

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH DICK CHENEY/GERALD R. FORD  
JOURNALISM AWARDS

SUBJECT: FORMER VICE PRESIDENT DICK CHENEY WILL SPEAK JUNE 1 AT THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB AS PART OF THE GERALD R. FORD FOUNDATION'S ANNUAL JOURNALISM AWARDS CEREMONY. CHENEY, WHO WAS PRESIDENT FORD'S CHIEF OF STAFF, WILL PRESENT THE FOUNDATION'S ANNUAL AWARDS FOR OUTSTANDING COVERAGE OF THE PRESIDENCY AND NATIONAL DEFENSE.

MODERATOR: DONNA LEINWAND, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

LOCATION: NATIONAL PRESS CLUB BALLROOM, WASHINGTON, D.C.

TIME: 1:00 P.M. EDT

DATE: MONDAY, JUNE 1, 2009

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**MR. ALAN BJERGA:** Good afternoon and welcome to the National Press Club. I'm Alan Bjerga of Bloomberg News, the vice president of the National Press Club.

We're the leading-- world's professional organization for journalists and are committed to a future of journalism by providing informative programming and journalism education and fostering a free speech worldwide. For more information about the National Press Club, please visit our website at [www.press.org](http://www.press.org).

And on behalf of our members worldwide, I'd like to welcome our speaker, our guests, and our viewers today. After the awards and speech, I will ask as many questions from the audience as time permits. Please hold your applause during the speech so that we have as many-- time for questions as possible.

For our broadcast audience, I'd like to explain that if you do hear applause, it ain't the journalists. Many of our people here are from the-- member of the general public. And they do attend our luncheons along with the working press.

I'd now like to introduce our head table guests and ask them to stand briefly when their names are called. From your right, Susan Page, the Washington Bureau chief of *USA Today*, and a two-time winner of the Gerald R. Foundation Journalism Award for her coverage of the presidency; Greta Van Susteren, host of Fox Cable News *On The Record*; Liz Cheney, the daughter of our speaker; Arnaud de Borchgrave, editor at large of *The Washington Times*, and director of the Transnational Press Project at the Center of Strategic and International Studies; Kenneth Walsh of *U.S. News & World Report*, the Gerald Ford Foundation Journalism Award winner for coverage of the presidency this year; Jack Ford, chairman of the Gerald R. Ford Foundation, and son of President Ford; Angela Greiling-Keane, reporter from Bloomberg News and chair of the National Press Club Speakers Committee.

Skipping over our speaker, we have Ken Dalecki, a freelance editor and the member of the Speakers Committee who helped arrange today's luncheon. Thank you, Ken. James Kitfield of *National Journal*, the Gerald R. Ford Foundation Journalism Award winner for his coverage of national defense; Helen Thomas of Hearst Newspapers; Joseph Calvaruso, executive director of the Gerald R. Ford Foundation; and Rhodes Cook, editor and publisher of the Rhodes Cook Letter and author of *America Votes*. (Applause.)

The National Press Club is honored once again this year to host the Gerald R. Ford Foundation's presentation of its annual award for outstanding reporting on the presidency and national defense. President Ford, who died in September, 2006, spoke at this podium a record 18 times. He believed that a free and unfettered press is vital to democracy, and established this awards program to act on that commitment. Many friends of the President are here with us today. We also welcome members of the President's family who are in our audience, his daughter, Susan, and sons, Steve and Michael, and one grandchild. A special greeting to Mrs. Ford, who I trust is watching this event on C-Span.

Jack Ford, one of the President's sons and chairman of the Gerald R. Ford Foundation, will present the awards. Mr. Ford? (Applause.)

**MR. JACK FORD:** Thank you, Alan. Thank you all for being here, members of the media, public, Vice President Cheney, Liz Cheney, members of the Gerald Ford Foundation, friends here in Washington.

Before I start, I'd thought I'd just pass along mother's warm welcome. She wishes she could be here. She's feeling great. She is watching. And so she sends all of you her very best wishes, and had hoped to be here, but looks forward to maybe in the future.

To begin with, our first award goes to Kenneth T. Walsh, *U.S. News & World Report*, for, in the words of the judges, "...examining the final year of the presidency of George W. Bush, Mr. Walsh portrayed the 43rd President, his record, his policies, his actions, his successes, and disappointments, and his character with insight, perspective, fairness, and objectivity. Basing his work on his extensive research, Mr. Walsh combined judgments from historians, interviews of close family members, reportal(?) skills that offer depth of understanding of this presidency that was unusual. He told his readers not only how but why President Bush dealt with the appalling tragedy of 9/11, the misinformation that provoked the preventive war in Iraq, and the economic downturn that marked the end of his eight years in Office. By resourcefulness in reporting and clarity of writing, Walsh has recorded a commendable account of the legacy of George W. Bush."

So at this point, if the Vice President would step forward. We would like to get Kenneth Walsh-- (Applause.)

**MR. KENNETH WALSH:** Well, thank you very much. I want to thank the judges and the Ford Foundation and all of you for coming, my own little group here. My wife, Barclay's here. And I want to thank Mort Zuckerman and Brian Kelly and Margie Mannix and Morgan Felchner from *U.S. News* for all the support, letting me cover the presidency with a great deal of latitude and insight that they helped provide.

