

By Joe Hagan

From [New York Magazine](#) | Original Article

The former vice-president has a plan to ensure his legacy: the political future of his daughter Liz.

When Dick Cheney took the stage on February 18 at the Conservative Political Action Conference, where thousands of right-wingers had gathered to speechify, debate, and hone their message, it seemed just like old times. The surprise appearance of the former vice-president was the idea of his older daughter, Liz, the blonde and biting critic of President Obama who was scheduled to make her own star turn at the conference. The details of the stealth operation were known only to the Cheney family and a small circle of aides and shared, says one person involved, on “a need-to-know basis.”

Liz arrived alone at the Washington, D.C., Marriott Hotel, while her sister, Mary, spirited their father through a side door and up to a room on the eighth floor, his undisclosed location, a short walk from the main stage. With 45 minutes until showtime, Liz met them in the room, where she practiced her speech in front of her father. The message: The president is dangerous and unwise, a fact even her 9-year-old daughter can plainly see, but conservatives are now resurgent, a righteous minority on the rise.

“They’ll try to attack us, and they’ll play dirty,” she warned. “They’ll try to silence us ... President Obama, you will never silence us.”

Her father was pleased and proud. It had been a long and fruitful year for the Cheneys, whose ubiquity on the national scene had surprised members of both parties. By the end of the Bush administration, Dick Cheney had become one of the least popular politicians in America (approval rating: 13 percent), and it was expected that once out of office he would, as he put it, “go fishing” and wait for history to prove him right or wrong. But it quickly became clear that Dick couldn’t sit on his hands—and neither could Liz. She has spent nearly every day since her father’s departure from the White House attempting to extricate him from the jaws of infamy by turning current events into a referendum on his policies. Casting herself as his defense lawyer, she has appeared on television 40-odd times in the last year. And she’s conducting the research for a Dick Cheney memoir, a book she persuaded her father to write.

“She’s more combative and she would rather he answer more critics than his own instincts might suggest,” says Barton Gellman, the author of *Angler: The Cheney Vice Presidency*. “He doesn’t care what people think of him; she does.”

During the Bush years, Liz Cheney became her father's close adviser, fighting proxy battles for him inside the State Department. By the time Barack Obama was elected, her views on U.S. foreign policy had become even more hawkish than her father's—amplified, say associates, by bitterness over Dick Cheney's treatment in the press and by fellow Republicans, including former Bush officials.

"They were hurt," says Alan Simpson, the former Wyoming senator and friend of the Cheneys since the sixties. "Liz especially. There's always the feeling of the unfairness of the treatment of her dad. That would drive a person."

It's driving her straight into the family business. As she builds a platform for herself with a political-action group called Keep America Safe, Republican Party strategists are already taking her measure for a congressional run as early as 2012. The same people who alighted on Sarah Palin, including *Weekly Standard* editor Bill Kristol, are hoping she can tap the anxieties of the so-called security-mom base that Palin helped to energize.

“She’s likely to seek office in Wyoming or Virginia,” says Karl Rove, the former Bush political adviser and a man who knows something about the underestimated children of political families.

But it will require a serious campaign—and a bit of well-orchestrated political theater—to pull it off. So while Liz prepared to go onstage at CPAC, Mary snuck their father into the VIP holding area, where the Cheney entourage quietly fielded BlackBerry messages about the rumor that the former vice-president was in the building. Word of his appearance had been artfully leaked to friends at Fox News, prompting Greta Van Susteren, host of *On the Record*, to post on Twitter: “just got email from fox colleague that her father vp cheney to walk her on stage.”

The fuse was lit. As Liz spoke, the crowd roared with expectation, hanging on her every word but also looking over her shoulder, until finally: “There is one man in particular we all know who certainly has taught me what it means to have the courage of your convictions,” Liz said, a grin spreading across her face. “You know who I’m talking about.”

