

URNS OUT CHENEY WAS NEVER REALLY VICE PRESIDENT AFTER ALL

I regret to inform you—and I do mean regret—that I’m going to have set aside a good deal of the next week “looking backward” at Dick Cheney’s career. His book is out next week and already he’s dropping some bombs, as only Dick can drop bombs.

Such as, for some period during his tenure as VP, there was a signed resignation letter in his man-sized safe (presumably right next to the Wilson op-ed on which Cheney hand-wrote an accusation that Plame sent her husband on a junket), known only to W and “a Cheney staffer.”

“I did it because I was concerned that – for a couple of reasons,” Cheney tells Jamie Gangel. “One was my own health situation. The possibility that I might have a heart attack or a stroke that would be incapacitating. And, there is no mechanism for getting rid of a vice president who can’t function.”

Cheney kept the signed letter locked in a safe, he reveals in the memoir “In My Time,” which comes out Tuesday. President George W. Bush and a Cheney staffer knew about the letter.

I presume that NBC and ABC will be sufficiently incompetent that they won’t ask Cheney what the other reasons were. Or who the staffer was.

So barring actually learning that information (until I go shell out an inordinate amount for a book I plan to throw a lot), here are my guesses.

In addition to signing the letter in case his heart gave out and turned him into a vegetable, Cheney also kept it in case he suddenly got into

very big legal trouble. Over leaking a CIA officer's identity, maybe, over knowingly authorizing torture (including in a few cases I expect we'll learn more about), or misusing the military. Or whatever else.

And if just one staffer ever knew of the letter, my bet is David Addington knew.

But here's the thing. Once Cheney signed that resignation letter, was he still VP? Or does that mean all the things he did, bootstrapping his own constitutional power onto the President's explicit power, were illegal? We know Republicans claimed that he could insta-declassify things like NIEs and CIA officers identities. But if he did that after having signed a letter of resignation that the President knew about, doesn't that mean he wasn't VP anymore? And those things were triply illegal?

Whoo boy. Send beer. I can tell already it's gonna be a long week.