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## **Interview of the Vice President by Chris Wallace, on FOX News Sunday**

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Q And good morning again from Fox News in Washington. Joining us now, the Vice President of the United States, Dick Cheney. Mr. Vice President, welcome back to "Fox News Sunday."

THE VICE PRESIDENT: It's good to be back, Chris.

Q Let's start with the President's speech this week in which he said that U.S. forces in Iraq, and let's put it up on the screen, are engaged in a struggle that will determine, his word, determine, the direction of the global war on terror and our safety here at home. If you and the President really believe that, why not send even more troops into Iraq and why depend on the Iraqi army and government, which have failed us again and again, why not say this is a U.S. war and we will do whatever it takes to win?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, in effect, we have said that. And we are putting in the force we think is what's required to do the job. It's based on the best military advice we can get. It can't be just a U.S. show in the sense that ultimately the Iraqis are going to have to be responsible for defending Iraq, for governing themselves. That's always been our ultimate objective and that hasn't changed. But it's clear based on recent developments that they need help, that we can provide that help by putting additional forces in for the foreseeable future and work in conjunction with the Iraqis. The Iraqis will be there, too, right alongside us. This is not just an all-U.S. show. It's always been a question of trying to balance what's the right amount of American force and American leadership with the question of handing over authority and responsibility and transitioning to the Iraqis. We're still very much engaged in that process. We've clearly made a judgment here, both the Iraqis have and the United States, that we need to do more to get a handle on the situation in Baghdad.

Q But to repeat my opening question, ultimately, will the U.S. do whatever it takes to win?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I believe we will. I think that if you look at the conflict that's involved here and remember that Iraq is just part of the larger war; it is, in fact, a global war that stretches from Pakistan all the way around to North Africa, and we've been engaged in Pakistan, we've been engaged in Afghanistan, we clearly are working closely with the Saudis, with the Gulf States, with the Egyptians, that we have gone in --and aggressively since 9/11 -- gone after state sponsors of terror, gone after safe havens for terrorist training and equipped and planned and operated to strike the United States.

And we've got people now like Karzai in Afghanistan and Musharraf in Pakistan. Who are great allies, who put their lives on the line every single day that they go to work - assassination attempts on their lives. And for us to succeed in all of those other areas, those people have got to have confidence in the United States, that they can count on us. If the United States doesn't have the stomach to finish the task in Iraq, we've put at risk what we've done in all those other locations. Remember what bin Laden's strategy is -- he doesn't think he can beat us in a stand-up fight. He thinks he can force us to quit. He believes after that Lebanon in '83 and Somalia in '93, that the United States doesn't have the stomach for a long war. And Iraq is the current central battlefield in that war, and we must win there. It's absolutely essential that we win there and we will win there.

Q Over the last 46 months, the President and you have repeatedly said that you are on the path to victory, sometimes proposing exactly the opposite policy of what the President did this week. Let's take a look.

(Video clips begin.)

THE PRESIDENT: Sending more Americans would undermine our strategy of encouraging Iraqis to take the lead in this fight.

THE PRESIDENT: Not only can we win the war in Iraq. We are winning the war in Iraq.

THE PRESIDENT: Will we be nimble enough? Will we be able to deal with the circumstances on the ground, and the answer is yes, we will.

THE PRESIDENT: Absolutely we're winning.

(Video clips conclude.)

Q Mr. Vice President, why should we believe that this time you've got it right?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, I think if you look at what's transpired in Iraq, Chris, we have, in fact, made enormous progress. Remember where we were four years ago -- Saddam Hussein was in power, a guy who had started two wars, who had produced and used weapons of mass destruction, violated 16 U.N. Security Council resolutions, prime sponsor of terror, paying the families of suicide bombers. Saddam has been brought to justice. He's dead. He was executed, as we all know, here a few weeks ago. His government is gone. There have been three national elections in Iraq. There's a new constitution; there's a new government that's been in place now for all of nine months. A lot of people are eager to go out and write them off now. I think it's far too soon. The fact is we've come a long way from where we started in Iraq. We still have a lot to do. It's been tougher and taken longer than we thought it would.