And out came Dick, a bit thinner than anyone remembered, his hair whiter, with a slight hobble, but beaming with delight at his rock-star reception. As the crowd chanted “Run, Dick, run!,” he looked like he could hardly believe how much fun he was having. But he reminded the crowd that he was there for his daughter: “There comes a time when those of us of our generation need to move on” to make room for the next generation. After his speech, Dick Cheney headed home, while Liz stayed and signed autographs.

Five days after the conference, the former vice-president suffered his fifth heart attack. Liz told reporters that he was fine and following doctors’ orders. It’s no easy thing to be calm in the face of such health scares, but Liz and Mary have been dealing with them for most of their lives. Their father had his first heart attack in 1978, when he was just 37. That was the summer of his first run for Congress, when Liz and Mary campaigned with him, wearing HONK FOR CHENEY sandwich boards and waving American flags from the family RV.

By that point, the girls had already begun to view their father as a historical figure. As chief of staff to Gerald Ford, Cheney had worked seven days a week, bringing his daughters to the West Wing on Saturdays to let them watch cartoons (and eat the candy they found in Donald Rumsfeld’s secretary’s desk). White House photographer and Cheney-family friend David Kennerly teased them and snapped photos at Camp David.

History is a theme for the Cheneys. Lynne, who holds a doctorate in literature and writes children’s history books (*America: A Patriotic Primer*), is presently working on a biography of James Madison. Dick gravitates to military and war histories and took the girls, when they were young, on summer trips to Civil War sites. In 2000, when Cheney was elected vice-president,

Liz and Mary commissioned a cartographer to create a map depicting the route taken by their great-great-grandfather's Union regiment. Their father hung it in his White House office.

Through the years, Liz recorded numerous interviews with her father for posterity. She sat in on about 30 of the 40 hours of interviews with Cheney's official biographer, Stephen Hayes, a writer for *The Weekly Standard* whom Liz personally vetted before introducing him to her father. When Hayes pressed record on two tape recorders, Hayes recounts, Liz Cheney turned on two tape recorders of her own.

Hayes says she frequently interjected, prompting Cheney to recall certain anecdotes. When Liz reminded her father about a fabled makeout spot where he used to take her mother during their courtship days in Casper, Wyoming, he surprised her with recollections of another place he liked better. "It was darker," he said. "You could get around much better." Liz rolled her eyes: "You guys can talk all about that later."

When Dick Cheney left office in January 2009, it appeared he'd lost the historical

argument—the legacy of botched Middle East warfare, legalized waterboarding, secret detentions, and domestic wiretapping hanging around his neck like a millstone. His final months in office were unhappy ones, and he told friends he was looking forward to retirement. But just two weeks into Obama’s presidency, he launched himself back into the national dialogue, warning of the “high probability” of nuclear or biological attack if his policies were softened. Sitting by Cheney’s side during the first fateful interview was Liz.

Cheney’s appearance stunned colleagues, especially former Bush aides, who didn’t like the idea of him as the face of the administration’s legacy. It seemed preposterous to think Cheney could somehow escape the bonds of the Bush years, but his unwillingness to cede any ground turned out to be a political masterstroke. “At the end of the day, the debate on national-security policy, removed from Afghanistan and Iraq, is a live debate,” says Steve Schmidt, the senior adviser for Senator John McCain’s presidential bid. “It’s not over yet. Vice-President Cheney’s record isn’t going to be judged in isolation.”

The Cheneys are now a stripped-down operation: Dick Cheney keeps an office at the conservative think tank American Enterprise Institute, where he has an aide, Peter Long, helping him with research. But mostly he works from home. On weekdays, Liz leaves her small children with a nanny, so she can work on the memoir either at her house or at her parents’. When her father has something to say about Obama, the former vice-president takes a break from the book to prepare a political attack, feeding statements to his preferred media conduit, Politico.com. Liz, who advises him on his statements, serves as the media go-between. “She is a conduit of information to and from her family,” says a former Cheney staffer.

Setting the Cheney record straight is going to be a long battle on multiple fronts. The first, of course, is the book. Mary Matalin, a longtime family friend and adviser, is the publisher, having acquired it for the conservative imprint she runs for Simon & Schuster. According to Matalin, Liz “helps pull material together for him, provides outlines of key topics, supervises research projects, and helps in the drafting.”