I know you have a main speaker, so I don't want to take too much time. But it's been a long journey for me since the story that I broke, that'll be in my obituary which was when George Herbert Walker Bush banned broccoli from Air Force One. I don't know if you remember that story, but everybody seems to remember that one. It's been a long time ago now, but there's been a lot of stories since. And I am one of the fortunate people who's been able to cover The White House and something I've always wanted to do. And I've been able to do it now for quite a long time.

Just on a serious note, I've been brought up in journalism to see journalism as a form of public education, to see it as a form of public service, the notion being that the country needs journalism to make informed decisions about what's going on in their own lives and in the larger life of the country. That's sort of guided me all along. I hope that in our difficult times now in journalism, and across the board, that we don't lose sight of that as our basic mission, as public

educators and trying to play a role in the fundamentals of our democracy. So with that, I want to thank you so much again. And thank you very much. (Applause.)

**MR. FORD:** The Gerald Ford Foundation's next award is to James Kitfield of *The National Journal*, reporting on national defense. The judges are pleased with the selection of James Kitfield of *The National Journal* as the winner of the 2009 Gerald R. Ford prize for distinguished reporting on national defense. Although the entries this year were particularly strong, Mr. Kitfield, in the view of the judges, hit a homerun with each submission. The quality and breadth were extraordinary, providing a tour of the critical areas of our times, from the counterinsurgency in Afghanistan to the strategic significance of Pakistan to the breakout from the nuclear nonproliferation regime to the dangers of stumbling into a confrontation with Russia.

Each was superbly written to guide readers through a web of complex concepts and relationships. As important, the judges believe Mr. Kitfield attacked these topics in real-time, no summarizing of what had occurred retrospectively, but creating a context and an assessment of events as they were unfolding. The judges would like to commend Mr. Kitfield for a body of work that was consistently strong, penetratingly relevant, and written to help Americans understand the intricacies of the global risk and realities that our nation now faces. So if Mr. Kitfield and the Vice President would step forward, please. (Applause.)

**MR. JAMES KITFIELD:** When I read that judge's response to my writing, I had to make sure there's no direct family members on that committee. It was very, very, very nice. Actually, was honored this award in 1990 when I was a reporter, didn't have a whole lot of experience on this beat. And I was able to bring my mother up for that. And I think that was probably the proudest moment of her life, seeing me accept this award from President Ford, who, anyone in this room who knows him, was probably the most gracious, decent politicians this town has ever seen. I'm very honored to be sort of associated with his legacy, because I think this award reflects qualities that President Ford reflected, which were substance, nonpartisanship, and truthfulness.

I won that award in 1990 for covering the mobilization that preceded Desert Storm, and am struck looking back to those days that there was a whole generation of soldiers who grew up in the Cold War who had never heard a shot fired...(inaudible). And that war was going to be the war that ended nation state on nation state war. It was the end of history as some of us-- some people wrote about that period, that hopeful period.

Well, what we found out since then, it was the beginning of an age of chaos. We found that out in places like Somalia, in Haiti, in Bosnia, in Kosovo, and then after 9/11, in Afghanistan and Iraq. And the biggest surprise of my

career has been how well our all-volunteer forces held up over that timeframe. But it's under a lot of strain. And another institute that's under a lot of strain is the one that's represented in this room, which is the media.

My last two trips to Iraq and then Afghanistan, I interviewed guys in units who had not seen a single American reporter in their whole wartime deployment, which I think is a very scary phenomena. And I think as we figure out or try to figure out a business model that works for our industry, we need to think about our responsibility when our men and women in uniform sent into harm's way. We need to go along and see how they're doing, basically.

Three people I want to thank specifically — my editor, Charlie Green, from *National Journal* over there for never saying no to my request to go do the kind of reporting that I'm being honored for today, Pat Pexton, who's my editor. He's, I think, the best in the business. And I'm really lucky to have him. And, you know, this business can be tough on people who love you. You're sent to some pretty exotic locales. And you get consumed in these stories and you're distracted to the point of not being a lot of good company. So babe, my fiancée, Lydia Pierce, thank you very much, and thank you. (Applause.)

**MR. BJERGA:** Thank you, Mr. Ford, and congratulations again to the winners. Today's speaker, former Vice President Richard Cheney, is as much of a newsmaker now as during his eight years as number two to former President George W. Bush. He has emerged as the strongest defender of Bush's post-9/11 policies which he helped create. He is taking on those who say the Bush Administration violated the nation's principles and perhaps the law in actions against terrorists and in the Iraq war. He wants the Obama Administration to declassify CIA memos he says prove that waterboarding high profile detainees yielded intelligence that saved American lives.

Mr. Cheney is also offering(?) political advice to Republicans saying, "Americans will eventually reject President Obama's policies." Ladies and gentlemen, the former Vice President of The United States, Dick Cheney. (Applause.)

**MR. RICHARD CHENEY:** Thank you. Thank you all very much. And let me thank Alan Bjerga for the introduction, and all of you for welcoming me back to the Press Club. This has begun to be an annual event. I am always delighted to come. I want to thank the family of my friend and mentor, President Gerald Ford, for inviting me once again to this event.

