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GEORGE W. BUSH INTERVIEW
JOHN MCCAIN: FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS
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GEORGE W. BUSH
Former President of the United States
February 16, 2018
Interviewed by Teddy Kunhardt
Total Running Time: 14 Minutes

START TC:
QT: 01;00;00;00

QT: 01;00;01;06

GEORGE W. BUSH:

Not a problem. **(Cross talk)**

QT: 01;00;03;16

CREW:

You got it?

QT: 01;00;04;05

CREW:

Got it. President George W. Bush interview, take one, marker, soft sticks

QT: 01;00;11;15

TITLE:

For McCain and Bush, their fathers shaped their lives

QT: 01;00;15;21

GEORGE W. BUSH:

Well, if you admire and love somebody because first and foremost they were a devoted father, than that person's going to have an influence on your future. I never really thought I was gonna be a politician. I'm pretty certain

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McCain didn't think he was gonna be one either. We were both—you know, maybe a little unsettled and a little kinda trying to find our way when we were younger but in the end, our dad's influenced some of the decisions we made as we became more responsible citizens. I never knew John's dad but I heard him talk about him with great fondness.

QT: 01;00;57;01

TITLE

John McCain's admiration for his father and grandfather

QT: 01;01;01;04

GEORGE W. BUSH:

I'm not sure we were that philosophical with each other. He—but it was pretty clear. I mean, when you—Laura and I went and visited he and Cindy in his place up there in Northern Arizona and you know, you could get a sense for how family has influence his life by the way he treats his own family and you know, I—I—I can remember asking John about his grandfather and father and you—you can—I can't remember the specifics of the conversation but I can remember the tenor of the conversation and his dedication and his admiration for his dad and his grandfather.

QT: 01;01;42;05

TITLE

McCain's love of Arizona

QT: 01;01;47;01

GEORGE W. BUSH:

Yeah, no he loves Sedona. God, he—we went over to visit him and he was cooking some kind of barbecue with his neighbor and he was like a kid. And he wanted to show me this particular high—hill and it was really—you could tell. His enthusiasm was about as high as I'd ever seen during my time of knowing John.

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QT: 01;02;07;06

TITLE:

McCain's win in New Hampshire in the 2000 presidential primary

QT: 01;02;13;01

GEORGE W. BUSH:

Well, first of all, I was surprised. I thought I was gonna whip him. Of course he thought he was gonna whip me. And it was a turning point for me, because—and for that I'm thankful that John beat me because I needed to show people I could get off the mat. I mean, I was kind of the presumptive heir to the—to the nomination and McCain stepped up and whipped me good and he outworked me and he had a better message for New Hampshire. And—and so I told my team, "Look, let's view this as a blessing, not a—not a defeat, and show the people we can bounce back." And so—and—and—you know, the competition with John was tough. On the other hand, it made me a better candidate and person for that matter.

QT: 01;03;02;21

TITLE:

Winning & losing in politics and the 2000 presidential primaries

QT: 01;03;07;00

GEORGE W. BUSH:

I had some good states ahead of me, you know, and I'm one of these guys—I—I had figured out quite a while ago that winning and losing one—what mattered in life in the end—I watched my dad lose for the US Senate three t—I mean, statewide in the—I watched my dad lose statewide three times in Texas and you know, the lesson there is, if you allow political defeat to define you, you'll lose the most important things in life like family and faith. And he didn't and he bounced back and became President having lost. So I wasn't all that—I never ran scared I was gonna lose but I was—and I knew John would be a tough competitor and all that defeat did was make me work harder.

QT: 01;03;52;03

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TITLE:

Accusations and attacks in South Carolina during the 2000 presidential primary

QT: 01:03;58;07

GEORGE W. BUSH:

I don't think my side said that and if they did, I'd have fired them. I think that there are some sideliners, you know, people who were—claim they were for so and so who floated stuff out. Yeah, it got testy. It got testy because third party people made it testy. I never really felt that race in South Carolina or anywhere for that matter breached my friendship with John. My admiration for him did not change in the course of a heated primary.

QT: 01:04;31;06

TITLE:

McCain and Bush appear on Larry King as the 2000 primaries turn negative.