“It’s going to be Dick Cheney in full,” promises Alan Simpson. “And Liz will assure that it is. It will be a hell of a book. She is right there with him because she can recall things that he couldn’t.”

But the medium where Liz has proved herself to be invaluable to the family cause is television. She has been waging a scorched-earth campaign to characterize Obama as “misguided” and “dangerous” and defend her father as a man of backbone in a world of wafflers and wimps. Unabashed and stunningly direct, Liz called Obama’s Nobel Prize a “farce” and the Democrats’ attacks on her father’s policies “incredibly irresponsible” and “appalling.” Most recently, she released a political ad attacking the “Al Qaeda 7,” seven unidentified Justice Department lawyers who previously represented terrorist suspects, which she equates with treason.

What inspired her anti-Obama campaign was the administration’s release of secret CIA memos

detailing the legal rationale, approved by Dick Cheney, for waterboarding, which left open the possibility of criminal prosecutions for former Bush officials and CIA operatives. The Cheneys were apoplectic at the “unprecedented” move, and maybe even afraid of legal blowback, having already been stung by the prosecution of Cheney’s former chief of staff Scooter Libby, who became ensnared in the CIA-leak investigation of the Valerie Plame affair.

In April 2009, on Liz’s first major TV appearance of the Obama era, MSNBC’s Norah O’Donnell grilled her about her father’s role in authorizing what she called legal torture of terrorist suspects. Cheney could hardly mask her contempt. “Well, it wasn’t torture, Norah, so that’s not the right way to lay out the argument,” she snapped. As O’Donnell, mouth agape at Cheney’s responses (“Listen to yourself, Liz!”), grew more and more exasperated, Cheney only got more defiant, arguing that the near drowning of suspects was practically humane, when you think about it, and delivering the Cheney-brand coup de grâce: a cold, brutalist vision meant to silence all comers.

“If Al Qaeda captures an American, they cut his head off,” she said. “So I think it’s very important for us to sort of take a step back from the emotion of this and say we needed to be able to get evidence about imminent attacks.”

Cheney’s blonde coif and genial smile ostensibly made her the kinder, gentler face of Dick

Cheney, a soft rebranding of the man some people called Darth Vader. But rather than distance herself from her father's controversial actions, she embraces them, even revels in them. She takes issue with what she calls the conventional wisdom about Dick Cheney (that he had sold the war on false premises and bent the law to conduct a shadow government in the wake of 9/11), and posits an alternate universe in which Obama's election wasn't really a rebuke of the previous administration at all but a large-scale refutation of reality. Iraq? "We're on the verge of winning that war, and you've got to give that credit to Dick Cheney and George Bush," she said, placing her father's name before Bush's. Guantánamo? With *Weekly Standard* editor Bill Kristol and Debra Burlingame, the activist wife of a 9/11 victim, Cheney launched Keep America Safe with the twin goals of keeping Gitmo open and portraying Obama's early desire to close it as dangerously weak on terror.

Despite the fact that Obama has become, in some sense, a war president, the Cheneys' attacks have had a lingering political potency. The administration has "given the Cheneys an open field," says Thomas Wilner, a prominent lawyer in the fight to close Gitmo. "Cheney says these things which are demonstrably wrong, and [Obama] doesn't go rebut it, and people believe them. It's a great mistake, I think."

Liberal critics have been outraged that the TV networks give the Cheneys so much on-air real estate for their crusade. Fox is a regular pulpit, of course, but Liz is also all over NBC, where she happens to be social friends with *Meet the Press* host David Gregory (whose wife worked with Liz's husband at the law firm Latham & Watkins), family friends with Justice Department reporter Pete Williams (Dick Cheney's press aide when he was secretary of Defense), and neighborhood friends with *Morning Joe* co-host Mika Brzezinski, daughter of Carter-administration national-security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski. When Mika criticized Dick Cheney on her show last year, the former vice-president

sent her a box of chocolate cupcakes.

