

"Key Trend in 2008 US Presidential Campaign"

Stephen J. Yates

Thank you for getting up so early to listen to someone like me speak. I want to especially thank Dr. SaKong for inviting me to speak at this conference. I also want to thank my good friend BJ Kim for that fine introduction of which I understood nothing.

I feel very humbled when I come to regions like Asia, especially South Korea to address you on topics like North Korea and Asian Security, I feel as if you live in this neighborhood, there should be little that I can tell you that you don't already know, so I wanted to address a topic like American politics where I feel perhaps I have something more to share.

The 2008 election campaign in the United States is unprecedented in many ways. I will go into more detail about this in a moment, but we have a very competitive field in both parties. It is the 4th national campaign we have had since the tragedy of 9/11, meaning foreign policy remains very dominant in the political discourse. Even though there has been a great deal of commentary about the candidates and issues, I think you could be excused like many Americans for having questions on where this all is going. My aim today is not to predict the outcome; I could not possibly do that, but share some of the new trends that I see driving this cycle. But in the interest of full disclosure, I would say I am a partisan Republican and I hope that the Democrats lose. This is a full agenda and you are all very well informed of American affairs, but let me jump into some of the details that I see are driving the campaign.

First, some of the unprecedented circumstances of this campaign: it is unusual that someone is not claiming to be the heir to the incumbent in the race. But because of the special relationship between Vice-President Cheney and President Bush at the beginning of the administration it is clear that he would not be seeking a position in higher office. And aside from that relationship, there are many reasons why candidates from both Parties are distancing themselves from President Bush.

And I mentioned since this is an election cycle that continues to focus on counter-terrorism or the reaction to 9/11 there is a lot of discourse about foreign policy. But if you listen carefully to what the candidates are actually saying it sounds like they are talking about foreign policy but really they are talking about the domestic politics of foreign policy issues. For instance when they talk about Iraq, they tend to talk about when to bring the troops home and not really talking about what strategies are necessary to change facts on the ground. And when they talk about counter-terrorism, they really tend to talk about the tactics that will be used at home to defend against,

retaliate or avoid a terrorist attack. And the debate is really about executive versus legislative power, not necessarily about what policy needs to be implemented.

Another factor that makes this cycle different is the very early start to concentrated attention of the primary campaign. The best experts in the US would say that it is too early and that it does not matter. But the major candidates are drawing very larger crowds and have raised an amazing amount of money already in the campaign. So that means the American public is engaged but it remains unclear what they seek in the next President. Many people would suggest that because of the results of the 2006 election, that 2008 should be a good year for the Democrats. That maybe true, but there are many reasons that make 2008 more complicated than 2006.

First, in 2006 George Bush was very much an issue even though he was not standing for election. If current trends continue in 2008, no candidate will be tightly connected with George Bush. In 2006 there were a number of disgraceful scandals that hurt the Republicans so close to the Election Day. One hopes that this does not happen again.

The most extreme example, were that some districts had to go vote for a candidate who's name was on the ballot and had already be on the way to jail. Because of elections rules, voters had to write in the new name for the candidate that they supported. I am sure Korean voters are extremely well informed, but it is too much to ask for American voters to go into the ballot box and remember the name of a new candidate and write it in on the ballot. But despite these unusual circumstances, the election results still shows a nation evenly divided.

The Democratic majority in the Senate is just one vote, and the Majority in the House remains proportionately quite small. And when you look at the map of the Electoral College from 2004 and you try to imagine which of the states that George Bush won will a Democrat nominee take away, it is not so easy. Ohio and Florida are the two states that seem the most vulnerable, that the Democrats could take them away from the Republicans. But depending on the Republican nominee there also are some states that John Kerry won in 2004 that a potential nominee could take from the Democrats to the Republicans. If John McCain were a nominee, it would be hard to imagine that he would lose the state of Arizona. And Rudolph Giuliani and Mitt Romney, among some others should be evenly competitive in parts of the Northeast that George Bush was not so competitive in.

Now I will turn to some of the specifics of the candidates in the field that you have heard of. The Democratic field has a lot of candidates, Hilary Clinton, Barack Obama and John Edwards. And there is an undeclared candidacy of Al Gore who despite the fact that he is not a declared candidate consistently gets 10% of the vote in polls. In

some ways he has never been more popular being a non-politician. He is probably happier not being a candidate too.

