Today on FACE THE NATION, from historic St. Anselm College in Manchester, New Hampshire, a campaign interview with John and Elizabeth Edwards. He's behind front-runners Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama in most polls, but John Edwards insists he is the right Democrat to lead America. And he's campaigning all over the country with his wife, Elizabeth, who revealed this spring that she has incurable cancer. Why is he running? What would he do about Iraq? And what is she hearing from voters about her situation? All questions and more for the Edwardses. I'll have a final word on going back to New Hampshire, the primary that never disappoints.

But first, John and Elizabeth Edwards on FACE THE NATION.

Announcer: FACE THE NATION, with chief Washington correspondent Bob Schieffer. And now, from the campus of St. Anselm College in Manchester, New Hampshire, Bob Schieffer.

SCHIEFFER: And good morning again. We are here with Senator and Mrs. Edwards, together. She is playing a major role in this campaign.

Mrs. Edwards, your book is now out in paperback. You have added a new chapter detailing how you found out that your cancer had come back, and that it was here to stay just as John Edwards was starting his campaign. So I have to ask you at the beginning, how are you feeling, and how's your health these days?

Ms. ELIZABETH EDWARDS (Wife of Former Senator John Edwards): Actually, I feel great. I have--still have no symptoms, which is a very good sign. My protocol is easy to work around a campaign schedule, and the medications I take don't tire me. Honestly, if you didn't know I had cancer, you wouldn't know I had cancer.

Former Senator JOHN EDWARDS (Democrat, North Carolina; 2008 Presidential Candidate): Actually, she seems to feel great. She's energetic and out there campaigning and speaking her mind. So I'm proud of her.

SCHIEFFER: Well, that's for sure. And we want to talk to you about that, and the role you're playing in this campaign in just a bit. But first I want to talk to Senator Edwards about some of the most current things that are happening.

Iraq and terrorism continue to hang over this campaign and over American life.

Fmr. Sen. EDWARDS: Mm.

SCHIEFFER: And last week Senator Clinton said that--she raised the possibility of a terrorist attack, and said, should that happen, it would give the Republicans an advantage, and it would--and she said she would be the best person, if that happened, to be in charge of that situation, as it were. You came down pretty hard on her. You said she was making a political calculation about terrorism. Why did you say that, Senator?
Fmr. Sen. EDWARDS: Well, there are a couple things that we just disagree about, with all respect to Senator Clinton, who's a--who's a great candidate for president. First is, I don't agree that the Republicans would have an advantage. I would never cede that. I think we are--and this is another issue that we disagree about--I think we're less safe, not more safe. We have fewer allies, and, according to Bush's own State Department, there are more terrorists in the world. So I think we are not safer than we were when George Bush took office, or just prior to September 11th.

And the second issue is, I think when you're talking about something as serious as an attack on the United States of America, particularly if you're a presidential candidate or a president, the focus should not be on politics and on votes, the focus should be on what's going to have to be done to unite America to keep the American people safe. So that's what I was talking about.

SCHIEFFER: In the news this morning, Prime Minister Maliki said this morning that Democrats in the United States who have been calling for his resignation, he said they are treating America as if--or treating Iraq as if it was somehow one of America's villages, as he put it, and he said it is time to start talking about Iraq with more respect. Any thoughts on that?

Fmr. Sen. EDWARDS: Yeah, I think that Maliki should quit worrying about Democrats and the presidential campaign in America and start worrying about what he needs to do in his own country. I mean, everyone knows that, at the end of the day, the Iraq Study Group has said, and most of us have said at this point, there can be no military solution in Iraq. There has to be a political solution. There has to be some compromise between Maliki and the Shia-led government and the Sunni leadership. Otherwise there'll never be stability and security in Iraq. And Maliki, who has been, clearly, a weak leader, needs to be focused on that job.

SCHIEFFER: Do you think he ought to step aside?

Fmr. Sen. EDWARDS: I think that's something for them to decide, not for us to decide. But, at the end of the day, the real test is, are they moving toward a political compromise. Because there cannot be stability in Iraq without it.

SCHIEFFER: Do you think they are?