QT: 01:04;36;04

GEORGE W. BUSH:

I remember pulling out a—ya know, we were some—I think he accused me of dirty campaigning and I pulled out some flyer that said paid for by John McCain. Yeah, I do remember that and Alan Keyes was still in the race. And I remember John and Alan got in a little bit of a spat during a commercial. This was one of those debates when they actually had commercials. And so you're kind of sparring, you know, and you're thinking about answers and stuff, then all of a sudden, "We're now taking a break." And then so the three of us would sit there with Alan K—Larry King and—yeah I remember it.

QT: 01:05;09;17

TITLE:

Looking back on the antagonism in the 2000 primaries

QT: 01:05;15;03

GEORGE W. BUSH:

People look back at that kind of—that period and say, “Man you guys must’ve really been antagonistic toward each other.” and I didn’t feel that way at all and I don’t think John did in the end either. I mean, look, we were kind of semi-war horses at that point who had seen a lot and no question it was spirited. I think any of the kind of antagonism as a result of that race really resulted from ya know, fringe supporters. He had fringe supporters saying ugly things about me and I’m confident some of my fringe supporters said ugly things about him. And—when I think about it, when I reflect upon my own feelings about John, as I say, they didn’t change. Matter of fact, when he whipped me in New Hampshire, it increased my admiration for him.

QT: 01:06;04;04

TITLE:

McCain endorsed Bush after dropping out of the race in 2000

QT: 01:06;07;20

GEORGE W. BUSH:

We had a meeting I think in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania if I’m not mistaken. We met in a hotel there and the reason I remember that is ‘cause that’s the same time that our old manager of the Texas Rangers, Bobby Valentine had the Mets in the hotel, they were playing the Pirates. And so on that day I met with John and Bobby Valentine, separate occasions I might add but yeah, we had a good visit. Look, I had campaigned with John for my dad in ‘88. I had seen what a stalwart—when—if he’s for you, he’s a stalwart. I mean there’s no hope—there’s no backing off, and—and so yeah, we had a nice visit.

QT: 01:06;48;16

GEORGE W. BUSH:

And then one of the first events we did together was on a bus tour coming down the panhandle of Florida and there were big crowds, I mean really big.

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And I think John could sense that something was happening in the general election that was positive and so yeah, he was on board.

QT: 01;07;07;18

TITLE:

Bush's relationship with McCain during his presidency

QT: 01:07;11;18

GEORGE W. BUSH:

You know, it was ok. I mean, it was good, except you know, John's an independent cut at times and just because I was for something, didn't necessarily make him for it. And so there are moments where he was a defender, a stalwart defender, and there was moments when he took an opposite point of view but never was the respect and friendship diminished.

QT: 01;07;32;14

TITLE:

On McCain's legendary temper

QT: 01;07;36;09

GEORGE W. BUSH:

He was very respectful of the presidency, very respectful. And he—and around me, he was ya know, a gentleman and I had—no, I never seen him get angry.

QT: 01;07;53;23

TITLE:

McCain post 9/11 and his support during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq

QT: 01:07;59;16

GEORGE W. BUSH:

First of all, he understood the nature of the conflict. There—there were some who you know, kind of wanted a limited response and maybe hold these

people at bay. John understood this was a war and that—and during war, the United States must use the assets at its disposal to defeat the enemy, which meant go on the offense. And so in Afghanistan and Iraq, he was not only supportive of the reason why we did this, holding people to account or trying to prevent an attack before it came but once in, he was supportive.

QT: 01:08;36;01

GEORGE W. BUSH:d

Now look, like a lot of people including me, we were critical of some decisions made and needed to adjust but in the end, John understood the stakes. So for example, on the surge, there was no stronger supporter on the surge than John McCain which was very important, 'cause his voice has enormous credibility in the Senate and—and it worked.

QT: 01;09;03;00

TITLE:

The surge compared to the Christmas bombing in Vietnam

QT: 01:09;08;09

GEORGE W. BUSH:

I think it's different. I think—well, first of all it's a different kind of war. But ya know, it's—it's—it's hard for me, maybe somebody else can draw that conclusion, I can't.

QT: 01;09;18;07

TITLE:

Speculation on John McCain running with John Kerry in 2004

QT: 01;09;22;21

GEORGE W. BUSH:

There's a lot of stuff—a lot of rumors and a lot of stuff around politics and no, I wasn't the least bit concerned.