But as you all know, at the beginning of this race it seemed it was Hilary Clinton's to lose. Barack Obama was viewed as too young and untested. John Edwards was attractive but didn't get much in the way of polls. But in some ways the comparison of Hilary Clinton to her own husband has been somewhat unflattering. While I did not personally like Bill Clinton, he had a great deal of charisma. He was a towering figure, who made you feel as if he was looking into your heart and connecting directly with you, even if he was talking about economics. He connected very well with many ethnic groups in the United States. And even though he had a bit of flamboyant lifestyle, he connected very well with the religious groups in the United States. He was the embodiment of a movement called the New-Democrats. Unfortunately for her, by comparison Hillary Clinton does not connect well with people like her husband did. She doesn't seem to have the same ease in connecting with Southern audiences and religious audiences that her husband did. And her critics seem to portray her as being too calculating and tough. She represents no new movement in American politics other than to move away from George Bush.

Barack Obama is truly an interesting figure in this race. It is unclear what movement he might represent. But he has some of the same qualities that Bill Clinton possessed and an even stronger personality. You may have noticed that he is an African-American, literally African, his father was from Africa. He was a child of mixed race, in some ways he literally embodies the best ideals America has to offer. The immigrant tradition succeeding in a new homeland, harmony among the races and an example of somebody who relied on his own abilities to rise up from humble circumstances to relative success. So without saying a word, he actually has an advantage. Unfortunately for me, because I hope the Democrats lose, he opens his mouth and he actually has some interesting things to say. It still remains too early to call, but it remains very competitive and either of these two candidates could win. And as short as six months ago few people in Washington would have predicted this.

The Republican side has many different characters. You may have seen a report last week that listed ten candidates on the stage. But the top tier in the Republican field is well known to you, I am sure.

Rudolph Giuliani, former Mayor of New York, John McCain, Senator from Arizona and Mitt Romney, former governor of Massachusetts. Each of these candidates has been pointed out in last week's debate of having referred multiple times to Ronald Reagan and never to George Bush. Part of the reason was that they were in the Ronald Reagan

Presidential Library and Nancy Reagan was in the front row looking at them. But it also reflects the reality that the Republican field is running away from President Bush and trying to go back and reclaim the glory that they felt came from the Ronald Reagan movement. And somewhat like the Democrat field, the Republican field this time also have undeclared candidates who are gaining a lot of attention.

You may have heard of Fred Thompson, the former Senator from Tennessee but now better known for the television program *Law and Order*. He is also a lawyer and despite that he is popular. He has a commanding presence; he is very tall, has a baritone voice, speaks with Southern Ease and is very smart. As I said, he has not declared his candidacy and keeps sort of toying with supporters about whether he will enter the race but he consistently commands 10% in the entire Republican polling.

Newt Gingrich, some of you have also heard of as well, is also an undeclared candidate and has said that he has an important announcement to make in September. Newt Gingrich has been involved in a nation-wide activity aimed at trying to elevate the level of political discourse to focus on the serious long-term issues. There are some well-known structural problems in American politics and governance, the health care system being one of them. And traditional party politics on both sides have failed to address this issue. And when it comes to issues of Homeland Security, Department of Defense and the so-called War on Terror there remain some structural issues about how best to align the resources in government to be effective.

Many people tend to see this race coming down to Rudolph Giuliani and John McCain on the Republican side. And they see the role of Fred Thompson or Newt Gingrich as not so much winning the nomination on their own but rather being the role of a kingmaker in endorsing one of these two candidates. The first of the leading candidates to endorse the ideas that Newt Gingrich puts forward will be probably be the one that takes the votes he has on the table. And Fred Thompson seems to be the candidate that represents the conservative base of the Republican Party and either he becomes competitive for the nomination itself or he will give the endorsement to the leader that protects him from that flank of politics. And of the two candidates that are leading our party at this point, Rudolph Guillani who is very hawkish and conservative on national defense and fairly liberal on domestic issues, John McCain has been viewed as very strong on national defense but has been willing to take on vested domestic interests in the Republican Party. Either Giuliani or McCain would benefit a great deal from an endorsement from Fred Thompson, in helping them unify a base of support in the Republican Party.

The outcome of this election is also going to be an unprecedented element of American

politics. The Democratic Party seems poised for the first time in history to put forward a nominee who is either female or African-American. And they seem to be in a strong position to become either the first female President or the first African-American President. And we have the very unusual potential of the former President becoming the First Gentleman of the country. On the Republican side we have the potential for the former Mayor of New York having divorced multiple times leading the party known for its conservative social values. John McCain will potentially set precedent because of his distinguished age but also if he wins, having succeeded of being a senator who has moved from the Senate to the White House in the Republican Party, which is rare. Mitt Romney, will potentially be the first Mormon to have arrived on the national political stage. And Fred Thompson of course should he move to the top of the list, being the first President who was on a regular TV series a year before moving into the White House. Now I am mindful of time, I have spent all of my time speaking about the politics and the personalities, I hope this provokes some questions but I will briefly run through some issue to set the stage for discussion.