Q But the fact is some of these policies that you proposed that we talked about there haven't worked. Why should we believe this policy will?

**THE VICE PRESIDENT:** One of the things that, in fact, transpired that's changed the circumstances over there was the successful strategies that Zarqawi pursued. We went up until the spring of '06, the Shia sat back and did not respond to the attacks on them. They sat there and took it. But after they got hit at the Golden Dome in Samarra, that precipitated the sectarian violence we're seeing now. We have to get a handle on that in order to be able to succeed. We do have to change and adjust and adapt our tactics if we're going to succeed from a strategic standpoint, but that's what we're doing. No war ever goes smoothly all the way. Lots of times you have to make adjustments. That's what we're doing here.

**Q** Throughout this war, the President has said that he listens to the generals on the ground and he gives them what they want. But in November, General Abizaid, the commander of all U.S. forces in the Middle East, spoke before the Senate committee and said that after meeting with every divisional commander that sending more troops into Iraq would prevent the Iraqis from taking on the responsibility they should take. Let's take a look.

(Video clip begins.)

**GENERAL ABIZAID:** General Casey, the corps commander, General Dempsey, we all talked together and I said in your professional opinion, if we were to bring in more American troops now, does it add considerably to our ability to achieve success in Iraq and they all said no.

(Video clip concludes.)

**Q** Mr. Vice President, why did you and the President decide to overrule the commanders?

**THE VICE PRESIDENT:** Well, I don't think we've overruled the commanders. The fact is the plan we've got here now has been embraced by Abizaid, by General Casey.

**Q** How do you explain what he said right then, that's less than two months ago?

**THE VICE PRESIDENT:** Well, it was two months ago. We've, in fact, looked very carefully at the situation, and we have a plan now that has, in fact, been endorsed by the generals, including Fox Fallon, who is the new CENTCOM commander, who is about to replace General Abizaid and Bob Gates, who is the new Secretary of Defense. Part of the debate has been, Chris, over this question of how much emphasis you put on the priority of transitioning to Iraqi control and how much you put on the question of using U.S. forces to deal with the security situation. And there's a balance to be struck there. And the old balance basically in the past placed the emphasis on transition to the Iraqis. But we've made the decision and came to the conclusion that until we got a handle on the security situation in Baghdad, the Iraqis weren't going to be able to make the progress they need to make on the economic front, on the political front and so forth. And so the conclusion is that with the plan that we put in place now that we're going to place a greater emphasis upon going after the security problem in Baghdad, that that has to come first. Political reconciliation is important. Economic progress is important, but that we've got to get a handle on the security situation in Baghdad. That means more Iraqi forces, that means more U.S. forces.

Q Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki, I think it's fair to say, has disappointed us over and over again. Let's take a look at the record. In mid-October, he demanded that the U.S. Military free an aide to Muqtada al Sadr, who was suspected of leading a death squad. On October 31, he made the U.S. end a blockade of Sadr City where we were searching for a missing U.S. Soldier. On December 30, he ignored our calls to delay the execution of Saddam Hussein, leading to an event the President said was right below Abu Ghraib as an embarrassment for our country. Question, how direct has the President been with Maliki that he can't fail us again?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: We've been very direct with him, and I think Maliki and his government understand very well that they, in fact, need to step up and take responsibility; that we need to have new rules of engagement; that there will not be any political interference, if you will, phone calls from government officials that interfere with the legitimate military activities of the security forces.

Q Let me ask a specific question about that. If U.S. forces want to go into Sadr City and take on Muqtada al Sadr, do you promise -- can you pledge to the American people we'll do that regardless of what Maliki says?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I believe we'll be able to do whatever we need to do in order to get a handle on the security situation there, and Prime Minister Maliki will be directly involved in it. This is just as much his program as it is ours. He's the one ultimately who has to perform in terms of the capabilities of Iraqi forces. So I think we do have the right understanding. Time will tell. We'll have to wait and see what happens here. But I do believe that based on the conversations we've had with Prime Minister Maliki and with his senior people, direct conversations between the President and Prime Minister Maliki, commitments he's made to him and -- that we've made to him and that he's made to us, that, in fact, we do have an understanding that will allow us to go forward and get the job done.

