

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB NEWSMAKER LUNCHEON WITH VICE PRESIDENT DICK CHENEY

TOPIC: THE GERALD R. FORD JOURNALISM AWARDS FOR 2006

MODERATOR:

JONATHAN SALANT, PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB ALSO

PRESENT:

JACK FORD, SON OF FORMER PRESIDENT GERALD R. FORD MARTY ALLEN, CHAIRMAN, GERALD R. FORD FOUNDATION TOM DEFRANK, WASHINGTON BUREAU CHIEF, THE NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, AND WINNER OF THE AWARD FOR DISTINGUISHED REPORTING ON THE PRESIDENCY MARK MAZZETTI, THE NEW YORK TIMES, WINNER OF THE AWARD FOR DISTINGUISHED REPORTING ON NATIONAL DEFENSE

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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.

The video archive of today's luncheon -- (laughter) -- the video

archive of today's luncheon is provided by ConnectLive and is available to members only through the National Press Club's website at [www.press.org](http://www.press.org). Press Club members may get free transcripts of our luncheons at our website. Nonmembers may buy transcripts, audiotapes and videotapes by calling 1-888-343-1940. For more information about joining the Press Club, please call us at Area Code 202, 662-7511.

Before introducing our head table, I'd like to remind our members of future speakers.

On June 22nd, Senator John Edwards, director of the Center on Poverty, Work and Opportunity at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and the 2004 Democratic presidential candidate, will be our speaker.

On June 26th, Dr. John Seffrin of the American Cancer Society.

And on June 28th, a special luncheon with executives of Nickelodeon, along with Romeo, the star of the series "Romeo!" and Miranda Cosgrove, star of the Teen Nick series "Drake and Josh," along with SpongeBob SquarePants. (Laughter.)

If you have any questions for our speaker, please write them on the cards provided on your table and pass them up to people who will be standing at either end of the room. I will ask as many as time permits.

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

From your right: Andy Alexander, Washington Bureau Chief with Cox Newspapers and vice chair of the club's Professional Development Committee; Gerard Baker, U.S. editor of the Times of London; Mark Mazzetti of The New York Times, this year's winner of the Gerald R. Ford Award for Distinguished Reporting on National Defense for work done when he was at the Los Angeles Times Washington Bureau; Tom DeFrank, the Washington Bureau Chief of the New York Daily News, and this year's winner of the Ford Award for Distinguished Reporting on the presidency; Jack Ford, the son of President Ford; Marty Allen, the chairman of the Gerald R. Ford Foundation; John Hughes of Bloomberg News and chairman of the National Press Club's Speakers Committee; Vice President Dick Cheney, who will get a longer introduction in a little while -- (soft laughter) -- Ken Bielecki, freelance editor and writer and the Speakers Committee member who organized today's luncheon -- and, Ken, thank you very much for your work -- former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger; Melissa Charbonneau of CBN News and a member of the Press Club Speakers Committee; Lisa Lambert of Reuters; Chris Berry of ABC and WMAL Radio; and Ed Prina, the retired Washington Bureau chief for Copley News Service. (Applause.)

Once again, the National Press Club is honored to be the venue for the annual Gerald R. Ford Foundation Awards for distinguished reporting on the presidency and on national defense.

President Ford, who celebrated his 93rd birthday last week, is not able to be with us today. But we know that he and his wife,

Betty, are watching us from their home in Rancho Mirage, California. Mr. President, your many friends here today send their best wishes to you and Betty. (Applause.)

We are joined today by President and Mrs. Ford's children. Besides Jack, who is at the head table, Susan, Michael and Steven are in the audience, and welcome to the National Press Club. (Applause.)

Beginning of our program, Jack Ford is here to deliver a special message from President Ford.

Jack? (Applause.)

MR. FORD: Thank you, Jonathan.

On behalf of mother and dad, who had attended this luncheon for some 25 years but can't be here today, let me extend a warm welcome to the vice president, Secretary Kissinger, members of the media, members of the Ford administration, just good friends of mother and dad -- on behalf of our family, nobody wishes they could be here more than mother and dad.

