



The Election of 2004 – Collective Memory Project

Interviewee: Vice President Richard Cheney

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Q: Vice President Cheney, how did you come to be the Republican nominee for vice president in the year 2000?

CHENEY: Well it basically started in the fall of '99. I was living in Dallas running Halliburton. My wife and I hosted a book party that involved Barbara Bush and Laura and Governor Bush came as well. This was part of the literacy program. What we did was hold a session in our house where people were invited partly to support the program. During the course of that then Governor Bush asked if there was a place we could talk. I took him back to the library at the back of the house and he asked if I would consider playing a major [00:01:00] role in this campaign -- manage the campaign or run the campaign and I told him I couldn't. I supported him and I wanted to do anything I could to help but I had a full-time job in Halliburton and I just wasn't available to go take on that kind of responsibility. Then fast forward a few months earlier in 2000 I was visited by Joe Allbaugh. Joe was the governor's principal executive assistant as governor. He came to see me in Dallas and one of the things he asked was whether or not I would agree to be considered as a running mate and I said no. I had no interest and I was very happy with private life. I couldn't remember a vice president who ever enjoyed the job. It just wasn't something I wanted to do. I was pretty firm about it and said no. [00:02:00] A short time after that I got a phone call from the governor asking if I would help him find somebody. And I said yes, I could do that. I could run the search. I had done that for Ford back in '76 and it had a beginning and an end and it would be over at



the convention and wouldn't detract from my other responsibilities at Halliburton, and so forth. So I ended up then through the spring running a search. It was very thorough, very extensive -- a large number of names on the prospective list. There was a long list and then a shorter list that you were really serious about.

Q: Did Governor Bush tell you "here's what I'm looking for"?

CHENEY: Sure. And part of that process was to hear from him what he wanted, obviously. I needed to know that to be able to evaluate which candidates ought to be considered and so forth. [0:03:00] We did a really thorough job checking out a number of prospective candidates. I talked to him on the telephone frequently, had a couple of meetings. The last one was just before the Fourth of July at the ranch down in Crawford -- hot Texas July day and he and I spent the morning going over all of the prospects. I had a notebook for him and a notebook for me. Then when we finished that we had lunch with Laura -- just the three of us and then after lunch he took me out on the back porch and I still remember it vividly because what he did then was he looked me in the eye and he said, "You're the solution to my problem." And I knew right then I was a failure. What I basically said was I'll take a look at what would I have to do in order to be able to take that on. I had worries about the company. [00:04:00] I was chairman and CEO of Halliburton. There were questions about health and about residency because we were both residents of Texas at that point. Under the twelfth amendment of the Constitution, the Texas electoral vote could not be cast for both of us. So there were a number of issues connected with it. We then went separate ways. I arranged to have a checkup by my doctor. I wanted to make sure that I was vetted. I set up a session with him down in Austin probably seven or eight days later and as I recall on a Saturday morning where I went down and sat down with him. He had Karl Rove there as well too and I made all the arguments against a Cheney candidacy. I was in the oil business. I was a ripe target to the Democrats. I'd had serious health problems. [00:05:00] At that point I'd had three heart attacks and explained that if I felt a twinge in the middle of a vice presidential debate I'd be off the stage headed to the nearest hospital. I went through all that - talked about my misspent youth. I was not a standout student when I went to college. It took me quite a few years to get through. So I laid everything out. Karl Rove was there with me and then he made all the same arguments I'd made as this was a bad idea. We both pitched it hard against the notion of my being vice president. A few days later his doctor had connected with my doctor -- he had Denton Cooley, basically of heart fame down in Texas -- talked to my cardiologist and concluded that I was fit to run for office and serve. Then I got a phone call in Dallas. One morning I was on the treadmill and the phone rang. [00:06:00] It was the governor and he said he wanted me to be his running mate and I signed on. That day then I flew down to Austin. We held a big press conference down there and announced that I was going to be his running mate for the campaign. What



affected my judgment on it -- a couple of things -- one, it was clear he was looking for somebody who could play a major role in the administration and clear that what he really needed and wanted was somebody with national security experience. And by that point I'd been Secretary of Defense through Desert Storm and ten years in the Congress -- a good part of that on the intelligence committee and White House Chief of Staff. I had the credentials he was looking for. I also became convinced as I listened to him talk about the job and evaluate various candidates that he was deadly serious about it being a meaningful job. He wasn't looking for somebody because [00:07:00] it would help with the electoral vote. Wyoming's the smallest state in the nation population wise but three electoral votes. They turned out to be important but we didn't know that at the time. He was, I felt, genuine in his notion that he'd spent a lot of time thinking about it. This was not a new idea. I found out later -- I didn't know this at the time -- but I found out later that back in '92 in the run up to the '92 election that he had actually gone to his dad when Dan Quayle was vice president and suggested to him that he should replace Dan Quayle with me in the '92 election. Like I say I didn't hear that at the time. This is something I learned some years later. So it wasn't the first time he'd thought about me in that capacity. But based on his concept of the job and what he was looking for, [00:08:00] I understood why he was interested in me for that post. I also came to believe that he never took my first no for a solid answer. He just accepted it and said, "Well, I'll get him involved" -- have him help me with the search and I'll understand.

Q: I was going to say it sounds to me like he might have very well been putting you in charge of the process to come up with somebody who matched your credentials knowing you would fail to do that and then you'd be responsible.

CHENEY: Yeah. I was alleged by some to have manipulated the process. I was the one who was manipulated by the process. I'm glad he did it obviously. I enjoyed the opportunity. It was a very special and unique experience. He was true to his word. I got involved in anything I wanted to get involved in and we obviously had major challenges throughout our eight years in office. I was always pleased and gratified that he'd offered me the job. [00:09:00]

Q: How did you handle that electoral vote problem with both of you being Texas residents?

CHENEY: I changed my residence. I went back to Wyoming. We had a home in Wyoming -- had for a long time. To register in Wyoming all I had to do was go home to Wyoming and go down to the county clerk's office and declare that I was a Wyoming resident and they transferred me over so I could vote in the Wyoming primary.



