

# WHY MCCAIN GOT A CRIMINAL DEFENSE LAWYER TO MANAGE HIS NYT PUSH-BACK

Bmaz sent me this article the other day, about McCain's ham-handed attempts to pre-empt news about his wife Cindy's struggles with addiction. I sent back this passage,

But both of Cindy McCain's staged, teary drug-addiction confessions have been vintage John McCain. His MO is this: **Get the story out – even if it's a negative story. Get it out first, with the spin you want, with the details you want and without the details you don't want.**

McCain did it with the Keating Five, and with the story of the failure of his first marriage (Cindy is his second wife). So what you recall after the humble, honest interview, is not that McCain did favors for savings and loan failure Charlie Keating, or that he cheated on his wife, but instead what an upfront, righteous guy he is.

Candor is the McCain trademark, but what the journalists who slobber over the senator fail to realize is that the candor is premeditated and polished. [my emphasis]

... Noting how differently McCain has dealt with his Iseman problem. McCain **didn't** get the story out first, not even in the three months since it became clear NYT was chasing the story. As a result, McCain's presser yesterday was an obvious—and ineffective—attempt at cover-up, with none of the candor he affected in his previous attempts to bury his own faults. For some reason, McCain failed to head the Iseman story off when it might do some good.

This Isikoff story reveals part of the reason why McCain didn't follow his normal MO of heading such scandals off at the pass.

Just hours after the Times's story was posted, the McCain campaign issued a point-by-point response that depicted the letters as routine correspondence handled by his staff—and insisted that McCain had never even spoken with anybody from Paxson or Alcalde & Fay about the matter. "No representative of Paxson or Alcalde & Fay personally asked Senator McCain to send a letter to the FCC," the campaign said in a statement e-mailed to reporters.

But that flat claim seems to be contradicted by an impeccable source: McCain himself. [snip]

[Floyd] Abrams [] asked [McCain during a deposition for a Mitch McConnell lawsuit fighting McCain's campaign finance reform]: "Did you speak to the company's lobbyist about these matters?"

McCain: "I don't recall if it was Mr. Paxson or the company's lobbyist or both."

Abrams: "But you did speak to him?"

McCain: "I'm sure I spoke with him, yes."

Isikoff's article also lays out what has been reported elsewhere—that Iseman gave McCain's staffers a draft letter to the FCC.

Isikoff's revelation sure makes it a lot clearer why McCain retained Bob Bennett to try to convince the NYT not to publish this story. Aside from the favors the NYT already owes Bennett, Bennett knows a thing or two about conflict of interest cases—not least from his investigation of McCain during the Keating scandal.

You see, it's one thing to cry "smear!" and push back against a newspaper that, incidentally, can't seem to figure out what the narrative of this story is. It's yet another to represent a client who has given sworn testimony—as McCain has—that this certainly appears to be corrupt.

At another point Abrams asked McCain if, "looking back on the events with Mr. Paxson, the contributions, the jets, everything you and I have just talked about, do you believe that it would have been justified for a member of the public to say there is at least an appearance of corruption here?"

"Absolutely," McCain replied. "And when I took a thousand dollars or any other hard-money contribution from anybody who does business before the Congress of the United States, then that allegation is justified as well. Because the taint affects all of us." Elsewhere McCain said about his dealings with Paxson, "As I said before, I believe that there could possibly be an appearance of corruption because this system has tainted all of us."

Oops.

Incidentally, given his history of receiving politically motivated leaks, I wonder if Isikoff has had this deposition transcript from back in the day when Republicans still bitter about McCain's campaign finance work—like Mitch McConnell, who took this lawsuit—were pushing for another candidate to get the Republican nomination. Abrams has been known to leak to journalists as well, though you'd think Bennett would have been able to convince Abrams to keep this under wraps. It sure looks like years of animosity from even more corrupt Republicans is coming back to haunt McCain.

**Update:** Oh, this will be fun. Copies of McCain's depositions are [here](#) and [here](#).