Lawrence O'Donnell, an MSNBC pundit who engaged in a particularly testy shouting match on *Good Morning America* with Liz Cheney over waterboarding, says the networks have allowed her a high degree of control over her appearances. "She had up to that point been completely accustomed to having interviews go her way and ceded on her terms," he observes. "She has been careful to make sure that the interviews worked that way."

And yet, connections aside, Liz Cheney is also remarkably effective as a television pundit, a right-wing messenger designed to infuriate the left, even her name a liberal bugaboo. She inspires hundreds of angry e-mails to MSNBC when she appears on its programs. Joe Scarborough, host of *Morning Joe*, told me he personally finds her "too shrill," but he's impressed by her spine. "She doesn't back away from unpopular positions," he says, "and she also doesn't immediately swat away questions about whether death panels are contained in the health-care bill or Barack Obama was born in America. She gives absolutely no quarter."

In fact, no issue is too small for Liz Cheney to deny to liberal detractors. When Chris Matthews, a vocal critic of Dick Cheney, pointed out that the Cheneys pronounced their last name "Chay-nee" on TV instead of "Chee-nee," as the name is actually pronounced by the family back in Wyoming, Liz Cheney went on MSNBC the next day to declare Matthews misinformed. "I pronounce it 'Chay-nee,'" she said with a genial smile. Later, however, a clip of her mother on the Diane Rehm radio show in 2007 appeared on the Internet: "Dick's family always has said 'Chee-nee,'" she said. "Most people say 'Chay-nee.' I think it's out of politeness."

But for Liz Cheney, it didn't matter: "Chay-nee" isn't just a name anymore, it's a political brand.

The Cheneys all live within blocks of one another in and around the affluent Washington suburb of McLean, Virginia, where Liz Cheney resides with her husband and five children. Liz's friends say she sets the bar for all-American normality: She watches *Mad Men* and *24* on TV, drives an SUV, attends Girl Scout meetings, and is frequently spotted on the sidelines of soccer fields, trading gossip with people like Terry McAuliffe, Washington

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reporter Glenn Kessler, and other power players whose kids go to the Country Day School or the Potomac School. Her friends often point to her children as proof of her humility. "I think when you have that many children pulling on your pant leg and demanding a refill on the sippy cup, you come down to size pretty quickly," observes Pete Williams.

It's a well-honed political image that is more or less true, save for the power, privilege, and issues of national security: When Liz outfitted her dad's office with toys to occupy her kids when they pay a visit to grandpa, the office was an undisclosed location meant to protect the line of

succession in case a dirty bomb blew up the capital and killed the president.

People who have known them for years describe the Cheney family as unfailingly tight-knit, bound by their insular life together in the 40-year bubble of Dick's career. In all things, they work as a focused political unit. "If you give them a choice of ten people to hang out with, they'll pick their own family every time," says Kennerly.

"Honestly, they're like a Korean family," says another person with ties to the Cheneys. "They actually sit around, the four of them, and come to a corporate decision."

This spring, Dick and daughter Mary will roll out a new consulting firm called Yellowstone Associates, exploiting Dick's ample Rolodex of energy-industry chieftains and Middle East dignitaries.

Growing up as the daughter of a Washington power broker, Liz Cheney was less Chee-nee and more Chay-nee, not nearly as interested in fishing and hunting in Wyoming as her sister, Mary, would become. “She was impressive even as a younger kid: bright, solid, not quirky or flighty,” says D. J. Gribbin, a family friend who walked to school with Liz in Bethesda in the late seventies, adding that she wasn’t “subject to the whims of fashion.”

Liz attended McLean High School, where she was captain of the cheerleading team, class of 1984. She rarely got into trouble, though she did once take Dick’s prized sports car for a spin against his wishes and wrecked it. It was a period, according to Pete Williams, when she was “testing the bounds of freedom.”

“She called his personal assistant asking her to soften the old man up before he got home, so it wouldn’t come as a huge shock,” he says.

