

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB NEWSMAKER LUNCHEON WITH SENATOR JOSEPH BIDEN (D-DE)
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MR. SALANT: Good afternoon, and welcome to the National Press Club.
I'm Jonathan Salant, a reporter for Bloomberg News and president of the Press
Club.

I'd like to welcome club members and their guests in the audience
today, as well as those of you watching on C-SPAN.

Please hold your applause during the speech so we have time for as
many questions as possible. For our broadcast audience, I'd like to explain
that if you hear applause, it is from the guests and the members of the
general public who attend our luncheons, not from the working press.
(Laughter.) The video archive of today's luncheon is provided by ConnectLive
and available to members only through the Press Club's website at
www.press.org. Press Club members may also get free transcripts of our
luncheons at our website. Nonmembers may buy audio tapes, video tapes and
transcripts by calling 1-888-343-1940. For more information about joining
the Press Club, please call us at 202-662-7511.

Before introducing our head table, I'd like to remind our members of
future speakers. On September 11th, Governor Thomas Kean and Representative
Lee Hamilton, the chair and the vice chair of the 9/11 commission; on
September 18th, Herbie Hancock, a Grammy Award-winning musician; on September
25th, Senate Judiciary Chairman Arlen Specter, a Pennsylvania Republican; and
on September 29th, Stan Kasten, the new president of the Washington Nationals
baseball team.

This Saturday, September 9th, the National Press Club will host its
9th Annual 5K Run and Walk and silent auction, benefitting our minority
scholarship program. For more information about the 5K or to register, or to
view our great auction items, please check out our website at www.press.org.

If you have any questions for our speaker, please write them on the
cards provided at your table and pass them up to me. I will ask as many as
time permits.

I would now like to introduce our head table and ask them to stand
briefly when their names are called. Please hold your applause until all of
the guests are introduced.

From your right, Rachel Ray (sp), a freelance writer; Margaret Talev of McClatchy Newspapers; Susan Page, the Washington Bureau Chief of USA Today; Bill Sweeney, the vice president for Government Affairs at EDS; John Hughes of Bloomberg News, chair of the National Press Club Speakers Committee. Skipping over our speaker for a moment, Michael Doyle of McClatchy Newspapers, and the member of the Speakers Committee who arranged today's lunch. And, Mike, thank you very much. Chuck McCutcheon of Newhouse Newspapers; Jeffrey Young of The Hill newspaper; and Jeff Bliss at Bloomberg News. (Applause.)

Five years ago this month, on September 10th, 2001, Senator Joseph Biden stood at this very podium to discuss America's security. The Delaware Democrat had recently just ascended to the chairmanship of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and came to the club five years ago to criticize President Bush's advocacy of a missile defense system, no matter what the cost to the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty.

This is what Senator Biden said then, "A strategic nuclear attack is less likely than a regional conflict, a major theater war, terrorist attacks at home or abroad, or any number of real issues.

We'll have diverted all that money to address the least likely threat while the real threat comes to this country in the hold of a ship, the belly of a plane, or smuggled into a city in the middle of the night in a backpack."

Should the Democrats regain control of the Senate in the November elections, Senator Biden once again would be in line to chair the Foreign Relations Committee. But he hopes not to stay there long. (Laughter, applause.) The senator, as you must guess, has his eyes on the White House. Well, how do we know? Well, he spent half of his August vacation in Iowa. (Laughter.) And since there are plenty of farms in Delaware -- you can see them all on 404 when you drive to the Delaware beaches -- (laughter) -- I'm sure he didn't go to Iowa to study agriculture. (Laughter.)

He ran once before for the White House in 1988, but abandoned his campaign following questions about the voracity of some of his statements. But Senator Biden's interest in the presidency began long before that.

In sixth grade, he wrote an essay, saying that when he grew up, he wanted to be one of two things: a priest or president. (Laughter.) He hasn't achieved either one of those two goals -- (laughs, laughter) -- but in 1972, at the age of 29, he defeated a two-term incumbent and became the youngest person ever elected to the U.S. Senate.

A month later, tragedy struck. His wife and infant daughter were killed in an automobile accident, and Joe Biden was sworn into office from his son's hospital room. Raising his two sons alone, he commuted daily from Delaware, a practice he continues to this day. He remarried in 1997, and has a daughter with his new wife.

Senator Biden is a former chairman of the Judiciary Committee, where he presided over the confirmation hearings of both Robert Bork and Clarence Thomas. More recently, he supported the 2002 resolution authorizing President Bush to use force in Iraq if negotiations failed. Last month, writing in The Washington Post, he suggested a confederation of Shi'ites, Sunnis and Kurds in Iraq, all in their own regions, with a central government

to protect the country's borders and distribute the oil revenue. Under his plan, most American troops would leave by the end of next year.

Senator Biden, it is a pleasure to welcome you to the National Press Club. SEN. BIDEN: Thank you. (Applause.)