In fact, dad enjoyed hanging out with the press probably more than any modern-day president today. I think his love and respect for the role that the media and the press play in our great democracy is somewhat unique in today's political world.

So while dad and mom can't be here in person, they're both certainly here in spirit, and nothing would make them prouder than to see this gathering from all areas of our democracy here to salute our friends in the media.

Thank you very much. (Applause.)

MR. SALANT: Thank you, Jack.

And please come up again as Marty Allen, chairman of the Gerald R. Ford Foundation, joins us to recognize this year's award winners.

MARTIN ALLEN (chair, Gerald R. Ford Foundation): Mr. Vice President, members and guests of the National Press Club, on behalf of the trustees of the Gerald R. Ford Foundation, I'd like to thank the National Press Club. This is the 19th year you've hosted us here, and we're very appreciative for that.

Jonathan, I got to do what I think is appropriate to do at press gatherings, I have to correct the record, if you will. Although President Ford is not quite 93 yet -- July 14th will be his birthday. So I just want to correct the record -- not you -- just in case there's anybody writing this down in their notes.

Each year we award the two prizes, one for distinguished reporting on the presidency, and one for distinguished reporting on national defense. Before we present the awards to this year's winners, I'd like to acknowledge the judges for the journalism prizes,

many of whom are here today and have this very difficult task of selecting our winners.

Could I ask the Presidency Prize judges, led by Jim Cannon, as well as the National Defense Prize judges, led by Debbie Van Opstal, to stand and be recognized. The judges, please. Please stand. (Applause.) Thank you for all your hard work.

And I do know that at your table there are copies of the press releases as well as the brochures that talk about this award we're about to present.

I'd also like to extend my thanks to the vice president. His being here now is the third year in a row he's been here representing President Ford, with his long-standing personal relationship that he and Lynne have with the president and Mrs. Ford. So we thank you.

On behalf of the Gerald R. Ford Foundation, I am pleased to announce this year's winner of the Gerald R. Ford Prize for Distinguished Reporting on the Presidency, Tom DeFrank of the New York Daily News. Tom is being recognized for the diligence of his reporting, his insight into significant changes emerging in the first year of President George Bush's second term, and the clarity and brevity of his writing. His coverage of the White House demonstrated a particularly keen perception of relationships among principals and how these relationships influenced official policy.

While many White House correspondents performed well and wrote at length during the year, none matched Tom in compressing information, analysis and lively writing into so little space. Considered as a whole, Tom DeFrank's work exemplified the excellence in journalism that brings greater public understanding of the modern American presidency.

Tom, please come forward to receive your reward.

(Applause.)

MR. DEFRANK: Thank you, Marty and Jack, for this wonderful award. I'm very appreciative. And of course, I'd like to thank the judges, especially, Chairman Jim Cannon, for recognizing my work covering the Bush administration.

I say this without any pejorative intent whatsoever. But in every White House, and I've covered the last seven, sometimes what's going on inside may be a little different than the public perception. Sometimes. My stories in 2005 tried to explore that differential, and I'm grateful that the judges took note of my efforts.

I also want to thank the vice president very much for being here. Mr. Vice President, your presence is a testament to your generosity of spirit as well as your great affection for President Ford, which many of us here share.

You know, the vice president and I have been dealing with each other professionally for almost 32 years now, and I can tell you, he's

not an easy guy with an anecdote. (Laughter.)

He's probably forgotten this, but I never will. I once told him in exasperation years ago that I'd make an anecdotalist out of him some day, and he said, "Good luck." (Laughter.)

So, having failed miserably in that quest, Mr. Vice President, I have an anecdote for you that I suspect you'll appreciate. I was really privileged to learn about this award from President Ford himself. By sheer coincidence, I was in Rancho Mirage visiting him the very day the judges reached their decision. Unbeknownst to me, he had decided to tell me personally -- just the way he is, the good guy that he is. So when I walked into his study he was holding a piece of paper. "I have good news for you," he said, "at least I think it's good news. You're getting the Ford award."