I first began attending this awards luncheon when President Ford was no longer able to do so, and asked me to take his place. He knew I would say yes out of my great respect for him, and also because I was Vice President and didn't

have a hell of a lot else to do. These last four months have been fairly quiet at our house. Lynn's hard at work writing a biography on James Madison and I'm busy on a memoir. I expect that the book I write will cover a lot of ground.

My eight years as the Vice President were quite a journey. And during the time of big events and great decisions, I don't think I missed much. One of the topics I'm sure to take up is the national security policy of the Bush/Cheney years. Like former President Bush, I'm proud of the decisions we made and of the record we left. There have been quite a few mischaracterizations, and, in some quarters, a failure to recognize the success of the strategy we followed to keep this country safe after September 11th, 2001.

I intend to set the record straight, not just because that is important in itself, but also because a clear understanding of policies that worked is essential to defending the nation in the months and years ahead.

I'm making it my business as well to defend the men and women in our government who did the hard work of keeping our country safe and did so when everyone was expecting another major act of terrorism, another mass casualty attack inside The United States. These men and women are an asset to our security. They are a credit to the nation they serve. And we owe them a deep debt of gratitude. (Applause.)

Now, with the passage of time and maybe the illusion that the danger has gone away, some are now suggesting ethics charges or even prosecution against these men and women. This attitude is foolish, it is deeply unfair, and it sets a dangerous precedent of the criminalization of policy differences. It's also wrong for the discussion of the last eight years to be informed by only one side of the story. And that's why I have asked and ask again today for President Obama to declassify the memos that lay out the valuable intelligence we gained through our detainee program.

This remains a serious debate about serious matters. And it's safe to say that it will continue for some time to come. There are many issues facing the country today, but none more urgent or deserving of our attention.

In discussions about presidential administrations, I guess one thing that I've got going for me is perspective. It's now well over 30 years since I and others in this room today had the good fortune to serve in The White House under Gerald Ford. And when I think back on that time, what stays with me the most of all is a sense of gratitude for the chance to call Gerry Ford my boss for 29 months, and my friend for a lifetime.

David Broder once described Gerry Ford as the kind of guy Americans always say they want as President, but didn't realize it when they had him. I suppose the unique circumstances of his taking office had a lot to do with that. But when the nation said its farewells to him a generation later, he stood tall in memory and America appreciated more than ever the sort of man who stepped into the presidency on August 9, 1974.

Gerald Ford was the unexpected President. Yet by temperament, ability, and the quality of his character, he came prepared. Somehow, after a long career in the legislative branch, he proved to be one of our more decisive executives, unafraid to make the tough calls, even when they carried his political risk. He had real courage, good and kind instincts, and just about the most level-headed judgment I've ever come across.

I had a pretty good vantage point as Chief of Staff, seeing him for hours most every day in every kind of circumstance. I watched him in summit meetings, during intense discussions in the Cabinet room and the situation room, and throughout the exhausting gallant effort of the 1976 campaign, a long trek that began with a tough challenge from Ronald Reagan, and then climbing back from a 32-point deficit in the polls against Jimmy Carter.

That election was the only one Gerry Ford ever lost. And he did not pretend to like it. But this man who took office with the roughest possible transition gave to his successor one of the smoothest. This was consistent with everything Gerald Ford did from the first day of his presidency to the very last. He always put the interest of the country first.

I'm not aware of any other President whose Cabinet and staff remained so close over so many years after leaving The White House. And that camaraderie owes more than anything else to the good man we served, and to the respect we still share for the last President and for the Ford family. It's good to see the President's children here today, Susan Ford Bales, and her brothers, Mike, Jack, and Steve, along with their own families. We'll all gather this evening for the annual Ford Administration reunion. And it's always one of the happiest occasions of the year. We only wish that Betty could be with us, but we know that she'll be thinking of us, and we'll certainly be thinking of our wonderful former First Lady with admiration and a lot of love.

This afternoon's gathering is also a fine tradition. And this year, we're pleased to confer the Gerald R. Ford prize on two well regarded journalists, Ken Walsh of the *U.S. News & World Report*, and James Kitfield of *National Journal*. Ken and James, you've both probably collected a few other awards in your day, but you'll never receive one that bears a finer name. And so you all have the warmest congratulations of all of us. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

**MR. BJERGA:** And thank you, Mr. Vice President. We're now going to be entering our question and answer period. Just as you said President Ford was well prepared to enter The White House, our audience is very well prepared to ask you a lot of questions. Please keep the inquiries coming forward.

First question, really, you referred to your effort to get information declassified from the Obama Administration. How's that goin'?

**MR. CHENEY:** Well, the debate is over a set of memos that were produced by intelligence agency, the CIA, that talked about what we had achieved through the interrogation program of high value detainees. And I would not ordinarily be leading the charge to declassify classified information. Otherwise, they wouldn't call me Darth Vader for nothing.

But once the Administration released the legal memos that gave the opinions that were used to guide the interrogation program (they'd given away the store in a sense of the techniques that were used in the interrogation program) I thought it was important to have the results that were gained from that interrogation program, front and center as well. So that's why I asked for those to be declassified.