Mr. President, thank you very much for that interesting -- (laughs, laughter) -- introduction. And thank you -- having covered for the Syracuse Post-Standard Washington for -- a Syracuse paper in the city that I went to law school -- thank you for not bringing up my law school grades. (Laughter.)

And I just -- I never correct a person who introduces me, particularly a press person. But -- (laughter) -- the choice here is between offending the president and my wife, and it's not hard. (Laughter.) I want my wife to know -- honey, if you watch this, I know we were married in 1977, not '97. (Laughter, applause.) I would not want her to think that I was unaware of when that -- as my mother would say -- Jill and I have been married almost 30 years, going on 30 years, 29 years, and she'd look at my wife and she'd say, "Dear, no purgatory for you being married to Joey." (Laughter.)

But at any rate, I thank you very much. And, Mike, thank you for arranging this. It's indeed an honor to be invited back.

Folks, these are important times. I guess every moment in our history has been important. But in my travels through my state and around the country, I have never seen the electorate as serious -- as serious -- not frightened, not alarmed, but as serious as it is today. And I have held office since I've been 27 years old as a kid in the county council, and I can say that without qualification.

Mike was kind of enough -- or maybe not kind enough -- was -- referenced my last appearance before the Press Club when I spoke almost five years ago to the day, the day before 9/11, and indicated what I thought the greatest threat was at that time. To state the obvious, I wasn't clairvoyant, but I knew what everybody else knew. And I believed then that I was making a valid point, and I think the point remains valid today. When it comes to America's national security, I believe this administration has the wrong premises and the wrong priorities upon which they're acting.

The president got it right, in my view, as he put it this week, we are a nation at war.

But that makes it all the more incomprehensible to me that five years after 9/11, he has failed to mobilize the American public in that war: no national energy policy, no national service, no real sacrifice, except from the soldiers and their families who are fighting this war. Instead, a massive tax cut for the most fortunate among us, even when they did not ask for that tax cut.

And given the opportunity that I believe was available to him on 9/12 to unite the world and the country, I believe his policies -- unintentionally, but his policies have divided us both at home and divided us from the rest of the world.

I -- and I believe these failures flow from a dangerous combination of ideology and some incompetence, and a profound confusion about who we are fighting in that war.

The president continues to talk about the war on terror, but that's simply incorrect. Terrorism is a means, not an end, and very different groups and countries are using terror toward very different goals. If we can't identify the enemy or describe the war we're fighting, it's difficult for me to see how we're likely to win this war.

In fact, this is a war on many different fronts. The most urgent of those fronts is the intersection of the world's most radical groups, like al Qaeda and their spin-offs that they inspired, with the world's most lethal weapons.

But we must also confront groups that use terror not to target us directly but to advance their own nationalistic agendas. We must deal with outlaw states that support them and otherwise flaunt (sic) the rules. And we must face a growing civil war in Iraq and a renewed war in Afghanistan. We must help resolve the generational war between the Arabs and the Israelis. And in addition to all that, we must engage in a long-term war of ideas with the well over a billion Muslims in the world, whose hearts and minds are up for grabs.

Yes, all these fronts are connected, but this administration's made the profound mistake, in my view, of conflating them under one label and arguing that success in one arena will bring success in the other arenas I have just stated, and has answered each of these difficult challenges that I've outlined with the same limited response: military force and regime change. That's been the response to each of these concerns -- military force and regime change. And it has picked the wrong fights at the wrong times, failing to finish the job in Afghanistan, which the world uniformly agreed was the central front on the war on terror, and instead rushing to war in Iraq, which was not the central front on the war on terror.

And as a result, this administration was just full of -- we were talking about it when we were eating -- full of very patriotic, very bright, very committed people. As a result of these actions, these very people have dug us into a very deep hole, without many friends to help us out.

To those who doubt this harsh verdict, ask yourself a simple question. Are we safer today than we were five years ago? Are we safer today than we were five years ago?

And to those -- probably the only ones who would agree -- maybe I'm joking -- but are the people I invited, the 10 or so I got to invite. (Soft laughter.) But all kidding aside, to those who agree with my assessment, I ask them to join me in what is our responsibility of asking the second question: What do we do so five years from now we are in fact safer than we are today?

Let me start with the first question I raised. Are we safer? Maybe the best answer is that this week the administration felt compelled to issue a new strategy on the war on terror, which in my view strongly suggests that they acknowledge that the present strategy is not working.

Folks, the facts speak for themselves. After 9/11, the administration urged we act against the dangerous "axis of evil," Iran, Iraq and North Korea. But today each and every one of those members of the axis presents a greater danger to us than it did five years ago.

In Iraq, a dictator is gone, and that's very good. But we may be on the verge of trading him for chaos and a haven for radicalism in the heart of the Middle East.

Meanwhile, Iran is closer to the bomb, and its reform movement is on the ropes.