Evidently crashing the car is a family tradition: It was after a 16-year-old Mary Cheney crashed her parents' car, according to her memoir, that she confessed to her parents that she was gay. Liz clearly struggled with her sister's sexuality. In 1991, the year gay-rights activists were threatening to out Mary, Liz approached family friend and Cheney State Department ally Richard Armitage for his opinion: Was homosexuality a function of nature or nurture? When Armitage said he believed it was genetic, Cheney seemed relieved. (A spokesperson for Cheney denies this conversation took place.)

At Colorado College, her mother's alma mater, Liz felt outnumbered by liberals but didn't bend to their views—a point of family pride. “Her mom was proud of the fact that Liz was very engaged, espousing her worldview and what was best for America, even in a context where most listeners wouldn't have shared her worldview,” says Gribbin. Her 125-page senior thesis, “The Evolution of Presidential War Powers,” tackled the subject that had fascinated her father since Nixon's fall and would consume him in the aftermath of 9/11. She argued that presidents had virtually unchecked powers during times of war, foreshadowing the legal advice of Bush-administration lawyer John Yoo, who wrote the legal memos justifying waterboarding.

Liz did meet one like-minded person at school: her future husband, Philip Perry, an English major from the Bay Area who was headed to Cornell Law School. Liz herself was on her way to Eastern Europe, hired by Armitage to help develop private enterprise in Eastern Bloc countries after the fall of the Berlin Wall for the State Department. Cheney, then the secretary of Defense under President George H.W. Bush, asked Armitage to keep an eye on her. “The father called up and said, ‘You know, she's got a will of her own, [but] she does have my name, so I'd appreciate it if you'd vet where she's going,’” recounts Armitage.

For security purposes, Liz used her mother's maiden name, traveling as Liz Vincent, and a friend says she was sometimes disappointed when security decided that she couldn't travel to certain locations. "She wanted to be judged on her professional contributions, but she was mindful of who she was," says Heather Conley, a former State Department colleague.

After Bill Clinton was elected in 1992, Liz left government and married Perry in Wyoming, where the wedding party went snowmobiling in Yellowstone. Soon thereafter, the couple moved to Illinois, where Liz entered law school at the University of Chicago. (Barack Obama was a professor of constitutional law there at the time, but the two never met.) Midway through, she gave birth to Dick's first grandchild. Around the same time, Dick Cheney was testing the waters for a presidential run in 1996. While Lynne and Mary were ambivalent, concerned for Mary's privacy and the impact of her sexual orientation on Dick's prospects among Republicans, Liz was "gung ho," Dick told Stephen Hayes. "She was out in the backyard painting yard signs."

But Dick Cheney opted out. Instead, he joined the energy company Halliburton as the CEO and by the end of the decade left the company with a reported \$20 million package. The Cheneys were now wealthy. Dick and Lynne bought a large plot of land in McLean—not far from his granddaughters' preschool—on which to build the family estate, the nerve center for the next phase in Cheney history.

The Cheney family story, rooted in a romanticized Wyoming culture of plainspoken simplicity and rock-ribbed independence, has long been that it is a matriarchy. Lynne is the family anchor and social navigator, keeping tabs on her husband's errant staffers, line-editing his speeches, and going on TV when Mary's sexuality becomes grist for a political movement. Referred to simply as "Mrs." by former campaign aides (and "Boss" by Dick Cheney, who is cast for comic effect as the family cook), she embodies the family's prairie-style feminism, the brassy, defensive exterior and stand-by-your-man fortitude, which she passed on to both her daughters.

While Liz was graced with the social composure of her mother, she has always been her father's intellectual heiress, ambitious and eager. "She idolizes her father," says an acquaintance. "She is in thrall to him." As Cheney prepared to reenter politics in 2000 after an absence of eight years, Liz became an increasingly important figure in his life. When Bush chose Cheney to be his running mate, Cheney hired Kathleen Shanahan, a friend of the Bush family, to run his side of the campaign. When they met, the first thing he told her was, "My daughters are going to be involved, and we're going to be a unit."

