



THE WHITE HOUSE
PRESIDENT
GEORGE W. BUSH

 [CLICK HERE TO PRINT](#)

For Immediate Release
Office of the Vice President
April 15, 2007

Interview of the Vice President by Bob Schieffer on CBS News "Face the Nation"

Taped April 14, 2007

9:19 A.M. EDT

Q And the Vice President joins us now in the studio. Welcome, Mr. Vice President. I must say, hearing those comments from you, this does not sound like an administration that's in a mood to compromise here, which leads me to ask you, why is the President asking the congressional leaders to come to the White House? Does he want to talk to them? Is he looking for a compromise? Or is he just going to call them there and dress them down?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, I think we're trying to work out the procedures here, obviously, to get the bill passed, the urgent war supplemental. It's absolutely essential we have it. It's for the troops, troops who are in the field or in combat every day. And the process has already run on far too long. We're already some 70 days since the President made this request.

What needs to be worked out is we need a decision, basically, from the Congress whether or not they're going to take the two bills that have now passed the House and Senate and send -- clean them up and send them down to the President in a fashion that he would find acceptable, with no limitations on the forces in Iraq and without all the pork that's in it. Then he'll get a bill he can sign and we can get on with our business.

On the other hand, if they're going to insist on those bills containing those provisions that were in both the House and Senate bill, he'll veto it. And it's important, I think, to have that heart to heart, everybody understand where everybody is.

Now, some of the leadership on the other side have suggested they won't pass any bill at all, or Harry Reid now has said he's adamantly opposed to any funding for the troops. On the other hand, Carl Levin, who is Chairman of the Armed Services Committee, has indicated they definitely do want to pass funding for the troops, even if they don't have the votes to override the President's veto on the limitation provisions and on the pork that's in the bill.

Q I guess what struck me, though, about your speech was, I mean, you started out by calling these congressional leaders irresponsible. And I wonder, how does that set the stage for productive talks?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, I think it's important they know where we stand. And the fact of the matter is, I do believe that the positions that the Democratic leaders have taken, to a large extent now,

are irresponsible. Harry Reid last fall said -- this was after the November elections -- that he would not support an effort to cut off funding for the troops. Then he changed that position to one in which he would support an effort to cut off funding for the troops, place limitations on the funding. And now he's to the point where he's saying he's going to support legislation that cuts all funding for the troops. He's done a complete 180 from where he was, in five months.

I think that is irresponsible. I think he cannot make the basic fundamental decisions that have to be made, with respect to the nation's security, given everything that's at stake in the war on terror and what we're doing in Iraq and with 140,000 American troops in the field in Iraq, in combat, every day, and call that kind of rapid changes in position anything other than irresponsible.

Q Well, serious people can have disagreements over serious things, and this is certainly a serious thing. Are you saying it's irresponsible to disagree with this administration on how to prosecute this war?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: No, but I -- there are members out there who didn't support the war in the first place and have been consistent over time. And that's certainly their prerogative if they want to do that.

I would say, for example, that there's a problem of consistency, if you will, if on the one hand, you vote unanimously to confirm Dave Petraeus as the new commanding general in Iraq, and then try to pass resolutions that deny him the resources he said during the course of his confirmation hearings he had to have in order to accomplish his mission. That's the proposition that we've seen now develop in the Senate, where they did, in fact, vote unanimously -- not one single negative vote on confirming him for that post, but then sending him out to take on this major assignment, turn right around and try to adopt legislation that, in effect, would tie his hands.

Q How long can this standoff go on before the combat units start to run out of money?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, the way it will work, the Defense Department has some flexibility, in terms of reprogramming and so forth, but it begins to bite fairly early on. I mean, the concerns that have been expressed by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs and by Pete Schoomaker, who is the retiring Chief of Staff of the Army, that if we don't get money flowing here shortly, say by the end of this month, it will begin to have an impact. What happens is, you have to pull money out of other accounts in order to fund the forces in combat, but it affects everything from training and readiness here at home of units before they deploy; it affects our work of our depots that are heavily involved in refurbishing equipment that's been heavily used and needs to be refurbished before it can be used again. It begins to have a significant impact in a relatively short period of time on the forces.

