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JOE LIEBERMAN INTERVIEW
JOHN MCCAIN: FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS
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JOE LIEBERMAN
Former United States Senator
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Interviewed by Teddy Kunhardt
Total Running Time: 1 Hour 24 Minutes

START TC: 01;00;00;00

QT: 01;00;05;06

TITLE

Befriending, working and traveling with John McCain

QT: 01;00;10;04

JOE LIEBERMAN:

So John actually has the recollection of how it began, which is, he says that I came over to him on the Senate floor during a vote shortly after I arrived, that would be 1989, he had already been there a couple of years and said, "Senator McCain, I've been following your career, I really admire what you've done and I hope we can work together on some things. And he said, "I'd like that." And I—that sounds right, I might well have done that. Obviously I knew about his time as a war hero, time as a prisoner of war and then I'd watched him get elected to Congress and the Senate. So we just were looking for opportunities to work together. In my recollection, we worked together somewhat on the Gulf War Resolution of 1991. It turned out to be a much more partisan divide on that resolution than I expected.

QT: 01;01;07;13

JOE LIEBERMAN:

I'd only—President Bush, 41, only got authorization from the Senate to go to war to get Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait by a vote of 40—excuse me, 52 to 47 and I declared early that I would vote for authorization so we—we kind of compared notes and spoke at similar times on the floor, and then we began to work on—our relationship really took root around shared values

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regarding American foreign policy, international leadership, support of human rights.

QT: 01;01;46;16

JOE LIEBERMAN:

I mean, the next thing we got involved in together, very bipartisan, John and I along with Bob Dole and Joe Biden worried about what was happening in the Balkans after the Soviet Union collapsed or—or fell, which was the leader of Serbia, Milosevic, was beginning to move on his neighbors militarily, particularly Bosnia, and we thought was beginning to commit genocide against the Muslims there. And we were trying to get the US to get the European—our European allies with us to intervene. Took a while but finally we did it. And—and so I just got doing—then the relationship went on to matters both foreign and domestic. And John and I began to travel together and you know, in the modern Senate, where it—where Senators are in and out of Washington like it's a revolving door. I don't mean in their career but every week and hardly have time to get to know each other.

QT: 01;02;48;21

JOE LIEBERMAN:

Therefore, don't have the precondition for developing trust. The—one of the few times when you really can get to know a colleague is if you're traveling together, you're on a plane together. And so we began to visit American troops abroad, visit foreign capitals that we felt had important relationships with the US. I'll stop after this one. John—there wa—there was a—beginning probably in the 1950's, an annual security conference mostly for NATO allies, European-American in Munich every February. And there was a Senator that was always the chairman of the American delegation to go there with other members of congress and others and it was sort of passed on informally.

QT: 01;03;37;17

JOE LIEBERMAN:

When John received the baton from Bill Cohen of Maine when he was going to become Secretary of Defense, he said to me, "You know, you ought to become co-chair of this with me because this is a bipartisan delegation and we want to send a message to the Europeans who are—who are there who were there to speak about American foreign policy in a non-partisan way and so I began to do that so that meant in addition to everything else that once a

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year, we would fly together to Munich knowing—the reason I’m smiling, knowing that John wanted to get as much out of every day he can. We would leave Washington on Thursday night, the conference usually started on Friday evening. Not enough to just fly to Munich, get a few hours rest and get ready for the conference, nope.

QT: 01;04;31;00

JOE LIEBERMAN:

We—John said, “We’re gonna stop somewhere in Europe on our way and fly overnight.” No shower, no nothing. Don’t go to the hotel room, etc.. Go right out wherever, Belgrade, Paris, Madrid, and—and meet with the—usually the head of state of that government and then go on to Munich. But the bottom line is that I think our relationship grew both because we—because we traveled together, had the time to get to know each other and trust each other and perhaps even like each other and because then we worked together on issues on which we agreed, mostly foreign policy and defense but some interesting ones on domestic policy as well.

QT: 01;05;19;09

TITLE

How Lindsey Graham, Joe Lieberman and John McCain became known as the Three Amigos

QT: 01;05;23;11

JOE LIEBERMAN:

We knew Lindsey only because he was part of the house committee during the Clinton impeachment trial that came over and made the case for convicting President Clinton, which I voted against convicting. And—but he was very impressive, he was smart, he was charming. So when he got elected to the Senate, he first got to know John and expressed an interest in some ways as I had some years before in working with John and John liked him a lot and so he began to travel with us and we worked particularly closely—he’d always come to Munich but we also worked very closely on both the Iraq war—the Afghan war was the first after 9/11 and then Iraq and spent a lot of time traveling, the three of us to visit our soldiers and our diplomats in Iraq and Afghanistan in all the years that we were engaged there and on one visit to General David Petraeus, honestly because he was in both, I forgot whether it was Iraq or Afghanistan.

QT: 01;06;35;23

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JOE LIEBERMAN:

I think it might have been Iraq. Dave Petraeus said, “Oh, welcome to the three amigos again.” And then he had a picture taken of the three of us and him and inscribed it. “To the three amigos.” And to the best of my knowledge that’s how it started but it—there wa—to me, as I look back at, the—my relationship with John and Lindsey is really one of the great bonuses of the privilege of being a United States Senator and it’s so classically American. I mean it’s such a—the three of us are so diverse in the states we come from, Connecticut, South Carolina, Arizona, our religious backgrounds, our life experiences, and yet we hold some values and policies in common and it drew us together. We also I think just enjoyed each other’s company.