Liz became his aide in debate prep against Al Gore's running mate, Joe Lieberman, working with Paul Wolfowitz and Republican adman Stuart Stevens. By the time it was over, the story goes, Liz had supplanted the more powerful men in the debate sessions, casually directing them by their first names and training her father to distill his answers into more accessible language. "Liz was very good at taking his immediately instinctive answers and making them real," recalls Shanahan, describing how Liz would ask her father to imagine explaining his foreign-policy prescriptions to his country cousin back in Wyoming. (Another former Bush-administration official close to the Cheneys says this is just part of the pass-the-torch

mythology: “She was not a senior adviser to him on this.”)

After the election, the Perry began to disappear from her name in the press, and she became known exclusively as Liz Cheney. She embraced a new role as the point person to sell the GOP as advocates for women, telling a reporter she found it “offensive when people in either party talk about ‘women’s issues,’” a phrase that she said “denigrates women” by assuming they’re less interested in guns and taxes.

The events of 9/11 transformed the Cheneys. Larry Lindsey, the former director of Bush’s National Economic Council, was in the White House bunker that day with the vice-president. “That experience really changes your view of the world,” he says. “You understand the concept of what it is to be a secure nation. I don’t agree with him on everything, but I understand where he’s coming from.”

The following year, with arguments for the Iraq War under way in Congress, Liz was appointed deputy assistant secretary of State for Near Eastern affairs, where she worked under her old boss Richard Armitage, then Colin Powell’s deputy secretary of State. She was given a wide berth to run a new aid program called the Middle Eastern Partnership Initiative. On the surface, it was a typical State Department program meant to foster goodwill overseas, but Cheney and her allies saw it as part of the burgeoning “Freedom Agenda,” the pro-democracy banner of neoconservatism.

Though outwardly genial and easygoing, Liz inspired suspicion among her colleagues, who considered her the eyes and ears of the vice-president in the department. Her job gave her a level of clearance for CIA intelligence that allowed her to have conversations with her father about national security, and Liz played information arbiter in internecine government combat. When David Wurmser, a special assistant to John Bolton at the State Department, was asked to fly to Kuwait on the eve of the Iraq War to brief Army general Jay Garner on the search for WMDs, Liz Cheney called Wurmser to warn him that her boss Armitage was going to block his efforts. “She would be very discreet,” says Wurmser. “There was clearly an effort to stop [Bolton], and she thought that was necessary to convey.”

Indeed, as the search for weapons of mass destruction fizzled, Liz’s relationship with Armitage, who was critical of the administration’s case for war, grew tense. At one point, Liz asked Armitage why State Department officials were leaking negative information about her father in the press. “My response was, ‘There’s no one leaking. They’re talking on the record,’” he recalls.

While Karl Rove admits in his new memoir that Bush would probably never have invaded Iraq had he known there were no WMDs, the backup rationale of liberating Iraq was good enough for the Cheneys. For Liz, the virtue of the cause was only proved by how unpopular it was, casting the Cheneys as a virtuous minority against the visionless masses. “She almost thrives in

an atmosphere where the overall philosophy is discredited and she is a lonely voice,” says a State Department official who worked with her. Still, she was increasingly frustrated by her father’s treatment in the press—and his somewhat cartoonish reputation as a snarling, power-hungry operator willing to bend laws to execute his foreign-policy fantasies.

Liz was galvanized by the Bush-Cheney win in 2004, seeing it as a powerful affirmation of the Cheney cause. In 2005, she won a promotion to principal deputy assistant secretary of State for Near Eastern affairs. Her flagship program, Forum for the Future, was to be held in Bahrain in November of that year, with Cheney negotiating an agreement among key Middle Eastern states on democratic principles.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice planned a secret detour to Baghdad during the trip to Bahrain. And Cheney saw her chance to finally visit the country her father had invaded. According to Glenn Kessler’s book on Rice, *The Confidante*, Liz insisted on coming along, strong-arming her female Secret Service agent, gamely donning a helmet and body armor, and hopping on a helicopter. Her friend Jim Wilkinson, Rice’s then–senior adviser, saw Cheney’s move as “courageous and the right thing to do,” but others on that trip did not. “She was full of herself and full of her sense of being the vice-president’s daughter,” a critic recounts.