Q The question a lot of people ask is, or else? In other words, the Iraq Study Group said if Maliki didn't live up to his promises, we would begin to cut aid, support, troops. What do we do if he doesn't live up to his promises? Is there -- and specifically because there's all this talk about, well, it's a democracy, would the U.S. consider backing another Iraqi?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I'm not going to get into that, Chris. We've got a good plan. We're just beginning the execution of the plan. Why don't we get together in a couple of months and see how it worked.

Q That's an invitation that I'll accept. But the question is, is there anyone else?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I'm not going to go beyond where I've said. We're focusing on making this plan work.

Q But it's not open-ended commitment?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: We're focused on making this plan work.

Q Does Congress have any control on how you and the President conduct this war?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Congress certainly has a significant role to play here. They have clearly been instrumental and a major player in terms of appropriating the funds to support the force and the activities in the global conflict, as well as our operations in Iraq. We talk to the Congress a lot. We consulted with over 120 members of Congress before the President made his pronouncement. We agreed to set up an advisory group, if you will, that draws on the chairmen and ranking members of the key committees of the House and Senate as we go forward. So Congress clearly has a role to play.

Q That's a consultative role.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: It is a consultative role.

Q The question I'm asking, though, is if they want to stop it, can they?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: The President is the Commander-in-Chief. He's the one who has to make these tough decisions. He's the guy who's got to decide how to use the force and where to deploy the force. Congress, obviously, has to support the effort through the power of the purse, so they have got a role to play and we certainly recognize that. But also, you cannot run a war by committee. The Constitution is very clear that the President is, in fact, under Article II, the Commander-in-Chief.

Q So let me ask you a couple of specific questions. If Congress passes a resolution opposing increasing the troops in Iraq, will that stop you?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: It would be a sense of the Congress resolution, and we're obviously interested in it and what Congress has to say about it. But it would not affect the President's ability to carry out his policy.

Q What do you say to members of Congress who may try to block your efforts, your policy in Iraq? Would they be, in effect, undercutting the troops?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, I think they would be, but I think more than that, Congress clearly has every right to express their opinion and to agree or disagree with administration policy. And they will. They haven't had any qualms at all about that. But there's a new element here, I think, Chris, and that is to say the Democrats have now taken control of the House and the Senate. It's not enough for them to be critics any more. We have these meetings with members of Congress and they agree we can't fail. The consequences of failure would be too great. But then they end up critical of what we're trying to do, advocating withdrawal or so-called redeployment of force, but they have absolutely nothing to offer in its place. I have yet to hear a coherent policy out of the Democratic side with respect to an alternative to what the President has proposed in terms of going forward. They basically, if we were to follow their guidance, the comments, for example, that a lot of them made during the last campaign about withdrawing U.S. forces, we simply go back and re-validate the strategy that Osama bin Laden has been following from day one, that if you kill enough Americans, you can force them to quit, that we don't have the stomach for the fight. That's not an answer. If, in fact, this is as critical as we all believe it is, then if the Democrats don't like what we're proposing, it seems to me they have an obligation to

put forward their proposal, and so far we haven't seen it.

Q Mr. Vice President, it's not just Democrats, though, who oppose the plan. This week there were a number of leading Senate Republicans who came out against it. Let's watch.

(Video clips begin.)

SENATOR NELSON: I'm not prepared at this time to support that.

SENATOR VITTER: Too little, maybe too late.

SENATOR HAGEL: The most dangerous foreign policy blunder in this country since Vietnam.

(Video clips conclude.)

