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TELEVISION PROGRAM TO "CBS NEWS' FACE THE NATION."*

CBS News

FACE THE NATION

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GUESTS: KARL ROVE
Retiring White House Adviser

Senator JOHN McCain (R-AZ)
2008 Presidential Candidate

MODERATOR/PANELIST: BOB SCHIEFFER – CBS News

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BOB SCHIEFFER, host:

Today on FACE THE NATION, interviews with Karl Rove and presidential candidate John McCain.

Mr. KARL ROVE (Retiring White House Adviser): (From press conference) Today I submitted my resignation as deputy chief of staff...

SCHIEFFER: This week President Bush's chief strategist, Karl Rove, announced he was leaving the White House. He's widely viewed as one of the most influential presidential advisers ever. So how will his departure effect the president and the Republican Party? Did his brand of politics leave the Republican Party better or worse? We'll ask him.

Then we'll talk with Republican presidential candidate John McCain, whose campaign has been floundering. Has he fixed it? We'll talk about that.

Then I'll have a final word on rabbit trails. But first, Rove and McCain on FACE THE NATION.

Announcer: FACE THE NATION with CBS News chief Washington correspondent Bob Schieffer. And now, from CBS News in Washington, Bob Schieffer.

SCHIEFFER: Good morning again. And we begin with Karl Rove, who is, I suppose, sort of making a farewell tour of the Sunday talk shows...

Mr. ROVE: Doing the trifecta.

SCHIEFFER: ...this morning. Yes. And you haven't been on any of the shows in a long, long time. Why did you decide suddenly to come out?

Mr. ROVE: Well, somebody else made the decision for me, and I'm just doing what I was instructed to do.

SCHIEFFER: Mr. Rove...

Mr. ROVE: How could one leave the White House without saying goodbye to you?

SCHIEFFER: Well, there you are. Even your enemies, Mr. Rove, have called you a political genius, a man of ruthless brilliance. I think it's fair to say you are sort of the template for the modern political consultant, and that is hardball politics, play to your base, demonize your opponents.

Mr. ROVE: I'm not certain I agree with that.

SCHIEFFER: But having said that, I mean, some people say that. I think you generally are--would be seen as the template for the modern political consultant.

Mr. ROVE: I disagree particular if that is what you think the template is. You cannot be a candidate like President Bush was in 2004 and get 60 million votes for president, more than any candidate for president in the history--get 25 percent more votes in 2004 than he got in 2000. Get 48 percent of women, 44 percent of Latinos, 29 percent of Jews as a Republican candidate, get 48 percent more black votes in 2004 than he got in 2000, and do so by, quote, "playing to your base." Now, I know that opposition talks about playing to the base, and I want them to keep thinking that's the right strategy. But you win elections like this president won in 2000 and 2002 and 2004 by broadening the coalition, by getting more people to register and to vote, and by persuading people who might have been inclined to the other side to come across for you.

SCHIEFFER: So you don't--you don't agree that you're--you're a practitioner of trying to play to the political base?

Mr. ROVE: No, look...

SCHIEFFER: You don't--you just see that as part of a broader strategy?

Mr. ROVE: Oh, sure. I mean, look, you've got to get your people out. But you cannot win elections with your people only. You've got to get your share of the independents, you've got to get your share of the--of the other side's party. You got to grab some of those people who might be inclined to have a D behind their name if you're a Republican candidate, or an R behind their name if you're a Democrat candidate. And you've also got to get people energized into the system who've never participated. Think about it. In a presidential election, we're lucky if six out of every 10 Americans register and vote. That means there're four out of 10 who don't. So you got to do all four things, and only one of them is to make certain your base is energized.

SCHIEFFER: Well, let me just ask you this. Do you think politics now today, modern politics, is meaner than ever? The country does seem to be split right down the middle.