Iraq remains the dominant issue of discussion in our election campaign. But as the Democrats in Congress are finding out, this is an extremely difficult issue to try to find a solution to. When it comes to War on Terror, we have a nation-wide debate, discussion and disagreement on what it is. Some campaigners say there is no such thing as a War on Terror, some people say there is something to the War on Terror but it should be called something else. Whatever it should be called there is a lot of disagreement about how it should be conducted. What is the proper balance between the interests of homeland defense and seeking international cooperation abroad? Should a President place priority on retaliation after an attack or should a President be prepared to take preventative or pre-emptive action? Under those circumstances, what is the balance between multilateral versus unilateral action? How much should the United States and its Partners spend on what is called the root causes of terrorism? What level of priority should the War on Terror be on the domestic and foreign policy of the United States? What role should the politics of target countries in the War on Terror be on the politics of this campaign?

There is a great deal of anxiety in the United States as there is in the world about energy security. This is another discussion that has many ideas and few solutions.

Other issues that will top the domestic agenda in the campaign include immigration, the Supreme Court and then those other foreign policy issues like China and North Korea. We might expect before it is all over that the candidates might talk about trade, we should hope. But this remains early in the process and we have a long way to go before

we hear all the candidates and I look forward to any questions you might have to guide our discussion further into greater detail. Thank you very much.

Questions and Answer

Q: Listing the issues, you did not mention the large budget deficit, is that intentional? Do you think it is not going to be an issue? And a follow-up question is that even though Bush is missing in this election, what do you think his three policy achievements are and what are his three policy failures.

A: The budget deficit definitely is an issue. Probably it has more to do with my bias on foreign policy and personalities that I did not bring it up on the list. But there is a great deal of disagreement about what the causes of the budget deficits are and what the solutions might be. There are many reasons why critics suggest that the United States should minimize its presence in Iraq, but one of them includes the incredible expense of sustaining that campaign for the budget. But I would point out, that Barack Obama in a speech he delivered a few weeks ago: suggested that the size of the American Army needs to be increased. Which tells me that if the defense budget is one of the core drivers of the deficit, then even under a potential Democrat Administration this is going to be sustained. You ask a very thoughtful question about what are the three biggest achievement and three biggest failures of the Bush Administration. I don't know that I will end up with three and three.

While the economic performance of the United States has not been good over the last few years has not been spectacular, it has been rather good. That is no small success given the tremendous disruption that 9/11 presented. And that, the first year of the Administration began with a recession. Personally, I don't think Presidents conduct the American economy but they either get credit or get criticized depending on its performance, therefore President Bush deserves credit.

He succeeded in promoting a new Chief Justice and an Associate Justice to the Supreme Court. That was accomplished at a time when Bush was not popular. Those two members of the Court are a reminder to the Republican base of why they are happy that they got a Republican into the White House.

On the foreign policy front, to me, the improved relations with India stands out as a pretty strong success in trying to change elements of geopolitics that drives the American decision making process. A billion people living in a democracy with nuclear weapons, reasonably important to establish an effective relationship with that emerging

nation.

I'm afraid the failures list could be quite long depending on who your sources are. I would say that on Iraq, the period of major combat operations was, in my view, an unmitigated success. But I think one of the failures that a reasonable person would have to put forward, that the public case for going to war was deeply flawed. And on top of that, at least in my view as a non-expert on Iraq, that the delay in transferring sovereignty to the Iraqi people was a strategic mistake. It allowed for an insurgency to deeply entrench itself and we are paying the price for that many years later. I am sure there are other things that I could address but I would rather only say one bad thing about the former administration.

Q: Thank you for your very informative and analytic presentation. Since you specialize in national security and foreign policy, I would like to ask you if you see any policy difference among Presidential Candidates towards Northeast Asia, especially towards the Korean Peninsula.

A: We have very little to go by in judging the candidates on Northeast Asia and Korea. Barack Obama has emphasized how important tough engagement and diplomacy should be. He also said that counter proliferation and control of nuclear weapons around the world should be a major priority for his Administration. But that does not tell you very much about what he will do that is different from what the Bush Administration or the Clinton Administration tried to do.