Q Aren't you losing a lot of support in your own caucus?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I don't think Chuck Hagel has been with us for a long time. The most dangerous blunder here would be if, in fact, we took all of that effort that has gone in to fighting the global war on terror and the great work that we have done in Pakistan, and Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia and across the globe out there, and saw it dissipated because the United States now decides that Iraq is too tough and we're going to pack it in and go home. And we leave high and dry those millions of people in that part of the world that have signed on and supported U.S., or supported governments that allied with the U.S. in this global conflict. This is an existential conflict. It is the kind of conflict that's going to drive our policy and our government for the next 20 or 30 or 40 years. We have to prevail and we have to have -- excuse me -- the stomach for the fight long term. And for us to do what Chuck Hagel, for example, suggests or to buy into that kind of analysis -- it's really not analysis, it's just criticism -- strikes me as absolutely the wrong thing to do. These are tough decisions, but the President has made it. It's a good decision. It's a good policy. We think on reflection it's the best way for us to move forward to achieve our objectives in Iraq.

Q I want to ask you one more question about this and then we'll talk about other issues. Iraq was a big issue in the November election. I want you to take a look at some numbers from the election. According to the national exit poll, 67% said the war was either very or extremely important to their vote. And only 17% supported sending in more troops. By taking the policy you have, haven't you, Mr. Vice President, ignored the expressed will of the American people in the November election?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, Chris, this President, and I don't think any President worth his salt can afford to make decisions of this magnitude according to the polls. The polls change.

Q This was an election, sir.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Polls change day by day, week by week. I think the vast majority of Americans want the right outcome in Iraq. The challenge for us is to be able to provide that. But you

cannot simply stick your finger into the wind and say, gee, public opinion is against, we better quit. That is part and parcel of the underlying fundamental strategy that our adversaries believe afflicts the United States. They are convinced that the current debate in the Congress, that the election campaign last fall, all of that is evidence that they're right when they say the United States doesn't have the stomach for the fight in this long war against terror. They believe it. They look at past evidence of it and Lebanon in '83 and Somalia in '93, Vietnam before that. They're convinced that the United States will, in fact, pack it in and go home if they just kill enough of us. They can't beat us in the stand-up fight but they think they can break our will. And if we have a President who looks at the polls and sees the polls going south and concludes, oh, my goodness, we have to quit, all it will do is validate the al Qaeda view of the world. It's exactly the wrong thing to do. This President does not make policy based on public opinion polls. He should not. It's absolutely essential here that we get it right.

Q Mr. Vice President, we have to take a quick break here. But when we come back, we'll talk about Iran, and the Democrats taking control of Congress.

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Q And we're back now with Vice President Cheney. The President talked very tough about Iran this week and it's not just rhetoric. He has authorized the arrest of Iranians making trouble in Iraq. He has moved against Iranian banks. You've sent two carrier groups and air defense systems into the region. What's the message that you're sending to Iran and how tough are you prepared to get?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, I think it's been pretty well known that Iran is fishing in troubled waters, if you will, inside Iraq. And the President has responded to that, as you suggest. I think it's exactly the right thing to do. But Iran is a problem in a much larger sense. They have begun to conduct themselves in ways that have created a great deal of tension throughout the region. If you go and talk with the Gulf States or if you talk with the Saudis or if you talk about the Israelis or the Jordanians, the entire region is worried partly because of the conduct of Mr. Ahmadinejad, who appears to be a radical, a man who believes in an apocalyptic vision of the future and who thinks it's imminent. At the same time, of course, they're pursuing the acquisition of nuclear weapons. They are in a position where site astride the Straits of Hormuz, where over 20% of the world's supply of oil transits every single day, over 18 million barrels a day. They use Hezbollah as a surrogate. And working through Syria, Hezbollah they've tried to topple the democratically government in Iran [sic]. Working through Hamas and their support for Hamas in Gaza, they're interfering with the peace process. So the threat that Iran represents is growing. It's multi-dimensional and it is, in fact, of concern to everybody in the region.

Q So what message are you sending to Iran and how prepared -- how tough are you prepared to get?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I think the message that the President sent clearly is that we do not want them doing what they can to try to destabilize the situation inside Iraq. We think it's very important that they keep their folks at home. They've been important, for example, in providing improvised explosive devices to some of the forces inside Iraq. The presence of U.S. military out there, not only in terms of what we're doing in Iraq, but also with our carrier task forces, for example, is indicated as reassurance to our friends in the region that the United States is committed to their security, and that we're a major presence there now and we expect to continue to be one in the future.