Mr. ROVE: Yeah. Well, it is split down the middle. It's--you know, I'm of mixed mind about it, because I go back and I read about things in history, and I read particularly like in the early campaigns, you know, the things that were said about John Adams and Thomas Jefferson by their paid agents. I mean, Thomas Jefferson literally arranged to have a notorious scoundrel hired as the editor of the--of the Republican newspaper in Richmond in order to attack John Adams in the most vociferous ways. And--but today it's different because we have--we're not a bunch--we're not decentralized around the country. We've got the cable networks, which are endless. We've got shows like yours. We've got big national newspapers. And there's a desire for the now. You know, it's sort of like--rather than, you know, let's say that the leader of the Senate stands up and calls the president a liar and then wonders the next day, you know, how can I--how can we find a way to work together. That's the debilitating thing about the system today.

SCHIEFFER: Well, do you think you've helped or hurt the situation?

Mr. ROVE: I'll leave others to judge. I--what I--what I try to do is serve a president whose attitude was, 'Let's find ways to bring the country together.' And we have. We brought them together in the war resolution, we brought them together to pass tax cuts. We brought them together to--this

president brought them together to pass education reform and energy legislation. But in this town, it's really tough, like when we tackled immigration and Social Security reform, there's some Democrats who never accepted it--him as president after 2000, and there're some Democrats who said, you know, the right path for their party was to obstruct him no matter what. And there're others who, while they understand the utility of working together in a spirit of bipartisanship, feel constrained by their caucus that doesn't sometimes want to give the president, quote, "a political victory." I've had Democrat members of Congress tell me, 'We'd love to work with you on Social Security reform, but our party's leaders are afraid of giving the president a, quote, "political victory.'"

SCHIEFFER: Why do you think, Mr. Rove, the president wound up being so unpopular?

Mr. ROVE: Well, I don't think he's wound up being so unpopular. We'll see at the end of the game--at the end of the day. We got 17 months, and I've known him for 34 years. He's a competitive person. He didn't come here simply to hold the office. He's going to continue to pursue a bold agenda at home and abroad, and he's got 17 months to get a lot of things done, and he'll be using every lever available to the president, which is considerable, to get things done right up to the end. I mean, think about the months ahead.

SCHIEFFER: But was it the war? Because, I mean, if we're...

Mr. ROVE: Well, I mean, the war...

SCHIEFFER: ...talking about right now--let's not talk about later.

Mr. ROVE: Yeah, yeah, it--the war's--the war's unpopular, but let me give you an example. Two weeks ago the president signed into a law the American competitiveness initiative. It was a--it basically designed to double our basic research to increase math and science skills. It was part of a State of the Union address in 2006, one of the big domestic initiatives. And despite the war and despite all the antagonism, we nonetheless were able to shepherd it through Congress, and he was able to get it signed into law. You look at the energy bills floating around Capitol Hill, and there's a lot of work yet to be done, and we're a long way away from it. But one of the interesting things is the 20 and 10 proposal of the president, it said, 'Let's reduce our dependence on foreign source of oil by reducing our use of hydrocarbons by 20 percent in 10 years.' A lot of those parts of his proposal are embodied in pieces of energy legislation working their way through Capitol Hill.

So I'm not as pessimistic about--as others might be about the ability to get big things done, and he is going to be focused on getting big things done.

SCHIEFFER: Let's talk some politics. You have been saying--you said the other day in an interview, I guess you said again today on one of the Sunday shows, "Meet the Press," I think it was, you took some issue with Hillary Clinton. You've talk about her being a "flawed candidate." Do you mean in character, or how do you mean a flawed candidate?

Mr. ROVE: Well, she enters the general--she enters the primary season with the highest negatives of any front-runner since the history of polling began. She has more people who have an

unfavorable impression of her than have a favorable impression. And not just in one poll, but in multiple polls. I'm a little bit distrustful of one poll.

SCHIEFFER: Do you think she's going to get the nomination?

Mr. ROVE: I've said several times this week I think she will, yes.

SCHIEFFER: Do you think that's good? Are you hoping that...

Mr. ROVE: It is what it is, you know. In politics, you can only--you can only hope about things that you got some control over. I'm not voting in the Democratic primary. That's up to Democrats to do.

SCHIEFFER: So how do Republicans win this election? Because you say things are better than perhaps they appear in the polls. How, how does a Republican go about winning this time? Because it's very difficult, and I've heard you say many times, it's very difficult to win three presidential elections in a row.

