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# Chafee's new book is tough on pro-war Democrats, Republicans, President Bush

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Former Sen. Lincoln Chafee, Brown University Class of 1975, presents the Stephen A. Ogden Jr. Memorial Lecture on International Affairs at Brown last year.

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PROVIDENCE — Former U.S. Sen. Lincoln Chafee's new political memoir is remarkable for its candor, its delicious window into life in America's most exclusive club, and its condemnation of President Bush and the combination of right-wing Republicans and Democratic enablers who plunged the nation into an ill-fated war without end in Iraq.

The most startling revelation: Chafee must be the only senator in U.S. political history who says his defeat was the result of voters acting logically.

"The system works best when power remains in the hands of the voters," writes Chafee. "I was a casualty of the system working in 2006, and while defeat is never easy, I give the voters credit: They made the connection between electing even popular Republicans at the cost of leaving the Senate in the hands of a leadership they had learned to mistrust."

The book, titled *Against the Tide: How a Compliant Congress Empowered a Reckless President*, is due in bookstores

April 1. It is being published by St. Martin's Press. The Journal obtained a copy last week, and Chafee agreed to talk about it in his office at Brown University's Watson Institute, where the former senator is a visiting scholar.

Then-Republican Chafee, of course, met defeat at the hands of Democrat Sheldon Whitehouse in the wave of anti-Bush and antiwar sentiment that cost the Republican Party control of both the House and Senate. Exit polls done on Election Day showed that Chafee had a 63-percent job-approval rating, high enough, in most election cycles, to guarantee victory.

The book excoriates Mr. Bush and his GOP allies who repeatedly fanned such wedge issues as changing the U.S. Constitution to ban gay marriage, abortion and flag-burning. But he saves some of his harshest words for Democrats who paved the way for Mr. Bush to use the U.S. military to invade Iraq. That includes New York Sen. Hillary Clinton, whom Chafee says put her presidential ambitions above standing up to Mr. Bush and the rush to war in Iraq.

"I find it surprising now, in 2008, how many Democrats are running for president after shirking their constitutional duty to check and balance this president," writes Chafee. "Being wrong about sending Americans to kill and be killed, maim and be maimed, is not like making a punctuation mistake in a highway bill.

"They argue that the president duped them into war, but getting duped does not exactly recommend their leadership. Helping a rogue president start an unnecessary war should be a career-ending lapse of judgment."

Chafee was the only Republican senator to vote against prosecuting the war. "The top Democrats were at their weakest when trying to show how tough they were," writes Chafee. "They were afraid that Republicans would label them soft in the post-September 11 world, and when they acted in political self-interest, they helped the president send thousands of Americans and uncounted innocent Iraqis to their doom.

"Instead of talking tough or meekly raising one's hand to support the tough talk, it is far more muscular, I think, to find out what is really happening in the world and have a debate about what we really need to accomplish," writes Chafee. "That is the hard work of governing, but it was swept aside once the fear, the war rhetoric and the political conniving took over."

Chafee writes of his surprise at "how quickly key Democrats crumbled." Democratic senators, Chafee writes, "went down to the meetings at the White House and the Pentagon and came back to the chamber ready to salute. With wrinkled brows they gravely intoned that Saddam Hussein must be stopped. Stopped from what? They had no conviction or evidence of their own. They were just parroting the administration's nonsense. They knew it could go terribly wrong; they also knew it could go terribly right. Which did they fear more?"

Unlike members of his own party, Democratic senators were not getting the influence, home-state goodies, White House invites and Congressional pork that goes with being in the majority. The Democrats had learned not to trust Mr. Bush before the Twin Towers and the Pentagon burst into flame on Sept. 11.

A bewildered Chafee, seeking an explanation, turned to an unnamed Democratic senator who opposed the war but was well-respected by his party's leaders. This senator tells Chafee "in confidence" what concerned the Democrats. "They are afraid the war will be over as fast as Gulf One. Few will die, the oil will flow and gasoline will cost 90 cents a gallon."

The anecdote is the only unattributed quote in a book that otherwise names names. The speaker was reportedly Rhode Island Democratic Sen. Jack Reed. When asked whether Reed was that senator, Chafee declined to confirm or deny it.

Reed, too, declined comment when asked last week about the quote.

Chafee, a 1975 Brown graduate, decided to write the book after an article about him appeared in Brown's alumni magazine. He was contacted by a literary agent — also a Brown alum — who asked him to write a book. Chafee decided to give it a try and worked diligently last summer to finish it. Tony De Paul, a former Journal reporter known around the newsroom for his writing skills, helped Chafee focus his thoughts and meet deadlines. "It is really in his voice," De Paul said of Chafee in a recent interview.

The book has some through-the-looking-glass scenes; one in particular reads like Hunter S. Thompson sans drugs. As Mr. Bush pressed insistently for war, Chafee requested a meeting with CIA brass to examine the evidence against Saddam Hussein's regime. "Sooner or later, I have to vote on this war, show me everything you have," Chafee requests of the CIA.

"What they had, I discovered as the meeting stretched into an hour, was next to nothing," recalls Chafee. "They showed me what they had with little comment and no enthusiasm. Someone handed me one of the infamous aluminum tubes, the kind we were told Saddam was using to enrich weapons-grade uranium while plotting mushroom clouds over America, the 'smoking gun' that Condoleezza Rice warned about.