Q So you're increasing the pressure on Iran to stop these activities?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: The pressure -- obviously, we're focused diplomatically on the nuclear problem. We've gone through the United Nations. We've gotten the U.N. Security Council resolution unanimously through that body to impose sanctions on Iran. There is no reason in the world why Iran needs to continue to pursue nuclear weapons. But if you look down the road a few years and speculate about the possibility of a nuclear armed Iran, astride the world's supply of oil, able to affect adversely the global economy, prepared to use terrorist organizations and/or their nuclear weapons to threaten their neighbors and others around the world, that's a very serious prospect. And it's important that not happen.

Q You say it's important that not happen. In fact, it was the basis of the Bush Doctrine, you will not allow the world's most dangerous powers to get access to the world's most dangerous weapons. Can you pledge that before you and the President leave office you will take care of the threat of Iran?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I think we're working right now today, as we speak, on key elements of that problem, specifically through the United Nations for example, with the nuclear program; through our military presence in the Gulf; with respect to our friends and allies in that part of the world; and obviously inside Iraq in terms of the actions we've taken or ordered be taken against -- force personnel that are making trouble inside of Iraq.

Q There's a report in The New York Times today that's been confirmed by administration officials the Pentagon and CIA have been obtaining financial records about hundreds of Americans suspected of involvement in either terrorism or espionage. Why involve the CIA and the Pentagon in domestic intelligence gathering?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, remember what these issues are. This is the question, as I understand it, of national security letters that allow us to collect financial information, for example, on suspected -- on people we have reason to suspect. The Defense Department gets involved because we've got hundreds of bases inside the United States that are potential terrorist targets. We've got hundreds of thousands of people, innocent Americans --

Q Why not let the FBI do that, sir?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: They can do a certain amount of it and they do. But the Department of Defense has a legitimate authority in this area. This is an authority that goes back three or four decades. It was reaffirmed in the Patriot Act that was renewed here about a year or so ago. It's a perfectly legitimate activity. There's nothing wrong with it or illegal. It doesn't violate people's civil rights. And if an institution that receives one of these national security letters disagrees with it, they're free to go to court to try to stop its execution. So there's -- this is a dramatic story, but I think it's important for people to understand here this is a legitimate security effort that's been underway for a long time and it does not represent a new departure from the standpoint of our efforts to protect ourselves against terrorist attack.

Q Your former Chief of Staff, Scooter Libby, goes on trial this coming week on charges of obstruction of justice and perjury. As I mentioned to Mrs. Cheney when she was here a few weeks ago, I happened to notice that you invited Mr. Libby to your Christmas party, which you also invited me to. Given his legal troubles, why?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Why what?

Q Why invite him to your party?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: He's a friend. He's a good man. He is one of the finest individuals I've ever known. And I did invite him to the Christmas party. The last two years he's been at our Christmas party. And before that, he was working for me.

Q Was he honest?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I believe he's one of the more honest men I know. He's a good man. And I obviously appreciate very much his service on my staff over the years and have very high regard for him and his family.

Q Libby's lawyers say they're going to call you as a witness, and we've had presidential scholars covering it. It appears it may be the first time ever that a sitting Vice President has testified in a criminal trial. Will you participate in a videotaped deposition or will you go into court and raise your right hand?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Chris, I'm not going to get into the trial. That's a matter that's before us. I have indicated from the very beginning my wholehearted cooperation with the investigation and with whatever legal proceedings emerge out of that, and this will all unfold here in the very near future.

Q Do you have any problem going into open court, sir?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I'm going to leave it where it's at. I'm not going to comment on the trial itself.

Q Now that it turns out that Libby wasn't the one who first leaked the name of Valerie Plame, what do you think of the one that he's the only one who's being prosecuted in this case?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I have strong views on the subject, but I'm not going to talk about it.

Q Let me ask you, because your wife, when she was on, and let's put it up on the screen, said, "It's bizarre and does not reflect well on our judicial system."