Q: One of the ways that your candidacy was unique --

CHENEY: One other thing though.

Q: Sure.

CHENEY: There was a lawsuit brought in Texas alleging that I was -- that we didn't meet the requirement -- that I didn't meet the requirements for citizenship in Wyoming -- residency in Wyoming. So we actually ended up in court -- one decision obviously that the court decided not to intervene. But there was a legal attempt by the Democrats to keep me off the ticket.

Q: The first of several in 2000 involving lawsuits. [00:10:00] So one of the ways that you were unique as a vice presidential candidate is that you had run the process that culminated in your selection. Another way that I think you were unique among vice presidential candidates is that you were coming to a candidacy directly out of several years in the private sector. Your daughter Mary points out in her book about the election -- *Now It's My Turn*. The elections that she was -- that therefore you didn't have the kind of political staff that typically a vice presidential candidate has when he accepts the nomination. How did you handle that?

CHENEY: Well it was -- all the time I was in office I had a press secretary, administrative assistants, advance and so forth. I've done a lot of those jobs myself. But after five years at Halliburton, I was chairman and CEO of a major corporation and it's just a different set of experiences that you look for in staff. What we did basically was [00:11:00] work with campaign headquarters down in Austin and they provided me with some names and people and in fact our staffs were joint to some extent but Kathleen Shanahan was a key hire. She'd worked as I recall in the vice presidential office when 41 was vice president. She was in Florida -- working in Florida. That's where her job or career was. She knew the Bushes. She knew Jeb. She was a good fit. She had a lot of experience. She had all those credentials that I needed and she was great. She became like a third daughter. It was Liz, Mary, and Kathleen. Then we ended up reaching out for some policy people that had been involved with the campaign and came out [00:12:00] and traveled on the road with me. When it came time to do debate prep I used some of the same people in terms of the policies and the issues that had been prepared for the president and his debate. There were other things that I'd been involved in that he had not been involved in that we had to do prep for and so forth. But we cobbled together a team in fairly short order -- so a little shaky at first. We had a few foul ups along the way. I always remember when I left Philadelphia we did a train whistle stop through the Midwest which was great -- both the president and the president



designate our nominee -- the ticket campaigned off a train for a few days. And then I went off to my first solo adventure. That was to talk about education in Florida and they'd scheduled me into -- [00:13:00] I don't know if you can hear over the airplane -- they had scheduled me into a school in Florida before a group of third graders and I was going to talk about the new scheme we'd come up for special tax exempt bonds that we would be issued to help finance school construction. I'm trying to be a good soldier and this is what campaign headquarters wanted. But I walked in -- little kids -- nine years old sitting around on the floor and I've got this text that would put most people to sleep. I got a similar reaction out of the crowd there. There wasn't a lot of applause or standing ovation. They didn't know what the heck was going on. After that I took control that I would do what I was asked to do if I could and thought it made sense -- didn't make sense I wasn't going to do it. And a speech on financing tax exempt bonds before third graders [00:14:00] about building schools didn't meet the qualifications.

Q: Mary Cheney also points out in her book that typically vice presidential candidates are used to attack the opposition and usually they're sent to non-battleground states to kind of rouse the faithful. But your campaign was different. It was a more positive campaign and it took place mostly in battleground.

CHENEY: I think that's true. We split up which obviously you want to do because you can cover a lot more territory. But we were in a position -- we weren't running against an incumbent but we were running against the vice president. And we also, frankly, part of our strategy was to tie Gore to Clinton as closely as we could because at that point Bill Clinton was carrying a few negatives -- you could put it in those terms -- after his time in office -- [00:15:00] the Monica Lewinsky affair and so forth. So we did everything we could that could tie them together. But it was also -- part of the strategy and a lot of this had been decided before I ever got on the ticket. There'd been talk about compassionate conservatives. It was a way to some extent that I think the president and Karl came up with of distinguishing him from the bulk of House Republicans or Congressional Republicans for example. It created a bit of friction on the Hill but it was a way to carve out an identity there focused on the fact that his accomplishments in Texas as governor on "No Child Left Behind" and some of those kinds of issues. We pretty much stuck with that but not entirely. We got down to the convention I gave a different kind of speech [00:16:00] that didn't quite fit with that strategy. I gave a tougher more of a red meat speech in terms of going after the Democrats at the convention which I enjoyed and was fun to do.

Q: It's time for them to go.



CHENEY: It's time for them to go -- a line that my wife thought of. It was taken from a Gore speech eight years before. He'd used that line so we appropriated it.

Q: Obviously if we were doing this interview on your vice presidency we'd spend a lot of time on 9/11 and the run up to the war but with our focus on elections, can you move forward a little bit and talk about the role you played in the 2002 mid-term election which turned out to be a very surprisingly good one for the incumbent party -- the Republican party.

CHENEY: Well you remember after the -- what 37 day recount and so forth -- it was a very close presidential election. The other thing that a lot of people forget [00:17:00] is that the Senate was evenly split 50/50. It was a close election all the way up and down the line. I ended up as the president of the Senate. I cast the tie breaking vote even on who got to chair committees which was pretty unusual. And it meant that with the 50/50 balance, there was a great temptation on the part of the Democrats to try to reach across the aisle and find a Republican who would switch and give them the extra advantage. We had agreed -- Trent Lott had been involved in the negotiations obviously and I think Tom Daschle at the same time that each party would have the same number of seats on each committee but that the Republicans would chair all the committees because I had the tie breaking vote. They changed that when they got Jim Jeffords of Vermont to switch. [00:18:00] This was partway through '01 -- I want to say late spring, early summer and Jim switched parties. I think they made him chairman of one of the committees. He got a pretty good price for what he did. That put us going in to the '02 off year election or mid-term election -- I thought -- always felt that it hurt the Democrats. That it was a little manipulative if you will but they couldn't do anything once they got there. They didn't really accomplish anything and in the end I think it set the stage for our victory when we actually gained I think it was about two seats in the Senate and gained some House seats once we got to the midterm. And that almost never happens. Usually the party that controls the White House loses seats mid-term [00:19:00] and we in fact won it and took back control of the Senate in '02.

