



Cheney not a voluble asset as running mate with Bush

Vice presidential hopeful speaks sparingly, shuns limelight

By Sean Scully
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PHILADELPHIA — Would-be Vice President Richard B. Cheney is, it seems, a man of few words.

In sharp contrast to other presidential and vice presidential candidates in recent years, Mr. Cheney shows up at events early, speaks briefly, avoids the media and leaves with little fanfare.

At his debut appearance in the convention city Sunday, he arrived 10 minutes early, spoke for five minutes, and wrapped up the event even before it was officially scheduled to begin.

At a morning breakfast for his fellow Wyoming residents yesterday, he spoke for about 10 minutes, but devoted most of it to reminiscences of his grandfather, who was a cook on the Union Pacific Railroad — a company Mr. Cheney went on to serve as a member of its board of directors. The breakfast event was held in an old Southern Pacific rail car.

Mr. Cheney devoted only a few minutes to his running mate, Texas Gov. George W. Bush, and to the looming presidential race.

"The feeling of emotion and dynamism wrapped up in this [convention] is something to behold," Mr. Cheney said. "It's because everybody understands how important it is we prevail in this election."

Nor is Mr. Cheney's public profile particularly high. He attended only one event Sunday, his welcoming rally, and one yesterday, the Wyoming breakfast. He expects to make only one formal ap-

pearance tomorrow, a luncheon for House Speaker J. Dennis Hastert.

He appeared briefly in the convention hall twice yesterday, but did not speak, and expects to attend tonight. He has barely spoken to the press since arriving in Philadelphia.

Staff says he is spending time preparing his speech to the convention, scheduled for tomorrow night.

Republicans are quick to say Mr. Cheney's reticence in front of crowds is a sign of strength, not weakness. They say it is a product of his long experience in government, serving in Congress, as White House chief of staff, and as secretary of defense.

"There's no aloofness or shyness about him," said Virginia Gov. James S. Gilmore III. "I think at this point he doesn't see the need to get out and speak at length — his record speaks for itself."

Mr. Gilmore also said that a vice presidential candidate has an obligation to be brief and keep from upstaging his running mate.

"He continues to be in a supporting role to the candidate," he said. "The candidate is George W. Bush."

Former Secretary of State George Shultz, who has known Mr. Cheney for decades, says his brevity is a sign of his essentially plain-spoken character.

"He's very straightforward, very cordial and reliable," he said. "He will show up on time and he will answer your questions — for five minutes, if that's what it takes."

Mr. Cheney has not conducted a political campaign in more than a

decade, since his last run for reelection as a congressman from Wyoming. He is at ease speaking before a crowd, but he seems to be out of practice on some of the associated pageantry.

He looked awkward and uncomfortable when posing with the Wyoming convention delegates for a photograph yesterday. While they sang a rousing song about "Ragtime Cowboy Joe," Mr. Cheney sat in the front row with a fixed smile and stared straight at the camera.

At his welcoming rally Sunday, he neglected to wave at, or even acknowledge, the bank of television cameras facing the hastily erected podium. The slack was taken up by a group of Republican governors, who leaped to the stage to wave at the crowd and play to the cameras in a more traditional fashion as Mr. Cheney worked his way to the door.

Mr. Cheney's press operation, meanwhile, has a distinctly chaotic feel so far, a marked contrast to the well-oiled Bush press team. Mr. Cheney hired a press secretary Sunday, but as of late yesterday he had not been introduced to the press. Press duties were being handled by Bush campaign and Republican National Committee staff, who were quickly trying to cobble together schedules, create a list of media contacts, and arrange for a press pool to follow Mr. Cheney.

Temporary staffers said they expect the press operation to smooth out considerably once the new press secretary "gets comfortable" with his new job and new boss.

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