham Lincoln, who had made all the tough decisions?

And I've just -- I've stated my view on it. I don't believe you can make poll -- make policy based strictly on the polls. You do it at election time and then entrust those you've elected to govern, and hold them accountable at the next election.

MS. SMITH: Well, if people -- if politicians shouldn't be governed -- if our elected officials shouldn't be governed by polls, why do they take so many of them, including the White House?

VICE PRESIDENT CHENEY: You've got me. I don't -- (laughter) -- I don't have a clue. (Laughter.)

MS. SMITH: But your White House does that.

VICE PRES, CHENEY: Not to the extent that you would think. We waste an awful lot of money on polls. (Laughter.) As a -- well, as a nation -- I mean, the people are always trying to find some way to measure things -- sort of the horse race mentality that goes with covering politics. I suppose that you just hope people are willing to pay for it and cover it and so forth. But the -- I would simply reiterate what I've said previously. I don't think you can govern the nation based on polls. MS. SMITH: You mentioned a few minutes ago that there's a reason that we haven't had a terrorist attack in seven years. Are you saying that's because of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq? What would you mean --

VICE PRESIDENT CHENEY: I'm saying it's because we basically made a decision after 9/11 that this was a strategic threat to the United States -- that before 9/11, our approach to terrorists -- to the attacks on the World Trade Center in '93 and so forth, Khobar Towers in '96 -- was to go out and arrest individuals and prosecute them, but treat it as a law enforcement problem.

And -- but what we recognized after 9/11 was that this was a far more serious threat to the nation than the work of an individual or two who might touch off a terrorist bomb in the basement of the World Trade Center. That in fact, it was a strategic threat and you had to mount an entirely different approach if you were going to succeed against that kind of threat.

And that's exactly what we did and that new strategy involved going after not only the terrorists, but those who sponsored terror; to those -- close down the safe havens where they found sanctuary; to go after those governments that had provided the sanctuary; to go strike at those individuals or organizations or elements that might provide deadlier technologies to the terrorists. Those are the policies we've pursued overseas.

I mean, you go into Afghanistan, you put troops on the ground, you close down the training camps where al Qaeda trained an estimated 20,000 terrorists in the late '90s -- 19 of whom came here and killed 3,000 Americans on 9/11.

You also had to move aggressively here at home in order to put in place the intelligence capabilities, in particular, that would allow us to defend against those attacks. That included such things at the Patriot Act, which gave us the right to use in the terrorist battle the same kind of tools we'd be using in the counternarcotics business; put in place a terrorist surveillance program, which was -- now is being debated on the Hill under the guise of FISA, but basically let us intercept communications between what we believed were al Qaeda-related numbers overseas and individuals here in the United States to find out what they were trying to do by way of future attacks against the government.

It meant we had to have an effective interrogation program when we captured terrorists. If you're going capture Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the mastermind of 9/11, you want him to tell you what he knows about that organization and what their plans are and where they're planning next to kill Americans and how they're organized and where they're operating from, et cetera. A whole series of questions that are absolutely vital to having good intelligence to take on al Qaeda and to win that fight. And that's what we did.

Now, we're taking some flak for it. It's not popular. We've got people out there running around -- The New York Times won the Pulitzer for revealing the fact of the terrorist surveillance program. Now, with all due respect to being here in the National Press Club with a lot of my friends in the press, I thought the idea that The New York Times would win the Pulitzer Prize -- one of the highest awards in journalism -- for revealing one of the nation's most important secrets and telling the enemy how it was we

were intercepting their communications, frankly, was less than honorable. It bothered me greatly. (Applause.)

But I've said before, and I'll say again: I think this president deserves tremendous credit for being willing to make those decisions to put those programs in place, to stick with it when it got tough and when we had a lot of our friends in the press corps or in the other party condemning us, attacking us, claiming we were violating the civil liberties of the American people by the measures we were taking. Those are the kinds of crucial decisions that have been essential in letting us intercept and prevent further attacks against the United States.