QT: 01;07;30;04

JOE LIEBERMAN:

I mean, you spend time on a plane, you’re reading a book, you talk about the book, occasionally you watch a movie, once hilariously, I—I hope I don’t affect Lindsey’s re-electability, we watched Borat on film and I thought I was going to have to apply CPR to Senator Graham, he was laughing so hard. But we all survived and had a good time. I’ll tell you McCain’s story about being on a plane. And this probably says something about him but I thought it was—he and I were sitting next to each other reading, flying somewhere. I don’t remember where. The plane began to go through a storm, a really serious storm and there’s lighting outside and the plane literally is bouncing up and down and John just keeps reading the book.

QT: 01;08;20;18

JOE LIEBERMAN:

So I turn to him, and I said, “Hey John, are you aware of what’s going on outside this plane?” “Well of course I am.” So I said, “Aren’t—aren’t you bothered by it?” He says, “Joe,” or Joey as he calls me, “Joey, if I was meant to die in a plane, I would’ve died over Vietnam, so don’t worry about it.” So I said, “This is great, you’re like an insurance policy. We can fly anywhere together and always arrive safe.” Anyway, it says a lot about McCain.

QT: 01;08;49;15

TITLE

John is fearless, but also thoughtful and complex

QT: 01;08;54;13

JOE LIEBERMAN:

I can remember one time when—one of the few times where I saw Senator McCain being overruled by somebody. I guess we were in the Fallujah and we wanted to go to the central city. We were meeting with the American Military on an American base and we wanted to go—John said, I want to go to the city. I believe it was Ramadi. And the—the top military person, US military said, “Sorry Senator, you can’t go. We don’t believe it’s safe enough to take you in there.” “What do you mean?” John says, “With all of you here and all that we’ve committed to this, it’s not safe enough?”

QT: 01;09;36;17

JOE LIEBERMAN:

So he said, “No sir, I’m sorry it’s not.” “Well I’m—I’m going!” Ya know, and so—oh my God, you could see the panic. But in the end, the military prevailed. But the next time we went which was in less than a year, they wanted to tell John, now I’m not saying this is the single reason why we secured that city, but when we came back less than a year later, US military said, “This time you can visit the city.” So we did, we walked down the main street.

QT: 01;10;06;05

JOE LIEBERMAN:

John is essentially fearless. So—and part of it I’m sure is that it’s his nature. What you hear about him as a young person, he took risks, and part of it of course is what he went through in Hanoi and survived. And he just has a kind of confidence about him, so he was never—our—our visits to foreign places were never—never had to pass a safety test. That’s what my wife said, she always—“Do you have to travel with McCain again? Couldn’t you travel with somebody else who takes fewer risks?”

QT: 01;10;48;17

JOE LIEBERMAN:

The other thing about John, I just want to say this while I think about it, he is a much more complicated and diverse and broad person than people think. So he reads history a lot, he reads fiction a lot. He has some favorite books, usually Hemingway’s that he’s probably read a dozen times, like For Whom The Bell Tolls. The bell’s toll or bell tolls, whatever it is. But the other thing

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about John is that when we'd be going somewhere where there was something he thought was worth seeing that was a cultural asset of interest. We—we'd—again, go early, no rest and go see it. So the one that comes to mind, we went to Libya once to see Gadhafi but John had heard that there were Roman ruins in Libya in Carthage that were really maybe the best in the world.

QT: 01;11;48;11

JOE LIEBERMAN:

And so we got there early and we rode out because we were seeing Gadhafi at night and they were amazing, it was an amazing experience and so that's—you know, that's John.

QT: 01;11;58;13

TITLE

McCain's public vs private persona and stories from the road

QT: 01;12;03;17

JOE LIEBERMAN:

He can be, he—he's compassionate. I mean he—his heart goes out to people. I mean the basic John McCain public image is the tough guy, the maverick, the fighter, if necessary in your face maybe occasionally showing temper but confronted with sort of human need, he's quite compassionate and you know, he's very—he's very principled about his foreign policy. The speech he gave after his cancer was diagnosed when he received that liberty medal in Pennsylvania about the importance of American international leadership based on our values, democracy, human rights, was taken in many ways as a slap at President Trump; in many ways it probably was, but it didn't just appear out of nowhere because John wanted to criticize President Trump, this is what his whole life's been about.

QT: 01;13;08;22

JOE LIEBERMAN:

And traveling with him for instance when we would go into a country, like we went into Uzbekistan once which for years was ruled by an autocratic ruler named Karimov I believe. Well, John and I said to the em—our US embassy, while we're there, we'd like to meet with some of the opposition to Karimov. And we did. We always called it meetings with civil society. I love that—that

euphemism. One of the most emotional examples of this was, we visited Myanmar, Burma and we were at the home of Aung San Suu Kyi, the great freedom fighter at that—in—in Burma. She had not yet—this is befo—she was back in the country, she was free if you will, but—and she was beginning to talk to the military government but she was not in any way part of the government or even actively involved with politics yet.

QT: 01;14;10;03

JOE LIEBERMAN:

But she brought into her home three young Burmese men, who by her intervention had just been released from prison where they had been taken because they had politically opposed the military junta or regime in Myanmar. I mean long story short, they looked terrible. I mean they had just obviously been through a harrowing experience, and they want—they were so excited about meeting John, secondarily me, but partially because John had gone through that experience and it was an inspiration to them and they had seen a statement he had made on behalf of the opposition in Myanmar and they told him through an interpreter how much it meant to them and I can tell ya yes we were—whether I've ever seen John emotional, he was emotional on that occasion.

