

# THE ILLEGAL WIRETAPPERS IN JOHN MCCAIN'S BACKYARD

The WaPo reports on yet another example of how John McCain has abused his position on the Commerce Committee and his stable full of telecom lobbyists to make sure he got cell phone coverage in the desert.

Early in 2007, just as her husband launched his presidential bid, **Cindy McCain** decided to resolve an old problem – the lack of cellular telephone coverage on her remote 15-acre ranch near Sedona, nestled deep in a tree-lined canyon called Hidden Valley.

By the time Sen. **John McCain's** presidential bid was in full swing this summer, the ranch had wireless coverage from the two cellular companies most often used by campaign staff – Verizon Wireless and AT&T.

Verizon delivered a portable tower known as a "cell site on wheels" – free of charge – to Cindy McCain's property in June in response to an online request from Cindy McCain's staff early last year. Such devices are usually reserved for restoring service when cell coverage is knocked out during emergencies, such as hurricanes.

In July, AT&T followed suit, wheeling in a portable tower for free to match Verizon's offer. "This is an unusual situation," said AT&T spokeswoman Claudia B. Jones. "You can't have a presidential nominee in an area where there is not cell coverage."

Over the course of the past year, Cindy McCain had offered land for a permanent cell tower and Verizon embarked on an

expensive process to meet her needs, hiring contractors and seeking county land-use permits even though few people other than the McCains would benefit from the tower.

Ethics lawyers said Cindy McCain's dealings with the wireless companies stand out because Sen. John McCain is a senior member of the Senate Commerce Committee, which oversees the Federal Communications Commission and the telecommunications industry. He has been a leading advocate for industry-backed legislation, fighting regulations and taxes on telecommunications services.

Now, I wouldn't be surprised if McCain's people were evenly split between AT&T and Verizon. I'm not surprised that the McCains were looking for coverage on these two networks.

But at the same time, I can't help but remember that AT&T and Verizon are the two companies who—according to reports—collaborated most enthusiastically on Cheney's illegal warrantless wiretap program. Sure, Jello Jay and even Barack Obama have given those telecom companies immunity. Still, I can imagine there are reasons—aside from just wanting to schmooze up a Senator on the Commerce Committee—to stay on the good side of a potential President.