Q: Were there any efforts and if so were you involved in it to try to persuade a Democratic Senator to switch parties to the Republican Party?

CHENEY: Not that I'm aware of. There may have been talk in various places but there was no conscious effort. Our problem was hanging on to what we had because there were some Republicans who were relatively liberal. Jim Jeffords I'd known for a long time -- I can remember when Trent and I were both in the House and he was the whip and I was the chairman of the Policy Committee. On tough votes occasionally he asked me to go get Jeffords' vote. We never got it. Jim was always



off over in a different part of the universe. But our ability to persuade one of them to switch -- we didn't have that kind of leverage. [00:20:00]

Q: Did you -- somebody did a tally of how many campaign appearances you and President Bush made in '02 and how much money you raised and it was a substantial number and I wonder do you recall the -- anything about that.

CHENEY: Yeah, I did a lot.¹ That's something vice presidents do. I didn't object to that. Back -- if you went back to my time in Defense -- it would have been the '88 and '90 campaigns -- or the '90 campaign -- '92, I couldn't campaign. Politically you stay out of that business when you're in Defense. But after I left Defense in '93 then in that coming cycle leading up to the '94 election, I did 160 campaigns. I was in the private sector then but there was a significant effort under way and that's when we took back the house and I wanted to be part of all that and was. [00:21:00] So going out and campaigning for candidates was something I was used to doing. It was expected of the vice president. But that stage was in the aftermath of 9/11 so our standing in the polls was pretty good. But I don't have any specific numbers in terms of how many races I did or how much money we raised but it was considerable.

Q: Looking ahead to 2004 was there any point at which you considered not standing for a second term?

CHENEY: Well, I -- in the run up to 2004, I made it clear to the president that I was prepared to step aside if he wanted to get somebody else. I wasn't opposed to staying on the ticket. I was enjoying what I was doing but I looked back at earlier contests specifically thinking about the '92 race [00:22:00] where I think if the president had had the opportunity to make a change, it might have helped in that reelection campaign of '92. And I felt that my job was to support the president and to help him be an effective president -- helping government. He had to get reelected to do that and I thought I didn't want to stand in the way. I didn't want him to feel that I was an obstacle to getting somebody else if there was somebody out there he'd rather have or somebody that would really help with respect to the election. So I went to him three different times. The first two times I felt he didn't take me seriously. I would mention to him at one of our lunches, for examples, that he

¹ The viewer may notice a break in the video at this point. Vice President Cheney received a phone message/text (the sound of which you can hear in the recording). In the edited-out section, the Vice President responded to the previous question of "how many campaign appearances...do you recall the -- anything about that" by beginning with "I don't remember the number, the exact number." He then took a quick break to respond to the phone message. When he returned, the interviewer picked back up with the same question, and Vice President Cheney responded anew with the phrase included in the transcription, "Yeah, I did a lot. That's something vice presidents do."



should know that I was perfectly prepared to step aside -- no hard feelings and be totally supportive if he wanted to get somebody else for the job. And the first couple of times he sort of brushed it off so I went back a third time and said it again and that time he took it seriously, went away for a few days, thought about it, and came back and said, "No, you're my guy." I wanted to make sure he had that option [00:23:00] and that he knew that I would be not at all hostile or in any way object to stepping aside for somebody else.

Q: I guess the one time since FDR's third term the president has run with a different running mate from the incumbent vice president was when you were in the White House in '76. But I gather Nelson Rockefeller didn't go to the president in the same way you went to President Bush and offered to step aside. Is that a fair description?

CHENEY: Again, a different administration now. No, the president asked him to step down. It was always fuzzed up a little bit. It was a delicate matter if I can put it in those terms. There came a time in late '75 -- we're getting ready to run in the '76 race [00:24:00] and by then it was pretty clear Reagan was going to challenge us for the nomination and I was, in terms of the White House, the one most heavily involved in the campaign. We made a number of changes in the fall of '75 that sort of completed the transition when Ford came in. He wanted to keep Kissinger as Secretary of State. No changes in the National Security apparatus in terms of personnel or policy. By late '75, especially as we were looking at the '76 campaign ahead of us, we felt it was necessary and he agreed to sort of put his stamp on things. So Kissinger gave up his second job as the National Security Advisor. Jim Schlesinger in Defense was fired, replaced with Rumsfeld and the president brought Rockefeller in and said that he was going to make a change in the ticket in '76. Rockefeller took it like a man. He wasn't very happy anyway. [00:25:00] I was told later -- I think Richard Norton Smith did a biography on Rockefeller that has a point in there where Rockefeller told Ford the only way he would serve as vice president for a second term is if he could also be White House Chief of Staff. That was the job he wanted. It was my job. It was a -- they parted -- they maintained a good relationship afterwards. My job as Chief of Staff created a lot of friction for the vice president. That's what I had to do. He'd come up with big spending ideas. We were in a position where our overall policy was no new starts because of budget considerations. But he'd bring the ideas in -- the president would give them to me, I'd staff them out. The answer would always come back no and then it would go back to Nelson Rockefeller and I was looked upon by him as the bad guy and to some extent I was. That was part of my job. [00:26:00] So I don't think -- I think it would be fair to say Rockefeller didn't offer but he quickly understood what the president wanted. And at the same time he carried through and delivered the New York delegation for us anyway.



Q: Which turned out to be important.

CHENEY: Absolutely.

Q: In a close race. So in 2000 when Governor Bush wanted to choose you, you sat him down and gave him all the reasons why he shouldn't choose you. When you approached him in '04 did you do the same thing? Did you say here's what you ought to be thinking of when you're deciding whether to replace me?

CHENEY: No, not in any kind of elaborate -- I mean he knew by being president for four years in terms of what -- I may have made some reference to like, "Mr. President, I'm carrying a lot of baggage out there if you want to make a change or get somebody else, I'll be perfectly happy to support it."