And North Korea has 400 percent more fissile material to make nuclear bombs than it did before we declared it part of the axis.

After 9/11, the president made the case that democracy is the antidote to radicalism, and I think he's dead right, and said so at the time. But today, this administration has equated democracy with elections, and failed to build democratic institutions to build moderates. Islamist groups, which are already militarized, have now been legitimized: Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in the Palestinian territories, and religious parties in Iraq.

Five years ago, President Bush pledged to capture Osama bin Laden, and then he redirected our military away from Afghanistan and toward Iraq. Today, bin Laden remains at large, and his videotaped messages inspire others to make attacks around the world.

Folks, remember what Secretary Rumsfeld rightly asked in what he used to call -- he called "snowflakes," a memorandum sent around to key people in the Defense Department? About a year and a half ago, he sent a memo saying and -- asking the following questions: Are we capturing more terrorists than our enemies are recruiting? And, do we have a plan to stop the next generation of terrorists? The answers are: No, we are not capturing more terrorists than they are recruiting. And the answer is: No, we do not have a plan to prevent the next generation of terrorists from emerging. The fact is, since 9/11, terrorist attacks around the world have nearly quadrupled.

Thankfully, there have been no attacks on our soil since 9/11. But we should not take false comfort from that fact. Our enemies are patient, very patient, as we learned just last month when the British and Pakistani police prevented a new attack on our planes and on our people. And I argued then, and I state it now, that that plot burst this administration's rhetorical bubble that, quote, "we're fighting them over there, so we don't have to fight them here."

After 9/11, this administration grudgingly embraced the need to protect America here at home by setting up a whole new department. Today, we know from Katrina, and the repeated warnings of the bipartisan 9/11 commission, from who you are going to hear on the 11th at this very podium, that we are still not prepared and we are still not protected.

So, are we safer than we were five years ago? Well, the American people will make that decision. And I think in making it, they'll look at whether the streets are more or less dangerous, whether our enemies are more or less lethal, and whether we have the world's respect that we had prior to the towers coming down. But that brings me to my second question: What

should we do -- what should I do to make America safer five years from now? I would start with Iraq, for no strategy can make America safer unless we can first succeed in solving the problem in Iraq. Iraq has already cost us dearly in blood and treasure. And because our forces are tied down, our ability to act against our enemies is limited -- and they know it. They know it. Because we've hyped the intelligence before going into Iraq, our ability to convince our allies -- and the American people -- of new dangers has been significantly diminished. And because we diverted our energy and resources from Afghanistan, Afghanistan is on the verge of failure.

Folks, this administration, as my mother would say, God love them, this administration does not have a strategy for victory in Iraq. Instead, they have a strategy as to how to prevent defeat and pass the problem along to the next administration. Ladies and gentlemen, the overwhelming reality in Iraq is what I've been saying for some time -- and I'm not alone. I learned it from our military folks on the ground in my seven trips in and out of Iraq as recently as last July -- this past July. The overwhelming reality in Iraq is a sectarian cycle of revenge. And throwing more troops into Baghdad may calm down certain neighborhoods, but it will not fix the problem.

We need a political settlement that allows each of the groups to pursue its interests and to pursue them peacefully. I've offered such a plan. I was cautioned not to set out a specific plan because we all know that's a dangerous thing to do in American politics, but I'm the only one in either party who's laid out a plan. Not everyone agrees with the plan. But the purpose of the plan is to keep Iraq together by providing each group that is now engaged in this cycle of vengeance breathing room in their own regions, getting Sunni buy-in by giving them a piece of the oil revenues within the constitution as amended, creating more jobs and reconstruction programs in order to deny, as General Chiarelli says -- the number two man in Iraq -- in order to deny the militia new recruits and bringing in Iraq's neighbors to support the political process that needs to be arrived at. If we do all of that, we have a chance -- we have a chance to bring our troops home by the end of 2007 without leaving chaos behind.

Getting Iraq, though, will not -- getting Iraq right will not guarantee success in the other fronts that I have mentioned. But it will allow us much more freedom, flexibility and credibility in our pursuit of these other significant foreign policy concerns. It will allow us to make profound changes in our national security strategy to deal with these complex threats and demands that will remain. And it will make it easier to put our focus back on the other profoundly important developments that will shape this country in this next century, like the emergence of China, India, Russia; the shortage of reliable sources of energy; and the growing impact of climate change on the entire world.

Today, I'm announcing a four-part plan to move America toward what I believe would be greater security. And it flows, I should say at the outset, from my absolute conviction that protecting our homeland requires a dramatic, a dramatic reordering of our priorities, that real security comes from prevention, not pre-emption, and that working with strong partners is better than alienating our partners and that advancing democracy is much more than just about holding an election.