QT: 01;15;13;00

JOE LIEBERMAN:

And I thought about it in circularity, I'll do this real quickly. He was—he's—he's very—he has a great respect for Natan Sharansky, the Russian refusenik and one of the things that affected John was in one of Sharanksy's books, he writes about being in the Soviet Gulag, prison, because of his political opposition to the—to the communist government, and how he was sustained through torture and deprivation by President Reagan describing the Soviet Union as an evil empire, and by receiving news that Senator Jackson, Henry Jackson of Washington State had taken action to essentially punish Russia for some of its human rights violations.

QT: 01;16;04;01

JOE LIEBERMAN:

And he—and Sharanksy said that sustained him and for John, that was a very meaningful, almost instructive experience and in turn he's done it over and over again for people fighting for the human rights in countries around the

world. And—and that moment in Myanmar when those three just released prisoners, political prisoners thanked him for speaking out on their behalf was a magnificent moment, in the way the closing of a circle.

QT: 01;16;36;16

JOE LIEBERMAN:

We did a press conference with her afterward on her front porch. There may have been still photos taken in that moment in her living room or wherever we were.

QT: 01;16;47;04

TITLE

A friendship beyond politics and the importance of bipartisanship

QT: 01;16;51;21

JOE LIEBERMAN:

I think the really important thing to say about the friendship that developed between John McCain and me is that it wasn't affected by politics. In other words, of course we were in different parties, we knew that. Part of what came out of our friendship is that it enabled us to work across party lines and it's pretty obvious in the—in the Senate and in Congress generally that if you want to get something done, you should work with at least somebody in the other party. It's very rare that anything significant gets done with the support of only one party. Obamacare is an example but the controversies that have followed Obamacare are an indication of the price you pay for—for one party accomplishing something, John got that.

QT: 01;17;44;21

JOE LIEBERMAN:

And so the fact that—so—first I want to say, the fact that we're different parties didn't affect our friendship 'cause in some sense, our friendship was more important than that. Incidentally, we both understood that there were times when we were not only gonna disagree but maybe publicly so and be on different sides of things. And to some extent, there were occasions when—when we—to be frank, disappoint each other because of the partisan differences on something but it never affected our friendship. And then on the other hand, we were able to work together on a lot of things and put forth a bipartisan message, not particularly on foreign and defense policy but for instance, we worked together for a number of years on climate change.

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QT: 01;18;39;05

JOE LIEBERMAN:

I'll tell you this story. After the 2000 presidential campaign in which John ran and lost the nomination, he came back and oh, sometime in 2001 we were, as so often happens, while votes are going on, Senators mill around and talk to each other on the floor, and he said, "You know, I've been meaning to ask you, during the 2000 presidential campaign," John said, "a lot of people were asking me about my position on climate change. I gave an answer but honestly I just never spent much time on it. And I know your—it's really important to you," me, "so I mean lets—let's see if we can work together on it." And we did. I mean, we started to talk about it, he acknowledged that there was a problem, he made some very passionate speeches.

QT: 01;19;27;12

JOE LIEBERMAN:

I remember he was greatly affected by comparative pictures taken at the top of Kilimanjaro, of the snow, 25 years ago and then, and we—we worked on a bill together, cap and trade so-called. And we introduced it, it got by my recollection more than 50 votes but we never could break the filibuster. John was in a minority of republicans supporting it but to his credit, he did.

QT: 01;19;58;07

TITLE

On John endorsing Bush in the 2000 presidential election

QT: 01;20;02;20

JOE LIEBERMAN:

That was one of those moments where you just knew that you know, it wasn't gonna affect our friendship. He had to do that. It was a very different situation in 2008 when he asked me to endorse him because I had just come through this election where I got defeated in the democratic primary for re-election to the US Senate and I went on to rerun as an independent, so I was a kind of an independent democrat but John was in the republican party, and I ne—I never expected that he would support the ticket that I was on with Al Gore.

QT: 01;20;37;01

TITLE

South Carolina in the 2000 presidential primary

QT: 01;20;42;03

JOE LIEBERMAN:

The South Carolina primary in 2000 was really just dirty old politics and it was very personal. I mean politics is b—is a contact sport and it's become in so many ways personal, vicious, but that was really low, particularly going in to the family; as you know they adopted a child from Bangladesh, an act of surpassing sort of humanitarianism and then this is used in the campaign against them to a—to appeal to the kind of lowest common denominator thinking of the people in South Carolina. It was an insult to the people in South Carolina and it was an insult to the McCain's so yeah, that bothered them a lot. And incidentally, when he came back in 2008, different opponents, and he won the South Carolina primary.

QT: 01;21;40;15

JOE LIEBERMAN:

I think it was one of the great moments in John McCain's political career, a kind of indication. I mean the big turnaround win that year for John in the nomination fight was New Hampshire but the win in South Carolina because of the way he lost in 2000, dirty politics, really meant a lot to him.