Q: How did your strengths as a campaigner and a candidate match up with or [00:27:00] complement those of George W. Bush? What did you bring to the campaign that --

CHENEY: Yeah, we were obviously from different backgrounds and so forth. He tended to talk more I think about domestic issues. He'd been governor of one of our biggest states -- a very successful governor of Texas and he has his own set of experiences and things he believed in and he was driving the train. When I got on board at the convention so to speak in Philadelphia, I'm a late comer. I'd been a supporter of the campaign but I hadn't been involved in anything beyond really -- well, I was part of the Vulcans group. The Vulcans were a collection of people with background in foreign policy and national security and we used to meet periodically with the president.

Q: And that was before you took on the vice presidential search, right?

CHENEY: Well, this was -- yeah it would've started back in probably late '99. [00:28:00] Condi sort of headed it up and managed it. Paul Wolfowitz was part of the group -- Scooter Libby, myself and we focused specifically on National Security matters. The president -- as I say his main focus had been -- when I gave a major speech I believe down at The Citadel on defense and so forth but his primary focus and the campaign's primary focus was domestic. In terms of how we campaigned, he had run twice in Texas. He had been on the campaign for maybe two years -- a year and a half at least by then so there was a long background there. From my perspective, I started campaigning basically at the convention. We had -- the first thing I had to do was sit down and write a speech. And the day we announced my candidacy I went back to the mansion there -- the governor's mansion in Austin. Lynn was with me and we sat down with John McConnell and Matt Scully. There were two speech writers who'd been working as part of the Bush speech writing



team but they were delegated to help me write my acceptance speech in Kansas City which they did. It was -- to some extent it captured the differences I suppose in terms of what I talked about. The convention theme the way it had been managed by the people that set up the convention was sort of soft I guess is the way I would describe it -- and positive. It didn't really go after the Democrats. I thought it was more appropriate to be more aggressive going after the Democrats and that's what we basically did. The crowd loved it. I had more fun giving that speech than just about any speech I can remember. It was very well received. [00:30:00] So partly my role became to the extent there was going to be an attack, I did as much of it if not more than anybody else. And that especially became truer in 2004. But my -- I saw my job basically as going after the president's opponents and like I said that was more pronounced in 2004 when we were running against Kerry. The president -- I'm trying to think of something -- what was different about campaigns -- I can't think of that much that differed. He spoke a version of Spanish and I didn't. I was good in some communities. He was more into education and those kinds of issues. I was more focused on Defense. Part of my convention speech really focused on Defense [00:31:00] -- the need to rebuild the military after the Clinton years.

Q: This was in 2000?

CHENEY: Mm-hmm.

Q: In 2000 basically your full time job is candidate for vice president. In 2004 you're vice president and dealing with more issues more intensively than most vice presidents are because of 9/11 and the aftermath. Did you find campaigning in 2004 was a distraction from more important work?

CHENEY: No. We had good fun. I'll put it in those terms. We'd been heavily involved -- I had been in the aftermath response to 9/11 and setting up what became known as a terror surveillance program and later enhancing interrogation techniques -- all that stuff was classified at the time. But I had spent a lot of time on that. [00:32:00] In 2004 I was more engaged as the person in charge of going after the other candidate -- in this case John Kerry. So things like -- he voted for it before he voted against it, talking about an \$87 billion appropriation for supporting our military efforts. That was a gift. When he did that as I recall he was on a tour of the Grand Canyon or something and he stopped in front of the microphones and we'd been hammering him on his vote against the funds for the war and that's when he said, "Well, actually I voted for it before I voted against it." And that became part of the litany that we used at every stop. It was always good for a laugh. It always conveyed this notion that he was something of a flip-flopper between having voted for the war and then being against it and so forth. [00:33:00] Things like that where I would actively and aggressively take on the



challenge of going after the nominee. We considered it a good day if I could start a fight with Kerry and he spent his time defending himself against my charges or attacking me and then the president is free to run as the president - above it all.

Q: And Kerry often took the bait.

CHENEY: Often took the bait.

Q: One of the things that characterized both of your campaigns -- both 2000 and 2004 -- is I think to an unusual degree for candidates the close involvement of your family as not just family but as campaign aides in various ways. Can you talk about that?

CHENEY: Sure. Both -- Lynn was very active -- out on the road some herself. There were times when she would go off with -- I think she traveled with Laura a time or two. [00:34:00] I can remember there was an airplane trip someplace where they lost the oxygen in the airplane and had to make an emergency landing. So there were occasions where she was out by herself or traveled with me a lot. Daughter Liz who was on maternity leave then -- she'd just had her third child. She was somebody that I used in the VP search process. She's an attorney -- University of Chicago -- experienced and had done a couple of tours for the State Department and I didn't know anybody I trusted more in terms of maintaining the confidentiality of the proceedings. We also needed some place to keep all of our sensitive papers. When you're collecting all of the -- I don't want to say dirt -- but all of the sensitive information on tax policy, health, and everything else -- tax returns, you've got to have some place to put the material that you gather up for review [00:35:00] so the president can make his decision. You don't want to take it to headquarters. Headquarters is chockablock full of people who when they're not evil, or malicious; they're just all caught up in the campaign. The press is all over the place. It's not a place to maintain secure documents. So we ended up keeping them in Liz's house out in McLean locked in a filing cabinet in the basement on the theory that nobody would think to look at a house in McLean in the basement for those kinds of papers.