What's happened now is that the response that came back to my formal request was a negative one. It, in effect, said that the--

[side remarks]

--was the subject of FOIA litigation, and therefore couldn't be released. The fact is, the same standard would apply if you looked at the legal memos that had previously been released. President has the authority to declassify anything he wants. He is the ultimate classification authority in the Federal government. And if they wanted to, he could, with the stroke of a pen, declassify those documents I've asked for this afternoon. I hope he will do it. I'm not sure he will. But eventually I think it needs to be out there. It's part of the record. This is an important debate. There's no question about it, a lot of strong feelings all the way around.

But I think that the declassification of those documents would serve a public purpose and would help to enlighten the debate and give the American people a broader basis upon which to make a determination.

**MR. BJERGA:** I know, Mr. Vice President, that many of your motivations for speaking right now are to give people a better understanding of history and a lot of the controversies that took place during the Bush



Administration. One of those of course was the run-up to the war in Iraq, and connections that were used to justify the argument and the decision to invade. Numerous official inquiries have determined that there was no meaningful collaborative relationship between Saddam Hussein's regime and Al Qaeda, an argument you personally advanced in making the case for invading Iraq.

Do you still maintain that such a collaborative relationship existed? And if so, what source of information did you have that the CIA, the DIA, the INR, and allied intelligence services did not have?

**MR. CHENEY:** Well, the prime source of information on the relationship between Iraq and Al Qaeda was George Tenet, who was the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, and who testified, if you go back and check the record, in the Fall of '02 before the Senate Intelligence Committee in open session that there was a relationship. Didn't say collaborative relationship or operational relationship, which are code words sometimes that get wrapped up in this debate, but that there was a relationship between Al Qaeda and Iraq that stretched back ten years.

That's not something I made up. That's not something I thought of. That's what the Director of Central Intelligence was telling us. And we know for a fact that Saddam Hussein was a sponsor, a state sponsor of terror. It's not my judgment; that was the judgment of our State Department. We know that, for example, he was making \$25,000 dollar payments to the families of suicide bombers who would blow themselves up and kill as many Israelis as they could with them. We know that there were other terrorists like Abu Nidal who had found sanctuary and safe harbor in Iraq over the years.

So the notion that you say not a collaborative relationship, I do not believe and I've never seen any evidence to confirm that he was involved in 9/11. We had that reporting for awhile. Eventually it turned out not to be true. But the fact of Saddam Hussein being a terror sponsor in-state, being somebody who provided sanctuary and safe harbor and resources to terrorists I think is, without question, a fact and of sufficient concern that-- Of course you saw in the tail end of the Clinton Administration that the Clinton Administration called for his ouster, and that the Congress of The United States appropriated \$100 million dollars for the purposes of supporting groups that would try to overthrow Saddam Hussein.

That was the policy of The United States before we even got elected. So I think I would stand by my statements that there was a role and there was a dimension of Saddam Hussein's policy that was involved in terrorism and supporting terrorists. And those are the authorities I'd cite.

**MR. BJERGA:** But given your own acknowledgement that some of the information about potential connections to 9/11, for example, turned out not to be as accurate as originally thought, are you then saying that the case for war that was being made in the fall of 2002, in retrospect, was not as strong as you thought it was at the time?

**MR. CHENEY:** No, I wouldn't put it that way. I thought it was strong at the time. And I still believe so today. I do believe that President made the right call when he made this decision. And, as I say, it was a very important decision if you look at it in the aftermath of 9/11.

The problem we were faced with in the aftermath of 9/11 was the possibility of another 9/11-style attack, only with much deadlier technology, with-- 9/11 with nukes or biological agents of some kind. And that concern drove a lot of our thinking in those period-- those months immediately after 9/11. We were faced with a situation where we felt we had to take action, pursue an aggressive strategy, which we did, to reduce the possibility that terrorists could ever get their hands on that kind of capability, or that a terror-sponsoring state might share that technology with terrorists.

I think it was a sound decision to make. I think it was an important part of our overall strategy in the global war on terror. I think it saved lives. I think we're far better off today because Saddam Hussein is no longer in Iraq. Instead we have a functioning democracy. And been major, major changes in that part of the world, and I think historically will be deemed to have been very significant.

**MR. BJERGA:** One thing you've made reference to in your addresses and in your characterization of that time immediately after 9/11 when you were first speaking of was the feeling of America being under attack, and the perspective change that that brings. On Sunday in *The Washington Post*, Richard Clark had a column (and he was, of course, there at that time as well) in which he characterized the Bush Administration as basically being in a state of shock. And I'm wondering what your characterization of those post-9/11 days were like, and when inevitably that sense of perspective did settle a bit, that immediate reaction, whether there were then adjustments made toward your policy given the change in perspective.

**MR. CHENEY:** Well, the-- Trying to think how to respond carefully and cautiously here. I looked at the world the morning after 9/11. And what I saw was 16 acres of ashes in downtown New York City, the island of Manhattan. I saw a Pentagon that had suffered a severe blow. If you looked closely enough on television, see footage of American citizens jumping out of windows in the upper stories of the Trade Center because it was better than being burned to death. And I knew for a fact that if we hadn't been successful, if the passengers on Flight 93

hadn't been successful, they probably would also have taken out, either The White House or the Capitol Building. It's the worst attack on the homeland in the history of the Republic. We lost more people than we did at Pearl Harbor.

