

# THE AMERICAN PROSPECT

## Liz and Dick

With the help of her powerful father, Liz Cheney is running for Senate and setting off the next round of an intra-GOP fight over foreign policy.

By Matthew Duss – July 18<sup>th</sup>, 2013

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It's not much of a surprise that Liz Cheney has decided to run for office, as she announced yesterday. With the help of her father, former Vice President Dick Cheney, and access to his considerable network of donors and supporters, she's been building a national profile herself, mainly on national security issues, for several years.

What is surprising is that she would challenge a sitting Republican Senator in Wyoming, rather than the state in which she's spent most of her time over the last decade. "When I heard Liz Cheney was running for Senate I wondered if she was running in her home state of Virginia," said Senator Rand Paul in response to the news that Cheney would challenge incumbent Mike Enzi.

The problem isn't that a primary fight could weaken the GOP in Wyoming. As Jonathan Chait noted yesterday, there's little real danger of a Democratic upset in reliably-red Wyoming. The problem, Chait continued, is that "Cheney is nuts—a spokesman of the deranged wing of the GOP that believes Obama is not merely the worst and most radical president in American history, but actually *wants* to weaken America," as she charged in a recent Wall Street Journal op-ed.

Cheney's video announcement of her candidacy—which, suggesting a sensitivity to the "carpetbagger" charge, included a long list of her forbearers who lived in Wyoming, as she didn't until last year—gave an indication of the delights that await. "President Obama has launched a war on our Second Amendment rights, he's launched a war on our religious freedom, he's used the IRS to launch a war on our freedom of speech, and he's used the EPA to launch a war on Wyoming's ranchers, our farmers, and our energy industry."

The fact that, even by the loose standards of political hyperbole, that's all complete bullshit, gets at what it is that Liz Cheney brings to the conversation: Brazen mendacity in defense of American militarism.

Cheney's run can be seen as another escalation in the ongoing battle for control of Republican foreign policy. In a 2010 piece for the *Nation*, I looked at the developing alliance between the Cheneys and the neoconservative network led by *The Weekly Standard* editor Bill Kristol. Their goal, I wrote, was "to resuscitate the neocons' post-September 11 vision of a world in which the United States, unbound by rules or reality, imposes its will on friend and enemy alike." The key

instrument of that effort was Keep America Safe, a 501c4 organization (now shut down, its website and Twitter feed have disappeared) whose main function was to keep America scared with wild stories of the terrorists that Obama couldn't wait to release into your neighborhood.

While Keep America Safe scored some political successes, playing a large role in cowing the administration into retreating from its initial efforts to close Guantanamo Bay prison, as a broader effort to rehabilitate neoconservatives' world-transformative schemes in the eyes of American voters, it's hard to argue that it wasn't a bust. Opinion polls over the past years have consistently shown the Americans are just not that into acting as the world's policeman—err, “benevolent global hegemon.” By the end of the 2012 presidential campaign even Mitt Romney was throwing the neocons under the bus.

And last month, President Obama announced that he was restarting efforts to close Guantanamo.

Meanwhile, Kentucky Senator Rand Paul has maintained a steady critique of the neocons' interventionist views, mounting the first real internal challenge to their dominance of the party's national security apparatus since the decline of the Republican realists in the 1990's. It's been slow going, and neocons still control the commanding heights of the GOP foreign policymaking infrastructure, but the challenge is real enough that the American Enterprise Institute, the neoconservative mothership, created the American Internationalism Project to combat, in the words of its two chairs, former Senators Joe Lieberman and John Kyl “neo-isolationist policies—demands for retreat from the world clothed in the language of fiscal prudence and disinterested realism.” This growing intra-party fight is clearly a big part of what's driving Cheney to enter electoral politics.

Still, selling Wyoming voters on this presents a challenge. “Mike Enzi is no Rand Paul, which raises the question: What's the policy case for Liz Cheney to make?” asks Justin Logan, director of foreign policy studies at the libertarian Cato Institute. “Can she persuade Wyoming voters she's not a Beltway elite carpetbagger who thinks she's entitled to the seat by dint of her last name?” Noting that there was talk of her running from Virginia as recently as 2009, Logan continued, “What has she done other than run some programs at the State Department while her dad was veep, and found a failed pressure group, Keep America Safe? What can she do for Wyoming voters that Mike Enzi can't?”

While Cheney represents an increasingly unpopular vision of foreign policy, it's unlikely that the Syrian civil war and the Iranian nuclear program will register much in Wyoming's election. “Conservative voters have shifted on foreign policy, but the GOP foreign policy establishment hasn't budged an inch,” Logan says. “They're pawing the ground for war with Syria and Iran. Given that elections—in particular, the Wyoming GOP Senate primary—aren't decided on foreign policy grounds, Cheney's could win the seat in spite of, rather than because of her foreign policy views.”