And my plan -- it starts from these premises. It's time for America to begin to recapture the totality of our strength -- militarily, economically, diplomatically and, I might add, the power of our ideas and

ideals. Folks, that's what's been missing the last five years. In all these analogies and comparisons to World War II, I would argue that's what won the Cold War, that's what defeated communism, that's what defeated fascism and that's what's gotten lost in the past five years. So let me begin.

First, to protect us at home, we should dramatically reorder our priorities. We should start immediately by implementing the recommendations you'll hear about on 9/11 when the committee stands here before you by implementing the recommendations of the 9/11 commission.

Last December, the commission, acting on their own nickel, issued a report -- I believe it was December 5th or 15th; I'm not sure -- but in December, last December, they issued a report. They gave a report card, literally, grading the actions of this administration and this Republican-controlled Congress on protecting America. And the report card was riddled with Ds and Fs.

The facts:

Five years later, just 5 percent of all the cargo containers that land on American shore, over 6 million of them -- just 5 percent are inspected. We don't inspect any cargo in the belly of American cargo planes or passenger planes.

Our first responders still cannot talk to one another in the moment of crisis.

Since 9/11 this administration has cut over \$2 billion from local law enforcement -- over \$2 billion cut. The 30 largest cities in America, the vast majority, are cutting local law enforcement, cutting joint task forces.

Why? Why would these patriotic -- and they are patriotic -- and smart men and women do this? Well, I've asked myself that repeatedly, and the conclusion I have come to is, they must assume that because we cannot protect everything equally, we should go out of our way to do the minimum necessary to give the impression that we are advancing our security.

Their only line of defense, when you press them, their only fundamental line -- and I can understand it; I disagree with it -- their line of defense is a questionable eavesdropping program that we should do under the law, rather than around it.

Intelligence is critical, but it seems to me to be the only place, the -- their Maginot Line, a little like their Maginot Line in the sky with National Missile Defense.

And the administration has taken the view -- which I find astounding -- that private industry can adequately determine and implement security measures without even having to tell us what they're doing. Let me say that again. The private industry can adequately determine and implement the security measures necessary to protect not only them but the public.

One of your -- I will not mention networks, but one of the major networks did a show -- I hope some of you saw it -- "The Most Dangerous Two Miles in America." And it talked about two miles just off I-95. There is no federal program setting standards, minimum standards.

Well, I totally disagree with the approach this administration has taken on homeland security, for I believe with strong federal leadership and investment, we can and we have the capability of scanning 100 percent of the cargo containers that land on American shore, before they land. Price: about \$1.4 billion.

We can protect our chemical facilities, eliminate some of the most dangerous chemicals -- with safer alternatives -- that are sitting targets for terrorists.

We can better secure our mass transit systems. We can ensure the security of our nuclear plants. We can develop screening technologies that better detect liquid explosives. And we can much better secure our borders.

I would immediately hire 1,000 more FBI agents because of the overwhelming burden on them in counterterrorism now. They are undermanned.

I would put 50,000 more local police back on the street -- new police, for we must bring local law enforcement in as equal partners.

We should require that networks turn over critical spectrum they promised to turn back and help local agencies purchase communications equipment so our first responders can actually communicate with one another in a disaster.

I need not take you back to New York and 9/11. I just take you back to Katrina. And folks, the largest cities in America still cannot communicate. First responders can't talk to National Guard. National Guard can't talk to FBI. FBI -- and the list goes on.

And in our big cities, we should develop a locally based counterterrorism unit to stop home-grown plots. Today New York City is the only city in America with such a unit.

And for those who say, like many of you are probably thinking, we cannot pay for this, with all due respect, I think that's dead wrong. For \$50 million -- billion, we can do all that I've outlined and more. At \$10 billion a year, we can make all of these changes.

My dad used to say before he died -- I'd say something, and he said, "Champ, look, if everything's equally important to you, nothing's important to you." This is about priorities. We must change our priorities.

And this administration's single, number-one priority are tax cuts. That is the truth of the matter. And ladies and gentlemen, the Bush tax cut for millionaires exceeds \$60 billion per year, just for those people making over a million bucks. A tax cut they didn't ask for, a tax cut they don't need, but a tax cut nonetheless, \$60 billion.

Were I president, I would take back the majority of that tax cut immediately and I'd pay, at just \$10 billion a year, I would put that money in a homeland security trust fund so we could implement all these measures.

For those of you who think that's a new gimmick, I'm the guy that wrote the thing called the Violent Crime Reduction Trust Fund. It lasted for years. Violent crime was reduced 8.5 percent per year. No new taxes. Every

single federal employee did not get rehired. Their salary literally went into a trust fund.

This is not a phony lockbox idea like Social Security. This is real. And I would set up just such a trust fund. You know, we can do this and a lot more, folks. As I say to my Democratic friends, wealthy Americans are just as patriotic as poor and middle-class folks, but nobody's asked anything of them. Nobody has asked anything of them.