We had good reason to believe that there would be follow-on attacks. We'd seen attacks in '93 on the World Trade Center in New York, in '95 on our operations in Riyadh, in '96 on Khobar Towers, in '98 on the East Africa embassies and in 2000 on the U.S.S. Cole.

And now along comes 2011-- comes 9/11 in 2001. And there was an accelerating pace of the frequency and of the scope and scale of the attacks. We would have been absolutely totally irresponsible if we hadn't taken the view that we had to do everything in our power in order to prevent that next attack. And that's exactly what we did.

And now you can look back at it. And to some extent, our success allows some of our fellow citizens to say, "Oh, there was nothing to worry about. You guys overemphasized how serious it was." You know, Dick Clarke — Dick Clarke, who was the head of the counterterrorism program in the run-up to 9/11, he obviously missed it. Fact is, that we did what we felt we had to do. And if I had it to do all over again, I would do exactly the same thing. I'd be just as tough and aggressive as I could to make certain that those individuals who wished us harm and who were prepared to kill thousands of Americans to achieve a political objective got what they had coming to them. And I think it was the right thing to do. And I don't have much tolerance or patience for those who suggest now, with the benefit of hindsight eight years later, they've forgotten what in fact happened on 9/11.

It was the right thing to do. The threat is still out there. We need to maintain our capabilities. And it's absolutely essential we not forget what happened then or what others are prepared to do. Just imagine — *just imagine* — what would happen if you had 19 men in the middle of two of our major cities, not armed with airline tickets and box cutters, but with a nuclear weapon or a dose of plague or some other deadly biological instrument. That's the kind of world we live in. And any administration or government that doesn't deal effectively with that threat I don't think would be doing its job. (Applause.)

**MR. BJERGA:** Your point on nuclear proliferation is a well taken one, Mr. Vice President. And one question we have here actually deals with that topic. When the Bush Administration took office, North Korea's plutonium production was frozen and Iran's uranium enrichment effort had only several hundred centrifuges. During your time in office, North Korea restarted its nuclear weapons program, conducted its first ever underground test explosion. Iran's uranium enrichment program grew to some 6,000 centrifuges.

In light of these growing nuclear threats, and considering that during the 2004 presidential debates, President Bush listed nuclear proliferation as the nation's greatest security threat, do you still contend that the Bush Administration kept The United States and its allies safer than when you began?

**MR. CHENEY:** Well, I would contend that for several reasons. First of all, I think we had a significant impact upon Al Qaeda, which was the threat of the moment. But we also, when we took down the Saddam Hussein regime, we eliminated one of the great sources of potential proliferation. He had previously produced and used weapons of mass destruction. We also took down Muammar Gaddafi's program in Libya. He surrendered all of his centrifuges, his uranium feedstock, and his weapon design to us. He did that just a few days after we captured Saddam Hussein. We took down the AQ Khan network, the man, AQ Khan, who had been the prime sponsor and builder of Pakistan's nuclear program who then went into business for himself, and on the black market, sold nuclear weapons technology to Libya, to North Korea, and to Iran.

So I think we had some considerable successes. We didn't bat a thousand, no question about it. And Iran and North Korea are still out there. Anybody who wants to know what they're working over on The White House today, my guess is there's a lot of attention being focused specifically on those two issues, because the nuclear proliferation question is a major one. It's one that whoever's in The White House is going to have to address.

Now the North Koreans have demonstrated once again I think that they have absolutely are not prepared to keep any commitments they make. They've now tested a second nuclear weapon. And they've been testing missiles. And they're getting ready, it looks like, to test another missile as well. It's going to require a concerted effort on the part of the Administration to find some way to make certain that neither North Korea nor Iran acquires nuclear weapons capability. I wish we could have done more, but those are problems that are passed onto the next Administration. I'm sure we'll do everything we can to help support their efforts.

**MR. BJERGA:** Noting the lessons of history and the changes that perspective can bring, as proof of the Bush Administration's actions in the war on terror, you often cite the lack of an attack on U.S. soil since 2001 as a basic sign of the success of your policies. In your AEI speech last month, you criticized *The New York Times*'s decision in 2005 to publicize one initiative, the terrorist surveillance program, saying the story could only help Al Qaeda. Yet since that information was revealed, the U.S. has yet to sustain an attack.

So following your logic that no attack means success, can we then say that the terrorist surveillance program didn't need to not be public because there's been no attack since?

**MR. CHENEY:** Well, I'm not sure I understand the question. (Applause.) I'll answer my version of your question. How does that sound? My complaint about what *The New York Times* did-- The terrorist surveillance program is one of those programs we set up in the immediate aftermath of 9/11. When working with the National Security Agency, we put together a program that made it possible for us to intercept the international communications that were related to terrorist groups, that is, we could pick up on, say, a dirty number, a number that had perhaps been found in the pocket of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed when he was captured in Pakistan, and see who he was calling in The United States.

The program was set up in a very, very careful and cautious way. It had to be reviewed by senior members of the Administration every 45 days. It had to be personally signed up to by the President of The United States. He had to authorize it every 45 days. And it was a very valuable program, still is a valuable program. Eventually we went to the Congress and got legislative authorization to continue major parts of it.

