Remarks by Vice President Richard B. Cheney
Accepting Hudson Institute's 2012 Herman Kahn Award
Thursday, December 6, 2012
New York City

Well, I didn't know you had it in you Scooter. [Laughter] I did get kicked out of Yale twice. The President, in the spring we took office—this would have been have been May of '01 – was asked to give the commencement speech at Yale that year. And, of course, this was a big deal. He was a graduate himself. He went to New Haven and he gave the speech and he said look, he said "I was a gentleman-C at Yale when I was there and I'm President of the United States." He said, "Of course, if you get kicked out you can be Vice President of the United States." [Laughter] He loved to tell that story and did every chance he got. But I don't want you to think that I just sort of coast and bask in the glory of having been Vice President of the United States. It was all put in perspective for me the other day.

Liz is with me here tonight. [Applause] She's the mother of five our grandchildren including my favorite, Richard, my namesake, who's six years old. I don't know why you waited so long to name one of them after me. But he came home from school and he told his mom, he said, the next day he was going to have to stand up in front of the entire school assembly, as were a number of the students and tell the assembled student body why he was special, what there was about him that made him special. And he said I've got two choices. And Liz said, "Well, what are they?" He said, "Well, I could say my grandpa was Vice President of the United States." And she said, "Well, that's good. You could use that one." She said, "What's the other one?" He said, "I got my cat at the dump." [Laughter] You don't want to let your head get too big obviously around six-year-olds. I still don't know what he said. They won't tell me. [Laughter]

Well, I'm delighted to receive this award tonight. I had the privilege of meeting Herman Kahn once early in my Washington career back in the late 60s. And Don Rumsfeld brought him in. I was working for Rumsfeld then and Don had met him, I think, through the RAND Corporation. I've always been tremendously impressed with the work that Herman Kahn had done but he wanted to expose some of us young people on his staff to somebody he had enormous respect and admiration for and to demonstrate the importance of intellectual pursuits and creativity and thinking outside the box, if you will, and to ask the difficult questions. We spent a fascinating afternoon there at 19th and M Street at the old Office of Economic Opportunity.

In those days, we were fighting poverty. Obviously, we didn't win but we were fighting it, but it was a very, very memorable afternoon that we spent with him. He was a very, very special man, obviously: a man as you think about the kinds of issues he addressed and then urged us to approach, and that had been mentioned that all of you who are part of Hudson understand very well. I think he'd find useful employment today in the times that we're faced with.

I wanted to take just a couple of minutes before I perform my next task. They said I could speak for a few minutes and I promise not to give a long-winded speech tonight.
But I am very, very concerned about what I see developing, day by day, especially in the Middle East, and especially about a subject that I used to talk about a lot—still do from time to time—but was often criticized for, and that's weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East, and in places like Iraq, Syria, and Libya and so forth. We've got obviously just in the last few days reporting that says the Syrians now are loading Sarin into their warheads, preparatory to using them presumably on their own citizens. It wasn't long ago, in 2007, when the head of Mossad, Meir Dagan, came to see me and Steve Hadley in Steve's office in the White House and laid down the photographs they'd taken of the interior of a North Korean-built nuclear reactor in the Syrian desert. And that was obviously of great concern, too, but another example of the problems that we have with proliferation. So Syria's been there before. Thank goodness today, five years later, that reactor's not an issue because the Israelis took it out in the fall of 2007. [Applause.]

So Syria's been potentially troublesome for many, many years obviously, and with regard to these kinds of issues. When we dealt with Iraq as we did extensively in years past, and some of the veterans here tonight served both in Iraq and Afghanistan—I had the privilege of meeting many of them before dinner—as I think back on it, what I think about, and one of the issues we were concerned about at the time, and I continue to be concerned about, of course, was that Saddam Hussein started his first nuclear program back when he was dealing with the Osiris reactor in 1981, which the Israelis took out. He was back in business again in 1991 when we went in after Operation Desert Storm, and the international community got in again and his son-in-law got out, and explained to us all what had been going on with respect to the nuclear program. And then again of course again in '03 he was prepared to get back into the business again as soon as the world turned its back. And we got rid of the threat by getting rid of Saddam Hussein. But in three sort of cycles with just one evil dictator, if you will. And, of course, the good thing was that we put him out of business. Another good development that flowed from that was that Muammar Qaddafi called, and he didn't want to be next. And so he turned over all of the nuclear material that he had—the centrifuges, the uranium feed stocks, and the weapon designs— to the United States. And we received it and were happy to do so. And that took care of another major source of proliferation.

His main supplier had been A. Q. Khan, the man who'd put together the Pakistani nuclear program. And he'd then gone into the black market operations himself. And Libya was his best customer, but he had other customers, in Iraq and in North Korea. And we shut down the A. Q. Khan network. But that didn't solve all the problems. And many of them remain. Of course, Khan, since he was under house arrest, was quoted not long ago in the newspapers, I think both the Post and the Times carried the story, alleging that senior Pakistani officials had been bribed by the North Koreans for the uranium enrichment technology that North Korea now is operating, and has some—according to one witness who's seen it, again been in the press—some 2000 centrifuges operating to produce highly enriched uranium, as opposed to the plutonium that they used for the system they've already got.