Mr. ROVE: It is. But the key is to have a positive, forward-looking optimistic agenda for the future of the country, to have candidates who can carry that message with conviction and passion. We've got at least four big ones and maybe others: Senator McCain, Mayor Giuliani, Senator Thompson, Mayor--Governor Romney. These, these men will be able to articulate that message. And, look, it's going to be an exciting election to watch because the outcome is not foreordained. But I feel good about these men. I feel good about their message. The campaign will serve the useful purpose of testing them, and I'm confident at the end we'll have a nominee that the American people can look to and see--look, every presidential election is an agent of change.

SCHIEFFER: Do you have any idea who that is, as yet?

Mr. ROVE: If I did--if I did, I wouldn't tell you, and, frankly, I've been focused too much on my duties at the White House to give that much contemplation.

SCHIEFFER: All right. Mr. Rove, thank you very much. Appreciate you coming by.

Mr. ROVE: Thank you, sir.

SCHIEFFER: We'll be back in a minute to talk about one of those Republicans and talk with him, Senator John McCain, in just a minute.

(Announcements)

SCHIEFFER: And with us now, Republican presidential candidate John McCain. He's here to talk about his campaign and about his new book, which is titled the "Hard Call: Great Decisions and the Extraordinary People Who Made Them."

Senator McCain, thank you for coming back. We haven't seen you in a while. It's good to have you.

Senator JOHN McCAIN (Republican, Arizona; 2008 Presidential Candidate): Thank you, Bob.

SCHIEFFER: Let me ask you first, do you think Karl Rove was good or bad for American politics?

Sen. McCAIN: I think history will judge that by the success of the president and how the president is judged, and I think the president's going to be judged on what happens, to a large degree, what happens in the war in Iraq. And if we are able to succeed, which I think we will, then both and he and the president I think history will have a favorable opinion of. But it's not clear whether we will continue to support this winning strategy or we're going to withdraw, and that's going to be a big debate in the nation and in the Senate in the middle of September.

SCHIEFFER: You said the other day you're not sure this is winnable.

Sen. McCAIN: Ah, no. I--look, what I said I was not positive. We are winning. We are winning. Why I'm not positive is because I'm not sure we are able to convince the American people that we've had a very short period of time where we have had a winning strategy and it is succeeding, and I believe over time that it will. I'm confident that it will. Is there problems? Of course there's problems. Is there difficulties? Is there greater sacrifice? But here we've got our opponents wanting to go back to a strategy that failed for four years and abandon a strategy we've really only been pursuing for about four months, which is succeeding. So, of course, I'm not positive about anything. But I know this, if you set a date for withdrawal, and that's what the Democrats are going to be proposing in the middle of September, my friend, that's a date for surrender. And this--it's going to be chaos, genocide, not only in Iraq, but in the region, and this is going to be a critical time here come the middle of September.

SCHIEFFER: Let me just read you something that was in The New York Times. There was an op-ed piece...

Sen. McCAIN: Mm-hmm.

SCHIEFFER: ...in The Times this morning written by seven soldiers, active military. It is very critical of our policy there. It says that the idea that we can beat this insurgency is, quote, "farfetched." They're are skeptical of the recent remarks that the conflict is increasingly manageable and that they say our military successes are offset by failures elsewhere. They say these are personal views. They say they don't want to address morale because as, quote, "committed soldiers we will see this mission through." But, clearly, this is going to have an impact it seems to me. Do you think that what they say represents what a lot of the people in the military believe?

Sen. McCAIN: I don't, and I hear from the military literally every day and people who are over there given the means of communications we have now. I have great respect for those soldiers. I appreciate their ability and their articulate presentation of their point of view. I respectfully disagree with them, and I am convinced that, at the end of the article, you will see that basically what they're advocating is for us to stand by and watch what happens in Iraq. Are we going to stand by and watch two million Sunni and four million Shia in Baghdad engaged in some kind of blood-letting? Are we going to watch Turks invade Kurdish areas because they will not stand for a Kurdish state? Are we going to stand by and watch Iranians reassert--excuse me, expand their area of influence in

southern Iraq and the entire region? And we've got to think about this regionally, Bob, because what happens with the Sunnis in Saudi Arabia? They'll feel that they have to help the Sunnis. Jordan has 750,000 refugees. Afghanistan and Pakistan can be further destabilized. Syria's encouraged to destabilize Lebanon, which puts greater threat on Israel. But, at the end of the day, to go back to the failed strategy of four years--which, in all due respect, is what that article advocates--I can't--I don't think that's the right strategy. And I respect their views. And I'm sorry for the long answer.