The next day, when she returned to Bahrain from the fortified Green Zone in Baghdad, the Secret Service was furious that she had evaded them. Her parents were reportedly surprised as well. Late to her own conference, Cheney found that chaos had erupted while she was gone: Representatives from Egypt were departing in a huff, unhappy with the resolution Cheney had drafted in advance. Cheney's critics saw her as naïve and unprepared, though her allies say the Egyptians were never going to cooperate anyway.

With conditions in Iraq deteriorating, the Bush White House began to pivot away from pro-democracy rhetoric and toward diplomacy with Iran and North Korea, marginalizing Cheney and the neocons. Liz saw the writing on the wall, and left the State Department to have her fifth baby, whom she named Richard. But her identity had been forged in the ideological battle at State. People who knew her in the nineties say they didn't recognize her by the time the administration ended—the same thing people said of her father, whose hard-right conservatism, contained while he worked for more centrist Republicans, seemed unleashed by 9/11. “She became her father's daughter,” says Armitage.

As his vice-presidency drew to a close, Dick Cheney began to appear to friends as quieter, grimmer, angrier. There was speculation that health problems had affected his temperament. Tom Ricks, the author of *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq*, says several congressmen recalled visiting Cheney and observing how “he sat and stared at the table and didn't seem to acknowledge their presence.” (In 2008, doctors discovered that Cheney was experiencing a recurrence of atrial fibrillation, and he underwent a procedure to restore his heart to a normal rhythm.) Meanwhile, a rift between the Cheney and Bush camps over Scooter Libby's role in the CIA-leak investigation was rendering Cheney less and less powerful.

Cheney's role had traditionally been "taking arrows so the boss doesn't," according to one former Bush official, but the Libby affair was causing those arrows to hit the boss.

In the summer of 2008, as the presidential campaigns got under way, Liz was the one to signal displeasure in the Cheney universe, arguing at a conference that the Bush administration's approach to the Middle East was "misguided" and that "this administration has gotten it right when we have been bold, when we have been decisive, when we have been focused, when we have used our military force when necessary," leaving open to interpretation who "we" was.

Cheney told colleagues that he was going to retire quietly. "He used to tell people, 'After this is over, you're not going to see Dick Cheney,'" recounts the former Bush official. " 'I'm going to be off fishing somewhere.' "

Cheney's supporters have always pointed to his lack of interest in pursuing higher office—saying he'd never run for president after Bush—as proof of his purity and absence of ego. But Cheney is not exactly without further political ambition. In a dual appearance with his daughter on Fox News last summer, sitting by a crackling fire at the National Press Club and chatting with Greta Van Susteren, Dick Cheney officially established his daughter as a potential candidate. "Well, I'm of course a proud father, but I'd love to see her run for office someday," he said. "I think she's got a lot to offer, and it's been a great career for me, and if she has the interest, and I think she does, then I would like to see her embark upon a career in politics."

As early as the 2000 election, Liz was being told by Bush and Cheney advisers like Stuart Stevens that she could be president one day. She laughed it off, but starting last summer, she seemed to draft an informal outline of her future. On an appearance on Fox News in late May, she recalled the coalition that Ronald Reagan built in the late seventies, roping together the Republicans, independents, and centrist Democrats, the “three prongs of the stool he was able to put together as a majority.” With Obama in office, she declared, “it will become possible for us again to build that kind of coalition,” implicitly marking Obama as another Carter.

While Keep America Safe is primarily focused on Gitmo, it is also transparently a testing ground for Liz Cheney’s political career. When she created the pac with Bill Kristol, he advised her to hire two former aides to John McCain’s presidential campaign, including Michael Goldfarb, a 29-year-old political consultant who has become her adviser. Goldfarb, who claims that he was the one to recommend Sarah Palin to Kristol as a national candidate, says they are running Keep America Safe “very much like a campaign.”

“I was excited about Palin; I’m more excited about Liz,” he says. “The same sort of excitement you get when you hear her father, except she’s this petite blonde with five kids ... There’s just something about her. You see that response across the activist portion of the party. It’s the response you saw to Palin ... She gets people worked up. She connects to people. She is in harmony with where the base seems to be. She’s right on the issues.