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I'm not going to talk about it.

Q Do you agree with your wife?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I'm not going to talk about it, Chris. I have strong feelings on the subject. I am likely to be a witness in this trial. It would be inappropriate for me at this point, shortly before the trial begins, to enter into a public dialogue with you about my views on --

Q But there's nothing that you have heard, nothing that you have read that shakes your confidence in Scooter Libby's integrity?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: That's correct.

Q What's your reaction to what the Congressional Democrats, especially in the House, have done during their first 100 legislative hours?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, I think it's interesting to watch. We've got a lot of people around town on my side of the aisle sort of wringing their hands, my gosh, what do we do now the Democrats are back in control of the Congress. The fact is for the nearly 40 years I've been in and around Washington, the Democrats were always in control of Congress. We've had a relatively new period of time here in recent years, but the fact that the Democrats now have control of the senate and the House isn't unique at all. Some of my friends have to adjust to minority status, if you will, and that's not pleasant always if you've been in the majority. But I think the Democrats are proceeding about the way I would expect them to proceed. They've got a few things they wanted to push and they're doing that early on. But I think they've got to come to grips as well, too, now with being in the majority. The fact of the matter is when you control the levers on Capitol Hill, it's not enough for you simply to be a critic of the administration. You've got to put forward positive proposals of your own.

Q Let's talk about at least one key issue. Treasury Secretary Paulson says he wants to engage the Democrats on Social Security reform without any preconditions. Does that mean that you and the President would consider an increase in the payroll tax as part of a grand bargain to make sure the system doesn't go bankrupt?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: No. What it means is that Secretary Paulson has tried to get people to the table to sit down and talk about the subject of Social Security.

Q Does that mean then that you wouldn't consider an increase in payroll taxes?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: the President has been very clear, I think if you look at his -- his philosophy over the years, he's been very, very consistent about it. We believe in keeping taxes as low as possible. We think that's been key to our economic success and to the progress that we've made on the economy, the creation of 7.2 million jobs in the last several years, so we don't believe a tax increase is necessary.

Q So conservatives --

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Now when we sit down and talk about trying to get people to the table to talk about Social Security, we said no preconditions. That's exactly what it means. Come to the table and

we'll talk.

Q So conservatives who worry that you're going to sell them out on payroll taxes shouldn't worry?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: This president has been very, very clear on his position on taxes, and nothing's changed.

Q A number of the new Democrat chairmen say they're going to conduct investigations of various things that have gone on over the last six years in the Bush administration. You're considered something of a hardliner when it comes to executive authority. What's the White House position going to be when it comes to requests for either documents or witnesses from the administration?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: We've been, I think, very responsible in that regard. And when there is a legitimate need for those documents to be presented to the Congress and they have a legitimate constitutional or statutory reason to have access to them, we try to accommodate them. Sometimes requests have been made that clearly fall outside the boundaries, clearly trying to get into an area, for example, that's preserved and protected for the President. The President's ability to consult, for example, with people in private without having to publicize or tell the Congress who he's talking to. We took that case on my energy task force, for example, all the way to the Supreme Court and won on a 7-2 decision. So it depends. We'll do everything we can to cooperate and work with the Congress. We want good relations with the Congress. But if they come down and seek something that we don't think is appropriate, we'll defend our constitutional obligations and responsibilities. We take an oath just like they do to protect, preserve and defend the Constitution of the United States. And so we have strong feelings about it and we've operated accordingly.

Q We have about 30 seconds left. Do you and the President feel embattled these days, do you feel isolated? You see the Democrats on Capitol Hill lining up against you. You see some of your support among Republicans falling away.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I don't. And the President doesn't either. I've been here off and on a long time, Chris, going back to 1968. I've seen embattled administrations. This isn't one of them.

Q We just went through discussions of that with Watergate, right, with President Ford's funeral.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Right.

Q This is nothing compared to that.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Correct.

Q Mr. Vice President, we want to thank you so much for sharing part of your Sunday with us. And please come back, sir.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Good to be here, Chris. Thank you.

END 9:32 A.M. EST

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