QT: 01;22;02;14

TITLE

McCain's idea to run Lieberman as VP in 2008 and later regret

QT: 01;22;07;20

JOE LIEBERMAN:

I'm surprised that I heard him say something like that once very briefly to another Senator on the floor but—of the Senate but it's an honor and I appreciate it. I—what can I tell you, I mean when Rick Davis, John's campaign manager in 2008 called me and said John wanted to put me on the short list for VP, honestly, my reaction was, "Are you kidding?" I—really—I said, "How could he do that?" I'm—ya know, I'm still a registered democrat even though I got re-elected as an independent and I got positions, particularly on domestic issues that are not popular in the re—republican party, particularly on social issues like gay rights, etc. So, "No, no, he's serious about it." And

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John and I didn't talk about it much. The next time I went out on the campaign trail, I said, "You know, John, Rick called me and told me you want to put me on the short list. Are you sure about that? I don't know how you can do it." I mean, "Oh believe me, I'm sure and I'm asking you as my friend to allow us to vet you."

QT: 01;23;13;23

JOE LIEBERMAN:

So ok, we did. And I think John felt that not only did we know each other well and trust each other and think a lot about a lot of issues but not all issues, that was part of the point. We had big disagreements on some domestic issues but that—there was a—would be a big message in this which is, this was going to be a bipartisan ticket, unprecedented—I mean not since the very beginning of the country when the parties were—were sort of less frozen then they are today and I know that at one point, Lindsey Graham was playing the role of my advocate and a spy within the ranks of—he would call me and say, so and so is for you, so and so is against you. But he said, "The people who are against you, I've asked somebody to do kind of—not a poll but they're calling up republican—" I think state leaders or county chairs and the estimate was that one third of the delegates would have walked out and everybody was saying the same thing, "John, make him your secretary of defense or your secretary of state, but wow, look at it, he's got—he's pro-choice, he's pro-gay rights."

QT: 01;24;27;23

JOE LIEBERMAN:

I mean, so they said, of course Lindsey said, "I told him if a third of the delegates walk out in protest, that's great because it will prove to the country what a maverick and independent McCain is and those people will not vote for anybody other than McCain and the Republican ticket." But it—it—you know, so anyway, I—he—it really—to me it was unreal and really from the beginning, impossible, but the fact that John entertained the notion of asking a democrat to be his vice presidential candidate and really entertained it seriously, it really says a lot about him. It speaks to his commitment to bipartisan government, also in a practical sense he understood that running as a republican candidate in 2008 after two terms of President Bush 43 and President Bush at that time was quite unpopular.

QT: 01;25;27;02

JOE LIEBERMAN:

And watching then Senator Obama rise as a presidential candidate who would in sense had assumed a superhuman quality that he had to do something different to have a chance to win and I think that was—and I think he was right. I don't know that it was me, he had a lot of good safe choices in the republican party but anyway at the end, as I expected, it didn't—it didn't happen. I'm touched that he—that he said that now.

QT: 01;26;02;02

TITLE

The 2008 election and Lieberman's endorsement of McCain

QT: 01;26;06;19

JOE LIEBERMAN:

John and I are keeping in touch as this goes on, as the campaign goes on, but he's busy and I'm in the Senate, when he comes back for votes, I talk to him. Probably around thanksgiving, maybe before thanksgiving, he called me up and said, "I got a question to ask you, it's not an easy one and before I ask you the question, I want you to know, that whatever your answer is, is not gonna affect our friendship." I said, "Good," I said, "now you've got me interested, what's the question?" So he said—and by that time you know, earlier in 2007, they were declaring his campaign over.

QT: 01;26;46;20

JOE LIEBERMAN:

I mean he was—he was falling and out and—but he pulled himself back. And he said, "The campaign's gaining a little momentum but the key will be the New Hampshire primary. Independents can vote in the New Hampshire republican primary." "Joey," he said, "you're Mr. independent right now and I think if you would endorse me it would really help." So I said, "You know, let me think about it. Just gimme a day or two, it's definitely within the range of the possible and I'll—I'll call you back." And I did think about it. And I gotta tell ya that I had been through a tough democratic primary in Connecticut, I still sort of had—I was controversial within democratic party ranks because I stuck with the war in Iraq. I felt it would be terrible as John and Lindsey did if we withdrew essentially accepting defeat there.

QT: 01;27;43;23

JOE LIEBERMAN:

Terrible for American credibility, terrible for the security of Iraq and the—and the middle east generally but I remained a controversial figure in the democratic party; I'm being very open and honest with you, so that the two major democratic candidates for President, Senator Clinton and Senator Obama, both very good friends of mine. Oh, let me not overstate it, good friends of mine. I had known Hillary since the 70's when she was at Yale Law School and I—and I developed a friendship with Senator Obama when he came to the Senate; hadn't asked me for my support so I thought, wow, John's my friend. John is clearly capable of being a great President by experience, by principle, by everything else, a good leader, a great leader. I'm down independent, I got elected as an independent.

QT: 01;28;40;20

JOE LIEBERMAN:

Wh—wh—why not? And he's my friend, you know? So how—what's the basis for saying no to him. So I call back and I said, "I'm ready to go." And that's what happened, and on a cold day, typically cold winter day in—I forgot whether it was December or January in New Hampshire, I announced my support and I spent a fair amount of time with him in New Hampshire leading up to the primary which was frankly a lot of fun. I mean, he was on a roll in New Hampshire. And you know, he had the bus, the straight talk express and it was like once earlier in my youth, it's ironic what the name was, Bob Dylan had a show that he was taking around America called the Rolling Thunder Review, ironic because of the Rolling Thunder reference to Vietnam but—and you know, Joan Baez would arrive and be with him for a few days and Allan Ginsburg would show up and the—the straight talk express was like that, it was like a movable feast and John would get on, you know--no—no rest.