Now, I'm not proud to admit this, but at that moment, my mind flashed back to 1976 to another sheet of paper, a telegram that read, "Congratulations, you've been selected as one of the panelists for the presidential debate." It was bogus. (Laughter.) The vice president knows where this one's going! (Laughter.) It was a hoax perpetrated by the merry prankster of the White House press corps, Jim Naughton of The New York Times, now of the Poynter Institute. I thought to myself, "Oh my God, 30 years later, Naughton strikes again." (Laughter.)

I couldn't help myself, and I blurted out, "Mr. President, is this for real?" He gave me one of those what-planet-do-you-come-from looks. "Of course, it's for real," he said, "Why the hell do you think I'm telling you?" (Laughter.)

So at that point I concluded it was for real and told President Ford what I humbly repeat today -- no award, no award could ever mean more to me than one with Gerald R. Ford's name on it.

I have some very brief thank-yous. First, to my bosses at the Daily News -- Mort Zuckerman, our chairman and publisher, and Martin Dunn, our editor in chief. Mort and Martin recognize that a great hometown newspaper can also have an impact outside its circulation area. This award could never have happened without their strong commitment to national news and Washington news. And I and my terrific colleagues in the Washington bureau are very grateful for that support and encouragement. Martin is here today. Thanks very much, Martin.

I'm also especially indebted to my former boss and mentor at Newsweek magazine, Mel Elfin, the guy who in 1974 had to convince our dubious editors that I was really up to handling the White House beat. For that and many other things, thank you, Chief.

A very special thanks also to my long-suffering wife, Melanie, and our son, Andrew, who like every journalist's family put up with a lot. All of you know, some things never really change in this business. I was fortunate to travel with the vice president overseas last month, and spent our 16th wedding anniversary in Kazakhstan -- (laughter) -- not the first time. Thanks, guys.

And of course, last but definitely not least, thanks again to President Ford for all his extraordinarily -- extraordinary personal and professional kindnesses since I was first assigned to cover him in the fall of 1973 when he was nominated as vice president.

I was one of a handful of reporters who traveled with him constantly for those tumultuous eight months. Three of those fellow travelers -- at least three -- are here today; my dear friends, Phil Jones of CBS News, trying to be unobstructive for once, and Howard Kerr (sp), Vice President Ford's Naval aide, and Bob Barrett, Vice President Ford's Army aide.

I thank you all for being here.

It was a miserable time for a country mired in Watergate, but it was also the most exhilarating eight months of my career, which is why instead of my regular White House credential I'm wearing a genuine authentic Gerald R. Ford Air Force Two Credential -- (laughter) -- from April of 1974. I savor those moments and cherish those memories. As an old Texas ranger captain liked to say, "They are for me forever the sunny slopes of long ago."

So thank you, Mr. President, for many things, large and small, especially because of you, I'm particularly honored to be associated with this award.

Thank you very much. (Applause.)

MR. ALLEN: Thank you, Tom.

I know that the president and Mrs. Ford would really appreciate not only hearing those remarks, but seeing an old friend. I always think of them watching this, and I have a feeling that they have the greatest collection of National Press Club mugs in the world. (Laughter.) And somehow I feel that they're sipping on a cup of tea or a cup of coffee as they watch this and watch Tom and watch the next recipient.

For our second award of the afternoon, I'm pleased to announce this year's winner of the Gerald R. Ford Prize for Distinguished Reporting on National Defense, Mark Mazzetti, of The New York Times.

Mark is receiving the award for work written while he was at the Los Angeles Times. In a field of particularly strong national security writers and a year of particularly gripping defense news, Mark's body of work stood out. He made complex security concepts and challenges from the nation's military strategies, the impact of individual decisions expressible to the American public. Mark's collection of articles was characterized by a refreshing sense of balance and even handedness in reporting that many Americans can appreciate.

Mark, please come forward to receive your award.

(Applause.)

MR. MAZZETTI: Thank you very much. It's a tremendous honor to win this award. It's a tremendous honor to be in any speaking series that includes Romeo and SpongeBob SquarePants. (Laughter.)