"I looked at the aluminum tube, looked at the analysts and thought, I can go buy one of these at Adler's Hardware," the Providence hardware emporium, writes Chafee.

"Few members of Congress were willing to stand up to the schoolyard tough [Mr. Bush] and in the early morning hours of Oct. 11, 2002, weeks before the crucial midterm elections, he bullied them into declaring Saddam an imminent threat."

From the start of his career, Chafee was the most unlikely of candidates. His father, the late John H. Chafee, was the archetype of the New England Republican moderate and served as a Rhode Island state legislator, governor, U.S. Navy secretary and as a U.S. senator. But Lincoln Chafee, as a young man never much interested in a politics, took the road less traveled.

He majored in classics at Brown, captained the wrestling team, then lit out for the American West and Canada, working at racetracks shoeing horses for seven years.

Chafee moved back home to Rhode Island and developed a yen for political issues in his native Warwick. He writes fondly of his formative political years as he moved from delegate to the state Constitutional Convention to the Warwick City Council to Warwick mayor. He recalls with a wink the times he was verbally lambasted by the Democrats who controlled the City Council when he was mayor of Warwick. After these meetings he and his tormentors jawed over beers at a nearby tavern.

The initial chapters could be titled "The Political Education of Lincoln Chafee." As an 11-year-old, he attended the 1964 Republican National Convention and watched what would become a seminal event in the lurch of the GOP to the hard right. That convention nominated Arizona Sen. Barry Goldwater as the party's presidential standard-bearer, and he was the first in a series of Republican presidential candidates from the South and West. As the party drifted right, New England moderates such as Chafee and his father became relics.

Chafee acknowledges now that he made some mistakes; perhaps the most blatant, he said in an interview, was not bolting the GOP sooner and becoming an independent, as did his friend then-Sen. James M. Jeffords of Vermont.

Yet, Chafee understood that switching out of the GOP would have hurt Rhode Island. Mr. Bush and Republican senators, Chafee noted, exacted revenge by stripping Vermont of a popular Jeffords-inspired program that helped dairy farmers.

Rhode Island's defense industries and installations, such as the Naval War College in Newport, could have faced cutbacks had Chafee left the GOP while he was senator. Federal support for Rhode Island roads and highways would also have been in jeopardy, Chafee says.

Since his defeat, Chafee has switched his voter affiliation from Republican to unaffiliated, Rhode Island political argot for independent. He declined in an interview to engage in any speculation about his political future, saying only, "I'm focused right now on promoting my book."

Chafee has few scores to settle in the book; he said that he plans to tone down before publication some of his criticism of Whitehouse. "I plan to cull anything that seems like personal animosity."

Of the general election, Chafee writes that he was both "irked and amused" at the "parade of Democratic Bush enablers" who trekked to Rhode Island to campaign for Whitehouse.

"Senators Harry Reid, Chuck Schumer, Hillary Clinton, and others who had voted for the war urged my constituents" to defeat him, Chafee writes.

Yet, Chafee doesn't mention that such GOP war supporters as former Tennessee Sen. Fred Thompson, Arizona Sen. John McCain and First Lady Laura Bush traveled to Rhode Island to raise money or campaign for Chafee.

He has nothing good to say about Mr. Bush, whom he did not vote for in 2004. He writes that he even flirted with running against Mr. Bush in the 2004 New Hampshire primary and had hoped that a leading Republican would challenge the president.

(In the 2004 general election, Chafee wrote in the name of Mr. Bush's father, President George H.W. Bush, whose foreign policies were in the internationalist vein favored by Chafee's northeastern wing of the GOP.) Chafee makes the case that Mr. Bush fudged all of his campaign pledges of 2000, especially the promises about running a bipartisan administration, running a "humble" foreign policy that would eschew nation-building military adventures abroad, and being a "uniter not a divider."

One of the big reasons Chafee lost his seat was his primary challenge on the right from then-Cranston Mayor Stephen P. Laffey.

Laffey wrote a campaign memoir last year that was an amalgam of conservative talk show slogans, anecdotes from the campaign circuit and stiletto-sharp vituperation aimed at Chafee.

In Laffey's book, Chafee was called a "backstabber," a "confessed cocaine abuser," "fickle," "a dull fellow," a "limousine liberal," a "Ted Kennedy Republican" and a "possible member of a Neville Chamberlain fan club."

Chafee doesn't mention Laffey's name in this book. But the former senator does say that Laffey's campaign — financed largely by a national right-wing group known as the Club for Growth — split the small Republican base in Rhode Island and contributed to Chafee's defeat. Chafee received financing from the national Republican Party but in the book laments how difficult it was to raise money.

Chafee and his wife, Stephanie Chafee, disclosed their worth in Senate documents as about \$80 million. The Chafees put \$1.5 million of their own money into his campaign. When asked why he didn't contribute more, Chafee said, "We thought \$1.5 million was enough."

Reprising what public opinion surveys showed at the time, Chafee says Laffey had no chance in 2006 of winning a U.S. Senate seat.

“My challenger was an extremist’s extremist... He might have been an appealing Republican in a Deep South or Rocky Mountain precinct, but in the state of Rhode Island, he was utter folly,” Chafee argues.

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