I would argue there are thousands of Americans alive today because of those decisions and those programs and those actions that we've undertaken over the last seven years. And you know, if you doubt the results, well, I would point out that it's now been almost seven years without another major attack upon the United States. That's a tremendous achievement.

MS. SMITH: How do you think the press has covered the effects of the surge?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: Well, I think some of the reporting has been -- has been pretty good. I think the surge has been a great success. The president made that decision at a time when, if you'd looked at the polls or if you'd followed the wisdom of the talking heads, you would have reduced troop levels in Iraq.

He didn't do that. He said, nope, we're not going to do that. We're going to add five more combat brigades and we're going to get a handle on the security situation in Baghdad, et cetera. It's worked, I think, dramatically. We've seen it. We've just had the announcement, of course, of what happened in May. We lost some 14 killed in action in May. You regret every single one of those deaths, but it's a lot better than where we were a year ago and it's the lowest casualty rate in nearly five years.

The surge has worked. It created the time and opportunity for the Iraqis to do a better job of getting their act together. Their forces are much more effective today. Look at what they did in the last few months in Basra and then Sadr City. It's been a success.

I guess if I were to say anything about the press coverage, as we make progress in our objectives in the war, as the criticism -- that is, as reporting on what's happening becomes more and more positive, I see just in general less reporting, less interest. The fact is that people have got other things to worry about. And there have been a lot of other issues to cover. I mean, we're in the middle of a presidential campaign. That's big news. Gasoline prices are \$4 a gallon. That's big news. So it doesn't receive as much attention. Good news never does. That's just the way our system works. But I do think — I think the surge has been enormously successful. And anybody who looks objectively at where we are today in Iraq would have to conclude that we're in far better shape than we were just a couple of years ago.

MS. SMITH: You just mentioned the election and oil prices. The questioner wants to know: How will oil prices affect the election in November?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: Well, it's -- my name's not on the ballot. If I were still a congressman, I'm sure when I went home to Wyoming every weekend I would hear a lot about gasoline prices. That's all anybody would want to talk about. I think that's what's happening right now.

When I talk to my friends on the Hill -- I go up every Tuesday, have lunch with the Senate Republicans. They're coming back from their home visits talking about gasoline prices. It's a big deal.

But if I were to argue how it ought to affect the election, I think it ought to have negative consequences for those folks over the years who've worked so hard to limit U.S. production of energy resources. That's my view of the world. Not everybody agrees with that, obviously. But we don't drill off East Coast; we don't drill off the West Coast; we don't drill off Florida; we don't drill in important parts of Alaska. And that means we have less domestic production than would otherwise be the case. And the old law of supply and demand works and when demand gets tight, those prices go up and so today we've got \$4 gasoline.

One way to change that is to increase our domestic production of energy resources, which we can do environmentally in a sound fashion. I would hope that it'd be one of the issues in this campaign. It should be a lively debate. I would expect that certainly my party will bring it up. I don't know about the other party.

MS. SMITH: You usually support tax cuts. How about cutting the federal gasoline tax, at least until supplies increase? What do you think of that idea?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: Well, it's a -- I think it's a false notion in the sense that you're not going to have much of an impact, given the size of the gasoline tax, on the total cost of a gallon of gas. You might buy a little bit of relief there, but it's minimal. And what it does is it avoids addressing the issue, because markets work. The law of supply and demand works. If you want to limit production of energy resources in the United States, that's fine. You can do that, if in fact, that's where national policy goes and that's what the policy process produces. But you can't both block the production of additional resources and complain because prices are too high. You can have it one way or the other.

And I'd say what I worry about with something like getting rid of or reducing a gasoline tax temporarily is that at some point, it's going to have to go back up. And it is vital to collect those revenues. They're related to almost a user fee in terms of having the resources you need to maintain the transportation system.

But it is, to some extent, a way to avoid addressing the main issue. It lets politicians say, well, there. I did something. I voted to reduce the gasoline tax. That's not why prices are \$4 a gallon. They're \$4 a gallon because we don't produce enough.