The reason for my comment about *The New York Times* was, when the program was still highly classified and the source of a good deal of information that allowed us to find out who inside The United States was talking to Al Qaeda folks outside The United States, we found ourselves in a situation where *The New York Times* received a leak. We called them into the Oval Office. The publisher and the editor and the Washington bureau chief of *The Times* all came down and met with the President of The United States in the Oval Office.

And the President said, "Look — please don't publish what you're about to publish, 'cause you're gonna tell the enemy how it is we're reading their mail. And that would not be good. In fact, there's a law against it." They went ahead and they published it anyway. And their reward for doing that was they won the Pulitzer that year for that story. And my argument in my speech the other day (and I reiterate it again here today) is that I think that action was damaging to The United States. It made our job tougher. It made it possible for Al Qaeda types to know how it was we were intercepting their communications. You know, who can know? We might be able to speculate that we'd been able to catch even more Al Qaeda senior managers than we have if in fact that secret had been maintained.

But it wasn't. *The New York Times* made the decision. My own personal view is that that damaged our security.

**MR. BJERGA:** Question that just came from the audience about one of your previous responses. You said that Richard Clarke must have missed 9/11. Wasn't he warning The White House for months of chatter about an attack?

**MR. CHENEY:** That's not my recollection, but I haven't read his book.

**MR. BJERGA:** We have a couple questions about Guantanamo Bay. The first one is simply, what would you say to those countries that want the U.S. to close Guantanamo but are unwilling to accept any of its inmates?

**MR. CHENEY:** The Guantanamo issue is a serious issue. And I don't mean to downplay its significance at all. If we had not had Guantanamo, we would have had to take captured terrorists, people we picked up on the battlefield trying to kill Americans, and bring them to The United States. And that created all kinds of problems, because once they came into The United States, they would have certain legal standing that they would not have as long as they were held overseas in Guantanamo. Then you would have been faced with a possibility that if a judge had ruled that we had to release them, we would have had no choice but to release them inside The United States.

So we used Guantanamo, which had been there for a long time. It's a place, for example, where-- I can remember when I was Secretary of Defense. We used to hold Haitian refugees that we collected before they got into The United States. We'd house them at Guantanamo, feed them and provide medical care and so forth. So this seemed like a good solution to a difficult problem at the time. And that was that we could house the people we captured in the war on terror at Guantanamo.

And the facility down there is a fine facility. These people are very well treated. They are, remember, again, unlawful combatants. They are terrorists. They are being treated in a manner that you would expect Americans to treat prisoners from other conflicts. And that's certainly the way it's been done.

I think it's going to be very difficult to close Guantanamo. Now, the current Administration is finding that out. We found it out. Obviously there were debates over Guantanamo in our Administration. President said at one point that he'd like to close Guantanamo. Nobody could ever figure out how you were going to do it, because you couldn't figure out what you were going to do with the bad actors that were still in Guantanamo.

*The New York Times* again, one of my favorite publications, the other day referred to the inmates at Guantanamo as abductees. You know, it sounded like these were people who were kidnapped on their way to the movies. These are bad actors. These are the worst of the worst. We already, during the Bush

Administration, had reviewed all the cases of everybody was held down there. They were all entitled to an annual review of their case. Several hundred of them, I believe over 500 were actually released, sent back to their home country on the grounds that they no longer constituted a threat to The United States or no longer had any intelligence value for us. So they were released.

Now as I understand it, 14% of them have in fact gone back into the Jihad business. They're back out fighting against us again after we'd released them. The ones that are left, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, Abu Zubaydah, and so forth, these are the worst of the worst. These are the folks who, given a chance, would walk in here today and blow themselves up and take as many Americans as they could with them. That's what they believe. There is not a great demand out around the country to have those folks shipped, you know, to your nearest facility. I haven't seen a lot of members of Congress stand up and say, "Oh yeah, I'll take a dozen." It's not going to happen.

And the same problem you've got overseas, with our friends overseas, who oftentimes have been critical for us having Guantanamo, holler at us to close Guantanamo, but not in my backyard. They don't want any of those nasty terrorists arriving in their capital city to be housed and fed and whatever's going to happen to them.

So we need Guantanamo. If we didn't have it, we would have had to invite it. It's a good well-run facility. The press has access to it. The International Committee of the Red Cross has access to it. The home countries of those people who are held down there has access to it. It's a good facility. If you're going to be engaged in a world conflict such as we are in terms of global war on terrorism, you know, if you don't have a place where you can hold these people, your only other option is to kill them. We don't operate that way, you know? When we capture people in combat, conflict, we hold them as prisoners. And these folks are being treated like prisoners of war, and ought to be held till the end of the conflict, in my estimation. And I think Guantanamo's a good facility. And I think the Administration made a mistake of the President issuing an order that he wants it closed with the year, but didn't have a clue as to how to proceed. And now they're having trouble because they're having to come up with a plan of some kind that will allow them to achieve that objective. It's going to be hard.

**MR. BJERGA:** You mentioned the people at Guantanamo Bay right now as the worst of the worst. But, I mean, it is true that there are people who, at least would be the worst of the really, really, really, really, bad already serving on U.S. soil — Zacarias Moussaoui, Ramzi Yousef. They're already serving prison time in The United States. And understanding the rationale that congressional delegations would resist, but congressional delegations don't always get what they want, there is obviously a hearts and mind element to a war against terror or

such. And it clearly would be very politically popular among allies to close Guantanamo Bay. And I'm wondering if you see any value in that as a benefit toward closing it, and if it's really actually impossible to close the facility given that we do have terrorists on U.S. soil right now who are serving in Federal prisons.

