

Lynne Cheney: Partisanship is a Madisonian principle

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Cheney: Daughters' feud 'unfortunate'

(CNN) -- Lynne Cheney has spent decades studying and admiring the nation's fourth president, James Madison.

Her new book, "James Madison: A Life Reconsidered" is a labor of political admiration that began five years ago and culminated in a historical journey in which Madison, the father of the Constitution, also becomes a prophet of productive conservatism.

She considers his impact generally under-appreciated but incredibly profound.

Cheney hopes her book will complete the record on Madison's important role in the Republican Party — as well as on his personal demeanor and political vision.

"We talked about his being reserved and reticent. And his friends thought that it was going to damage his political career, but it didn't. He had such gifts. And they came shining through, his amazing intellect, his political skill, that when you combine with modesty, he became an evermore admirable figure," she told CNN.

Her personal journey

In a wide-ranging interview, Cheney also spoke about her own personal political journey — as a second lady, historian and mother — and the impact of the public feud last year between her daughters over the issue of same-sex marriage. The family, she now says, is a "happy family."

She considers Madison the prophet of small government. He pushed for a strong central government early in his political career when he served in the early House of Representatives, but he started having some doubts.

"Madison began to worry about too strong a government," Cheney told CNN.

He founded the nation's first political party.

"That political party led to an era of partisanship in the 1790's that's the equal of anything we have today," she said.

When asked if that partisanship was worse or better today than when the government first began, she recounted how mean the politics of the 18th and early 19th centuries were.

"Alexander Hamilton was revealed as an adulterer in the pages of the newspaper. Dolley Madison (James Madison's wife) was attacked. ... So, it was every bit as vicious, I think, as today is. And Madison was really responsible for it by starting this Labor Party."

Does she think this politics of personal destruction is a terrible thing?

"Madison wouldn't have thought so."

When asked about her views, she responded, "I don't think so either. ... Its what happens when you have free and open debate."

Controversial politics

Cheney is no stranger to controversial politics. Her husband, Dick Cheney, was a House GOP backbencher before becoming a member of the majority leadership and vice president.

He became a chief defender of the Iraq War and the controversial terrorism interrogation policies on terror detainees used by the George W. Bush administration in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks.

"I'd like to take some of the edge off it, trust me. You know, I've been through this," she said.

The most recent trial by fire occurred when her family had to confront fallout from her daughter Liz's bid for a U.S. Senate seat from Wyoming.

After Liz reiterated her opposition to same-sex marriage, her sister, Mary, who is gay and married, lashed out.

"Liz, this isn't just an issue on which we disagree. You're just wrong - and on the wrong side of history," Mary wrote on Facebook.

Dick and Lynne Cheney felt the need to issue a statement to try to calm the tensions. How does a parent deal with all of that?

"My underlying philosophy is that you should try to keep family matters within the family. And I think it was, you know, unfortunate that happened," Lynne Cheney told CNN.

"It's hard to have two wonderful daughters who see things differently. ... The disadvantage is that it becomes a public dispute. And I just don't wanna do anything to continue that trend. It's not good for family generally to do that, and I don't think it's good for ours."

She said the advice she would give other families who are going through these types of issues is to "just love your kids. ... I love them unconditionally. I can't think of a greater gift that any parent can give a child."

About her position on same-sex marriage, she said, "I think Dick actually had the classic formulation. He said, 'Freedom means freedom for everyone.' I think that's a principle we can all agree on," she said.

'A happy family'

When asked if there had been a reconciliation between her daughters she responded, "We're a happy family."

Dick and Lynne Cheney now spend a majority of their time in Wyoming, not in Washington. But they both are still very much into politics -- of all centuries.

"Madison was the man who said we're a government of laws, not men. (President Barack) Obama seems to be showing us that we can be a government of man and not laws. So it is ... how can you evaluate the two of them in the same breath? I can't see it," she said.

While the former vice president has been very vocal in his opposition to some of Obama's policies, especially national security, former President George W. Bush has vowed not to comment publicly on policy matters or his successor.

Asked why the former President has decided not to engage, Mrs. Cheney said "I have no idea. But he seems to be content and happy and I look forward to seeing him and Mrs. Bush next week."

Do the Cheneys and Bushes keep in touch? "Well, I'm going to be at the Bush Library -- talking about James Madison."

Jeb and Hillary

As for some of those who may run for President in 2016, she said former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush would make a "great contribution" if he ran.

"He has to sort that out. It is so hard to run for President that -- you know, you have to be sure in your own heart and that's what you wanna do. And he'll figure that out," she said.

She was more sure about Hillary Clinton.

"I in fact don't even understand what the debate is about - will she or won't she. She's running." She added, "you know she was defeated in this 2008 election in the primary. And we didn't see that coming. So I'm not sure I could, I could predict that one for you."

For their part Dick and Lynne Cheney are getting ready to celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary.

Asked if they miss being at the center of the political universe, she said, "That was a great time and a time that both of us enjoyed. But it's, you know, it's one stage of your life and you move on to another one. We're in our Western years now."