She helped me put together the search itself. I also used her for debate prep. She couldn't travel all that much because she had small children especially a young baby -- our granddaughter, Grace. But things like debate prep she would -- I remember I said, "Liz, you're in charge of debate prep." And so away she went. She took it. I couldn't think of anybody better, [00:36:00] more reliable, more broader gauge. The time since I left office I've written two books and she was my coauthor and collaborator on both of those books. So it was a -- if I had to look at all the people that were available, Liz was far and away the best. She didn't get paid for it -- worked as a volunteer. Daughter Mary became my aide-de-camp, if



you will -- the body person who made sure I had a copy of my speech for the next stop, that I knew where I was, that I didn't go to Jacksonville and say how good it was to be back here in Tallahassee for example. Made the trains run on time from the standpoint of me personally -- our luggage got taken care of -- all those things that when you're the candidate you need somebody to look after all of those kinds of things. And in 2000 Mary did that. And then later on when we came back in 2004, I put her in charge of all aspects [00:37:00] of the presidential -- the vice presidential campaign as part of the overall presidential campaign. Again she had the background and the experience, knew me, and they had a great time. They were the right age so we have a situation today when the four of us get together -- my wife and my two daughters, we often end up telling old war stories about campaigning. We did six statewide campaigns in Wyoming. And the kids had been very young then but played a role -- then two national campaigns. I never lost when my name was on the ballot so something worked and they had a lot to do with it. It was -- a lot of people talk about the strain on a family when you go through one of those campaign situations. There are stressful things that happen and can create problems [00:38:00] but I always felt from my standpoint the national campaigns were a very important part of my life and I wanted to share it with the family and the four of us together would roll up our sleeves and it was a family enterprise and they got to travel as much as I did, met all kinds of interesting people, were involved in all aspects of the campaign from travel and schedule to debates and all the rest of it. It was the right thing to do.

Q: Mary in her book writes about a certain apprehension in 2000 that she would become a story -- she and her partner. In 2004 she writes about having a crisis of conscience when President Bush endorsed the marriage amendment to the Constitution in the State of the Union. Can you comment on that? [00:39:00]

CHENEY: Yeah. It was difficult -- not only surprising. I remember the president at one point - - probably at one of our lunches which we did weekly, where he mentioned that he was going to support the Constitutional amendment that in effect would outlaw same-sex marriage and he knew that I disagreed with that. This would have been before the '04 campaign. The question had come up in 2000 in the debate when I was asked -- trying to remember, oh, I guess it was Bernie Shaw, the debate moderator in 2000, where the issue had come up and I had basically given my view that freedom means freedom for everybody and people ought to be free to enter [00:40:00] into any kind of relationship they want to enter into. A separate question as to what kind of status -- legal status it had and historically that had been determined by the States. I thought that was appropriate that there was no need for federal legislation. He knew my view differed from his. He gave me a heads-up about it. I think he felt a little more uncomfortable about it than I did. Mary had to make her own decision. She was obviously upset about it. On the other hand, Mary's basically a conservative Republican in her views so she



swallowed hard and kept on trucking. You don't agree with candidates all the time and I think that's the way she responded to it.

It was interesting in '04 because the Kerry camp obviously decided to try to use it to score points in the debate. In my debate with Edwards, he brought it up. [00:41:00] He was a little bit more smooth than Kerry was later on but that's when I made my, reiterated my earlier statement. But when Kerry did it, it was nasty. It was -- the Edwards statement wasn't welcome either but one of the things I emphasized was keeping my cool and not losing my temper on the stage which I thought was important with Edwards. When Kerry brought it up with Bush, he talked about, as I recall, he said that Mary was a lesbian and had a partner he was sure that we loved her and so forth -- it was really, very very heavy-handed and very -- very much, I thought, grossly inappropriate in terms of trying to use [00:42:00] a child's sexual orientation as some kind of issue in the campaign. It was doubly disturbing when his campaign manager came out afterwards and in an interview said Mary was fair game. The result of that, first of all, was a very angry mother. I was scheduled -- we had a rally we were doing while that debate was being held in '04 between Kerry -- the last debate between Kerry and Bush. I was scheduled to speak to a crowd -- we were in a hotel or someplace where we watched -- had a debate watching party and then I was going to speak. I couldn't get to the microphone fast enough. Lynn got there before me. She really unloaded and it clearly was a major gaffe on their part. It got us a bump in the polls and in the family we always refer to it since then as the 'Mary Cheney Bounce'. [00:43:00]

Q: I can't think of another campaign in with a president's or vice presidential candidate's child was mentioned by the opposition. And here in two debates her name was mentioned.

CHENEY: It was a no-class operation. It was stupid for them to do it. It did more damage to them. I think it's because they knew they were behind and it was the ultimate cheap shot.

Q: Well Edwards -- I'm thinking about the way in which you handled that when it came at your debate in '04 because Edwards had made his fortune as a trial lawyer. So obviously very experienced at getting people to respond the way he wanted them to on the stand. Did you go into that debate thinking he's going to try some things to provoke a reaction from you -- maybe not even knowing what they would be -- and here's how I'm going to handle it if that comes up?

CHENEY: We did a lot of research in both debates [00:44:00] -- both before Lieberman and Edwards. It was my view -- still is -- that there are two things -- two events that are important for the vice president to handle well. You can put vice presidents out



there, send them all over the country to make speeches -- doesn't really make that much difference. You might raise some money but most of the time what the vice president's got to say isn't that consequential in the campaign. The exceptions to that are the acceptance speech you give at the convention and the other is your performance at the debate. The whole country's watching. So I treated them both very seriously. We spent a lot of time getting ready for those debates. Rob Portman, who was then a congressman from Ohio, now a Senator, played my opponent both times. He was superb. He was meaner and nastier than either Edwards or Lieberman. [00:45:00] And, so we did a lot of work. I watched with respect to Joe Lieberman -- he had debated Lowell Weicker from Connecticut when he earned his Senate seat and they debated in a way that was pretty rough, and the tapes of Joe Lieberman is not the Joe Lieberman I got to know who was kind of a friendly fellow. He was very aggressive going after Weicker so I was prepared for that. I talked to Joe some months after the election -- after we'd won. I stopped by his office one day and we were just sitting there chatting about the debate and we both agreed that we both had expected the other one to be just vicious and that we were loaded and neither one of us fired the first shot. So it turned out to be a really good debate and most people liked it and liked the way it went and I thought it had gone well. We had expected the worst and so we were ready to go [00:46:00] but didn't have to. It was a gentlemanly affair but we got rave notices from the press on both sides. With respect to Edwards, I didn't have the kind of respect of him -- for him that I did for Joe Lieberman.

