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INTERVIEW OF VICE PRESIDENT DICK CHENEY

BY YANEK MIECZKOWSKI, Ph.D.

West Wing Office
The White House
Washington, D.C.
June 28, 2007

MIECZKOWSKI: Thanks a lot for setting aside time for me.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: You came recommended by Stu Spencer and the Fords.

MIECZKOWSKI: There was some -- I saw Stu in April, and there were a number of questions that he couldn't answer, a few questions, and I figured maybe I could ask you, and you could fill in some gaps for this article. I did bring you -- (inaudible) -- sign a copy of your book, but I brought you a copy of my book, and also there are a couple other things inside for you. One is an essay I wrote with the yellow tab on the Ford presidency. I tried to do in one page sort of a summation of his legacy. I thought you might be interested in that from my college's alumni newsletter.

And my college President, who is a Republican politician, wanted me to hand deliver a note to you inviting you to speak at my college any time.

He was for 12 years the Suffolk County executive, and he was one of only two Suffolk County delegates for Cheney-Bush in 2000.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Oh, in 2000. Okay, well, thank you.

MIECZKOWSKI: Thank you. I wanted to first to ask you about Ronald Reagan's challenge to President Ford. What were some of the strategies, besides capitalizing on some of his faux pas, like the \$90 billion federal transfer, the Schwieker pick -- what were some of the Ford campaign's strategies for beating back the Reagan challenge?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: This is all on the record?

MIECZKOWSKI: Yes.



THE VICE PRESIDENT: To be used only in, what, an article, a book?

MIECZKOWSKI: Yes, an article for -- the immediate purpose is *American History Magazine*, a feature article on the 1976 election that will appear next year.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, Reagan -- obviously, what we emphasized was -- in part, was incumbency. We ran as the incumbent president. Reagan had a tough uphill climb, in a sense that he had to go against that. On the other hand, he had the advantage; he was much better known than Ford. And the president had never run outside of Grand Rapids in his congressional races.

Reagan had a major following in the party, and had been shooting for the '76 presidential campaign for probably eight years; had thought about running in '68 -- stuck his head up and down in Miami at the convention. It didn't do any good, but he clearly had been waiting for the end of the Nixon administration to run, and jump into the race.

Tried hard to persuade him not to. We had various and sundry people close to him talk to him and so forth. He wasn't interested, for example, coming to work in the administration, as a Cabinet member.

So we ended up with the head-to-head contest. But I'd say the main overall strategy we pursued was to run as the incumbent, and take advantage of everything we could think of, from that perspective.

MIECZKOWSKI: Was one strategy to sort of deemphasize Rockefeller's role in the administration?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, Rockefeller, by then, had been, I guess it was November of '75 -- had stepped aside as Vice President. So we had the Vice Presidency open. The President was going to get to make a decision at the convention as to who his running mate was going to be. Rockefeller was clearly controversial in conservative ranks. When he agreed to step aside, then that opened up the possibility that Ford could pick somebody else.

MIECZKOWSKI: One thing that Stu told me was that was you -- not necessarily you -- that you generically negotiated a specific number of appearances that Reagan would have to make on Ford's behalf in the general election -- I think it was 12. Do you have any recollection of that, or Reagan following through? Because Ford was very bitter about the lack of help from Reagan when it came to the fall.



THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, what happened was we had an agreement in advance, before we got to the convention. At the convention, the night that we had the balloting to see who the nominee was going to be, the winner of that contest would go the hotel suite of the loser, and there would be a unity meeting. And we did that. We went to the Reagan hotel. There were conversations that night with Lyn Nofziger who was there, Paul Laxalt. And there were discussions of Reagan making appearances on Ford's behalf. I don't recall a particular number being part of that. And he did do some appearances, but not a lot.