MS. SMITH: Somebody e-mailed in this question: As the former head of Halliburton, you know the oil business. Is the era of oil as our main energy source coming to a close?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: No. I don't think it is. I think we are doing a lot to develop additional kinds -- additional sources of energy. I mean, we obviously -- we've got the whole ethanol program under way and biofuels and so forth and hybrids and electric cars and all of that's good. I mean, I don't want to discourage any of that. I think it's important for us to develop as broad an array of sources out there as possible and that's one of the positive benefits of the price levels we see today.

But I also think that you need to recognize that we've got an economy that is built on the basis of fossil fuels. Now, that may change over time, but you can't change it overnight. And that's everything from filling stations that peddle gasoline, refineries that produce refined product to an enormous investment out there in deep offshore wells and pipeline systems and processing facilities that we've invested over 100 years and hundreds of billions of billions of dollars in developing.

And over time, we will see that perhaps become less important, but the idea that five or 10 or even 15 years from we'll be in a position where we don't rely on that anymore I just think is unrealistic. We will continue to have to rely on fossil fuels for some significant additional period of time. And we won't be able to switch dramatically overnight to fuel cells, for example. We'll get there someday, but it's not going to happen instantaneously.

MS. SMITH: I hope this is not your last visit to our podium, so perhaps we'll have a chance to ask for your reflections after the change in administration, but we have a question from a 12-year-old in our audience today.

She says, "Mr. Cheney, what was the most difficult obstacle in your rein as vice president?"

VICE PRES. CHENEY: What was the most difficult obstacle?

Well, first of all, I didn't exactly think of it as a "rein". (Laughter.) Henry, when he was in government, he reined. (Laughter -- applause.)

But I don't mean to make light of the question. The question of a 12-year-old is probably the best one I've had today. (Laughter.)

But no, a difficult part of it, frankly, to some extent has involved the press. My job as vice president is as an adviser. I don't run anything. I'm not -- it's not like being

secretary of Defense when I had 4 million people working for me or even being a congressman when I was casting a vote and explaining my actions on the major legislation of the day -- or even being President Ford's vice president -- or chief of staff.

Being vice president, the way it's worked for me, has been strictly an advisory capability. I mean, I'm asked for my views. I get to sit in on most of the policy meetings. The president's encouraged me to speak up whenever I want to and I've done all that. But what that means from the standpoint of my relationship with the press is I'm never going to tell you what you want to know, because what you want to know is "what advice did you give". That's sort of the key question to ask an adviser. And I cannot function very long or very effectively as an adviser to the president if I talk about my advice. Every time I sit down with a reporter, that's about the first question they ask. And my first answer is that I'm not going to talk about it. And what it means is that I have been given -- I suppose the reputation and image of someone who keeps secrets, who is a Darth Vader -- (laughter). I asked Lynne the other day how she felt about me being called Darth Vader. And she said, well, it humanizes you. (Laughter.)

So it forces you to function in a very different way, but it's part of the deal. My effectiveness depends directly upon my ability to give advice and keep it confidential. And therefore, I don't come to the press club very often.

MS. SMITH: But part of your model is a little different from other vice presidents in that you had made it clear from day one that you didn't intend to run for president, which is certainly not the case for many vice presidents. Do you think that the Republic would be better served with the Cheney model of vice presidencies?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: I thought you were going to say, "If I'd run for president." (Laughter.)

MS. SMITH: Are you making an announcement today? (Laughter.)

VICE PRES. CHENEY: No, no. (Laughter.)

I think each administration -- each president's got to figure out how he wants to do it. It's really a -- sort of a one-off kind of an arrangement. I can remember talking to President Ford about it. And he told me the nine months he spent as vice president were the worst nine months of his life. He hated the job, did not like it, found it very difficult and hard to do.

From my standpoint, I did not rush into the opportunity to serve as vice president. The first time the subject came up I really said I wasn't interested. Eventually, I was persuaded to take the job -- after I'd spent some time with the president listening to him talk about it and how he was thinking about it as we went through the process of looking for somebody to do it.

