

Was Cheney the most important and powerful vice president in US history?

After becoming a candidate for the US Presidential election, the Presidential candidate will choose a running mate and the pair will fight the Presidential election together. The candidate who wins the election's running mate will become the US Vice President. In both the 2000 and 2004 Presidential elections, George W Bush selected Dick Cheney as his running mate. Cheney became the US Vice President between 2001 to 2008 inclusively.

The powers and functions of the US Vice President have changed over time, from VP to VP. There are some fixed powers that all Vice Presidents have.

The US Vice President is the President of the Senate. He will be the Speaker of the Senate and will only vote in the case of a tie, where he has the deciding vote. Gore was the most recent Vice President to exercise this power when in 1993 the budget vote was tied and he voted for the budget. The budget therefore passed the Senate.

After a general election, the previous Vice President's last task is to ensure electoral college votes are correctly counted. He will then confirm the election of the new US President. This must have been a disappointing function for Al Gore to carry out in 2000, when he was the previous Vice President and the losing candidate in the presidential election.

According to the US Constitution, should the President have to leave office for reasons such as resignation and death, the Vice President will take up the empty office of President. In fact, many political commentators, politicians and Vice Presidents themselves have described the office of US Vice President as just a waiting game or more a back up to the President. When criticised for his selection of Vice President, JFK highlighted this point by famously saying he is too young to die in office. There have been nine cases of US Vice Presidents becoming President without election, including the Nixon resignation in 1974 of which Johnson then assumed his constitutional right to become the US President. Of course, George W Bush fully served both of his terms as US President so, Cheney didn't get the chance to exercise this constitutional right, unlike nine previous Vice Presidents. If he didn't get possibly the biggest prize in US politics, when nine other Vice Presidents did, then perhaps he wasn't as powerful as he is sometimes made out to be. Of course, it must be highlighted that once a VP has become President, he is President and has no Vice Presidential power. We must therefore compare Vice Presidents by how powerful they were whilst holding the office of US Vice President.

To compare the powers of different Vice Presidents, the unofficial functions they carried out are to be looked at. These are very much dependant on who the Vice President is. Up to 1804, the Vice President didn't

do much and it wasn't until 1949 that the role of the Vice President started to become more significant.

Vice Presidential power is more significant when the President is less politically experienced such as when Nixon was Vice President. Eisenhower was the current US President but, was an army officer without political experience. George W Bush, President from 2001 to 2008 inclusively, wasn't the cleverest of Presidents and politically was quite inexperienced. So, it makes sense the reason why Cheney would have significant power as the US Vice President. Bush goes so far to say that when 'Cheney is talking, that's me (*Bush*) talking'.

At the beginning of the Bush administration, decisions were to be made on environmental issues. Many in the administration have voiced, that the final decisions were made with "the view of Dick Cheney had been instrumental". Al Gore had a similar part to play in the Clinton administration but, there was a slight twist with Cheney. Cheney had been put in charge of an environmental task force of which a paper was presented to him by a 12 years of service, environmental advisor. This report contradicted Cheney's view and was to have disappeared. This advisor went on to resign because of this incident. Cheney was that powerful, that his word was more important to the President than a senior, specialist's advisor. Another advisor went onto quit because of Cheney and told the media that if you want to talk to Bush, Cheney is always there. No other President has had his Vice President advising him on almost every decision he makes and unparalleled access to the President.

Cheney didn't just over rule the work of environmental advisers, he managed to do work of Cabinet departments without their acknowledgement and seriously undermine their positions. This is shown with the military commissions that Cheney had enforced, after the 9/11 attacks. The NSA and Secretary of State Colin Powell didn't find out about these controversial moves until CNN announced them on their news channel.

If 9/11 showed how powerful Cheney could be, the Iraq War was an even bigger force that could well have been his downfall too. Bush had shown no appetite for war. This can genuinely be proven by a quote in his presidential debates with Al Gore in 2000: "I don't think we should just walk into any country and say: this is how we do things, so should you." It appears that there is enough evidence to suggest that Cheney was making the big decisions in the Iraq War. In modern politics, the Iraq War has given the US a terrible reputation and quite possibly changed the way the world thinks. Bush has very much been criticised for this yet, it appears that Cheney was the ringmaster and the one responsible for the US' poor reputation. No other Vice President has ever had this sort of influence on military strategy and foreign affairs. The Iraq War alone could possibly prove Cheney was the most powerful US President in history.

So, although nine Vice Presidents have become the actual President, it appears that Cheney didn't need his President to die, resign or be impeached, to receive Presidential power. Dick Cheney was described as the "Real US President" and the puppet master of George W Bush. A commentator named Ratner said "we will never go back to where we were before him." It appears the office of Vice President is no longer a waiting room.