

MCCAIN'S "FAVORS" FOR ONE SPECIAL LOBBYIST: THE BOB BENNETT ANGLE

If I'm not mistaken, NYT's blockbuster detailing McCain's inappropriate relationship with a telecom lobbyist is the matter in which Bob Bennett was representing the good Senator (no, I'm not—Bennett's out working this story hard tonight). If you haven't already read about this on every other lefty blog, here's the jist:

Early in Senator John McCain's first run for the White House eight years ago, waves of anxiety swept through his small circle of advisers.

A female lobbyist had been turning up with him at fund-raisers, visiting his offices and accompanying him on a client's corporate jet. Convinced the relationship had become romantic, some of his top advisers intervened to protect the candidate from himself — instructing staff members to block the woman's access, privately warning her away and repeatedly confronting him, several people involved in the campaign said on the condition of anonymity.

When news organizations reported that Mr. McCain had written letters to government regulators on behalf of the lobbyist's client, the former campaign associates said, some aides feared for a time that attention would fall on her involvement.

Now, there are many angles to this story. The "McCain in charge of Senate oversight of telecoms" angle. The "McCain dalliance with a torture lobbyist" angle. The "why does this woman look just like McCain's wife?" angle. But for

now, I'm just interested in the Bob Bennett angle.

Bennett's been out pitching his new book; as part of that, I heard him on Diane Rehm. Bennett said he was representing McCain in a matter in which he allegedly gave a lobbyist special "favours."

Hmmm.

But that's not the part I'm a bit stunned by. Actually, there are three parts I'm stunned by, just off the top of my head:

- This story broke in the NYT. The last time we saw Bennett (before he was giving Jose Rodriguez' story when Rodriguez refused to do so himself, I mean), he was standing in a hallway in the Prettyman Courthouse accepting Max Frankel's thanks ... "you did a good job for us today." Meaning "us," the NYT. In some twisted way, Bennett only recently rescued the NYT from its embarrassment named Judy Miller. But here his next big client save one is, having his Presidential aspirations seriously rocked by the same NYT. If I'm Bob Bennett right now, I'm bitching about those ingrates at the Times.
- And let me remind you, this is the Bob Bennett who set the standard for working the

press. When you hire Bob Bennett, you hire him to work the press for you. How well did that work out for John McCain? Maybe Bennett let his McCain guard down in favor of his book tour... but Bennett is frantically trying to work the press to put this genie back in the bottle.

- And what about Bennett's most famous client before that? No, I don't mean Cap Weinburger. I mean Bubba Clinton, in the Paula Jones matter. Either McCain is just an idiot, or he didn't think twice about the optics of having a guy who represented his potential opponent's **husband** in a matter that erupted (sorry) into the biggest political sex scandal of all time. You want to bury the story of the pretty blond lobbyist, you don't hire Bob Bennett.

Only that's precisely what John McCain did.

Update: From the NYT article:

Mr. McCain said that the relationship was not romantic and that he never showed favoritism to Ms. Iseman or her clients. "I have never betrayed the public trust by doing anything like that," he said. He made the statements in a call to Bill Keller, the executive

editor of The New York Times, to
complain about the paper's inquiries.

First, "never" (which the campaign has repeated tonight) is an awfully long time. It seems that McCain has always admitted to showing favoritism to Keating. Which makes "never" kind of vague, huh?

And Bill Keller? Right in the middle of this?
Ooh boy.