Fmr. Sen. EDWARDS: No. I think--I can't--if there's any difference, I can't see it. And I know that we're going--Petraeus is going to come forward with his report in September, and I think the--that--at least from my perspective--the test in that report should not just be what's happening with the military and what's happening with the situation with violence on the ground, the question is, has, during this surge, has there been any change in the political situation. And how long are we going to be willing to keep troops on the ground at this level if there's no serious movement toward a political compromise. I think that should be the test for this report that's coming.

SCHIEFFER: Well, when the Senate and the House come back into session at the end of the summer here, the first thing they're going to have to deal with is what to do about Iraq, funding the war.

Fmr. Sen. EDWARDS: Yes.
SCHIEFFER: You're seeing even some Democrats, like Senator Clinton, to go back to Senator Clinton, saying it looks like that maybe the surge is working in the sense that there is less violence there. What do you think the Senate should do here, Senator? I know you have said that you'd like to immediately draw down about 40,000 troops there...

Fmr. Sen. EDWARDS: Yes.

SCHIEFFER: ...and then work from there and eventually get all of them out.

Fmr. Sen. EDWARDS: Yes.

SCHIEFFER: Do you think that's in any way a possibility, or is the president going to be able to ride this out?

Fmr. Sen. EDWARDS: Well, I think there's actually a mandate from America, regardless of what I think. I think America said very clearly in the November 2006 elections that they wanted a very different course in Iraq, and I think the Congress has a responsibility under that mandate, and I think they should stand their ground. I think they should not submit a single funding bill to the president for the war that doesn't have a timetable for withdrawal. And I think they should use whatever legislative tool is available to them, including filibuster.

SCHIEFFER: Including a filibuster?

Fmr. Sen. EDWARDS: Including a filibuster. To do everything--this is not politics. This is about life and death. We have men and women dying in Iraq, and they're dying in part because of what we--what we talked about a few minutes ago. Because the Sunnis...(unintelligible).

SCHIEFFER: Well, you know, Senator Warner, the--perhaps the most influential and respected voice on national security on the Republican side, said last week that it is time to start bringing home at least--he said pick a number, but at least 5,000. And he says no timetable; he doesn't think that's wise to set a timetable, but he did say it's time to start the withdrawal. What about that? Do you think that--you think they should go beyond that?

Fmr. Sen. EDWARDS: I think we should go beyond that, but I'm glad to see that Senator Warner, having just apparently come back from Iraq, is seeing what most of America is seeing, which is the real test here is we have to shift the responsibility to the Iraqis. They have got to feel the heat. And they've got to start moving on political compromise. It's that simple. And the threshold question is, how do you shift that responsibility, how do you intensify pressure on them. And we can't do that until we start taking troops out of Iraq, which I think is exactly what Senator Warner's saying. I'd go far beyond what he suggests, but the truth of the matter is, we have to start taking troops out of Iraq.

SCHIEFFER: In February, you were on FACE THE NATION, and I asked you what would happen if the administration took your advice, did exactly what you say we ought to do. What did you think would happen, and you said, `I don't know.' And I remember asking you at the time, `Can you run
for president and say you don't know what would happen if the administration does what you say that it should do?'

Fmr. Sen. EDWARDS: I don't think anybody who suggests to America--and America has been misled and misled about this war, and they're sick of it. They want the truth. The truth is there are no good choices and no one can predict with any kind of accuracy exactly what's going to happen in Iraq. So, if I were president of the United States today, I would do what you suggested earlier, but I would also be very open and forthright with the American people, that we cannot predict what's going to happen. We're going to maximize the chances of success, we're going to do this in an orderly and responsible way, but there's no way to know with certainty what will happen.

SCHIEFFER: But even if it meant a--some sort of a regional conflict that broke out that brought other people in the Middle East into it, you say we have to take that risk to get our people out of there?

Fmr. Sen. EDWARDS: I think we--I think we actually maximize the chances for success by starting to draw down troops in Iraq. I think that what it does is it shifts the responsibility to them, and there's at least some opportunity for them to reach some compromise. I think we should, in combination with doing that, we should engage the Iranians and the Syrians who have a clear interest in a stable Iraq, particularly if America's no longer occupying Iraq. We do have to, I believe, Bob, prepare for the other possibilities. I mean, I would maintain a presence in the region--we have an obvious interest in the region.