And again, remember, we asked for this over two months ago. It is an urgent supplemental; it needs to be passed right away. Instead, it's become a vehicle, if you will, for the other party to try to load a bunch of provisions on it that we think are unwise.

Q If the President has to choose between funding the war and a timetable for withdrawal, what happens? What does he do?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, the President has the --

Q I mean, obviously, I know he's going to veto it the first time around --

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Yes, he will.

Q -- but what happens after that?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I think the Congress will pass clean legislation. I think there are enough Democrats on the other side of the aisle who they may support the provisions that were written in in the House and Senate, but if they don't have the votes to override the President's veto, that they will not leave the troops in the field without the resources they need to be able to carry out their mission.

Q But what if they don't do that?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, I'm willing to bet the other way, that, in fact, they will. I don't think -- there may be some people who are so irresponsible that they wouldn't support that, but I think the fact of the matter is that the majority of Democrats on the other side of the aisle, once they've gone through the exercise and it's clear the President will veto the provisions that they want in, that they don't have the votes to override, then they will, in fact, give us the bill that's absolutely essential. I don't think that a majority of the Democrats in the Congress want to leave America's fighting forces in harm's way without the resources they need to defend themselves.

Q But a majority of Americans do want a timetable for withdrawal.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, also we've got a majority who, I think, would prefer to have us win. And there's a fundamental debate going on here, in terms of whether or not our objective in Iraq is to "withdraw," or whether our objective in Iraq is to complete the mission. And I think a majority of Americans would prefer the latter, if we can get it done.

Now, it's tough. It's no question it's a very difficult assignment. But we've got a new commander in the field, we've got a good strategy in place, and I think we will see positive results.

Q Mr. Vice President, we also have a terrible situation going on right now, and that's what I want to ask you about. How do you explain what's happening now? I mean, all last week, tens of thousands of Iraqis out in the streets chanting, "Americans go home," a bomb goes off in the parliament. Then this weekend, more Iraqis died; two big bombs go off on Saturday. You said first that we didn't need a lot of American troops there, then you say we're going to put more in and that's going to change the situation. It doesn't seem to be getting better to me.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, I think we are making progress. But the ultimate source of that, of course, is, in terms of that judgment, will be our commanders on the scene and Dave Petraeus. I don't want to underestimate the difficulty of the task, Bob. But just because it's hard doesn't mean we shouldn't do it. And of course, the enemy will do everything they can during this period of time to try to

halt progress on that, so they send in a suicide bomber into the cafeteria in the parliament.

Q Well, the bomb in the parliament, who did that? Is that -- is this part of the civil war? Is this part of the terrorists? Is it a combination of both? Do we even know what has caused this, or who has caused it?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: We don't know. My expectation is that we'll probably find out. These kinds of attacks in the past have been attributed to al Qaeda in Iraq. They're the ones, for example, who, some years ago, destroyed the U.N. facility in Baghdad. They're the ones who bombed the mosque at Samarra, these strategic strikes that are aimed at trying to foment strife.

So I would expect we will find out who did it in this case. Unfortunately, one member of parliament was killed, obviously. But just because it's difficult or complicated doesn't mean the United States should withdraw, or that we should give up the task. Of course it's hard. This is a very difficult assignment. But it's absolutely essential that we get it right. There's an awful lot riding on it, not only in Iraq, but in terms of the efforts we're making in that part of the world to deal with this global war on terror.