The second thing we must do is defuse threats to American security before they're on the verge of exploding, by switching from this doctrine of military preemption to a comprehensive prevention strategy. Military preemption must always be an option available to a president. It always has been and it always will be, for it may be our only choice against terrorist groups who have no territory or people to defend and who are amassing stealthy weapons instead of visible armies.

But turning preemption into a one-size-fits-all doctrine, which ideologues tend to do, was a profound mistake based upon a faulty premise. By using America's might, this administration and the intellectuals who support it thought we would demonstrate our resolve and convince our enemies to give in to our will, with or without war, because of the great shock and awe that we were capable of inflicting upon them.

The fact is, the dirty little secret is, preemption, the preemption doctrine has actually made America less secure. It says to Iran and North Korea their best insurance policy against regime change is to acquire weapons of mass destruction and do it as quickly as you possibly can. It says to fault-line states like India and Pakistan, China and Taiwan, Russia and Chechnya, Israel and the Arab states, that it's all right to use force first and ask questions later.

And it requires a standard of proof for intelligence that may be impossible to meet unless you cherry pick the facts, as we did before going into Iraq. And, folks, all this has a very dire consequence, the consequence is undermining our credibility around the world and with our own people.

There's a better way, there's a better path -- a comprehensive prevention strategy that would secure loose weapons around the world, build the capacity of our partners to detect dangerous materials and disrupt terror networks, set new standards to seize cargo on the high seas and in the air, and reform the non-proliferation regime.

The third thing that my plan calls for is instead of acting alone, we must build effective alliances and international organizations. I realize they are "dirty words" to some on the right. This administration starts from the premise that America's military might is so much greater than anyone else's, that anything that can get in the way of us using it whenever we want should be ignored and is a liability. Translated: international organizations.

I start from a completely different premise. Most of the threats we face -- radical fundamentalism, the spread of weapons of mass destruction, the spread of infectious disease -- none of these have any respect for borders, and not one single one lends itself to a totally military solution.

Our main enemy is a network of fundamentalist groups that could tap into the spreading supply of dangerous weapons. And the best response to a network of terror is to build a network of our own, a network of like-minded countries that pools resources, information, ideas, and power. That's what happened with the Heathrow plot, that's how it got stopped. Taking on radical fundamentalists alone isn't necessary, it isn't smart, and it won't succeed.

But as we say to the rest of the world we will live by the rules, we also must insist that the rules be enforced. That could have been the basis for a common approach to Iraq. And I still believe it's the foundation for stopping North Korea from pursuing dangerous nuclear weapons. The United States should be leading others to a new understanding of state responsibility, including the use of force, when necessary.

Folks, civilized societies have a responsibility to protect innocents and to prevent catastrophic events. That's why force was necessary in Bosnia, and why I was the first one to call for its use. That's why force was necessary in Kosovo. That's why force was necessary in Afghanistan. And I would argue, respectfully, that's why force is necessary in Darfur right now. (Applause.)

But, folks, by hyping the intelligence about Iraq, by failing to level with the American people, this administration has soured the American people on the use of power and has hamstrung the next president's ability to use power wisely. We're on the verge of risking trading the "Vietnam syndrome" for an "Iraqi complex" -- a legacy that could haunt this country for decades.

My fourth and final point is, we must advance freedom and progress by developing democratic institutions in the Middle East and beyond. The president thinks that as well.

We must prove to millions of people who are disenfranchised politically and economically that we offer hope, while radical fundamentalists only offer hate. Again, this administration starts on that effort from a fundamentally flawed premise. They believe and have believed that democracy can be imposed, that it can be imposed by force. That has never happened, to the best of my knowledge, and it will not happen. They think democracy and elections are synonymous. They are not. Elections are necessary, but they are not sufficient to establish a democracy. We must put much more emphasis on building institutions of democracy, political parties, independent media, a judicial system, effective government, nongovernmental organizations, and, yes, labor unions.

We must help bolster failing states, which become havens for terror -- by building schools and training teachers, opening closed economies, empowering women, relieving their debt, and redirecting the focus of international institutions to deal with them. That's what we should have done in the Palestinian Authority, to support Abu Mazen against Hamas. That's what we should have done in Lebanon after Syria was expelled, to support the Lebanese government against Hezbollah. But we did neither.

And the net effect has been extremist groups gain both stature and legitimacy, while we remain silent, failing to make our case to the larger Muslim world.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have to re-invigorate our public diplomacy to explain our policies around the rest of the world. We've got to get in the game. We've got to get in the game. Let me give you one example, Iran. Our greatest ally against the theocracy in Tehran, I believe, are the Iranian people. Look at the polling data; they admire America. But we never get our side of the argument into Iran to the people who could insist upon their government altering their policies. They never hear our voice. America, whose greatest strengths are our ideas and our ideals, we've become afraid to talk, afraid to talk.