Thank you, President Ford, and thank you, Vice President Cheney, for being here.

A special thank-you also to the judges this year. I've had the privilege to know and be friends with several of the past four or five winners of this award, whose work I admire tremendously, so it's an honor being with that group.

And a special thank-you also to my editors at the LA Times, two of them who are here right now, and that's Bob Ourlian and Tom McCarthy, who I think truly deserve as much credit as I do for this award, for giving me the freedom and the time to pursue a few different themes last year in national defense reporting. So I'm truly grateful for them for allowing me to do that.

And the two themes that I pursued particularly last year were, first of all, the impact of the Iraq war on the U.S. military, everything from the strategy to the personnel to the decisions made by young Army captains who are deciding whether to stay in the Army after several tours in Iraq, to how the Army decides to market itself during a time of war.

And the second theme was how the military is trying to grapple with this idea of being in an information war and how public affairs these days often gets blended with information warfare and there are times when the press can get brought into being used for military operations. And I think that is something that people in the military are very concerned about and I think something that the press should continue to look into and report on, because there is concern out there.

So again, I wanted to thank the Los Angeles Times and my bosses and, again, President Ford, for this award. And it's a true honor. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

MR. SALANT: Congratulations to both winners. And what Tom DeFrank did not tell you was, later on the press corps got their revenge on Jim Naughton. And they invited him -- he was called and told that he was going to get an exclusive interview with President Ford after the election and was told to be at Camp David at 8:00 Saturday morning. (Laughter.)

And Jim Naughton showed up at Camp David, and nobody knew anything about the invitation. (Laughter.) And according to the National Press Club library's research, the person who invited Jim Naughton to come up to Camp David for the exclusive interview was none other than his chief of staff, Vice President Cheney. (Laughter.)

If this was RFK Stadium, home of the Washington Nationals, you'd now be hearing the following announcement: "Pinch hitting for Gerald Ford, Number 2, Dick Cheney. Number 2." As I mentioned earlier,

President Ford is unable to be with us today and has asked his former chief of staff, Vice President Cheney, to represent him at our awards luncheon. Thank you, Mr. Cheney, for stepping in for Mr. Ford again this year.

No vice president in our history has held the power and influence of Dick Cheney, nor has any vice president before him assumed the office with such an impressive resume. Besides serving as White House chief of staff, Dick Cheney was a member of Congress for a decade, secretary of Defense during the first Gulf War, and chief executive of a major corporation, Halliburton, for five years. He is a trusted adviser to President George W. Bush and has been likened to a chief operating officer, with the president as CEO.

Mr. Cheney was a leading proponent for the overthrow of former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein. Today the vice president is one of the administration's most outspoken supporters of America's efforts to quash the insurgency in Iraq. Mr. Cheney's been a steadfast advocate of the Bush administration's war on terror, including warrantless wiretapping of American citizens, an effort that concerns both Democrats and Republicans alike.

Mr. Cheney has also been criticized about the secretive way in which the administration developed its energy policy, one that favors increasing the supply of oil.

In addition, he has also faced questions about his former chief of staff, Scooter Libby, who was indicted last year for allegedly lying to a grand jury investigating the leak of the name of an undercover CIA agent.

Asked how all the criticism has affected him, Mr. Cheney admits he has changed. He said on "Face the Nation" last March, "I'm a lot older, and I've got a lot less hair." (Laughter.)

He is popular among his fellow Republicans and is a frequent speaker and fundraiser for his party.

He and his wife, Lynne, a public figure in her own right, have two children.

Mr. Vice President, it is an honor to welcome you back to the National Press Club. (Applause.)

VICE PRESIDENT CHENEY: Thank you. Thank you all very much. I appreciate the warm welcome. It's good to be here this afternoon, and, Jonathan, I thank you for your words and the audience for their warm welcome.

