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Cheney rallies state's GOP

By ROB JOHNSON
Staff Writer

The U.S. vice president returned to Tennessee yesterday to thank the state's Republicans for helping deliver the 2000 presidential election, to energize them for a crucial U.S. Senate race and to warn that the global war on terror won't end with any tidy arms control agreements.

Dick Cheney last stumped in Tennessee just days before the 2000 presidential election that saw George W. Bush squeak out a victory, thanks in large part to Tennessee's electoral rejection of its native son, Al Gore, the Democratic nominee.

What was once a sure GOP Senate seat is up for grabs, now that U.S. Sen. Fred Thompson has withdrawn from a re-election bid.

A former governor, Lamar Alexander, and a sitting U.S congressman, Ed Bryant, are seeking the Republican nomination to face Democrat Bob Clement in the November election.

Republicans are keen to win back the majority in the U.S. Senate, a point Cheney was eager to emphasize at the Statesmen's Dinner at the Nashville Convention Center, where more than 2,000 people were paying \$200 each to attend. About 25 people were expected to pay \$10,000 each for a private gathering with Cheney.

U.S. Sen. Bill Frist of Tennessee introduced Cheney as a man with "a reassuring intellect." President Bush "indeed relies on him, and he says so often," Frist said.

The vice president told the enthusiastic crowd, arrayed before him in the large exhibition hall, that he was sorry to see Thompson leave the Senate.

"Fred's leaving the Senate and retiring from politics. Then again, I know of people who have left public life previously only to make a sudden and unexpected return. Nine years ago I thought I'd retired from politics. I was certain that my whole career in public life was over," Cheney said.

He couldn't resist a dig at Gore: "I was even thinking about growing a beard."

Cheney had sharp words for a U.S. Senate that has been slow to appoint President Bush's judicial nominations. The administration has tapped 103 people for judgeships, Cheney said, and on the U.S. 6th Circuit Court of Appeals, which includes Tennessee, eight of its 16 judgeships are vacant.

"The Senate has simply failed to meet its responsibilities, and that's another reason to put Bill Frist and his Republican colleagues back in the majority," the vice president said.

He contends that President Bush has pulled off a historical juggling act.

"Our president has risen to the very difficult challenges facing our country. Some of his predecessors have led major wars. Some have had national emergencies. Others have had to deal with economic recessions. In just 18 months, President Bush has had to deal with all three."

On the terror front, he promised that the United State would not sit back.

"The nation is alert to dangers, and we are prepared to defend ourselves, but wars are not won on the defensive. There is no treaty at the end of the day that will settle this conflict, no arms control agreement with Osama bin Laden. For the security of our people and our freedom, we must find and defeat the enemies of the United States of America," the vice president said.

He added later: "Afghanistan is only the beginning of a long and unrelenting effort. It is not fast or easy work to confront a terror network that has cells in 60 or more countries, but we are going to shut down terrorist camps wherever they are and disrupt terrorist plans and find the terrorists one by one and bring them to justice."

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