SCHIEFFER: Mm-hmm.

Fmr. Sen. EDWARDS: We probably need to be beef up our presence in Afghanistan, we need a naval presence in the Persian Gulf, probably need a rapid deployment force in Kuwait. Maybe should stage some troops in--station some troops in Jordan if we could get staging authority from the Jordanian government.

SCHIEFFER: All right, we'll come back and talk about this some more, and Elizabeth Edwards' role in this campaign when we come back in one minute.

(Announcements)

SCHIEFFER: And we're back with John and Elizabeth Edwards.

Mrs. Edwards, I want to talk to you a little bit about the role that seems to be developing for you in this campaign, and it is most unusual. Some people are calling you the attacker in chief. Others say that we've never had a candidate's wife who's been put in charge of the tough stuff. Usually they are--they are brought into the campaign to talk about the softer side. But yet, you called Senator Obama `holier than thou.' You have said Senator Clinton is not doing a good job on presenting health care. When someone asked why Senator Obama and Senator Clinton were getting so much publicity, you said, 'Look, John is not black and he is not a woman, and there's nothing we can do about that.' Do you feel, as a woman, that you can say things in the campaign that perhaps Senator Edwards cannot say?
Ms. EDWARDS: None of this is calculated in any way. I have always been really forthright. I think if I have any value in the campaign--everyone knows I support my husband, obviously.

SCHIEFFER: Mm-hmm.

Fmr. Sen. EDWARDS: Shocking news.

Ms. EDWARDS: But my value is that people trust me, they trust me to say what's on my mind and to be direct. And I answer questions. I answer questions about why it is John uses the Internet so heavily. I think it's partly because the mainstream media is involved with an obviously interesting story between a man of African-American heritage and a woman candidate. These are--that's an interesting story. If he wants to get his policies across, he needs to find someplace other than mainstream media--today excepted--to get that message across. And it wasn't meant in any way to be derogatory of--even of the press. (Unintelligible).

SCHIEFFER: Well, do you think--do you think in some way that the whole dynamic of this campaign has changed because we do have a woman who's leading in the polls now, Senator Clinton? Has that changed the way you campaign?

Ms. EDWARDS: I don't think it does. First of all, I think you have to campaign with blinders on in a certain respect. My idea is--my purpose, I think, is to talk about John's policies. He gives me an incredible buffet from which to speak. You know, the first person on health care, the first person on environmental, the only person with a rural policy, you know, a really aggressive position with respect to Iraq. I've got a lot of things I can talk about out there, and honestly, I--except when asked, I don't--I don't references the differences between John's vote on dedicated funding for Iraq and Senator Obama's, or John's health care program and Senator Clinton's. I don't--I don't volunteer these, but when asked, I try to be trustworthy.

SCHIEFFER: Well, I know--I remember--I remember one time that Ann Coulter, the Republican activist and author...

Ms. EDWARDS: Mm-hmm.

SCHIEFFER: ...was tearing his hide off on, what, Chris Matthews' show. And you just picked up the phone and called, and said, 'Hey.'

Ms. EDWARDS: Well--but that has to do with, I think--I mean, as a mother, honestly, at--sometimes I've been pretty disturbed about the trend in the political dialogue. If we're arguing about policy, and I'm saying `somebody's health care policy doesn't do this, and somebody--and John's does do--does do what's missing,' that's different than calling--than name calling. And that denigrates the whole process. Turns people off, we have less people voting, and it's really important to get those people engaged because we can't--this is the wrong way for us to go.

SCHIEFFER: Let me talk to both of you about what you--if you should become president, what you envision the role of the first lady to be. I remember when Senator Clinton decided to run for the
Senate, I think she had a news conference, or she said someplace, 'I'm going to have to put my first lady duties aside now, because I'm going to go run for the Senate.' Well, anybody who looks at the Constitution knows that the first lady has no duties assigned.