The fact was, by the time we got to Kansas City, there were strong feelings on both sides, if I could put it in those terms. A suggestion was made, for example, that Reagan ought to be on the ticket. Ford wasn't eager to have Reagan on the ticket. Reagan wasn't eager to be on the ticket. There was a belief that that would have been the best combination we could have come up with. But they had been so competitive with one another through the course of the primaries that the Reagan camp, for example, before they would agree to meet, was -- I can remember talking and having Bill Timmons talk to John Sears, who was Reagan's campaign manager, to set up the meeting. And the message that came back was they would agree to the meeting but only on condition that we not offer the vice presidency, which we agreed to do. So I got the president's approval and passed that message back, and then we had the meeting.

So they weren't eager to be asked, and President Ford wasn't eager to ask him. So it was not a close relationship at that point, if I can put it in those terms.

MIECZKOWSKI: Yes, they didn't have good personal chemistry.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: No. I think it would be fair to say over the long term Ford ended up probably feeling closer to Jimmy Carter than he did to Ronald Reagan. He and Carter used to do things together after they were both ex-presidents.

MIECZKOWSKI: And perhaps one reason they felt close was they both battled Reagan; they felt some kinship in that.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Perhaps.



MIECZKOWSKI: Any other memories of the '76 convention that stand out in your mind, the Dole pick, or anything else?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, yes -- I mean, you're not doing a book, you're only doing an article. It was the last really contested convention, from that perspective. I thought it was a great convention. It was about as exciting as you could get under those circumstances. We went into it believing we had the votes, but the Reagan people were claiming they had the votes. Obviously we were right and they were wrong, but there were a lot of key moments. One was when the (inaudible) Mississippi delegation. Mississippi turned out to be key to the nomination.

And when Reagan named Schweiker as his running mate before the convention, we took advantage of that to pull the Mississippi delegation over to our side. I can remember I got on the airplane and flew down to Jackson, Mississippi and met with the Republican delegates from Mississippi. This was before the convention.

We took a vote at that time, and the thing about Mississippi, they had a unique rule in that -- or they had 30 delegates, and 30 alternates. The way they operated was everybody got half a vote. So a delegate was the same as an alternate. And they also had a provision that they operated by the unit rule; they would cast the votes inside the delegation, and whoever came up with a majority of those 60 votes would then get all of the delegates. So when Reagan named Schweiker, that gave us an opportunity, and people like Clarke Reed, for example, who was a long time state party chairman. I pulled him across, and we got the votes we needed in order to be able to get all 30 delegates from Mississippi.

And that was crucial.

The other thing was, we were able to hold the Pennsylvania delegation.

Reagan thought when he picked Schweiker, Schweiker would bring a bunch of Pennsylvania delegates with him. And they couldn't break the Pennsylvania delegation; we were able to hold that, and go steal the Mississippi delegation. That really made the difference in the outcome. There were a lot of great moments at that convention. We stayed up all night after Ford had won the balloting to make the vice presidential pick. He met with Reagan, but he met with a lot of other people, too, a series of meetings in his hotel suite, and then went to bed without having made a decision. A lot of people thought it was going to be Howard Baker. The next morning I got called early to go down to the President's room, and he and Mrs. Ford were in there, still in their pajamas and robes, and so forth, getting ready for the day. And at that



point he said to me he thought he'd go with Bob Dole; surprised everybody because they all thought he was going to go with Howard Baker.

MIECZKOWSKI: And once you were past the convention, one question that Stu Spencer couldn't answer was, who developed the "no campaign campaign," the Rose Garden strategy? Was that you, or was it a meeting of the minds?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: It was two guys who worked for me.

MIECZKOWSKI: Mike Duval?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Mike Duval and Foster Chanock. I don't know if you've ever heard of --

MIECZKOWSKI: Oh, sure, yes. I know -- I interviewed Mike Duval once, and Foster Chanock died --

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Foster died in 1980 or so. Yes, he was only about 28 or 29.

MIECZKOWSKI: Yes, he was a young guy.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: And of course Mike is dead now, too. But, no, they both worked for me. I'd given them the assignment of trying to pull together fall campaign plans. Stu did a lot of the political side of it, if you will. In terms of the Rose Garden strategy really came out of work that Mike and Foster did, and also, I believe, as I recall, they were the ones that came up with a debate challenge; that Ford had at the convention in his acceptance speech would issue a challenge to Jimmy Carter to debate, take the initiative. We were 30 points behind, and we had to try something.