Ladies and gentlemen, I believe if we do all these things, if we recapture the totality of our strength, my students here from Delaware will read about this period as one chapter in our nation's history, not as the final chapter.

Folks, our enemies are not 10 feet tall. They are not 10 feet tall. We will defeat radical fundamentalists the same way my parents' generation defeated fascism and communism. They did it by matching our military competence with our commitment to protect our values and project them to the rest of the world.

Bin Laden and his ilk may be beyond our reach, and we must defeat them, but tens of millions of Muslims are open to our ideas and ideals and we must reach them. If we do this, teenagers from Baghdad to Beirut, from Jeddah to Jakarta, will pick the promise of a better life under freedom, tolerance, and respect over the hopelessness of radical fundamentalism.

Ladies and gentlemen, we can do much, much, much better, and folks, don't underestimate the American people. They are full of more grit and will and optimism than all of their leaders in both parties combined. They know we need a new approach, and they know there's no easy answers. They know it well. But they also know, with real leadership, America will prevail because we have never ever, ever, ever failed. We've challenged the American people. Never.

So folks, it's about time we get on with changing our priorities and win this war.

Thank you. (Applause.)

MR. SALANT: We have a lot of questions, and let me begin with this one.

Why do you honestly believe that al Qaeda has not struck the U.S. again? Are you worried that they are planning something larger and more complex than 9/11?

SEN. BIDEN: I believe they're planning something as large and complex as 9/11. If you look at their modus operandi, that's how they have proceeded, that's how they have worked, and I believe that's what they're doing. I do acknowledge, and thankfully it's occurring, that we have a lot of their leadership on the run and some of which we've captured. But as I said, they're patient. Remember the first try on the towers, how long it took for the second. These folks are in for the long haul.

MR. SALANT: Is the fact that there has been no terror attack on U.S. soil since 9/11 due at all to President George W. Bush's policies?

SEN. BIDEN: History will judge that. I believe that the failure to protect the most obvious targets that are capable of wreaking as much havoc as happened on 9/11 has been a tragic mistake, and we cannot wait any longer to deal with it.

And I believe that the effort in Afghanistan -- particularly had we pursued it -- but the effort in Afghanistan initially has moved them into a different mode, and it has metastasized.

So there are many good things George Bush has done. I'm not saying that George Bush has been a bad president, a bad guy. I'm just saying the priorities, the priorities are way off. And these guys are in for the long haul.

I would offer as an example the fact that the British and the Pakistanis were the ones working together who uncovered a massive plot against the United States with 12 or so aircraft heading to the United States, I assume to be blown up over the United States. They're still there, folks. We need to deal with our significant exposure.

MR. SALANT: What should we be doing to stop breeding the next generation of terrorists?

SEN. BIDEN: We should begin to protect -- project our values. Go on my website, uniteourstates.com. I proposed for the president, at his request, an entire public diplomacy program four years ago, which he took great interest in. He asked me to do it. I spent hours -- a couple hours with him going over it. It is the essence of how I would proceed.

We have to compete, folks. We have to get in the game. We cannot leave behind the characterization of us as this uncivil society waging war on Islam. We've got to get in the game. That's a start.

And the second way I would do this is by demonstrating that we are prepared to work with other nations. We are prepared to adopt the policy that if you want us to be concerned about your issues, we'll be concerned about -- you want us to be -- we want them to be concerned about our issues, we'll be concerned about their issues. We cannot be dismissive as they are. That does not in any way give up the right to react pre-emptively and does not give us -- give up the right to act alone. But we should in fact be more engaged. There's 1,200,000,000 Muslims -- a relatively small percentage attracted to this fundamentalist ideology. But we must compete for them.

MR. SALANT: Democrats in the Senate will try to pass a resolution asking for Donald Rumsfeld, the secretary of Defense, to resign. But would it make any real difference? After all, isn't he just implementing President Bush's policies? SEN. BIDEN: Yes and no. (Laughter, applause.)

MR. SALANT: Under the federation you proposed for Iraq, how does the government prevent ethnic and religious strife, such as occurred in the former nation of Yugoslavia?

SEN. BIDEN: By -- the same way we did in Bosnia. We even had a more bifurcated, trifurcated system there. We had three different presidents. We had 30,000 American troops over the last 10 years there. No

one's been killed. No massive, no significant ethnic cleansing occurred in that 10-year period.

They're now attempting to redraft their constitution to become part of Europe. The Iraqi constitution already calls for this mechanism in their existing constitution. And mark my words -- if in fact we go anywhere near this proposal, you will find the Shi'a militia -- and there are a multitude of them -- competing with one another within Shi'a territory for control of the Shi'a territory and not be occupied with figuring out how they're going to take out every Sunni.

If you give the Iraqis -- the Sunnis a piece of the oil action, then you will find them no longer feeling the need to support an insurgency, which the majority of them would like to go away, except they see no alternative except Sunni -- Shi'a repression.