Q: You mean based on his career or -

CHENEY: His career, um, it turned out I was righter than I knew, given what was going on in the campaign, everybody found out later. He obviously had a mistress and conceived a child out of wedlock so to speak and that's personal stuff with him. But he had been portrayed as this great trial lawyer so I operated on the assumption that this guy's got to be skilled and know how to handle himself on his feet and so forth. I didn't find that at all in the debate. I often felt [00:47:00] as we went through the evening that he hadn't spent as much time preparing as I would have expected. The line that I came up with that I used on Edwards was to the effect that his hometown newspaper had labeled 'Senator Gone'. That was a headline of a story in the newspaper. I mentioned that. I talked about his frequent absences from the Committee on Foreign Relations -- that he'd only attended, I don't know, 20% of the committee hearings or something like that. As the president of the Senate I was on the Hill every Tuesday for lunch with the Senate Republicans and in all that time I'd never seen him. And my closing line as I remember, "Frankly, Senator, tonight when you walked on the stage was the first time I ever met you." His wife [00:48:00] after the thing ran up and said, "Well, he saw you at the prayer breakfast once." OK. Fair enough -- prayer breakfast once.



But he was -- that debate was not pleasant. Frankly, I had no respect for John Edwards and I was right.

Q: Is there a word you -- one word you could use to describe him?

CHENEY: Scumbag.

Q: Chris Matthews who's not known for celebrating Republicans said --

CHENEY: Chris doesn't care much for me either.

Q: After that debate he said it was like a howitzer against a water pistol.

CHENEY: Mm-hmm.

Q: It's funny because in those debates you're debating -- you're side by side with the other party's vice presidential candidate but isn't that kind of an artificial situation because otherwise in the campaign, you're really focusing on the other party's presidential campaign, right? I guess what I wonder is, [00:49:00] is the vice presidential debate so different from what you're otherwise doing as a vice presidential candidate that it's sort of an odd thing?

CHENEY: It can be. It doesn't have to be. I treat it in part -- it's an opportunity for the country to see and evaluate the individuals who've been selected by the president to be his number two -- to succeed him if something happens to him. And if you believe that the ultimate test is whether or not this individual is capable of being president of the United States, that's the best look you're going to have before the election at that proposition. So if you get up and really foul up or don't do very well in those debates, it reflects badly on the decision making capability of the principal. I'm trying to remember the Palin thing. She gave a good acceptance speech at the convention [00:50:00] which was pretty impressive but she started to come unraveled after that in interviews and so forth.

Q: Although she had a good debate.

CHENEY: She had a pretty good debate.

Q: But that was about it for good.

CHENEY: I think the debate's important and if you blow it, it does say something about the presidential candidate. In my case I think most of the president's people supported me -- maybe not all of them but the president had trouble on his first debate with Gore -- or Gore --



Q: With Kerry.

CHENEY: With Kerry -- that my debate stopped the erosion and got us back on the right track again.

Q: You mentioned debates as a time when you're in the spotlight and also the acceptance speech. The convention in '04 [00:51:00] had a very different tone than the kind of warm and fuzzy 2000 convention. Could you talk about the convention and then talk about your speech?

CHENEY: I'm trying to remember my speech there. Well, the convention, of course, by then in 2000 we're the new guys. We're not running for reelection. In terms of having to defend a record it's more what you've done before. We got to office by '04 and we were at war in Afghanistan and Iraq. We've had to deal with 9/11. There's a lot of serious stuff going on that we're responsible for. But we were still strong enough I think in terms of the polls that we basically challenged the ability of Kerry to be able to respond [00:52:00] to the crisis the way Bush had and to be able to manage the war against terror for example -- raised doubts about him on how he'd handled the defense budget over the years. Things like "I voted for it before I voted against it." Those kinds of issues -- that whole the Swift Boat operation was very important in '74 again, in portraying Kerry as somebody who had inflated his own military record. So there were -- those differences played a role with respect to what happened in terms of how we handled ourselves. We were -- we'd been through -- we'd cut it a little close in 2000 when we only carried Florida by 350 votes or whatever it was. That was very much on our minds. We didn't want that to happen again. Although, '04 when you look at it, [00:53:00] we carried an absolute majority which hadn't happened for quite a while I guess. The president's dad had it back in --

Q: Oh, the popular vote.

CHENEY: The popular vote -- percentage of the popular vote. We won enough so that in the Electoral College it was pretty clear cut but there were only three states as I recall whose votes switched -- New Mexico, Iowa, and one other -- Arizona maybe.

Q: Colorado?

Assistant: New Hampshire.

CHENEY: New Hampshire -- yeah -- New Hampshire, New Mexico, and Iowa. And we picked up New Mexico and Iowa and New Hampshire switched from Republican back to Democrat. That's not a very big change. It was enough to give us about a 30-point lead in the Electoral College but we were very much aware of that earlier press and



what had happened in 2000. And I think we'd been through the mill one more time [00:54:00] and it wasn't our first rodeo and I thought we did a better job. Mehlman I thought did a great job as the overall campaign chairman.

Q: Ken Mehlman?

CHENEY: Ken Mehlman.