It's a very, very dangerous part of the world. And when I hear our president announce that we got Bin Laden, problem solved; that Al Qaeda is toast; that they are significantly diminished; and that we can pivot now, because the United States no longer has to be
concerned about developments in that part of the world, and focus our efforts on Asia—I am, on the one hand, appalled. Secondly, I fear for future developments if, in fact, they're going to continue to pursue the policies that this administration has pursued. And live in accordance with a fiction. We've got more territory now in that part of the world, when we start to add up all the areas that have come or are coming under the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood, and the radical Islamists—it's a lot more land and territory there for safe harbors and sanctuaries for terrorists than we ever faced back in the time of 9/11. That entire part of the world appears to be, or a good part of it, certainly, to be moving in a direction that's fundamentally hostile to long-term U.S. interests. And yet we are—seem to be—unable to influence events in that part of the world. Partly because we're headed for the exits, and everybody knows we're headed for the exits. We pulled out of Iraq. We didn't even bother to negotiate a stay-behind agreement that was traditional in those kinds of relationships. We're well on our way out of Afghanistan. And we've had a president who's been to Cairo, one of the first things that he did, to apologize for the U.S. reaction to 9/11. Alleged that we had "overreacted" and fallen away from our basic, traditional values. Who was going to deal with the Iranian nuclear threat, which I have not mentioned up 'til now, but with everything I talked about before didn't mention the Iranian problem, but he was going to deal with the Iranian problem by sort of resetting the relationship. Sit down and talk to the Mullahs—they'll understand, and no longer be a threat to the United States. Which was obviously seriously misguided. Part of my frustration with the recent election—and I didn't come to make a political speech tonight—we've got very, very serious economic problems. We can talk about that for hours. And without question that's the focal point at this time and it needs to be. It is absolutely crucial that we deal with it appropriately. But as I look forward and as I consider all that's happened in the international arena. In the Middle East in particular, in places like the Arabian Peninsula and Yemen and Egypt and Libya and now ongoing with respect to Syria, and the prospect that we'll see the continued spread of basic, fundamental, radical Islamist ideology, that fundamentally hates the United States and much of what we stand for, has been a source of significant grief—certainly for this city and for all Americans on 9/11—faced with the very real prospect that an area of the world that has spawned terrorists by the thousands, and some who've come to the United States and killed Americans, is back in business.

And the United States which once used to dominate that part of the world not long ago, who had valued allies and bases throughout the area, who had been looked to for leadership for example at the time Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait and we were able to muster some 36 or 37 nations to gather with us to liberate Kuwait and send Saddam back into Iraq—when we got the rest of the world to pay 50 out of the 55 billion dollar cost of the exercise—that day is gone. We had our friends—and we still have some in that part of the world—not only Israel, which is obviously at the top of the list, but also the Saudis, the UAE, and many of the other Gulf States—and certainly in my conversations with those people, they no longer believe us. They no longer trust us. They no longer believe that they can count on the United States of America to do what we did 20 years ago when we came in and set back Saddam Hussein's operations, and what we've done since in Iraq and Afghanistan, and in terms of trying to promote democracy, of getting rid of regimes that were clearly not supported by their populations, and now see us, as I say, bailing out, headed for the exits. Allies no longer trust us or have confidence in us
and our adversaries no longer fear us. And the president can make bold statements and bold talk as he did in the last couple of days about developments in Syria, but I don't think they care. And unless something fundamentally different happens, I have grave doubts that he's prepared to do anything vis a vis Syria except hope that he can get away with, as he has up 'til now, saying, well, I got Bid Laden, problem solved. It's far from solved. If anything, the national security threat we face is as serious as is the economic one. And when you add to that the enormous damage that is, and is about to be, done to the United States military—with the trillion dollar cut when you add up what's already on the budget as well as take out another 500 billion—we're doing enormous damage to our long-term military capabilities.

One of the first things I did after Desert Storm was call Ronald Reagan in Los Angeles – this was right after we finished the operation—and I said "Mr. President, I want to thank you for all those $600 toilet seats you bought back in the '80s." He didn't see the humor in it immediately. But the point was that what we had to use in the '90s was what he purchased and the troops that had been trained and recruited and the officers that had been educated and the equipment that had been built back in the early '90s.

So what we're doing today by way of damaging the U.S. military is going to be a fact of life that future presidents are going to have to deal with. Barack Obama isn't just dealing with his budget problems. He in fact is restricting the future capabilities of the next president, two or three times down the road in terms of our capacity to be able to deal with fundamental threats to the United States. And they are out there. And we can be absolutely certain there are people tonight planning to do what happened on 9/11 only with deadlier weapons than 19 hijackers armed with plane tickets and box cutters. So I hope and want to thank Hudson for the work that you do in this area. I think the legacy of Herman Kahn is a very valuable one, I think you keep it alive, I think you do great work, especially dealing with the kind of threats that we're going to be faced with in the future. But I hope, I hope, that in time we'll come to our senses and recognize, what I think Herman Kahn would recognize, that it's a dangerous world we live in, and for us to act as though the danger is gone, problem solved, all we have to do now is "pivot to Asia," that they'll realize that that's a very, very serious error. And that future generations, if not this one, are going to pay a very, very heavy price for our inability or unwillingness to face reality—is I think the significant weakness by this president and this administration.

That said I want to move on to a lighter topic and that's to mention my good friend and colleague Alan. He is a brave man. He has great courage because he hunts with me. That's part of it. [Laughter] But... [Applause] I know how much he loves Hudson because we've talked about it. I know his devotion to the nation and all the good work that he's done over the years—he's been enormously successful. I think it's our great good fortune that those of us who are his neighbors in Jackson Hole and who have had the opportunity to work with him on many, many worthy projects that he's done a superb job during his time at Hudson. I don't want you to think you guys at Hudson are ignored. I'm on the AEI board and we watch it very, very carefully. But I'm privileged tonight to invite Alan to come up to the stand we got an award we want to present. [Applause]