It's true, I am the party who called Jim Naughton the morning after the election in '76 and offered him an exclusive interview with the president of the United States on what it was like to lose the '76 election. But I had help. Aldo Beckman put me up to it. Mr. DeFrank was part of the group, as I recall, maybe Phil Jones. And it was because Naughton had been so outrageous for a couple of years -- he'd managed to make everybody the butt of a joke. What was especially rewarding was that when we promised the exclusive interview, if he'd



be up at Camp David that Saturday. And, of course, the president wasn't there. He was in Palm Springs, I think, by then. (Laughter.) But Naughton was worried about missing the interview, since it was going to be at 8:00 in the morning, and he wanted a photographer along, so he got hold of George Tames -- many of you may remember as a famous photographer for The New York Times -- and flew him in from Florida, and then they drove up to the cozy motel in Thurmont, Maryland, where they spent the night to make sure they didn't miss the meeting the next day. (Laughter.) And when the Marines arrested them at the gate at Camp David -- (laughter) -- they put him on the telephone, and some of us were waiting in my office in the West Wing, and, of course, Naughton knew then he'd been nailed. (Laughter.)

The amazing thing was about two years later, I was running for Congress for the first time in Wyoming. In the midst of my first campaign, I had a heart attack. And so I found myself at age 37 in the intensive care unit in the hospital in Cheyenne, Wyoming. I've got all of the various wires and tubes running in me and so forth, which happens after you've been through one of those experiences, and I was laying there contemplating my future, wondering whether or not I was going to be able to continue my political career and so forth. And my wife, Lynne, walked in, laughing. And I didn't see anything very funny -- (laughter) -- about the circumstances. She handed me a telegram. It said, "Dear Dick, I didn't do it." Signed "Naughton." (Laughter.)

But anyway, we need to get serious. And I'm delighted to have the opportunity to participate once again in the presentation of the Gerald R. Ford Prizes for Distinguished Reporting. For many years, of course, the highlight of this event was an appearance by the president himself. And although he couldn't make the journey today, as Jack indicated, I had the privilege of talking to him last week, and he obviously asked to extend best wishes to all of you here today. I know the entire Ford family is looking forward to helping him celebrate his 93rd birthday in next month, and shortly after that, I believe the 58th wedding anniversary of Gerry and Betty Ford.

It's good to be with the journalists who have received the Ford prize this afternoon. This is the first opportunity I've had to meet Mark Mazzetti. But, Tom, of course, is someone I've known for more than 30 years; covered President Ford as vice president, and continued covering the White House for Newsweek. He traveled constantly with us, witnessed almost everything that you can see at that level -- summit meetings, campaign events of every conceivable variety, historic debates, two assassination attempts. And I know that Tom, as well as most other journalists who dealt with our 38th president, came away from the experience with unstinting admiration for the man himself.

My own history with President Ford goes back to the very beginning of his presidency when he put Don Rumsfeld in charge of the transition, and Don asked me to join the team. Rumsfeld, of course, became chief of staff. I served as the deputy, and then took over that job when President Ford asked Don to go to the Defense Department as secretary of Defense.

The Ford administration lasted from August 9th of 1974 until

January 20th of 1977. But, as Henry Kissinger has observed, the pace of activity and the volume of challenges in those 29 months were sufficient to fill an eight-year presidency. A simple and partial recitation of events is enough to bring back the feeling of that era and the nature of the task that fell to President Gerald Ford: economic recession, the fall of Saigon, the capture and rescue of the USS Mayaguez, the only Supreme Court vacancy in a period of nine years, meetings in Helsinki and the Helsinki Summit, the pardon of former President Nixon, clemency for draft deserters, the death of Chairman Mao, the nation's bicentennial, the nomination battle in 1976 with Ronald Reagan, finally, the general election campaign against Jimmy Carter, in which we started out 30 points behind, but in the end, achieved one of the closest Electoral College votes in the nation since the election of 1916.

Through all of this, America was exceedingly fortunate to have a steady hand at the wheel. Although Gerald Ford inherited a tarnished office and had to clean up a mess not of his own making, he was more than equal to the enterprise. He spoke plainly and forthrightly to the American people. He made decisions carefully, but also firmly. And while he was naturally modest, he was comfortable with responsibility and a master of details.