More broadly, John McCain put forward an idea of a League of Democracies. I certainly don't know all the details of his idea, but it seems to be to the notion that trying put together a group of like-minded democratic governments might lead to a coalition able to take action where the United Nations Security Council failed. He specifically referred to the influence of China and Russia at the Security Council in suggesting that this League of Democracies could perhaps overcome their procedural vetoes of action.

Really in terms of Asian issues, most of the rest of the discourse speak only of China and even when talking of China really focused only on the economic issues, the strategic economic dialogue, currency, trade imbalance. Those vague answers are probably the best I could do on speaking on behalf of these many campaigns.

Q: Thank you Mr. Yates for your interesting lecture. You said as a Republican, you would rather see the Republican victory over the Democrats. What would the Republican victory contribute to your value system, what is the more value-orientated

system. In other words, why do you not like the Democrats?

Secondly, to sum up your presentation, if I was to bet some money on the outcome of the election, contrary to your wishes or your hopes I would bet on Obama because he has all the merits that you could hope to win the election. Suppose he was to win, what changes would it bring towards the US policies to Iraq? That's one area and also what change would it bring towards the US trade policy?

A: Well, it is not that I dislike the democrats, most of the members of my family vote for the wrong party. And if I one day run for office in the State of Maryland then my family won't even vote for me. On balance I have a prejudice when it comes to the conduct of foreign policy. For me, most Republican strategists talk about the world in terms of objectives you want to achieve internationally. The Democratic Party is much more closely identified with its roots in domestic politics. And foreign policy in making a completely vague generalization tends to be an outgrowth of their domestic political objectives. The issue of whether something is popular or not is more important seemingly than the strategy or morality of a cause. So that is my bias, my family thinks I am wrong.

In terms of Obama, really even though I am a native of the Washington area and politics is a part of life, he is very interesting person in this race right now. My children are of mixed race and so I have a personal interest in seeing how someone of these origins can succeed in national leadership. So even though for partisan reasons, I hope he loses, I still think he is the most interesting person in the field and maybe gained an unfair advantage in my analysis.

On trade I don't think Obama has really addressed the issue yet, on Iraq my own personal view is that Iraq will be for Obama, what the "missile gap" was for Kennedy*. If Obama or any other Democrat is elected in 2008, my belief is that that they will soon quickly discover that the United States did not invade Iraq for oil. That it is an extremely dangerous situation, and that our options are quite difficult not simple as they appear in the campaign. And my sense is that no matter whoever is President, they are going to have to put up with several years of military engagement in Iraq of some form or another. We can wish it were otherwise but that is only a wish, not reality or otherwise.

Q: Thank you, let me join my first speakers in thanking you for your interesting

* In 1960, John F Kennedy asserted that there was a critical missile gap (between the US and USSR) and he gained some political advantage. But once elected and briefed by intelligence and military officials he realized that that was factually incorrect.

presentation. I want to try to go back to what you said, that the Republican candidates try to get away from the Bush image and presidency and why they try to identify themselves with the Reagan Administration. So I would ask has there been some discussion in Republican circles about what went wrong with the Bush Presidency? What lessons are to be drawn from that, what needs to improve for the next Republican President?

A: There is a lot of introspection going on about how we ended up where we are today. I don't pretend to have some special insight on what went wrong, but no one can declare it a success when you go from an overwhelming public support to a public approval rating that is now 20%. And in fairness to the President, if in ten years from now we are talking about a pacified and stable and successful Iraq, he is not going to look as bad as he does today. And perception of Iraq seems to be far and away the most important factor in people judging their approval or disapproval of the President now. There are structural problems in the President's conduct that make it very hard to get outside, the "bubble". Unquestionably President Bush has a close-knit, small group of advisers that he trusts a great deal, and some people from the outside who by definition are not being consulted feel excluded and feel as if the President is missing out on important information. But trying not to pass judgment on the current President, there are a few things that Republicans hope for in the next leader. They want an effective communicator; they want somebody who is actively engaged with American constituencies and friends abroad. And they want a clear objective on what we are trying to do today. So implicitly if this is what people seek as an alternative, these are what some of the criticisms of Bush are.

Q: This is a follow-up question, why then is the US engaged in Iraq?

A: This is not a small question. Probably in fairness it should be the topic of a full speech. I am not an expert on Iraq, and I try like crazy in my time in government to avoid issues related to the Middle East and to focus on Asia instead. Partly because I like Asia and also partly because Middle East issues are hard.