MIECZKOWSKI: Right. And can you tell me a little bit about the debate preparations you did in the White House theater? And was it you and Alan Greenspan who stood in for Carter, or who played Carter in the debates?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I'm fuzzy on the debate prep. We did do it in the theater. My recollection, though, is I don't recall a stand-in. We



did not have somebody up there answering questions pretending to be Jimmy Carter. I could be wrong. Someplace there's got to be photographs of those sessions.

MIECZKOWSKI: Yes, I couldn't find any at the Ford Library, but I'll look again.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: When we -- when I've done the debate prep, when I debated both in 2002, 2004, I always had Rob Portman as my stand-in. But my recollection is, Ford was reluctant to do that, and instead it was just a matter of him standing up practicing, doing Q and A and delivering a closing statement and so forth.

MIECZKOWSKI: And who lobbed questions at him? You, or --

THE VICE PRESIDENT: We had a group of staff people, basically, throwing questions at him. That's how I remember it. But I could be wrong.

MIECZKOWSKI: And do you recall preparing for criticism about the Helsinki Accords that, unfortunately, got Ford into trouble?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: It -- Henry Kissinger talked to him about that, the Helsinki thing. The question was -- that got us into trouble stemmed from a meeting that Hal Sonnenfeldt, who was a senior State Department official, and held in Europe with the U.S. ambassadors to Europe, had them all together. And this was in the aftermath of the Helsinki summit.

And the allegation was made in an Evans and Novak column that there was some kind of "Sonnenfeldt Doctrine" whereby the administration recognized Soviet domination of Eastern Europe. And the President didn't believe that and didn't buy into it. Then the long-time support within the Republican Party for the captive nations in Eastern Europe refused to recognize the legitimacy of Soviet occupation.

And I always believed that what the President had in his mind when he answered the question -- and I think it was Max Frankel of the *Times* -- asked Ford whether or not Poland was dominated by the Soviet Union.

And Ford responded by saying Poland is not dominated by the Soviet Union, but what he was thinking about, what he had in his mind, was this notion that was embodied in the so-called Sonnenfeldt Doctrine, allegation. And he fired back and said, Poland is not dominated. And



then Frankel came back and gave him a second shot, and asked the question a second time.

MIECZKOWSKI: Even gesturing with his hands.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Thinking he might want to clean it up. Then Ford came back and he hit it again exactly the same way. So it -- I was backstage in the green room watching the debate, and I knew it was problematic. But the debate went on with -- finished up. The President did a good job, and all the rest of it.

Then we got in the car and took him to the house where he was staying.

And I had to go down to -- I think it was the St. Francis hotel there in San Francisco, with Stu Spencer and Brent Scowcroft. We walked in and they had a big auditorium, or a ballroom, full of reporters, and we were going down to brief them on our side, and, in fact, do our post-debate spin. And as I walked up to the podium, Lou Cannon of the *Post*, great old reporter, Lou hollered at me from the back of the room, he said, "Hey, Cheney, how many Soviet divisions are there in Poland?"

And I knew right then we were in trouble.

And it took us a couple of days to persuade the President that he had to go out and explain this was a -- that he understood the Soviet Union still occupied Poland and so forth.

But in the meantime, we got hammered hard by Carter. And it was a -- interesting, because there was a poll that we had underway that night, election night -- it was actually ongoing during the course of the debate nationwide -- sort of rolled from the East coast to the West coast -- with the time zones. And what the polls showed was when Ford made that comment it has absolutely no impact. It had no impact in the questions asked after the debate. It wasn't until the following day, after the press had worked it over, and commentators, and Carter jumped on it, then it began to sink in and began to have an impact with the voters.

MIECZKOWSKI: Yes, it was sort of a media orgy.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: That's one way to describe it. (Laughter.)