“You have a little crush on her,” he gushes. “It’s hard not to.”

Liz will be a speaker at the Southern Republican Leadership Conference in New Orleans this April, along with Sarah Palin. Her advocates say she trumps Palin on substance. “If you put Sarah Palin and Liz Cheney in a circle of 100 journalists, asking anything they wish, I’ll tell you, pal, you don’t need a compass to figure that one out,” says Alan Simpson.

Larry Lindsey, who worked with Liz on Fred Thompson’s failed presidential campaign, suggests Liz trumps her father as well. “I think she’s a better politician than her dad,” he says. “She’s really outgoing, connects with people, very quick with a response, which the vice-president often wasn’t.”

Cheney has already mastered media messaging. Her ambition is most transparent in how carefully she avoids alienating any faction of the conservative movement, including the tea-party wing. On TV, she has danced around fringe issues like Obama's place of birth, careful not to deny the claim outright, even if it's clear she doesn't really believe it. She praised Palin's book, *Going Rogue*, even though she didn't finish it and once called the prospect of a McCain nomination "a sad day for the Republican Party."

The most-talked-about political possibility for Cheney is the Senate seat in Virginia currently held by Democrat Jim Webb. Assuming the political pendulum is swinging toward Republicans in 2012, Cheney might hope to ride national momentum in the state where she's been a resident since 1996. She could feasibly gain traction among the state's large population of active and retired military personnel, not to mention security moms.

In terms of organization and money, Liz Cheney would have access to her father's legacy financial backers. Keep America Safe is partly funded by Mel Sembler, a top donor to the Bush-Cheney campaigns and a longtime family friend who's encouraging Liz to run for Senate in Wyoming. "Wherever she wants to run," says Sembler, "I'd be happy to support her."

Like Hillary Clinton, Liz Cheney is an intensely polarizing figure, both blessed and saddled with a political brand name. “The big question is, if she runs for Senate, would Dad be a political asset on the campaign trail?” asks David Kennerly.

Several Republican operatives I spoke with said Cheney would need to define herself apart from her father. “It’s necessary to lay out your own views and values,” says Karl Rove. “She has to establish her own identity.”

Which might be difficult, as there are no instances on record where Liz has diverged from her father’s message. For her fans, of course, that’s precisely what makes her so appealing. “Dick Cheney does not waver on his core beliefs. Nor does Liz,” says Rush Limbaugh, who e-mails with Liz regularly. “She does not think in terms of defining herself. She knows who she is. She does not have to construct an image because she is genuine. It is blank slates like Obama who need to ‘define’ themselves.”

Her friend Elliott Abrams says any attempt at attacking the daughter for her father’s name will

only get opponents so far. “If you have a woman candidate and what you’re saying is, ‘Don’t pay any attention to what she’s saying, just pay attention to her father,’ it’s not going to be very long before people say, ‘What kind of crap is that? This is sexism,’” he says. “It’s a little dangerous for the Democrats if they go that route.”

The cynical view is that talk of Liz’s political future is only fodder for the rollout of Dick’s memoir, a marketing campaign to prep the news cycle for its release a year from now. The Virginia Senate seat wouldn’t exactly be easy pickings. A longtime Cheney ally and past donor told me that he would back either Ed Gillespie, the former Republican National Committee chairman, or former Virginia senator George Allen, the more prominent and proven names likely to vie for that Senate seat, before he would back Liz Cheney. And the governor of Virginia, Republican Bob McDonnell, who has an outsize influence in the state’s nomination process, barely knows the Cheneys. (Limbaugh, however, says he would back the “formidable” Cheney over Gillespie or Allen.)

But the Cheneys, ever cognizant of history, take the long view. And they seem to like a righteous campaign, even if—perhaps even especially if—the odds are against them. Liz offers her father both a way of managing his legacy and a future for his ideas. “It used to be Bush,” says a former Bush White House official. “Now it’s Liz.”