It is a global conflict. This week we had attacks in Casablanca and Algiers, in Algiers by a group, an announced affiliate of al Qaeda. We've seen attacks from New York and Washington, all the way around to Jakarta and Bali in Indonesia. And we've got millions of people in that part of the world who have signed on to fight the good fight, people like President Musharraf in Pakistan and Karzai in Afghanistan and hundreds of thousands who have signed on with the security services, millions who voted, all based on the proposition that the United States is going to lead the way in conducting this fight against this evil ideology. And if we now decide Iraq is too tough and we're going to bail out, what happens to all of those folks who have signed on out there? Are they going to have any confidence at all that the United States is going to stay and complete the mission?

Q Let me ask you, because it leads me to this question, Mr. Vice President, you have, throughout this war, been optimistic about how things were going. Two years ago, you told Larry King, "I think they're in the last throes, if you will, of the insurgency." What did you base that on at that time? Because there were many people had a totally different view of what was happening, and it brings us down to where we are now. I mean, why should people believe you now when so many times in the past, statements from this administration have proved to be incorrect?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, partly we have to respond to questions from the press, and we do the best we can with what we know at the time. My statement at the time that you referenced was geared specifically to the fact that we had just had an election in Iraq where some 12 million people defied the car bombers and the assassins, and for the first time, participated in a free election.

And we had three elections in 2005 in Iraq, set up a provisional government, then we had a ratification of a brand new constitution, and then elections under that constitution of the new government, the new government that's in place now.

I still think in the broad sweep of history, those will have been major turning points in the war in Iraq. I do believe we can win in Iraq. I think it is a worthy cause. I think it's absolutely essential that we prevail, and I think the United States of America, at the beginning of the 21st century, is perfectly

capable of winning this fight against these people and setting up and establishing an Iraq, a democratic government that can defend itself. That's basically our mission. We need to be able to do it there.

And there might have been a time in our history when we could retreat behind our oceans and not worry about what was happening in the Middle East -- in Iraq or Afghanistan or Yemen or someplace else. But remember what happened in Afghanistan. In Afghanistan, we were involved in the 1980s, supported the Mujahideen against the Soviets, the Soviets withdrew in '89, everybody walked away from Afghanistan. In short order, they had a civil war. The Taliban came to power. It became a safe haven for al Qaeda. Osama bin Laden moved in. They set up training camps and trained 20,000 terrorists in the late '90s, some of whom came here and killed 3,000 Americans on 9/11.

But what happens over there is absolutely vital from the standpoint of U.S. security, and we no longer have the luxury of turning our back on that part of the world and ignoring what happened. We have to prevail in Iraq, and we can.

Q Let's take a break here. We'll come back and talk about this and some other things in a minute, after this break.

* * * * *

Q We're back now with Vice President Cheney. Mr. Vice President, we were talking about credibility. The Attorney General is going to Capitol Hill this week to testify before the Judiciary Committee. There are questions about whether he has been truthful about what's been going on in his Justice Department. Again, it comes back to this question of credibility. We have the Attorney General; we have optimistic statements about the war in Iraq; your own top aide, Scooter Libby, was convicted of perjury. Does this administration have a credibility problem?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, I don't think so, Bob. I think, obviously, we've got issues we need to work through. The Attorney General will be doing that this week, with respect to the U.S. attorney question, and the Justice Department. But you do the best you can with what you've got, obviously. And I think that, on reflection, that, indeed, the record of the President and his administration will stand up well to scrutiny.

Q But let me just get to the Attorney General, here. A new story this weekend, new emails show the department was selecting candidates to replace U.S. attorneys -- which, of course, is certainly the President's right, these are political appointees -- a year before they were -- the people in office were dismissed.

Now, before that, they had said just the opposite. They had said these U.S. attorneys were being replaced for performance reasons. That seems to be a direct contradiction, and -- can the Attorney General continue to serve and be effective when there are questions about he can't seem to get his story straight about what's going on in his own department?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, Al's going to have the opportunity, I think Wednesday, sometime this week, as you mentioned, to go before the Congress and testify to all these matters. He's a good man. I

have every confidence in him; the President has every confidence in him. But he'll have an opportunity to go address these particular issues.