QT: 01;29;47;13

JOE LIEBERMAN:

I mean, he—he—he does a rally, he gets on the bus and he's surrounded by the media. There's no candidate section, media section, security section. It's all together and we had a great time and he won a big victory in New Hampshire which I think was the turning point in that 2008 nomination fight so, glad to be part of it—proud to be part of it.

QT: 01;30;12;04

TITLE
Sarah Palin

QT: 01;30;17;15

JOE LIEBERMAN:

He's never really said anything negative, I mean, about Sarah Palin to me, I mean at different times since then maybe she's done things that have surprised him or disappointed him but part of it is I think he's a person of honor, also he made the decision and she did the best she could do but they—they at different times brought me into the campaign to work with Sarah Palin and I got to know her and I got to like her but it was a big jump for her in that campaign. She—she did ok, I mean—and a big moment for her was in the Vice Presidential debate and they were really worried in the McCain campaign that it was gonna be a disaster but I—I would say that most people thought Joe Biden won the debate. But it was not a disaster for Sarah Palin, she held her own. So no, John has never—we haven't talked about it a lot, maybe for the obvious reason that—that I was also on his mind.

QT: 01;31;28;04

JOE LIEBERMAN:

Sometimes when I'm—I say to other people but never to him, if the choice of Sarah Palin was a mistake, I blame myself because he clung too long to the notion that I could be his running mate that year and you see, he understood there, he—he—he—I think that he needed to do something different and though—sort of choose a Governor from Alaska who was a woman, had a good record running the state, was different. I mean, he had more conventional choices which were good choices like Mitt Romney, Tim Polenti, but he knew that he had to do something—something different.

QT: 01;32;10;22

TITLE
Things that bring John joy

QT: 01;32;14;19

JOE LIEBERMAN:

Well, he gets a lot of pleasure out of things that would surprise people. So he loves to read, so that gives him pleasure. He loves to learn, I mean he's—this is a great thing about John, he's 81 now, he's still learning all the time. When you think about it, when he—after he got out of the POW camp in Hanoi, came back, went through therapy, etc., ends up as a Naval—Senate US Navy Liaison in the office there. Doesn't really know anything about politics. I don't—I didn't know him before then of course but my guess is, people would say, wow that's a weird place for John McCain to be but he learned, and he learned how to do it, was influenced a lot by Senator John Tower who he worked closely with and became really a good politician and I mean that in a positive sense.

QT: 01;33;12;20

JOE LIEBERMAN:

I mean he learned how to get legislation passed, he learned how to talk with constituents, tireless again, loves to do the town hall meetings. I don't know any elected official in America who loves to do a town hall meeting, the exchange, as much as John does. So, oddly, that kind of stuff when it's working gives him pleasure, when you get into battles and you don't feel like you've done well, not so good. So reading, learning—when have I seen him happy? He likes to be with friends, I mean, loves his place in the hidden valley in Sedona, Arizona, I guess an hour and a half north of Phoenix, beautiful place. Counts the number of different species of birds he sees there. I was out there with him a while ago for a weekend and he sits on the terrace and he's got bird feeders. "Oh, look at that one Joey!" And a little hummingbird comes up. Now, this is not the popular vision of McCain.

QT: 01;34;15;07

JOE LIEBERMAN:

I was there once years ago and you know, it's like, I talk about it happening and my wife and I were shocked to find that two of—they used to—the McCain's used to hold July 4th parties at the hidden valley and the—two of the other guests there are Warren Beatty and Annette Benning, pretty good. So McCain says to my wife and us and me and a couple of others, "We're gonna take the obligatory hike today across the river, up the hill to the other side to see the property over there." And—ok, great. So Beatty comes over to me and says, "You know, you don't have to do this." I said, "I think you're

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wrong, Warren.” Anyway, that was great. That—John—that gives John pleasure.

QT: 01;35;03;20

JOE LIEBERMAN:

What can I tell you, just some of the natural conversations that we’ve had, particularly he and Lindsey and me on planes. Our sitting together watching a movie on the plane as we’re traveling, laughing a lot. You know, he’s—he’s got a great sense of humor and a surprising recollection of certain kinds of jokes. I don’t know if you’ve—you should challenge him to do this if you haven’t already. Ask him if he’s ever heard of Hennie Youngman who was a great classic comedian of the earlier generation, one-liners, and could he tell you any Hennie Youngman jokes? And he—he will begin to give you a bunch of really, funny, old—old time jokes. John doesn’t drink. In—in recent years, the only time I’ve seen him have a drink—I actually saw him have a drink twice.

QT: 01;36;03;19

JOE LIEBERMAN:

One was the night before Tom Ridge and I were gonna endorse him on the same day in New Hampshire and we went to a restaurant called the Common Man, we always remember it. And John had a drink. Never saw him have a drink before. But every year in Munich, we go out to a restaurant there and he has a schnapps, the German liquor, and gets a lot of fun out of that.

QT: 01;36;27;05

JOE LIEBERMAN:

One of the things that happened, I don’t—this is—no relevance to this, that day that Warren Beatty was there and when we took the hike, my—and we went to the other side of the river, my wife sort of tripped into a cactus and got some pricklers in her rear end and just opened up a new chapter in her relationship with John because he—as the gentlemen he is, volunteered to remove those cactus pricklers from—anyway, we—we still laugh about that.