MIECZKOWSKI: So despite that, what would you point to as some of the factors that brought Ford from 33 points behind to a dead heat on Election Day? I was talking just last night with Bob Orben and he told me something I didn't know. He said that the Gallup organization got word to you guys at the White House that Ford was going to win it by a



whisker -- but they privately sent word. Do you remember that? Or what factors --

THE VICE PRESIDENT: No, my recollection is the -- we had been way back, about 30 points, Labor Day, when the campaign started. And we sat down and figured out -- that's where -- why the Rose Garden strategy made sense, the debate challenge. Sat down and figured out how many votes we had to have to win, in terms of popular vote. I can't remember the exact total now, but it was something like we had to change over that 60-day period of time in order to close the gap. We had to persuade something like 100,000 people a day -- I don't remember the exact number, but it was a lot.

And what that did was drive home the point that you couldn't do it one vote at a time; shaking hands wasn't going to get you there, you had to come up with something far bolder and that would let you reach out and touch a lot more people. And that's why the debates were attractive.

I thought we ran a good campaign. We had the problem with the second debate on Poland, which we got over in a few days. The other thing that happened, that slowed us down about the same time were the allegations that the President had gotten some kind of benefits from the Maritime Union. And this was a charge that could only be put to rest by getting a special prosecutor to investigate it. A lot of this had been looked at when Ford was confirmed for Vice President, and his whole record had been pored over by both the House and the Senate. It was a phony charge; it wasn't true.

But that, in combination with the debate performance cost us about a week in the middle of the campaign. We had momentum, we were really rolling and then all of a sudden, boom, these two things stopped us until we could get through that. We still came very, very close -- almost pulled it out.

I always felt good about the campaign because I felt like we gave it our best shot and that it was an uphill climb from the very beginning -- partly because you had the pardon in the background, the Nixon pardon, and it was the first presidential campaign after Watergate, we were carrying all that baggage. It just wasn't to be.

I don't remember being told that we prevailed, we had won it. What I recall is we -- the night before the election we ended up in Grand Rapids, did a big rally there with local folks; spent the night. Got up the next morning, the President went and voted early and then we went to a café that every Election Day he had gone to for breakfast.



And a few of us went with him and had breakfast. Then we went out to the airport in Grand Rapids and there was a ceremony at the airport because the locals had painted a huge mural on one wall of the Grand Rapids Airport -- you may have seen it -- it's got his mother in it, and his father and family and so forth, sort of the story of his life.

And it was a very, very emotional moment. He was in tears. The press corps was in tears. I mean, there was just a tremendous outpouring of affection and gratitude and brought back a lot for him, and this was Election Day, he was running for President.

And then we got on the airplane and flew back to Washington, and all the way across the country there wasn't a cloud in the sky, I mean, it just was brilliant sunshine, every single place we went. And that meant we were going to get high voter turnout in a lot of the cities in the Democratic areas. So by the time we landed I was concerned. But it was almost as if that ceremony in the Grand Rapids airport that morning had been the ultimate climax of the campaign. And then we came here, spent a good part of the evening upstairs in the residence, and we went back and forth. The President was up there together with the family -- Jacob Javits from New York, Joe Garagiola -- had been on the campaign with us -- a couple of other people. Bob Teeter and I went up there several times during the course of the evening to deliver the latest results.

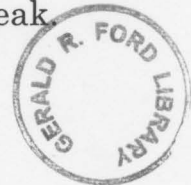
And then went up about 2:00 a.m., told the President we thought it was all over, but we didn't think he should concede until the next morning, there was still a slim possibility depending on what happened in Oregon and Hawaii or something like that, we were only about 20-some electoral votes short.

MIECZKOWSKI: So he went to sleep thinking that he might have been able still to pull it off?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I'd say that we were pretty sure then we were not going to pull it off, but we wanted to wait until morning before we finally closed the deal.

MIECZKOWSKI: And who told him in the morning, was it you?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Yes. I was -- he knew by then. I can't remember exactly how the word came in; by then we had the final count. And he'd lost his voice, so we went out into the press lobby and Mrs. Ford read his concession statement, because he couldn't speak.