Q: I wonder -- do you think it made a difference in both 2000 and 2004 that you had really ruled yourself out as a future candidate for president, which is very different from, say, George W. Bush's father or Al Gore or the typical vice president. You, unlike probably Joe Lieberman and certainly unlike John Edwards, had pretty much said vice president is going to be the summa of my public service -- my own ambitions here for future office are not a factor. Does that make a difference in --

CHENEY: It made the -- it's an interesting question partly because it was -- I think it's one of the reasons [00:55:00] Bush turned to me in 2000 -- back in 2000. I had looked at running myself after I left the Defense Department in '93 -- actually that '94 election cycle when I did 160 campaigns. I'd set up my own PAC to finance my travels and contribute to some candidates and so forth. That was a very conscious effort on my part to assess whether or not I wanted to run for president. So I went through that whole process testing the waters, got through with it, went out to Jackson Hole which is where we spent the holidays always, and talked about the proposition with the family and so forth. In the end I concluded not to do it. I thought I had the experience to be president, thought I would enjoy being president. I didn't want to do what I would have to do in order to run and win the campaign and it was a long shot. [00:56:00]

In a sense it's always a long shot. But I concluded then that I'd had 25 years -- great years in public life in the Congress, the White House, Defense and that I was still young enough to have another career in the private sector which is what I did. I went off and joined several boards and eventually took over Halliburton and was enjoying life in the private sector. That was the track I'd laid out for myself. So I'd already given a lot of thoughts back in the early '90s to running myself. I decided not to do it and I also was convinced based on past experience that usually when bad relations develop between presidents and vice presidents -- and most of the time they do -- a lot of it starts at the staff level and a lot of it has to do with the vice president having a separate agenda. A separate agenda -- not necessarily a difference in policy so much as [00:57:00] he makes decisions or offers advice based on how it's going to affect his prospects in Iowa eight years hence. And I didn't want to do that. And I also thought that it would be much easier to be effective as vice president if when I spoke everybody thought I was speaking for



the president. It's not just Cheney worried about his political future. And I think that worked very well in our administration.

Things happened -- well, for example, shortly after I got elected and sworn in, Denny Hastert, the speaker, and Bill Thomas, who was then the new chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, came to me and said, "Look, Dick, we know you're going to have an office on the Senate side. You're the president of the Senate but we think of you as a man of the House. We think you ought to have an office on the House side of the Capitol." Never before happened in our history but they did it [00:58:00] partly because we were good friends. I served with them in the House. Bill Thomas was just taking over as chairman of the Ways and Means and the chairman of the Ways and Means has two really great offices. One is on the floor below the main floor of the Capitol but it looks up the mall all the way to the Lincoln Memorial. It's a huge, big office down there. And then he also has a nice office that's just off the Democratic cloak room on the main floor. They came to me and Bill said that he and I were classmates. We got elected together, I'd campaigned for him, we knew each other, and so forth. He said, "You take your pick. I'll take which ever one you don't want." I said, "Well, I'd like that one over there next to the Democratic cloak room" -- drive them nuts and it did. I had it for six years so I was able to -- I did a lot of work on the Hill on key issues when we'd get in a bind [00:59:00] on tax policy and defense issues and going to war in Iraq and the TARP later on when we're having financial problems in '08 but a lot of that was because I had that set of relationships because I was looked upon as somebody who wasn't running for office himself. I wasn't up there trying to feather my own nest but I spoke with credibility on behalf of the administration and I think it helped a lot inside the White House too.

Things weren't always smooth and (inaudible) between the VP operation and the presidential operation. There were moments of strain. There were moments I disagreed with the president but it was a lot smoother than it had been in other administrations I've been associated with. I know how miserable Nelson Rockefeller was and the extent at which he was unable really to speak for Ford. Ford always told me it was the worst eight months of his life being vice president. [01:00:00] After I got to be vice president, he could never resist the temptation to say, "Dick, I don't know why you took that damn job." So it was -- we started out doing things in some cases dual hatting. Key people -- Scooter Libby who worked for me as my chief of staff, assistant to the vice president, Commission job. He also carried the title of assistant to the president. Mary Matalin who was dual hatted. John McConnell, my speech writer, was a crucial part of the president's speech operations. One time they asked him to run the shop and he turned them down. He wanted to keep working for both of us. So it was -- in the congressional relations area -- a couple of the people that ended up running the White House



congressional shop started doing my congressional shop and then moved over to and took the other job when it became available. It was part of the fact that I wasn't running for president [01:01:00] was part of an overall strategy to keep that thing tied together as much as possible.

I think it was instrumental in me being a consequential vice president that there was never -- I'm sure there were a few doubts in various places but for the most part, the people that counted knew that I wasn't there to feather my own nest. I was there to help the president and to carry out his wishes and that there was only one agenda in the West Wing and that was his agenda. And that all bore down directly on the question in '04 -- I'm not out there getting ready to run in Iowa. I was out there doing my darnedest to defend the administration and support the president to defeat John Kerry.

Q: I'm thinking also no Republican Senator or governor thought of you as a rival in '08 and therefore didn't have that complicating your relationship with them. There's a short quote [01:02:00] in Peter Baker's book about your and President Bush's tenure in office and the quote is unattributed but it's -- and specifically unattributed but generally attributed to somebody in the White House. And the quote is "Cheney was pissed" and the context is Cheney was pissed not only by the president's endorsement of the marriage amendment in the State of the Union but the way in which Karl Rove and others in the campaign sort of tied the reelect campaign to ballot measures in various states to add marriage amendments to state constitutions with the idea of driving turnout among evangelical Christians.

CHENEY: That's not true. Now the president had a different view than I did. I thought I was right. I was never asked or requested by him -- there may have others who wished it would have been that way -- that I alter my views. No, I wasn't pissed. [01:03:00] He was president. He had to make the decisions. There were times -- and one of my favorites was the DC gun law which was the -- a lawsuit had been brought striking down the -- trying to strike down the DC ban on guns basically on the grounds of it violated the second amendment -- the right to bear arms. The first case that got national attention was with the DC circuit. And a very good friend of mine, Larry Silberman - Judge Silberman -- a long time he had been in the Nixon administration, Labor, and so forth. He wrote the opinion for the three judge panel that basically shot down the DC gun law and then it had to go to the Supreme Court. [01:04:00] The question was what position the administration would take. Would they file a friend of the court brief and the justice department prepared such a brief at the direction I think probably of Josh Bolten -- speculating a little bit on this now. Josh lived in the district. He was a little soft on the second amendment. The president and I both were from Texas and Wyoming. They're not soft on the second amendment.



Q: Josh grew up in the district.