QT: 01;37;04;22

TITLE

Campaign Finance Reform and the scourge of money in politics

QT: 01;37;08;22

JOE LIEBERMAN:

Well, it was really principled, it was kind of—you might say objective in the sense that he had seen what was happening in politics because of the relentless pressure to raise more and more money in some sense without limits and he wanted to do something about it. I mean you—the natural public reaction to money in politics is that the money in politics affects the independence of elected officials. Of course they're right, there's a real danger with that. But there's another side if you're an elected official that you appreciate, which is, you are forced to spend an inordinate amount of your time raising money. In the first place, all of us have offices a short walk from our Senate office 'cause you can't raise money from your Senate office where we go an hour or two hours a day to call people for money.

QT: 01;38;12;04

JOE LIEBERMAN:

That's two hours a day we should be at committee hearings, meeting constituents, getting ready for whatever's coming up. Terrible. And then when you get to leave Washington because the votes are over, half the time you're rushing to either go home for a fundraiser or because almost nobody excepts from the big states can raise the money they need in a campaign, you're traveling around the country. It just eats away at the time, so John was really affected by that and so out of that experience and his own sense of principle, put—put the bill together with Russ Feingold. I was on the bill; I was proud to be on the bill. I mean again, it's—he—he stepped out, he stepped away from most members of his party, he formed a bipartisan coalition with Russ Feingold and others, including me and he—he fought like hell for it.

QT: 01;39;11;14

JOE LIEBERMAN:

The other thing to say and this is the lost art for the moment in Congress and John is prepared to negotiate and compromise to get something done in Congress. In other words, some visions of him as the sort of stubborn, sort of immovable McCain don't allow for the reality that he's had a very productive career as a US Senator because he's not been stubborn and immovable. He's been willing to get in there and negotiate compromise because he knows that to get 60, 70, percent or even 50 percent of what you want is better than

getting zero done, and that's what he did on McCain-Feingold. Had an effect until it was essentially overridden by the Supreme Court. It's a major accomplishment in his life.

QT: 01;40;11;15

TITLE

McCain's dramatic vote on the healthcare bill and the aftermath

QT: 01;40;16;16

JOE LIEBERMAN:

There was that dramatic moment, John has the initial surgery and then the diagnosis that he's got the can—the brain cancer. Against his doctor's suggestion, I wouldn't say orders, he comes back for the votes on Obamacare. He gets the moving reception from members of both parties. But you see, this is John. He wasn't content to just let it be there, this was a moment of opportunity. So he takes to the floor of the Senate and he gives, I think one of the great speeches in the recent history of the US Senate where he decries the partisanship, the ideological rigidity, the refusal to work together and get something done for the people who are good enough to send members of congress to congress, and he calls for the regular order, which is senate vocabulary for meaning, we have a process around here.

QT: 01;41;16;20

JOE LIEBERMAN:

Legislation starts in committees, they're bipartisan, members of both parties, bring up the bills, have amendments. If they pass, they pass, if they fail, they fail. Then you gotta vote on the bill as it exists after the amendment process. If you think it's better than the status quo, vote for it. If you don't, vote against it. If it comes out of committee, same thing on the floor. It was a great speech. Then the republican leadership brings up two repeals of Obamacare which were totally partisan, in other words there were no democratic support for it. And the republicans are shocked and some of them angry that John McCain votes against both of those republican amendments to repeal Obamacare. But John was just implementing the policy that he expressed in his speech. Because those two bills had not emerged from the regular order.

QT: 01;42;14;14

JOE LIEBERMAN:

That was one party trying to jam something down and he essentially was saying, we can do better. So I think in that speech he gave and those two votes, he really set a standard for the Senate and I think it stimulated some of what seems to be happening afterward, which is some work in the house by a group called the problem solvers caucus to take on in a bipartisan way some of the healthcare reform and that same set of ideas being adopted now by Senator Lamar Alexander, republican and Senator Patty Murray, democrat and I think there's a fair chance that that will be adopted probably that will be before this goes on the air but in other words I think John opened up a window with that speech and those two votes against the partisan Obamacare repeal.

QT: 01;43;08;01

JOE LIEBERMAN:

The votes against the repeal were less about those amendments than they were about upholding the principle that he had just eloquently articulated in—in the speech he had made.

QT: 01;43;20;07

TITLE

The question of the Republican's strategic use of Lindsey Graham to sway McCain

QT: 01;43;25;13

JOE LIEBERMAN:

I don't know, I don't know. It's possible. I mean, Mitch McConnell's a great legislator and leader; in other words, he—he—he works the process. But they totally misread John. In other words, I think they felt that he had really martianed—marshalled all his physical strength to come back after this surgery and that naturally he would vote with the Republican party but he came back for a different reason. He came back to do the right thing and to send a message to his colleagues and to the country and it couldn't have been more important or timely.

QT:01;44;05;18

TITLE

Regarding a *New York Times* article on McCain standing up to Trump

QT:01;44;09;18

JOE LIEBERMAN:

So I thought it was an accurate article but I will tell you again that—for instance, the speech he gave when he got the Liberty Medal in Philadelphia was—should never be read by anybody as a kind of personal attack on President Trump because John doesn't like President Trump so he found a reason to attack him. That speech he gave in Philadelphia about the importance of American international leadership, consistent with American values; human rights, democracy, rule of law, market economies, that was John. And it was the summation if you will of so much that he's stood for and fought for over his career.