MR. SALANT: This questioner writes, very simply, "Has Iraq broken beyond repair?"

SEN. BIDEN: Very close. Very close. I think if we do not use our significant leverage and the real capability -- because he is a first-rate ambassador -- of our present ambassador in Iraq to put pressure upon this so-called unity government to deal with what everybody knows they have to deal with, not a single person you will find will suggest there's any possibility of getting Sunni buy-in without giving them a piece of the action, there's no possibility of getting the Shi'a militia under control without taking them on directly and purging them, and there's no possibility -- no possibility -- of forcing these three entities together in a tightly knit group.

Folks, imagine what would have happened after the surrender at Yorktown if we attempted two weeks later to pass the Constitution. I'm not being facetious. Does anybody think Virginia and Massachusetts would have been under such a system? It took us 11 years to have our Philadelphia moment, 11 years to get started. To hold this country together, you've got to give them breathing room, you've got to give them breathing room.

MR. SALANT: Senator John Warner of Virginia has said that if Iraq descends into civil war, Congress will need to pass another resolution spelling out the U.S. role there. Do you think such a resolution is likely, and would you support it?

SEN. BIDEN: Yes and yes. (Soft laughter.)

MR. SALANT: Won't partitioning the country -- Iraq, we're talking about -- make Iran stronger?

SEN. BIDEN: I'm not calling for partitioning. I'm calling for a loosely federated system, not like Yugoslavia. It's called for under the Iraqi constitution, as voted on now. There's 18 governorates. It says any three of those governorates -- think of them as states -- can get together and form a region.

You have Maryland State Police and you have Virginia State Police. If there's a riot in Maryland, you don't call in the Virginia State Police. You have laws in Maryland on property, on education, on marriage that are fundamentally different than the laws in other states in the nation. That's what I'm talking about. Give them some breathing room. Have a central

government, a central government in a federal city called Baghdad, with control over resources, borders and the army.

MR. SALANT: Moving to Iran, how can you justify sanctions against Iran for pursuing its nuclear program when Pakistan and India have nuclear programs endorsed by the U.S., and Pakistan has already been caught selling nuclear bomb technology?

SEN. BIDEN: We have not endorsed Pakistan. We have endorsed India, because they've acted responsibly in the exercise and the control of the weapons they, quote, "illegally acquired" by violating what we thought to be the regime.

This administration has been totally responsible and irresponsible in Iran. How do you not attempt to stop the development of nuclear program with a nation that says it's going to wipe another country off the face of the Earth? Don't know how you do that.

MR. SALANT: The former president of Iran is speaking at the Washington National Cathedral this evening. Are you meeting with him? And if so, what is the central message to him?

SEN. BIDEN: I am not meeting with him. I support the president's decision to give him a visa. I think it's a worthwhile thing for him to be here. Again, I want an exchange of ideas.

When I was chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, I spoke before the Iranian-American Council -- Chamber of Commerce, with Chuck Hagel before me and afterwards Dick Lugar. And we all said -- I was the chairman -- I said I invite members of the Majlis, their once mildly independent parliament, to meet with us anywhere in the world, to begin to discuss our differences.

Ladies and gentlemen, there's a great phrase John Kennedy used. He said, "America should never negotiate out of fear, but it should never fear to negotiate." What do we have to fear from talking? (Applause.)

MR. SALANT: This questioner wants to know: Given what has occurred in Iraq, what prevents the current administration from mounting yet again a misleading public information campaign urging military intervention in Iran during the next two years?

SEN. BIDEN: The wisdom of the American people. They figured it out, folks. No, not a joke. You know what I mean, this is pretty basic stuff, it really is pretty basic. The most significant political event that occurred was Katrina. It blew away the illusion that there was a plan. It blew away the illusion that there was competence.

And I wish this were not so, and I mean it sincerely. As I go around the country, Democrats are happy the public has realized what's going on, but they act like there's an election tomorrow. This man will be president for the next two years and several months. I do not think it's good he is so weakened. But I think there is no possibility of him regaining his stature without a radical change in policy. I think this whole offensive about appeasement and all of that, it's really just -- you know, the press asked me -- it's just simply sad. I really mean it, it is sad. It is sad.

This country -- go to your neighbors, you press people, go to your next-door neighbor this beautiful weekend and try to assess how they feel. I don't care if they're Democrats or Republicans. They are worried. They know we're adrift. And to engage in this malarkey is just sad. But the American people ain't going to buy it. (Applause.)

MR. SALANT: What is your reaction to President Bush's announcement yesterday of the existence of secret detention centers holding detainees, in addition to Guantanamo?

SEN. BIDEN: What took you so long? (Laughter.) And why weren't they transferred years ago? And why didn't we get -- imagine where we would be now if the president had brought them to Guantanamo, provided them a trial, convicted them for the whole world to see.