CHENEY: Yeah, he grew up in the district. But what the justice department produced was just mush. It was one of these very complicated opinions that didn't seem to go anywhere, when what I thought we ought to have is a ringing endorsement of the second amendment and support for the Silberman opinion. Well as this is pending, I get a phone call from my friend, Kay Bailey Hutchison, from Texas -- a Senator. [01:05:00] She said we're putting together up here a brief on that issue and it's going to be strongly supportive of the Silberman opinion and we just wondered if you might not like to join our brief as the president of the Senate. So I got Addington down, my attorney, my counsel, and had Dave review it and I called her back a few hours later and said, "Kay, I would love to do that." So I signed on with the Senate brief in my capacity as president of the Senate which was at odds with what I might have done as the vice president downtown but it's one of those unique situations because we are dual hatted. I did have offices in both places and you do have budgets in both places. You are mentioned in both parts of the Constitution and so we signed it and sent it up and Nino Scalia didn't help matters any when [01:06:00] he said to the press -- he said, "You know, we're really just at sea up here. We didn't know what to do with that case and the vice president's brief arrived and it was very clear." So he sort of stuck it in to the squishes down in the justice department.

It created consternation in the West Wing. The president never mentioned it once. Not one time ever. I always had the feeling what I said wasn't exactly what he'd campaigned on. But I got that visit from Josh Bolten, came to see me and he said, "I'm here to call a process foul." "What do you mean process foul?" He said, "Well, you know Addington's out of line here. I want to talk to Addington." "Be my guest." He never said it directly to me. He wanted to talk to Addington. Addington and he had a (inaudible) and in the end Addington said, "Look, I don't work for you. I work for the vice president." It was -- there were difficulties once in a while but I had more fun with that one. [01:07:00] I got bigger laughs out it than anything else but the president never once said a word about it. So in terms of the same-sex marriage issue and the constitutional amendment he knew how I felt. I understood what he was doing. I didn't see any conflict between us -- no tensions there.

Q: Election day -- memories of election day and I'm thinking certainly one element of that -- [audio/video malfunction]

CHENEY: -- exit polls had been -- well if you go back to 2000 we went to -- I voted in 2000. I voted in Wyoming and then flew to Texas down to Austin which is where we're going to watch the returns come in. As we were going down on the plane before we landed in Austin, the preliminary exit polls were starting to show up and they're



all negative. We'd learned in that 2000 process that they just aren't very good or very reliable. You can't count on them. [01:08:00] And by the time we got to 2004 I just didn't pay any attention to them. I knew they were out there -- I'm not even sure -- I'm sure somebody came and told me what they were but I didn't -- still to this day I don't have any confidence that those exit polls produce anything that's of value. Afterwards if you get a fairly detailed questionnaire you can learn some things about people who voted and check it up against your polling report when you're trying to estimate what the vote's going to be and how people vote. But in terms of determining the outcome, the exit surveys that I heard about are just some of the early returns. In 2004 got Ted Kennedy to go to John Kerry's house and congratulate him and call him Mr. President. It was election night but it's more than just the exit polls. I don't remember being especially concerned about the '04 election survey.

Q: Do you have any memories of that day in general. [01:09:00]

CHENEY: I assume we voted in Wyoming. We came back here for that evening and we ended up going to the White House and upstairs in the residence. My granddaughter, Kate, was with us. She was the youngest person there and I can remember 41 was there -- the Bush family basically and at one point in the evening he got hold of Kate and he said, "Look, you're the youngest person here. I'm the oldest. Come on over here. We're going to talk." He could not have been nicer or more charming to her. We were more sophisticated at that point about concessions and who concedes and as I recall the Kerry people didn't want to concede. At the time there was some question about Ohio. [01:10:00] I think it was handled better than it had been four years before but we ended up with the main rally the next day when we went over and made our statements. I think over at the Reagan building, and the President and I both spoke and we had a big gathering over there. But it was -- it didn't have the tension and the uncertainty that we had four years before.

Q: That event you just mentioned is where President Bush said he thought he had earned political capital from winning that election. Do you agree? Was there a mandate of any kind in the results of the '04 election?

CHENEY: There had been a lot of thought given and discussion about social security. It was something that we wanted to do that needed to be done. And the president [01:11:00] and his people operated on the assumption that we could do it in the second term. That wasn't a new idea that just emerged out of the campaign but then as we went into '95 ['05] we put a lot of time and effort into the social security issue. The president did especially -- I did a fair amount of it too. We went and helped town halls all over the country, laid out ideas, talked about allowing the younger people to be able to invest some of their taxes and other instruments into



the market or whatever they might want to do. We got absolutely nowhere. We tried but the Democrats wouldn't bite. They didn't want to participate. We really worked hard at it for a better part of the year.

To say we had a mandate beyond that, we got elected. We won the election. [01:12:00] The first time around in 2000, we won by such a close margin. We refused to accept the proposition that somehow we needed to change our posture or our policy and take a more moderate course. I can remember arguing with the five moderates in the Senate that I had lunch with them around the time of the recount. They were sort of expecting us to go for the middle -- "Absolutely not. This is what we ran on. This is how we got elected. Full speed ahead." And that was our mindset certainly in 2000. In 2004 it was hard to say that it was a mandate although the president felt strongly that we had just won the election now we ought to go out and try to solve one of the biggest problems -- the entitlements problem.

Q: So it's very unusual for a president running for reelection to have his party gain seats in the Senate. And you gained four or five. Did that give a sense that this election was [01:13:00] not just a personal victory for you and the president but a party victory for the Republican party?

CHENEY: I don't recall a lot of discussion about that. Anything would have been an endorsement compared to what we had in 2000 when we didn't even win the popular vote. I suppose it's all relative but you only get a 37-day recount, the Supreme Court sent it. You don't know who won or who lost. You can't get the transition started -- anything more decisive than that would give you a feeling of I suppose having some kind of mandate. The voters had voted and it was a clear cut. By the end the president had the largest vote total up till that time in the popular vote and we actually won by a majority. That hadn't happened for some time. [01:14:00]

Q: Thank you, Mr. Vice President.

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