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QT: 01:09;28;20

TITLE:

McCain's tough stance on Rumsfeld.

QT: 01:09;32;23

GEORGE W. BUSH:

One of the roles of the legislative branch is hold the executive branch to account and that's what he's doing. And I—I understand the nature of checks and balances and sometimes John was a pretty significant check.

QT: 01:09;52;03

TITLE:

What makes McCain a great senator

QT: 01:09;55;11

GEORGE W. BUSH:

He's a great senator. And you know, one of the things that makes him an interesting person, he's unpredictable. On foreign policy and military matters, he's very predictable because he understands the military as well as anybody in the—in the Senate.

QT: 01:10;13;03

GEORGE W. BUSH:

I've always been an executive branch guy and all I can tell you is, he has great respect for the US Senate, its traditions, its rules and its history.

QT: 01:10;22;11

TITLE:

On learning McCain had brain cancer

QT: 01:10;30;04

GEORGE W. BUSH:

I think Lindsey Graham told me, his good friend Lindsey. And I have talked to John since then, you know, check on him, see how he's doing and I—there's no doubt in my mind he'll battle. And ya know, Laura and I—reason I called

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him was I wanted him to know that Laura and I wish he and Cindy all the best. To the extent that he thinks prayers help, I'm offering mine.

QT: 01;10;57;10

TITLE:

How McCain will be remembered

QT: 01:11;01;21

GEORGE W. BUSH:

He'll be remembered as a great public servant. He'll be remembered not only as someone who endured a horrible five and a half years and came out with the desire to make a positive contribution in life but as a great US senator. I mean somebody who in the tradition of a lot of senators—some—some really good senators who were independent of mind but solid in principle. And people look at McCain with admiration.

QT: 01;11;36;16

TITLE:

How Bush first met McCain

QT: 01;11;40;01

GEORGE W. BUSH:

Campaigning for my dad.

QT: 01:11;41;03

GEORGE W. BUSH:

He was a big George HW Bush supporter, you know, I'm sure they had become acquainted when dad was Vice President and John—I think he was in the Senate in '88.

QT: 01:11;52;16

GEORGE W. BUSH:

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So he was—I met John—you know, I must have met him before but I remember him at a big—at a 41 rally and man, he was very fired up. And when John gets fired up, he gets fired up. And he—he was strong, strong for dad. And so, here’s a McCain story for you. My last debate ever, my whole life, my last political debate was in 2004 in Arizona. And I’m getting ready to go on stage at Arizona State University against John Kerry. And I was ready for it. You know, I felt good about it. And we had a room with friends that were up there.

QT: 01:12;45;22

GEORGE W. BUSH:

And I think my daughter was there, maybe both of ‘em were there. Laura was there, a couple of senators and buddies from Arizona; they’re kind of mingling around and I’m over t here trying to kind of get the zen of debate, you know, kind of relaxing and I look down and there’s McCain who is crouched right in front of me about this far from my face saying, “Just relax, just relax!” And I’m saying to myself, “Man how can I relax when you’re yelling, “relax!””?

QT: 01:13;14;13

GEORGE W. BUSH:

Anyway, he was you know, basically it was his way of saying I’m wishing you well, go get ‘em.

QT: 01;13;20;06

TITLE:

On McCain working to normalize relations with Vietnam

QT: 01:13;28;08

GEORGE W. BUSH:

Ya know, John came to the realization that Vietnam can be an ally, which is ironic.

QT: 01;13;38;05

GEORGE W. BUSH:

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I think it speaks highly of his character. I suspect that it's—when you get through it all, as you start out, you're gonna find out that you know, that maybe the title ought to be *A Man of Character*.

QT: 01;13;52;15

TITLE:

On painting a portrait of McCain

QT: 01:13;56;20

GEORGE W. BUSH:

Well, you know, I don't know how much money your budget is, but I'm on a penchant. Yeah, it'd be kind of interesting to paint a portrait of John McCain. It'd be—I—you know, as a painter, often times a painting should reflect your kind of—inner thoughts and your emotions and I would paint him with affection.

END TC:

QT: 01;14;20;10