MR. SALANT: How do the Democrats counter Republican attacks that they are soft on terror and want to "cut and run"?

SEN. BIDEN: Reminding them that none of the Republicans supported Biden's effort when I tried to get the permission to bomb in Kosovo to save tens of thousands of innocent women and children; remind them how they played around with this whole deal in Bosnia. Remind them, remind them.

Folks, look, as I think about it, you know, if there was a stenographer here and I was still in court, I would say, "I retract that statement." The American people know. The American people are smarter than both my party and the other party gives them credit for. My party's going, "Oh, my God, they're going to buy into this." Folks, it's over. They're on to it. They're looking for an answer.

Look, folks, I go out and it's rumored I'm interested in another office. All right? (Laughter.) I give you my word -- think about this, I did 49 events in Iowa while I was vacationing there -- (laughter) -- in 13 days. I didn't get a single question asked to me about a social issue. Do you hear me? Do you hear me? Not a joke. Every single question -- and I was campaigning in at least 30 of those events with other candidates -- for other candidates. And guess what? They are allegedly liberal Democratic Caucus-goers. There is no applause line in standing before Democrats like standing before Republicans and talking about Clinton and getting a clapping line -- you know, a negative remark. There is no applause line. Democrats, Democrats, say, "I don't want to hear -- don't tell me about the mistakes Bush has made, unless you're going to tell me how we've learned from mistakes and what you're going to do."

Folks, the public is beyond this. They're ahead of you guys in the press. They're ahead of the Democrats. They're ahead of the Republicans. They want solutions, and they know there is none out there being offered by this administration. (Applause.)

MR. SALANT: Since you brought up Iowa, I'll ask you a presidential question.

SEN. BIDEN: My mistake. (Laughter.)

MR. SALANT: How does a fast-talking Easterner running for president persuade red-state voters to vote for him?

SEN. BIDEN: You pray. (Laughter.)

Look, folks. We love to categorize us all, and we all get put in -- I got in trouble for, when I was down in South Carolina, saying that -- I didn't get in trouble in South Carolina, I got in trouble on Fox News Network when I got asked a similar question by the host on a Sunday program. I rarely go on Sunday programs, but -- (laughter). And he said, "How could a guy like you compete?" And I said, "You don't understand my state." And I used the wrong terminology.

Folks, look. There's a thing called the Delmarva Peninsula. It's not called the Del-Mass-Connecticut Peninsula, it's the Delmarva Peninsula. That's where I'm from. Read "Chesapeake." Read the history of my state. The politics are not fundamentally different than they are anywhere else.

And the bottom line here, folks, is -- I said at the outset, and I really mean it -- I've never seen the public as serious. And they're not going to buy into the Rovian view -- that a lot of Democrats are adopting, I have to admit -- of dividing the country and getting more blood out of the stone in terms of your constituency.

The woman raising two kids in Cedar Falls, Iowa, has absolutely no different aspiration than the woman raising two kids in Bayou Lafourche, Louisiana; Brooklyn, New York; or Seattle, Washington. I refuse to buy into this notion that we are a red and blue country. (Applause.) This country has a purple heart.

I may be back here having been proven wrong. But folks, I don't want to be president of the United States if that's how you got to do it. Not for moral reasons. No, let me explain what I mean. It's not like, you know, I'm such a noble guy. How do you govern? How do you govern?

Name me one single issue that we all know needs to be resolved -- from the energy crisis, to education, to health care, to national security -- name me one that lends itself to a 51-percent solution. Name me one. And if I can't compete in a dozen -- not one or two -- a dozen red states, then I shouldn't be your president, I shouldn't be. You can't govern if in 30 states you get -- in 15 of them, you only get 32 percent of the vote on average, and the other 15, you can only get 42 percent of the vote. You can't govern. And I've been here too long. It'd be a great honor to hail to the chief, but I'd rather live home. And I don't want to be sitting behind a desk if God gives me the opportunity to do it and not be able to do anything that I ran for the purpose of doing. And you can't do it unless you can compete. So if I'm wrong about that, then I'm dead wrong, but so be it.

MR. SALANT: Senator, before you go we'd like to offer you the official National Press Club coffee mug -- (laughter) -- suitable for staying home on Sunday mornings watching those few talk shows you're not on. (Laughter.)

SEN. BIDEN: (Laughs.)

MR. SALANT: And a certificate of appreciation for appearing before the club. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

SEN. BIDEN: Thank you very, very much. It's been an honor. Thank you very much. (Continued applause.)

MR. SALANT: I'd like to thank everyone for coming today. I'd also like to thank National Press Club staff members Melinda Cooke, Pat Nelson, Jo Anne Booze, and Howard Rothman for organizing today's lunch. And thanks to the Eric Friedheim National Journalism Library for its research. Research at the library is available to all club members by calling 202-662-7523.

We're adjourned. (Sounds gavel.) (Scattered applause.)

END.