Fmr. Sen. EDWARDS: That's right.

SCHIEFFER: I mean, it isn't an elective office in any way. What role would Elizabeth play in your administration if you were elected, Senator?

Fmr. Sen. EDWARDS: Well, she's the person I trust most in the world, so I mean, I would care--we talk about everything. We talk about everything personal to us, our family, our responsibilities to our kids. And we talk about my views and her views on national policy. On most things we agree, on some things we don't agree. But...

SCHIEFFER: Gay marriage, for example.

Fmr. Sen. EDWARDS: That is an example. And I think that there--I want--but I care what she says, and I want to hear what she says. So she would be somebody that I would talk to, and would...(unintelligible).

SCHIEFFER: But would you put her in charge of something? I remember Bill Clinton was campaigning, he talked about 'two for one.' I have also known, over years of covering Capitol Hill, members of Congress who've made their wives chiefs of staff.

Fmr. Sen. EDWARDS: Yeah.

SCHIEFFER: In my mind, it never worked, because you're putting somebody in a position that you can't fire. Would she...

Fmr. Sen. EDWARDS: That's true, actually.

SCHIEFFER: Would she ever be in charge of a program, or would she be in charge of initiatives?

Would you want to, Elizabeth?

Fmr. Sen. EDWARDS: Well, I'll let her speak to it. Let me say one thing about it...

Ms. EDWARDS: OK.

Fmr. Sen. EDWARDS: ...before she does. I think that the way we do things, and the way we interact, it's so natural that I would not want to change that. I think titles and specific charges is not the way that we do things together. And I think, because of that, it doesn't make sense. Now, there may be things that she has a particular interest in, and I'll let her speak for herself on that. But I think what she has done during the course of the campaign--being honest, being forthright, being strong--I personally respect, and I applaud her for it. And she will continue to do that, as she has the entire 30 years that we've been married. And I expect her to continue.
SCHIEFFER: Well, I mean, for example, if I were covering the White House, and you did something as president, what if I called up Elizabeth Edwards and said, `What's going on here?' Would she be speaking out, or would she be answering questions...

Fmr. Sen. EDWARDS: Let her say it.


SCHIEFFER: ...from the press? What about that?

Ms. EDWARDS: No. I mean, John--I presently respect the way things are done, and John has people who speak for him. And I'm really supposed to be just a mirror for people see him. And what I have to say about it, honestly, is not very important. People will be voting for John. The extent to which I can shed a light on who he is as a person, that's great. I never practiced law with him, partly for some of the reasons that you--that you mentioned. And--but it doesn't mean that he didn't talk to me about his cases; he always did. I think that the first lady gets a megaphone. She doesn't get a job, she gets a megaphone to talk about the things she cares about. I care about veterans' issues--my dad is a veteran--military families--I was raised in one. I care about after-school programs; we've started one. Care a great deal about what happens with respect to breast cancer and treatment and research. So the--I mean, I have a lot. And that doesn't even mention a seven-year-old and a nine-year-old at home.

SCHIEFFER: But you're not campaigning for a Cabinet office?

Ms. EDWARDS: I am absolutely--not only--I will not accept, nor will I...

SCHIEFFER: All right, all right. We'll take a break here, and we'll come back and talk about life on the campaign trail.

(Announcements)

SCHIEFFER: And we're back now with Elizabeth and John Edwards.

Very quickly, we were talking during the break about how you find out about some of the differences you have, and you said you found out her position on gay marriage when you read it in the paper.

Fmr. Sen. EDWARDS: Actually, that's not exactly right. One of my staff told me that she had just said it in San Francisco. But Elizabeth reminds me, she said--probably said it in front of me, I just wasn't listening.

SCHIEFFER: This happens in various marriages.

Ms. EDWARDS: It does happen. In a--in a 30-year marriage, it does happen now and again.
SCHIEFFER: Your book is absolutely wonderful...

Ms. EDWARDS: Thank you.

SCHIEFFER: ...and it is so--it's a loving love story.

Ms. EDWARDS: Yes.