**MR. CHENEY:** Well, I wouldn't want to try to sell that idea to all of those nasty congressmen up there who were opposed to having them come to their districts. I think the facts speak for themselves. I don't see a list of folks overseas willing to receive these terrorists. Towards the tail end of our Administration, we had, I believe it was seven Uighurs. These are Chinese Muslims who were hostile to the government of China who were picked up in training camps and so forth in Afghanistan. And we agreed to release them, to let them go. We spent months trying to find a place where they would be received.

The only place that would take them was Albania. And so we did that. They went to Albania, and that's where they are today. But, you know, in spite of all of the arguing and the hand wringing and the statements of criticism we've heard from our allies, they haven't agreed to take any of these folks. And they're not likely to, especially if the situation continues here in the States where members of Congress and a great many other people don't want to have them released in the States either.

If you bring them here and incarcerate them, and then a judge rules that you can't hold them any longer, you've got to release them in The United States. And once you've done that, you know, you're going to have a problem.

**MR. BJERGA:** This is a question from one of our viewers on C-Span — as a person who never served in the U.S. military, why should the American public accept your position that waterboarding is not torture when Senator John McCain, who was tortured for years in a Vietnam prison, says that waterboarding *is* torture?

**MR. CHENEY:** Well, the guidance that we looked for and adhered to was the one provided by the Justice Department. We went to the appropriate agency of the Justice Department, the Office of Legal Counsel, and said, "What are the guidelines here? What can you do that's appropriate? And what can you do that's not appropriate? What do you have to stay away from?"

And they drew a red line that was provided to the Central Intelligence Agency. And that's the guidance upon which they work. That's the guidance I would take. I thought it was the appropriate way to proceed. I do believe it was. And I don't believe that we engaged in torture. There were three people who were waterboarded, not a large number. And in fact, it was done under the overall



guidance of the central-- elements in the CIA and the Department of Justice. And I thought it was well done.

**MR. BJERGA:** Final question on national security topics — why didn't your Administration capture Osama Bin Laden?

**MR. CHENEY:** Well, I believe he's still out there someplace. He is, I'm sure probably buried deep in the ground somewhere, hiding. He doesn't communicate, obviously. He's learned that he shouldn't communicate electronically, clearly. We will continue-- I'm sure the current Administration will continue to search for him. You know, he's an important figure, obviously. We'd love to have captured him on our watch. We didn't. I'm sure the Obama people feel the same way.

But the important thing is, I don't think he can have much impact now in terms of managing the organization, because that link between Obama (sic) and the people under him is pretty fragile. I don't think he has the capacity to do as much harm as he did at one point. But we ought to still continue to chase him.

**MR. BJERGA:** In the limited time we have left, a few questions on domestic topics of the day — what do you think of today's General Motors bankruptcy and the fact that the U.S. government is now actively involved in managing two of the three major U.S. automakers?

**MR. CHENEY:** I'm worried, I guess is the way I would put it. I think once you get into the business of having the government run a major corporation like General Motors (and it looks to me like today they own General Motors, certainly the majority shareholder) then all these political pressures come to bear and decisions begin to be made, not for economic reasons or for business reasons, but rather to appease certain political interests.

When it's time, for example, to make a decision to close a plant in City X and open up a new plant in City Y, there'll be cries of outrage not to close that plant in City X. I hark back to my own experiences. I worked in the wage price control program back in the early '70s. And at the time, we in effect, the direction of the President, with the approval of the Congress, took on the responsibility for determining the wages, prices, and profits in every economic enterprise in America. And we got ourselves into a fix because all of a sudden, we were responsible, for example, for the price of hamburger. Price of hamburger goes up 20 cents at the store, that's the government's fault, you know? President did that. Wage price control people did that. You guys allowed the price of hamburger to go up 20 cents.

You quickly ended up in a situation where government is being expected to make decisions, and the decision making process is more subject to politics than is the private sector, and also makes decisions, I believe, for reasons that are not in the economic best interest of the country. There's a reason why the U.S. has prospered as much as we have over the last 200 years. And a big part of that is our private free enterprise system, and because people are able to make decisions based on economics and on good business sense. And some companies succeed and some companies fail. If government's going to get into the business of bailing out all the big corporations that get into trouble, you end up committing huge resource to try to keep somebody like General Motors alive, when in fact the right answer might be (we'll find out now, we're going to-- shot at it) that they go through the Chapter 11 process, that they shed themselves of some of those old obligations, and that they come out new and able to compete more effectively than they did before. That's a healthy process. This is a dynamic economy where we create new things and destroy old things on a continuous basis. That's the way the business world works. And it's fundamentally healthy.

Now we have a situation where I'm concerned because I see the government stepping in. And they're supposedly going to preside over a Chapter 11 process here. We'll see how that works. But I do not like the precedent that we're setting here in terms of, when you get a corporation that big that the government of The United States steps in, takes over, and begins to operate it, make judgments that I think are best left to the private sector.