I'll never forget the time when budget season came around and the president made an announcement to the staff. Instead of having the OMB director brief the news media on the budget, he, the president, would do it himself. And he did. It was a moment without parallel in the last 50 years, and he was superb.

In every respect, Gerald Ford labored hard at his job, and he was good at it. And on his last day in the Oval Office, our economy was strong again, the nation was confident again, and largely by the character of President Ford, the wounds of an uneasy time had been healed.

As chief of staff, my job entailed many long hours at President Ford's side. In working with him every day, it struck me that whatever the circumstance, whatever the political temperature, whatever the challenge of the moment, I was always dealing fundamentally with the same man. Gerald Ford's the kind of person whose good qualities appear on first impression, and are only confirmed when you spend any length of time with him. If a situation ever tempted the man to be petty or cruel, he never once sank to it. He is abidingly decent, thoughtful and utterly lacking in pretense. He is also a very wise man who appreciates history, understands human nature, and lives by The New Testament. He's been a mentor and a friend and a source of good advice to me and so many, many others. And those of us who served in his administration feel a great loyalty and admiration for our leader, and we're extremely grateful that President Ford has received a gift of many years of good health.

President Ford is also a patient and a forgiving man, and so naturally he has a high regard for the news media. (Laughter.) It is more than fitting that the good name of our 28th president be attached to the prestigious awards presented this afternoon. And on President Ford's behalf, I'm happy to congratulate Mark Mazzetti and Tom DeFrank. (Applause.)

And now for the questions.

MR. SALANT: Thank you very much, Mr. Vice President.

First question: Are we winning the war on terror?

VICE PRESIDENT CHENEY: I believe we are. I think we've made significant progress, if you look back over the last nearly five years now. The -- 9/11 obviously was a watershed event for us. After 9/11,

we adopted a very aggressive strategy that involved a range of activities, but most especially going after the terrorists wherever we could find them, on their ground; going after states that sponsored terror; given the fact that the biggest threat now is the possibility of an al Qaeda cell armed with a nuclear weapon or a biological agent in the middle of one of our own cities, the WMD issue -- and it's been very important -- going after the financial networks, where I think we've made significant progress; cooperation with intelligence agencies of other nations as well, too.

I look at the broad sweep of events over that period of time, and several things stand out. First of all, the fact -- and I'd define this as sort of a key ingredient -- of getting the locals into the fight. That is to say the United States cannot all by itself succeed every place unless we've got friends and allies willing to participate in the venture.

Certainly we did that in Afghanistan when we went in and toppled the Taliban government and short order, with the help of Afghans who participated in that conflict. We've done it in places like Pakistan, where the government of Pakistan signed on, and it's been a good ally. We've captured and killed more al Qaeda in Pakistan than just about any place else in the world. It's happened in Saudi Arabia and is happening now in Iraq, where we've gone in, taken down regimes that were safe havens for terrorists or we had reason to believe were an integral part of the problem and of course moved aggressively then in Afghanistan and Iraq to stand up new democracies, to train their own forces. And that process goes forward.

The other point I'd make in connection with the global war on terror is the fact that it's been nearly five years now and we haven't been hit again. Now, nobody can promise that we won't be hit. We know that the organizations are still out there; that in addition to al Qaeda, there are al Qaeda wanna-bes; there have been attacks around the world since 9/11, in places like London and Madrid and Istanbul and Casablanca and Mombasa and Tunisia and Jakarta and Bali and many, many other places. But the fact of the matter is, we've been safe and secure here at home. That's not an accident. It didn't happen just because we got lucky.

I think there's a great temptation on the part of some people to believe that 9/11 was a one-off affair and it'll never happen again, but that's not the case. And one of the reasons it was -- several reasons I think why we have been successful up till now is that we've gotten extremely aggressive at taking the battle to the enemy overseas, but secondly, also because we've taken some measures here at

home that have been instrumental in collecting the intelligence we need to be able to disrupt attacks against the United States and to protect the lives of Americans.

And there I would point to such things as the Patriot Act and the terrorist surveillance program.