And he's been absolutely true to his commitment to me, which was I'd have an opportunity to be a major participant in the process, to be part of this government, to get involved in whatever issues I wanted to get involved in. Sometimes he agrees, sometimes he doesn't. We don't always come to the same conclusion by any means.

But from my perspective, I had an obligation and I think it was -- I think it's worked well -- to not be consumed with trying to use the job in order to advance my own political interest. That is to say I wasn't going to run for anything when I got through here; that I was going to serve as vice president and move on; that my -- that people had to look at what advice I gave based upon -- knowing that I was giving it based upon what I thought was best to do rather than how it was going to effect me in the Iowa caucuses, for example. And I think that's worked very well.

In other administrations, vice presidents will be picked for all kinds of reasons -- because they can help carry a key state in the presidential election. We're about to see two candidates picked here by Senators Obama and McCain. I wait eagerly to see how that process works and where they come out, but they may make decisions with respect to their running mates that are entirely different than President Bush did when he came to me. And that's fine. That's as it should be and I would not think automatically that the only way to do it is the way we've done it.

I think it's worked very well for us, but I'm sure if you were to talk to other vice presidents -- with the exception of President Ford -- they probably enjoyed doing it the way they did it.

But each administration sets some new standards. I always remember that for the first 150 years of the Republic, the vice president didn't even have the office in the executive branch. I'm still paid by the Senate. That's where my paycheck comes from. And it wasn't until Walter Mondale was vice president that he had an office in the West Wing.

So it's grown and developed and evolved over the years. I would expect it'll continue to do so. And I don't think we've broken the mold for it. I think it will change and evolve over time, depending on what the president needs and the personalities of the president and the vice president.

MS. SMITH: Can we expect a book from you of your experiences?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: Perhaps.

MS. SMITH: Oh -- good! (Laughter.)

VICE PRES. CHENEY: I really haven't decided yet. And I've never written a book and I always said that I got this job because I didn't write about the last one. (Laughter.) But we'll see.

MS. SMITH: On that tantalizing note, we're almost out of time, but before asking the last question, a couple of important matters to take care of.

First, let me remind our members of upcoming speakers: On June 5th, this Thursday, Sharon Rockefeller, president and CEO of WETA; on June 9th, Brian Montgomery, assistant secretary of the Federal Housing Administration will discuss the nation's housing crisis; June 13th, Mary Tyler Moore, actress and international chairwoman of the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation will be here.

Second, I'd like to present our guest with the National Press Club mug -- (and Mr. Ford ?). VICE PRES. CHENEY: Thank you.

MS. SMITH: Thank you.

And the last question: Mrs. Cheney says you and Barack Obama are eighth cousins. Any plans for a family reunion? (Laughter.)

VICE PRES. CHENEY: Well, that's true. We are in fact distantly related. And we haven't talked about a family reunion. I have no objections. I'm not sure Senator Obama is up for it -- at least not before November. (Laughter.) He'd probably be fearful I might whisper in his ear and change his whole view of the Middle East.

But no, we actually are. When Lynne was doing her research on her book, discovered an interesting thing. I won't bore you with all the details. We'd always known about the Cheney family line on my father's side of the families. It goes back to Massachusetts in the 1630s. My grandmother was named Tyler, but it turned out she was descended from a Richard Cheney -- same last name -- who landed in Maryland in the 1650s. So I had Cheneys on both sides of the family -- and we don't even live in West Virginia. (Laughter.)

You can say those things when you're not running for reelection! But the fact is, his mother and my grandmother have a common ancestor and descended from Maryland about eight generations back. So we are in fact cousins.

Thank you.

MS. SMITH: Vice President Cheney, you've been a charming guest. Thank you so much. (Applause.) Thank you so much.

I'd like to thank you all for coming today. I'd also like to thank National Press Club staff members Melinda Cooke, Pat Nelson, Jo Anne Booz and Howard Rothman for organizing today's lunch.

Thank you and we are adjourned. (Sounds gavel.)

END.