Q It sounds like you're leaving it to him to fix this problem.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, as Vice President, I don't know anything about the particular problem you're talking about. I mean, this took place inside the Justice Department. The one who needs to answer to that and lay out on the record the specifics of what transpired is the Attorney General, and he'll do so.

Q I want to also ask you about Scooter Libby. He was your close friend, I assume is still your close friend, after he was found guilty of perjury in connection with the outing of the CIA agent Valerie Plame. You expressed disappointment in the verdict. You said you had no comment and would have no comment. But the prosecutor said the case left a cloud over the Vice Presidency. I'd just like to ask you, first, have you talked to Scooter Libby since the trial?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I have not.

Q You have not. Why not?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, there hasn't been occasion to do so. But I have enormous regard for the man. I believe deeply in Scooter Libby. He's one of the most dedicated public servants I've ever worked with, and I think this is a great tragedy.

But I'm also constrained not to discuss it. It's still pending in the courts. The matter will be appealed. And as I said the other day when the verdict was handed down, I'm not going to comment on it.

Q Well, I mean -- but as your friend, wouldn't you even call and express your regrets? I mean, I am surprised to hear you say that.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I just -- I haven't had occasion to do that.

Q Do you, in any way, feel responsible for what happened to him?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Bob, I'm simply not going to get into the case. And I think it would be inappropriate for me to do so.

Q I ask you that because, as you well know, Senator Schumer said that he was the fall guy for you.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Bob, the answer is the same. (Laughter.) You can ask, but you'll get the same answer.

Q Some of the people -- you and I, of course, have known each other since the Ford administration --

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Exactly, we have.

Q -- when you were President Ford's Chief of Staff. Shortly before he died, Bob Woodward revealed that President Ford had said that you had become more pugnacious and had developed a fever about what he called the threat of terrorism. He suggested you had sort of changed. Do you feel, Mr. Vice President, that you have changed since those days?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I don't know that I've changed. I'm certainly older than I was when we worked together in the White House, or you covered us in the White House, 30 years ago. No, I think the thing that some people mistake for, or categorize as "Cheney's changed" sort of analysis, is 9/11. And 9/11 did have, I think, a remarkable impact on the threat to the United States on what we were required to deal with as an administration. I deal with it every day. I look at the intelligence reports every day. Just before I came down here, I went through an intelligence briefing this morning.

The fact is that the threat to the United States now of a 9/11 occurring with a group of terrorists armed not with airline tickets and box cutters, but with a nuclear weapon in the middle of one of our own cities is the greatest threat we face. It's a very real threat. It's something that we have to worry about and defeat every single day.

And we've worked hard now, for going on six years, to do exactly that. We've been successful at defending against further attacks. But it's not easy. It's not dumb luck. It doesn't just happen. It's because we've got a lot of good people who spend a lot of time, devote their entire professional lives, if you will, to this mission.

Now, when you deal with that every day, you can't help but be very serious about the enterprise that we're involved in. And right now, it's my job to be one of those people who worries about that.

Q Senator Reid, who you mentioned earlier, the Democratic leader, said that he thought that President Bush had become more isolated over Iraq than Richard Nixon was during Watergate. You were around during those days.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I was.

Q Do you think that's true?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I do not. I think that's a ridiculous notion.

Q It's a ridiculous notion?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Yes.

Q Do you feel you have become more isolated?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I don't think so. I spend as much time as I can, get out and do other things --

at home in Wyoming, or yesterday I managed to go shopping with my daughter for a birthday present for granddaughters. But I obviously spend most of my time on the job.

Q Mr. Vice President, how's your health?

THE VICE PRESIDENT: It's good.

Q It's very nice to talk to you this morning. I hope we'll see you again soon.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, I enjoy doing the show, Bob.

Q All right, thank you very much.

END 9:39 A.M. EDT

Return to this article at:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/04/20070415.html>



CLICK HERE TO PRINT