

FOURTH BRANCH SARAH

I'm sort of busy today, preparing for the special Monday Book Salon with Bart Gellman, talking about his book Angler: The Cheney Vice Presidency. The book salon will be at 3PM ET, so prepare your questions.

But I confess that reading the book after watching the VP Debate the other night made me laugh—rather than shudder—at Palin's clear hopes of following in the path of Fourth Branch Dick.

IFILL: Governor, you said in July that someone would have to explain to you exactly what it is the vice president does every day. You, senator, said, you would not be vice president under any circumstances. Now maybe this was just what was going on at the time. But tell us now, looking forward, what it is you think the vice presidency is worth now.

[snip]

PALIN: No, no. Of course, we know what a vice president does. And that's not only to preside over the Senate and will take that position very seriously also. I'm thankful the Constitution would allow a bit more authority given to the vice president if that vice president so chose to exert it in working with the Senate and making sure that we are supportive of the president's policies and making sure too that our president understands what our strengths are. John McCain and I have had good conversations about where I would lead with his agenda. That is energy independence in America and reform of government over all, and then working with families of children with special needs. That's near and dear to my heart also. In those arenas, John McCain has already tapped me and said, that's where I want you, I want you to lead. I said, I can't wait

to get and there go to work with you.

[snip]

IFILL: Governor, you mentioned a moment ago the constitution might give the vice president more power than it has in the past. Do you believe as Vice President Cheney does, that the Executive Branch does not hold complete sway over the office of the vice presidency, that it is also a member of the Legislative Branch?

PALIN: Well, our founding fathers were very wise there in allowing through the Constitution much flexibility there in the office of the vice president. And we will do what is best for the American people in tapping into that position and ushering in an agenda that is supportive and cooperative with the president's agenda in that position. Yeah, so I do agree with him that we have a lot of flexibility in there, and we'll do what we have to do to administer very appropriately the plans that are needed for this nation. And it is my executive experience that is partly to be attributed to my pick as V.P. with McCain, not only as a governor, but earlier on as a mayor, as an oil and gas regulator, as a business owner. It is those years of experience on an executive level that will be put to good use in the White House also. [my emphasis]

See, at first when Palin said this, I was immediately horrified by the thought of someone with the power of Dick Cheney, but the ignorance and incompetence of Sarah Palin—a sure recipe for disaster.

But that's assuming that Palin could pull off what Dick Cheney did. And—as Gellman's book makes clear and I'll try to describe for

Monday's book salon—it has taken Dick Cheney way more to pull off his historic power grab than simple proclamation of a Fourth Branch.

Rather, Dick Cheney has succeeded because he is a master of bureaucracy. He knows how to manipulate the machines of our government at every level—and does so with consummate skill.

Palin, by contrast, can't even manage to pull off personal vendettas in Alaska's small government without leaving blood and tracks in the snow revealing her work. Sure, she's got Cheney's instinct for punishing disloyalty. But aside from that, she's got none of Cheney's skill.

That doesn't make her safe or in any other way a sound choice for VP. But it does make me laugh.