Obviously, there's been some controversy in connection with those, but the terrorist surveillance program has been very important. I -- we've engaged in a debate about the wisdom of the program and whether or not it's legal, but it clearly is legal. We believe it is consistent with the Constitution. It is a program that is reviewed personally by the president every 45 days. He renews it only after he's been assured by our lead intelligence officials, by the Defense Department and assured by the attorney general of the United States that it fully complies with the laws of the land. Then and only then does he renew that act.

But I think that combination of things, the very aggressive campaigns overseas in key areas as well as the extraordinary measures we've taken to defend the nation here at home are in no small part responsible for the fact that we have not been hit again since 9/11. And again, let me emphasize, nobody can promise that we won't be hit again, but I think we've had significant success, primarily because of decisions of the president coupled with the enormous and tremendously courageous performance of our military, our intelligence people, who -- and a lot of others involved in the effort.

MR. SALANT: The court that must approve some of those wiretaps -- discussions first began, according to this questioner, when you were chief of staff of President Ford. What were the discussions at the time, and what was your position on the setting up of those courts?

VICE PRESIDENT CHENEY: As I recall, the act was passed, I think, in 1978, after -- I was a candidate for Congress then, but I wasn't in the government at that time.

I think the important thing, I would say -- we do support the FISA Act. I think it has been important. The fact of the matter is the technology has evolved so dramatically in the telecommunications area in the last several years that the FISA Act does not fit precisely all circumstances that -- that we now are faced with. But we work very closely with the FISA courts in terms of carrying out our duties and responsibilities in that area.

MR. SALANT: About a year ago, you said that the insurgency in Iraq was in its final throes. Do you still believe this?

VICE PRESIDENT CHENEY: I do. What I was referring to was the series of events that took place in 1995 (sic).

I think the key turning point, when we get back 10 years from now, say, and look back on this period of time and with respect to the campaign in Iraq, will be that series of events when the Iraqis increasingly took over responsibility for their own affairs. And

there I point to the election in January of '05, when we set up the interim government; the drafting of the constitution in the summer of '05; the national referendum in the fall of '05, when the Iraqis overwhelmingly approved that constitution; and then the vote last December, when some 12 million Iraqis, in defiance of the car bombers and the terrorists, went to the polls and voted in overwhelming numbers to set up a new government under that constitution, and that process, of course, has been completed recently with the appointment by Prime Minister Maliki of ministers to fill those jobs.

I think that will have been, from an historical turning point, the period that we'll be able to look at and say, "That's when we turned the corner; that's when we began to get a handle on the long-term future of Iraq."

MR. SALANT: Do you think that you underestimated the insurgency strength?

VICE PRESIDENT CHENEY: I think so. I guess the -- if I look back on it now, I don't think anybody anticipated the level of violence that we've encountered. I guess the other area that I look in terms of an area where I think we were faced with difficulties we didn't anticipate was the devastation that 30 years of Saddam's rule had wrought, if you will, on the psychology of the Iraqi people. It's very, very hard to go from the way they were forced to live for a long period of time to a situation in which they have the opportunity for self-government, for setting up and operating their own free and democratically-elected society. That's a huge transition to make, and if I look back on something that I underestimated, it would be the extent to which that society had been damaged by that series of events that had occurred over 30 years during Saddam's rule up to and including the 1991 uprising, where so many Iraqis rose up against the regime and then were slaughtered by Saddam Hussein's forces.

MR. SALANT: This questioner wants to know, is there any scenario under which you envision the draft being reinstated?

VICE PRESIDENT CHENEY: No. None that I can see. I'm a big believer in the all-volunteer force. I think it's produced a magnificent military. I think -- we keep the provisions for the draft in case circumstances should arise where it might be needed, but I don't foresee the development of those kinds of conditions any time in the future.

MR. SALANT: You have talked about reclaiming the powers of the presidency that was lost following Watergate, in fact, when President Ford had taken office, and you've talked about the notion of the unitary executive. Should there be any limits? And if so, what?

VICE PRESIDENT CHENEY: I don't believe I've ever talked about a unitary executive; others may have suggested that I talked about that.