QT: 01;44;59;10

JOE LIEBERMAN:

He's actually resisted taking shots at President Trump when lesser people would've done that who had been attacked as John was by President Trump, particularly about whether he was a war hero or not which was astounding to me but—but so John's upholding a banner here and it's the banner of his own beliefs that I think are the right beliefs about what America stands for in the world.

QT: 01;45;36;09

TITLE

McCain's diagnosis and confronting mortality

QT: 01;45;40;00

JOE LIEBERMAN:

Knowing John McCain, even if he hadn't had the cancer diagnosis now, he has such a different approach to American foreign policy, to American government than President Trump, that he'd probably be speaking out on a lot of these issues anyway. But look, the obvious truth is, John's a realist; in addition to being fearless, he is a realist. He knows he's got a serious health problem and that has forced him to confront his mortality in a way that he probably hasn't since he was in the Hanoi Hilton and maybe even then he didn't confront it in the same way because he was—he was fighting it, you know.

QT: 01;46;26;07

JOE LIEBERMAN:

He was fighting to stay alive to deny his captors of victory over him. So inevitably, as he's said not only privately to people like me but publicly, you know, every life must end at some point. He obviously hopes that his goes on for a long time. He's got—he's fighting—his spirit and will in dealing with the cancer diagnosis are inspirational really, and he's got just great treatment. But if you reach a point where you've got to confront your mortality, you start to think of—well, the first thing that John's thought of which he's said, and he's now said it somewhat publicly, and it's quite remarkable, his reaction to this diagnosis is not depression or anger, part of it is to be grateful and express that gratitude for the life that he's led.

QT: 01;47;30;10

JOE LIEBERMAN:

And the life he's led has not been all easy, five and a half years in a—in a prison in Hanoi but the opportunities he's had to do the things he's done, to stand for the principles he's stood for, but I think the other reaction obviously is to do what he's always done but with a different meaning to it because he's got cancer now, make the most of every day. And to him, I think that particularly means stating some principles, talking about what America means to the world, what American government should mean to the American people and I think he's done it brilliantly, and I'm not betting against John McCain. I think he's gonna go on for a long time.

QT: 01;48;21;17

TITLE

McCain's pacing himself as he undergoes treatment

QT: 01;48;25;05

JOE LIEBERMAN:

Most of the time when I talk to him about how he's feeling, he says, "I'm doing ok, I'm fine." I think there've been a few occasions where he's had to acknowledge that the treatment has done to him what it does to everybody. It's tired him out some. So to a certain extent in a way that he's never done before but it's wise to do it now while he's in treatment, he's paced himself. He—he—he rests occasionally. There was recently, he worked really hard through a time in Washington in the Senate, there was recess, went back out to the hidden valley and rested and slept longer than he normally does and I

talked to him during that period a couple of times and he just said he felt great.

QT: 01;49;14;14

JOE LIEBERMAN:

So he's been—he's not a complainer but I honestly think—for instance I talked to Mc—a couple of days ago and he said, "Ya know, I—" I said, "How ya doing?" He said, "I—I feel great," he said, "I'm not—I'm not just telling you that. I feel really good." And you know, but he knows that he goes sort of MRI to MRI to see how things are going and as I said, he's—he understands the seriousness of what he's got but...

QT: 01;49;47;22

TITLE

Humor and spirituality

QT: 01;49;52;09

JOE LIEBERMAN:

He is spiritual. I mean, we kid a lot about this. He—he kids a lot about having to put up—you know, I'm an observant Jew so I follow a lot of the rules and he actually is hilarious on this sometimes that—they gave a—they gave a sort of farewell dinner for me and one—many in Washington when I wasn't gonna run again at the Israeli embassy. There was a great crowd there. And oh you know, Secretary Panetta, Secretary Napolitano, Vice President Cheney came. There were a lot of speakers. McCain got up at the e—as the last speaker and he said, "You know, I don't know what more to say about him than has been said so I want to make an important announcement. I am announcing tonight that I am converting to Judaism."

QT: 01;50;48;00

JOE LIEBERMAN:

So everybody cheers, you know. He says, "Here's why. Traveling with this s.o.b, having to stop what we're doing on Saturday, walk to places, eat kosher food whenever we can, I mean I've already done it, why not just go all the way." He was—he was hilarious and he was—for some reason, I think he saw himself as a—as not only a comedian but a foul mouthed comedian and he swore a little more than he—than he normally does. So that's the funny part of the—I must admit that I got back at him after I told him when I got up to

make the final talk that night, I said, “I thank John for his announcement, he was converting to Judaism. I would say, on behalf of the Jewish people, it’s really a major acquisition for my people and I just want to express my own envy that his entering the covenant was so much less painful than mine.”

QT: 01;51;43;10

JOE LIEBERMAN:

So, and then—then he would develop a joke when nex—every time, he’d tell the joke and then he’d, if I was there, he’d say, ‘cause he learned the word, “When’s my bris Joey?” Ya know, so, and then recently again he starts to joke about it. I said, “John, you know with all you’ve gone through, I think I can get the Rabbi’s to give you a waiver on that one.” But so that’s one way in which we’ve done it. I would say that we—we’ve talked about faith somewhat; I think he is a—a spiritual person. He believes in God, he believes in fate, destiny. I would say a good person to talk to about this in a different way, a more uniquely religious way is the former Senator from Oklahoma, Tom Coburn who’s actively Christian, really observant and is a kind of missionary and both while they were in the Senate and I know since John got this diagnosis, Tom Coburn has talked to him periodically, they prayed together, etcetera.