SCHIEFFER: Beautifully told, it seems to me. You all had your 30th wedding anniversary. I continue to go back to this business of finding out that you had cancer. Do you have any regrets about deciding to just go ahead and live your life as you've done on this campaign?

Ms. EDWARDS: Of course, you don't get to do it both ways, but choosing to fight for the things that we've fought for for a very long time is enormously important to me. It allows me--and John, honestly--to focus on something other than my condition. We get to focus on the fact that other people need health care. You know, we each have stories that we learn along the road that make us realize that, in fact, despite this diagnosis we're actually very lucky. And--because we see people who have diagnoses as terrible as these, but they don't have--they have no health care. So, those people drive us every day and make us glad that we're fighting this fight. I mean, I don't think anybody else has a truly universal health care. They're going to leave some men and some women out, and if they have my condition, it's heartbreaking to think that they don't get the answers to their--to the problems they face in their lives.

SCHIEFFER: I'm told that you are preparing some sort of guide for your children?

Ms. EDWARDS: I actually wrote...

SCHIEFFER: Can you--can you talk about that?

Ms. EDWARDS: ...I wrote that in the 1980s after "Terms of Endearment" came out. I wrote a letter to my children. I thought it was a very good idea, in case you had a sudden death, that you would tell your children things you thought were important that you might not yet have told them. My older children, I've--we've had children in the '70s, '80s, '90s and '00s, so my '70s and '80s children were very young when I wrote this letter. I haven't changed it, honestly, since I first wrote it. It talks about--it talks about religion and the kind of person you marry. I hope they all marry someone as wonderful as John has been to me. And they have--it's just the little things that you might have wished on your deathbed that you had a chance to say.

SCHIEFFER: In your book, you write about that when you found out about this and you announced your plans, some people said to both of you, 'You're in denial about cancer.' You said you're not.

Ms. EDWARDS: We're not.

SCHIEFFER: Would you talk a little about that?
Ms. EDWARDS: Well, I think John said this in the press conference, that we're not in denial. We understand the seriousness of this diagnosis. We understand that this disease will probably kill me one day. We're cheering on all the researchers out there, hoping they--all their NIH grants get funded so that--and I have to stay alive long enough for that to happen. But just because you accept that you've got the disease doesn't mean that you have to accept the end of your life yet. You need to keep fighting, as John has decided to do and I have decided to do, for the things that are important to you for the people that matter to you--who matter to you.

Fmr. Sen. EDWARDS: I would do--Bob, I would do anything for her, just to be clear about this. And I--and I said that to her the day--that long day in the hospital room where we got the bad news. But both of us believe that what we're doing is important and this is the cause of our lives, and that's why--that's why we continue.

SCHIEFFER: Well, I want to thank both of you for being with us this morning, and I wish you the very, very best.

Ms. EDWARDS: Thank you, Bob.

SCHIEFFER: Back with a final word in just a minute.

(Announcements)

SCHIEFFER: So here we are back in New Hampshire, sooner than ever but maybe not soon enough. The way these other states keep moving up their primaries, New Hampshire may have to move its to before Christmas if it wants to be first. But whenever they have it, what I love about coming here is the wackiness it brings out in our campaigns.

Like back in '84, when Democrat Gary Hart showed that he could throw an axe better than anyone. Now there's a skill every president needs.

And then there was George Bush's dad in '88. Someone accused him of being prissy, sort of a wimp. So he countered with a strategy of driving things with big wheels: forklifts, snowplows, tractors. He even got aboard an 18-wheeler and gave the horn a big toot. It worked. Better images through heavy machinery.

And then there was the greatest unintended sight gag in the history of politics when Republican candidate Gary Bauer entered the pancake-flipping contest. He flipped his pancake high into the air and then--and then...

Unidentified Woman: (From file footage) Oh! Oh no!

SCHIEFFER: Bauer also dropped off the political map after that, but, except for his feelings, he wasn't hurt that day.

Yeah, I've said it 1,000 times, these campaigns start too early and they last too long. But when you think about all the things that have happened here, you got to love coming to New Hampshire.
We'll be back in Washington next week, unless I fall off the stage, too. So long.