**MR. BJERGA:** One correction, Mr. Vice President. You're not out of the woods yet on national security. This is a follow-up to a previous question, just for clarification. When did you first discuss with President Bush the need to use enhanced interrogation techniques on detainees? Was it before the CIA came up with a specific list of tactics? Was it before the Office of Legal Council at the Justice Department said those tactics were legal?

**MR. CHENEY:** My recollection is that the way the process worked was the Agency came to us, that is, came to the members of the National Security Council, then also sought guidance from the Justice Department. That is, it was their initiative because they had a couple of cases where they thought enhanced interrogation techniques would provide information from individuals that they weren't otherwise going to get it from.

And the response of the National Security Council, myself included, was, as we all know, we all approved it. I'm a strong believer in it. I think it was the right thing to do. And the Justice Department was asked for its legal guidance in terms of what could and could not be done. But it basically was, as I recall, at the initiative of the CIA. They were the ones in control of and in possession of these prisoners. They were the ones in charge of the interrogations. And I think they

handled it very well. I thought it was well done and exactly the right way to proceed.

**MR. BJERGA:** Just a couple more questions — first, what do you think of President Obama’s nomination of Judge Sonia Sotomayor to the Supreme Court? Do you support her confirmation?

**MR. CHENEY:** Well, I don’t have a vote, obviously. And if I had to nominate someone for the Supreme Court, I don’t think I would have nominated her. I think I would have gone more with somebody like John Roberts, Samuel Alito or Nino Scalia or Clarence Thomas. That’s my view of the world. I’d like to see conservatives nominated to the Supreme Court.

Nothing personal against the nominee. The President’s made his call. That’s his prerogative. He won the election. Now there will be a debate in the Senate over whether or not she ought to be confirmed. I look forward to the hearings, just like I think a lot of other people do. But if it were my nomination to make, I think I would have gone with somebody with a little more conservative bent.

**MR. BJERGA:** Question on social issues — given recent developments in Iowa and elsewhere, is some form of legalized gay marriage inevitable in The United States?

**MR. CHENEY:** Well, I think, you know, freedom means freedom for everyone. And as many of you know, one of my daughters is gay, and something that we’ve lived with for a long time in our family. I think people ought to be free to enter into any kind of union they wish, any kind of arrangement they wish.

The question of whether or not there ought to be a Federal statute that governs this I don’t support. I do believe that historically the way marriage has been regulated is at the state level. This has always been a state issue. And I think that’s the way it ought to be handled today, that is, on a state by state basis. Different states will make different decisions. But I don’t have any problem with that. I think people ought to get a shot at that. And they do at present.

**MR. BJERGA:** We are almost out of time, but before we ask the last question, we have a couple of important things to take care of. First, let us remind you of some future speakers coming up here at the National Press Club. On June 8th, we will have David Simon, a former reporter for *The Baltimore Sun*, and best known for producing the popular HBO drama, *The Wire*. On June 11th, we have General James Conway, commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps. And on June 25th, we have Stan Kasten, the president of the Washington Nationals.

Also, very important part of our program right here, we need to present our speaker with the coveted (you know what's comin' here) all important "speak here and get one free" National Press Club mug. (Applause.)

But we're not quite done with you. We have one final question. And it's something that really gives pause and reflection as this goes on. And thank you for the lengthy session that we've had here today. I think a lot of people in our audience, and viewers have found it fruitful. When you're standing here and you're talking about the legacy of the Administration, you're talking about what is and isn't torture. You're talking about unauthorized wire taps or the case for Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. It's truly striking the wide range of influence you had as Vice President of The United States. Given that, were you the most powerful Vice President in U.S. history? If not, could you give us an example of another Vice President who was?

**MR. CHENEY:** I think we'll leave that judgment to history. I obviously-- (Applause.)

**MR. BJERGA:** --or your book.

**MR. CHENEY:** No. Let me say just a word, though. When President Bush asked me to take the job, my initial reaction was no. I'd done 25 years in Washington as Secretary of Defense, White House Chief of Staff, congressman and so forth. Then he persuaded me I was the right one for the job for what he needed to have done. And I signed on. And I haven't regretted it for a minute.

But a lot of the credit's due to him, who basically promised me that I'd have wide open access to whatever was going on, that I could be an integral part of the process, and dig into whatever I wanted to dig into. And he absolutely kept his word. And I am proud of the fact that I've worked for him through some very difficult times. Each Administration's unique. Each Administration has to deal with a different set of problems, and so forth.

We had a very special set of problems that emerged out of 9/11, that then dominated our years in The White House. But I have great respect and regard for President Bush. And I would not have had the opportunity to do all that I did if it hadn't been for him and if he hadn't kept his word to me that I could be a significant and important part of his Administration. And I'll always be grateful for that. Thank you. (Applause.)

**MR. BJERGA:** And thank you for coming today, Mr. Vice President. I'd also like to thank National Press Club staff members, Melinda Cooke, Pat Nelson, JoAnn Booz, Howard Rothman, and a cast of hundreds for organizing today's lunch. Also thank you to the National Press Club Library for its research.

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Thank you very much for your time and for attending today, and for viewing on C-Span. This meeting is adjourned. (Gavel sounds.)

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