QT: 01;52;50;22

JOE LIEBERMAN:

But you know, I pray for John’s health every day when I say my prayers and I told him that. He thanked me and every now and then now he’ll say, “You still—you’re still including my name in your prayers every day?” I said, “You bet I am.” So what can you say.

QT: 01;53;07;12

TITLE

McCain doesn’t talk about dying

QT: 01;53;11;19

JOE LIEBERMAN:

Not in that sense, only in the sense that every life must reach an end and he’s so fortunate to look back at his life and all the opportunities he’s had. He’ll say to me, “Joey, just think about the places we’ve gone and the things we’ve seen and the things we’ve learned and the good times we’ve had.” And—he

said to me twice, “You know there are billionaires who—who couldn’t go to the places we’ve gone and have the great times we’ve had.” So I said, “Right you are.” But so really his—it’s—it’s more appreciative. I would say that he faces his mortality now with the same kind of fearlessness that has kind of characterized his life. Believe me, to say the obvious, he wants to live a lot longer and those of us who love him want him to live a lot longer but he—he knows he’s got a serious illness and as I’ve said, I wouldn’t bet against him. I know people who’ve lived with glioblastoma for years and years and years and I believe John can and will be one of those.

QT: 01;54;23;18

JOE LIEBERMAN:

One time we talked about the averages, you know? He told me about what the average lifespan is after a diagnosis of glioblastoma. So you know, I’m his friend, what do you do? Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, I say, “Hey John, that’s an average you know. You’re not average. As a matter of fact, let me be honest John, everybody knows you’re abnormal. And so the fact that you’re abnormal and you’ve got great treatment, you’re—you’re gonna beat this.” I hope and pray I’m right.

QT: 01;54;55;04

TITLE

What he’ll miss about McCain

QT: 01;54;59;12

JOE LIEBERMAN:

Well, I’ll miss just the friendship honestly. I don’t have the privilege—you know, people have asked me always since I left the Senate five years ago, “Do you miss the Senate?” Well, I was there a long time, I was privileged to be there. Sometimes I miss it but really I miss the people who are my friends there and no one more than John McCain. I mean we—it’s been great. We keep in touch, we talk regularly, we talk about public policy, we talk about politics, we laugh about things that strike us as funny so you know, it’s hard to even think about because his—his friendship in my life is unique and very important and I—I just hope he goes on a lot longer.

QT: 01;55;48;15

TITLE

The normalization of relations with Vietnam, traveling to Hanoi with John and the Clintons

QT: 01;55;53;07

JOE LIEBERMAN:

You know I watched John, I wasn't directly involved with him, he was very involved with Senator Kerry. It was really classic McCain, maybe, Kerry too. I mean, two Vietnam vets, controversial in a way because there was so much attack on Kerry when he ran for President but they both believed in the normalization of relations with Vietnam. Really remarkable statement, classically American. We had this war, they were both there. John suffered terribly as a result, I mean think of all the—he's come out—he came out of the war with disabilities because of the way they treated him. Can't comb his hair, you know? I mean that's—a lot more than that, but that's part of it. He can't raise his hand that high. But he was big enough as a person, and knew it was in America's interest to normalize relations so—so he led the fight and it was hard for people who were going to take a more narrow, small minded view ultimately to prevail.

QT: 01;56;53;09

JOE LIEBERMAN:

But I just wanna tell you this story. One time, we went to Vietnam together, we went to Hanoi. And on the plane in, he said, "I—I want to prepare you that if people recognize me, it's gonna be a reaction that will surprise you." Ok. So we're actually at the museum that was the Hanoi Hilton and we're coming out and there's a group of students, probably high school or college, and they recognize him. They—they go wild like he was a rock star and they start to chant, "Mac-Cain, Mac-Cain, Mac-Cain!" They wanted his autograph, they wanted to take pictures. So afterward I said to him that was amazing. It was very, actually emotional for me to watch it. So I said, "What do you think's on their mind?" So he said, "Two things. One is, they think, the Vietnamese people think they treated me a lot better than they really did." And I think that's true. The second thing is that everybody in Vietnam knows that John in spite of being their prisoner led the fight for normalization of relations between the US and Vietnam.

QT: 01;58;17;10

JOE LIEBERMAN:

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So he became a hero there and I saw that with my own eyes. But I'll tell you, it's deep in him. You go through that Hanoi Hilton museum with him, he'll tell you about everything, about every—a couple of times I saw sort of his eyes wander off and you could feel him just going back to thinking about what he experienced, you can read about it in some of his books. It's just really unbelievable and to think that he came out of that as an in-tact person, you know, and lived the incredibly productive life he did after being locked up for five and a half years, that's—that's amazing.

QT: 01;58;59;09

JOE LIEBERMAN:

It says a lot about John, it says a lot about Kerry and Clinton too, because at various times Kerry and McCain fought and there was difficulties between them. John always had a pretty good relationship with the Clintons. I mean not politically but as time went on, pretty good personal relationship. Certainly after President Clinton went out of office and when Hillary came into the Senate, they developed a good relationship. She traveled with us a couple of times and it was you know, very positive, very warm and it's very memorable.

QT: 01;59;34;03

TITLE

Regarding a speech McCain gave honoring Lieberman

QT: 01;59;38;18

JOE LIEBERMAN:

He was hilarious, it was like being in Vegas. And you know, he could've been Don Rickles or somebody.

END TC: 01;59;49;00