Had the kids there, as well, too. There's a picture with him up in front of the press.

And then we went back into the Oval Office and got Jimmy Carter on the phone. And the President whispered an introduction of me to Carter; that's all he could get out. And I sat down on the couch over by the fireplace and on the telephone and read the concession statement to Governor Carter, and congratulated him on his win.

MIECZKOWSKI: Do you remember President Ford's reaction in the morning when you called and told him it's been lost?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, he knew. As I say, I think he had a pretty good idea. There wasn't any false hope there.

MIECZKOWSKI: Could I ask you just in general what you regard as your --

THE VICE PRESIDENT: A couple more.

MIECZKOWSKI: -- your greatest achievement as the Chief-of-Staff for Ford? Special Assistant? Chief-of-Staff?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Oh, I don't know that -- come up with any one -- particular one. The key was working with him, being there through a remarkable period. And then he came in, aftermath of Nixon's resignation and Watergate, had to bind up the nation's wounds, so to speak; and restore the credibility of the office, did a superb job; and just being part of that whole effort. It was a continual seven-day-a-week, 52-week-a-year; a very intense kind of experience.

MIECZKOWSKI: All right, thanks. I see David Obey here on television. He's recently published a book -- or publishing memoirs -- in which he said that the best president he worked with, from Nixon to, I think, George W., was Gerald Ford. He's a Democrat, so --

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Yes, he's from Wisconsin. Ford had a special relationship, especially with the guys of the Appropriations Committee. He served on the Appropriations Committee for 25 years. And Dave Obey, who got elected in '69, a special election to replace Mel Laird; and Laird became Defense Secretary.



MIECZKOWSKI: Defense Secretary.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Would have served as a very junior member of the House when Ford was the Republican leader. And they overlapped about four years, five years -- Ford, of course, left in '74. But yes, I can understand why Dave feels that way.

MIECZKOWSKI: When he told Ford that, Ford apparently said, well, you have slim pickings there. (Laughter.)

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, Ford was very close to a lot of the guys on the appropriations committee; one of the many respected most under George Mahan of Texas. He was a Democrat, he was Chairman of the Defense Subcommittee for many, many years, and Ford served on that subcommittee with Mahan.

MIECZKOWSKI: I interviewed Barber Conable; got to be friends with him in writing that book and he told me that he introduced you to George Bush Senior at a dinner at his house. Is that right?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Forty-one.

MIECZKOWSKI: Right, right.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Yes, okay. We did have dinner together at Barber's house. This was when he was --

MIECZKOWSKI: It was at Barber's.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Oh yes.

MIECZKOWSKI: Barber's house, yes, that's right.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I'd already met Bush by then. But I remember this would've been -- and I'd -- the first time I met George Bush senior was -- I was working for Bill Steiger from Wisconsin as a staffer on the Hill when I first came to town. And this would've been 1969. And we had a group of members who got together to go survey college campuses to see whether or not we should eliminate funding on campuses where there had been riots and disruptions in the late '60s. And Bill Steiger, my boss, was one of the six guys who put that



together. Another one of the people who did it was 41. And when I first met him at a meeting in his office -- it was in the spring of '69 when I first met him, George Bush senior -- and then knew him when he was our ambassador in China, and CIA Director in the Ford administration.

My recollection as having dinner at Conable's with 41 would've been when he was already Vice President. And they were lining up people to work in the '88 campaign to sign on. I was there to get lobbied to sign on as part of the Bush 41 team of the president, which I didn't do.

(Laughter.)

I didn't sign on for anybody. I wanted to run for Republican whip in the House. And therefore I didn't want to get involved in anybody else's presidential campaigns because we had a whole lot of people over there: Jack Kemp, Howard Baker.

So I'd quarrel with Barber about -- but I do remember having dinner at his house (inaudible) with their wives but, I think by then he was head of the World Bank or -- I don't remember exactly.

MIECZKOWSKI: I think you're right.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Yes, when he left the House.

MIECZKOWSKI: Yes. Well, thanks very much, Mr. Vice President. I appreciate it a lot.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Thank you.

END