But I clearly do believe and have spoken directly about the importance of a strong presidency, and that I think there have been times in the past, oftentimes in response to events such as Watergate or the war in Vietnam, where Congress has begun to encroach up on the powers and

responsibilities of the president, that it was important to go back and try to restore that balance.

I participated in the Iran-contra investigation in the Congress. Those of you who are bored and don't have anything else to do, there are minority views we filed with that report that lay out a view with respect to how we think the balance ought to exist between the executive and the legislative in the conduct of national security policy. So I do believe there is a -- it's very important to have a strong executive.

What are the limits? The limits of the Constitution. And certainly we need to and do adhere to those limitations. But I think if you look at things like the War Powers Act, for example, adopted in the aftermath of the Vietnam conflict, that that was an infringement of the president's ability to deploy troops. It's never really been tested. I think it's probably unconstitutional. There are a series of events like that that we believed needed to have the balance righted, if you will, and I think we've done that successfully.

MR. SALANT: This comes as no surprise, this being the Press Club, I do have several press questions for you.

The Bush administration worries that disclosures of classified information may have damaged national security. Can you cite a time in U.S. history when a press disclosure has genuinely damaged national security?

VICE PRESIDENT CHENEY: Well, I do believe that there need to be secrets. I think there are things that the federal government does in the national security arena that need to be off limits. And I think the fact of the matter is that there have been stories written that are damaging, if you will, from the standpoint of national security.

I would -- obviously, I can't get into any operational details. One of the frustrations that exist with this debate is that you cannot go out and talk about current operations with the press in order to try to explain to everybody why that particular piece of information needs to stay secret.

Let me just say that there have been examples that I am aware of where we've had discussions of ways in which al Qaeda communicates, for example, and because of those conversations, they no longer communicate that way. And we've lost the ability in some cases to be able to intercept important communications.

I can think of one situation recently that had to do with a story that appeared in one of our major newspapers. It dealt with certain technical countermeasures that we were considering with respect to how we would deal with a certain type of a problem, and within five days of the publication of that story, there were posted ways to deal with that and to neutralize our activities on one of the jihadist websites. It was about five days from publication in a major U.S. news outlet until it was on a jihadist website; advice, in effect, on how to counter what our military wanted to do in a particular area.

Now, that strikes me as a pretty straightforward, direct example

of why it is important that there be secrets. I think that oftentimes in the past there's no question the executive branch has probably overdone it with respect to classification. On the other hand, the assumption on the part of some of the press that it doesn't matter if it's classified, they have every right to print absolutely anything they want and they are the final judges, I think that's a mistake.

I think if somebody is asked by, say, the president of the United States or a senior administration official who's in a position of authority and has some knowledge in the area, to withhold on a particular story, they need to give that serious thought. And I think that we are -- one of the problems we have is that oftentimes as a government, we're perceived by other governments overseas, people we have to work with, intelligence services who need to have confidence in our ability to keep a secret -- find it difficult to work with us because the United States has oftentimes demonstrated an inability to maintain the security of classified information. So it's a problem.

MR. SALANT: Mr. Vice President, I've been advised by your staff that you need to cut the program off early, so I want to ask a final question to you.

VICE PRESIDENT CHENEY: Why is that? (Laughter.) Something's going on I don't know about. (Laughter.) Or maybe the president's watching. (Laughs.)

MR. SALANT: I hope he's not watching because of this question. (Laughter.) President Bush will be 60 on July 6th. What gift do you plan to give him?

VICE PRESIDENT CHENEY: (Chuckles.)

Q Maybe a shotgun?

VICE PRESIDENT CHENEY: He's got one already.

What gift do I plan to give him? Well, we usually don't exchange birthday presents, we exchange Christmas presents. And I'd have to give serious thought -- it's probably -- it's one of those things that needs to be secret. (Laughs; laughter, 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 Press Club's Eric Friedheim Library for its research.

Mr. Vice President, before you go, I'd like to offer you the official National Press Club coffee mug. (Laughter.)

VICE PRESIDENT CHENEY: Thank you, sir.

MR. SALANT: And also a certificate of appreciation for being here today. (Applause.)

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