SCHIEFFER: Well, let's just talk about that for a little bit. You started out this campaign season basically as the front-runner. You are no longer the front-runner, by a long stretch. You're running fourth in some polls. You've had to shake up your campaign. You collected money and spent a lot, and didn't get much for it, it seems. Do you think the fact that you have been so steadfast in--so steadfast in support of this war is what has cost you in those polls?

Sen. McCain: No. I think--I think, first of all, we're in good shape. And I'm happy where we are. We're back on town hall meetings, and the enthusiasm is there. And we're going to be just fine in my campaign. And every campaign has its ups and downs. I think, frankly, the immigration issue has caused me some difficulties with our base, because I think we still--we've failed to convince the American people that we're serious about securing our borders. They don't have confidence in us any more because of our failure handling Katrina, corruption in spending, and the failure in the--in the war. And we couldn't convince them that we're serious about enforcing the borders. We have to do that. As president I would say, 'I will secure the borders.' But I still think we need a comprehensive approach to this immigration issue, including a temporary worker program. So I think that was--that was harmful to me.

Bob, I know what's right, and I'm going to do what's right. And at the end of the day, I'm going to sleep well at night because I know what's right for America. I've made mistakes in the past, but on Iraq, immigration, other issues, I really have to do what I think is best for this nation, and I'm proud to do so. And I've had a wonderful, wonderful life and career.

SCHIEFFER: All right. Let's take a break here. We'll come back and talk about this some more. Back with Senator McCain in a moment.

(Announcements)

SCHIEFFER: Back now with Senator McCain.

Senator McCain, Karl Rove says it looks like Hillary Clinton is going to be the nominee for the Democrats, and he thinks she's a flawed candidate. Do you agree with him?

Sen. McCain: Oh, no. I wouldn't--no, I think she's been very effective in the Senate. I don't know the Democratic politics, but I see her in a front-runner status right now. I've worked with her on many issues. But, again, she's a liberal Democrat, I'm a conservative Republican. I look forward to that debate. This debate should be about issues. I have seen her shift on her position on Iraq from basically supporting to now seeking withdrawal dates I don't know when. And so I'll be glad to have that debate with her. But I think we should have a respectful campaign with lots of debates.

SCHIEFFER: This whole idea of Senator Rove--I mean, Mr. Rove says that he doesn't think politics is much meaner than it has been at many points of our history. And I think he's probably right on that, but I must say...

Sen. McCain: If you look at low points in our history, yeah.

SCHIEFFER: But I must say it seems like that it is very, very mean these days and, as a result of that, very little is getting done. Is there--do you have any ideas about how to sort of raise the tone of these campaigns?

Sen. McCain: Sure. First of all, I think you're absolutely right. You look at the opinion polls, approval of Congress is at an all time low. I mean, people are frustrated. Seventy percent of the American people think the country's on the wrong track and they don't have confidence in us. That goes back to this immigration thing.

SCHIEFFER: Mm.

Sen. McCain: And by the way, as president, I will secure the borders. But I think that one of the things we need to do is sit down together and get something done, thereby gaining the approval of the American people, which is what all politicians crave. And I think that, as president, the first thing you say is, 'I reach out my hand to the Democrats, and I'm asking the American people to have the Democrats reach out their hand to me.' But I have not seen the citizen--the Senate more partisan than it is today--the majority leader of the United States Senate standing up and saying the war is lost; the chairman of the senatorial campaign committee saying 'We're going to pick up seats because of this war.' Have they forgotten that presidents don't lose wars and political parties don't lose wars, nations lose wars. And when nations lose wars, nations suffer. And my dear friend, you and I have been around long enough to know what happened to the military in our society the last time we lost a war.

SCHIEFFER: Let me go back to immigration.