But if you recall at the moment that bin Laden issued his *fatwa* or order to attack the United States he cited the presence of troops in the Holy Land in Saudi Arabia as one of the reasons to call extremists to arms. Recall in 2000 and 2001, with great expense the United States was maintaining UN Sanctioned No-Fly Zones against Iraq. If the United States wished to take away this cause for radical Islamist war against the United States by removing troops from Saudi Arabia, how can you do that while continuing to enforce

the UN Security Council Sanctions Resolutions? How can you do it without making the situation worse in the Middle East? Really when it comes to the hard issues of the day, the UN has a complicated record at best. But some people on our side of politics felt like that our credibility was at stake, that we could not simply allow a sovereign country, a member of the United Nations defy all of these resolutions. And to remove our troops without addressing that problem would undermine the credibility of that institution.

I raise this not as the single reason why there was a case to be made to go to war against Iraq, but there was factors in this discussion that was not popularly discussed in the press and what became the narrow focus on WMD. But you could get greater detail from someone who was following this more closely than I was and also in the interest in time I need to wrap it up.

Q: You pointed to a fundamental difference that exists between the Republicans and Democrats in the United States. That Republicans are more internationally minded and Democrats are more domestic-orientated in their politics. What are the structural factors that account for such differences?

A: Well I am sure that my generalization is not fair to either party. There are many Republicans who never think about the world, they may care very intensely and only about religious values, abortion issues, societal issues in the United States. And there are clearly parts of the Democratic Party that care about a global civil rights movement, environmental issues and things like that. But on balance, when inside the Democratic Party when they are trying to pick a nominee, most of their arguments look at how to bring together the several domestic constituencies that comprise the Democratic Party and these constituencies tend to be a domestic-orientated, labor movement, women's rights, the environmental concerns tend up to be more domestic than international focus. But you have a collection of many different domestic interest groups that make up the Democratic Party.

I don't know the answer to why in the Republican side there tends to be more of a discussion on what a President's global vision would be than that I perceive to be from the other side. I have always attributed it to a reasonably strong base of support for Republican candidates that come from the armed services. And whether by chance or otherwise, the most successful Republican candidates in the last 50 years have been Eisenhower at the beginning of the Cold War and Reagan at end of the Cold War, a little bit with Papa Bush, focused primarily on foreign policy. And the credit achieved by high-profile Democratic candidates tend to have been Lyndon B. Johnson's War on

Poverty rather than the war in Vietnam, Jimmy Carter's appeal to human rights, civil rights and human values and Clinton's stewardship over the economy.

Q: You made it clear that you want to see the next President to be a Republican. From that point of view, which one would be the easiest to beat Hilary Clinton or Barack Obama, for what reason? And do you think America is ready for either a female President or an African-American President?

And the Republicans in the past, from time-to-time, played racial politics. Do you think Republicans are going to be mature enough to stay away from that kind of sexual or racial politics?

A: I sense a bit of partisan stereotyping in the question. Speaking for myself, I don't believe anyone in the current situation cares about whether the candidate is a man or woman, black or white, or whatever. There isn't a lot of whatever in the field, there is just Obama, the other white guys and the girl. But I don't believe that any significant decision is going to be in this cycle based only on that. Republicans have a reasonably strong record of putting forward female and African-American candidates for office. I worked unsuccessfully in a minimal way for a candidate in the state of Maryland who would have been an African-American Senator from the great state of Maryland but we could not get enough votes. And you recall in the 2000 cycle that Elizabeth Dole, who when I last checked was female, was one of the major candidates in the race in that cycle. So I really strongly do not believe that's going to be a key decider.

Are there people in the US who are prejudice? Yes, there is in all countries that I have seen, the United States is no exception. But Obama to me is harder to defeat in several political respects.

Hilary Clinton has the very difficult choice to make about whether she is to run as the second generation of the Clinton Empire or a new person with a new agenda. I don't think she can win without appealing to her husband's record, and if she does appeal to it that is a long record to attack.

Obama's relative lack of experience is an advantage, because it is in his hands to craft his image now and to project his future. I think Obama's challenge will be that he is very popular in terms of personal image but his politics might expose him to a lot of attacks from Republicans when it becomes clear that he is a very common Democrat when it comes to ideology.

What most of us are waiting to see is how vigorously Hilary Clinton will attack Barack Obama in order to take the Democrats nomination. If I was advising a Republican

candidate after that attack, I would recommend them not to criticize Obama but to just keep quoting what Clinton had to say. The difficulty is that I believe the American public is going to like Barack Obama; much of the American public does not necessarily like Hilary Clinton. They are motivated to support her because they hate George Bush and the Republicans or that they believe the Clinton machine that was so successful in 1990s that it can bring them back to victory. I hope this addresses some of your questions.