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Ridge Disagrees with Cheney, Obama

By: Reid Wilson

Former Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge said in an interview Sunday he did not think President Obama's policies have made the country less safe.

Ridge specifically disagreed with his former boss, Vice President Dick Cheney, but he also said he disagreed with Obama's approach to keeping the nation out of harm's way.

The former Pennsylvania governor, who earlier this year decided against running for the United States Senate, said the debate has devolved into a politically-heated back and forth.

"It's just the whole notion of a Republican vice president giving a speech after the incumbent Democrat president. It's got to go beyond the politics of either party," Ridge said. "At the end of the day, we're continuing the same policies in Afghanistan and Iraq and the debate around memos and waterboarding does not make us less safe."

"What I'm suggesting is that both men in principle are correct. The real issue is what do we do with these prisoners and what do we do with -- when we capture or apprehend other similar individuals in Iraq, Afghanistan, or elsewhere in the future. That's nowhere in the debate," he continued. "And if you believe it's a global scourge, you had better figure out a way to deal with it."

Ridge, the first head of a department created just after the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, said he had not seen evidence to back up Cheney's claim that enhanced interrogation techniques were used to save American lives.

But, he said: "I do believe that since President Obama has released the memos that are substantially redacted, then perhaps there may be information that should be released to show that they actually received substantive information that enabled America to better protect itself. You can't have it both ways."

Ridge said the administration should release interrogation memos in full, without redactions. He also said he disagreed with Obama's assertion that the Bush administration relied on fear rather than foresight in making decisions after the Sept. 11 attacks.



"The men and women in charge of America's security, whether the military or the intelligence community, the president, the vice president, the attorney general, the FBI director, did everything they could at the time to prevent another attack on America. And [they] did it consistent with the Constitution and the rule of law," Ridge said.

Ridge, a centrist elected twice to govern the swing state of Pennsylvania, said his party needs to accept new visions for the GOP in order to grow and regain seats it has lost.

"We have to be far less judgmental about disagreements within the party and far more judgmental about our disagreement with our friends on the other side of the aisle," Ridge said. "I think a lot of our commentators are being shrill."

"Let's lead our party based on some principles that have been very much a part of who we are for decades, and let's be less shrill, in terms of -- and, particularly, not attack other individuals. Let's attack their ideas. Let's explain, in a rational, thoughtful, responsible and reasonable way why our ideas and our approach are more acceptable, why they should be more acceptable to the average citizen," he added.

Ridge again refused to say he would back ex-Rep. Pat Toomey (R-Pa.), the most prominent Republican in the race against Sen. Arlen Specter (D-Pa.). Ridge said he has heard other Republicans are interested in the race.

"Tom Ridge has a secret ballot," he said. "I'm going to wait to see if the people that I know whom I might support decide to make the difficult decision to run."

Though Ridge called himself a "strong" Republican, he said he has no qualms about voting Democratic. "I've never, ever, ever voted straight Republican ticket in my life and I never will."