Sen. McCain: Sure.

SCHIEFFER: Mayor Giuliani says that he believes illegal immigration can be stopped, period. Do you think it can?

Sen. McCain: I think we could get it largely under control. I think that if we were able to identify everybody in this country--and the way you do that is, if they apply for a job, they have to have a tamper-proof biometric document. And without--anybody who doesn't have that, then the employer who hired them would be prosecuted. Then you dry up the magnet from south of the border, because if they know even if they get across our border that they can't get a job here, then I think that has a very big effect. And by the way, I applaud Secretary Chertoff's, now, this matching of Social Security numbers. But I think you're going to see some economic impact from that. But we can't allow hiring people who are here illegally to go on forever. But I believe we have to have a temporary worker program--and I mean temporary. If you're an agriculture worker, come for 10 months, go back for two months. You see my point?

SCHIEFFER: Mm-hmm. Let me--let me just talk a little bit about these primaries that're coming up.

Sen. McCain: Mm-hmm.

SCHIEFFER: Who do you see at this point as--well, I'll just say as your main competition?

Sen. McCain: I don't know. I see it kind of evolving, and some people are up and some are down, and that's our favorite game here in Washington. I'm sticking on my message. I'm sticking on my theme of my campaign. And the basis of it, the reason why I'm running is because I am the most qualified to take on the transcendent issue of the 21st century--radical Islamic extremism. I am fully prepared. My life has fully prepared me for that. And I am prepared to lead. And I know that sounds egotistical. But the fact is that I'll match my vision and my qualifications to lead in this transcendent evil that we are going to have to surmount over anybody else who's running on the other side of the aisle.

SCHIEFFER: Given you what know--General Petraeus, as you do know, as we both know...

Sen. McCain: Mm-hmm.

SCHIEFFER: ...is about to give his report on progress in the war. Given what you know, what do you think he's going to say? What will his report suggest, what will it ask for?

Sen. McCain: I believe that he's going to depict what I think are the facts on the ground, and I'm in close enough contact with people to think it's pretty accurate. Militarily, we are succeeding. Politically, we have some difficulties, although there's progress on the local levels, on the basic levels in--on the ground in Iraq. We are going to be able to move our troops from some areas to others, and eventually--and I say eventually--we will be able to withdraw not only to bases, but withdraw completely. But it's going to take awhile. And the political process to move forward, the police are still corrupt. It's going to be long and hard and difficult, but we are succeeding. And that's what's important. And I think if the American people can see success, then they will allow us the opportunity to succeed.

SCHIEFFER: We're out of time, but you think he's basically going to ask for a little more time?

Sen. McCain: Absolutely. I think he's going to say, 'This is succeeding.' We've failed for four years with a bad strategy. We've only been in for four months.

SCHIEFFER: All right. Thank you, senator.

Sen. McCain: Thank you.

SCHIEFFER: Back in a minute.

(Announcements)

SCHIEFFER: Finally today, 16 years on FACE THE NATION has taught me one thing: When I ask a question and guests start laying out conditions, such as, 'First, let me tell you this,' or 'The real question is' or 'It is important to put all that in context,' I know that we're headed down the old rabbit trail that will take us anywhere but to a straight answer. When people want to answer, they do so quickly, directly and clearly. When they don't, we get all those conditions and the lectures about the importance of context.

So excuse me for getting a little suspicious after hearing the White House is now proposing some new conditions on the delivery of General Petraeus' long-awaited report on progress in Iraq. Conditions such as the White House wanting the general to deliver the report to Congress behind closed doors, while Cabinet officers do the talking in public. And suddenly, we're told the general won't actually write the report, but that his thoughts will be incorporated in a summary prepared by the White House.

Now, mind you, this is the report the president has said over and over that he will use to decide where we go from here in Iraq. Over and over, we've been told don't rush to judgment until we hear from the general. Now we're hearing all these new conditions. Maybe it's because I've been dragged down the old rabbit trail too many times by too many people with something to hide, but this does not sound like we're headed to a straight answer. No, this sounds like anything but, and that's a real shame.

That's it for us. We'll see you next week right here on FACE THE NATION.