

# KUNHARDT **FILM** / FOUNDATION

BILL MCINTURFF INTERVIEW  
*JOHN MCCAIN: FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS*  
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**BILL MCINTURFF**  
**McCain Pollster**  
**September 27, 2017**  
Interviewed by Peter Kunhardt  
**Total Running Time: 1 Hour 9 Minutes**

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

**QT: 01;00;05;21**

**TITLE**  
Meeting John McCain

**QT: 01;00;10;00**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

I first met John McCain in 1991. It was post the Keating episode and they were rebuilding a political team for his 1992 reelection. And a guy named Jay Smith who had been his consultant asked me to take over the polling. And so we were planning and preparing for what might have been and was presumed to be at the time a very, very difficult reelection, given that we were just coming off of the Keating story.

**QT: 01;00;38;22**

**TITLE**  
The effect of the Keating Five Scandal on McCain's reelection in 1992

**QT: 01;00;43;13**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

The Keating story by the time the election of 1992 came around, John had essentially already been exonerated. He worked so hard to kind of reestablish himself with the Arizona electorate and so by the time the actual election of 1992 came around, the Keating thing was in the verbatims. People talked about it but it did not have much bearing on the good feelings people had about the Senator and what turned out to be a very comfortable reelection.

**QT: 01;01;09;20**

**TITLE**

Keating Five as an assault on McCain's integrity

**QT: 01;01;15;07**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

John McCain is a person for whom personal honor is a very big deal. And when you read his autobiography and he talks about his dad, an officers code in the Navy and what's expected of an officer and personal honor, these are the core of who he is and so the Keating thing was I think the first time that somebody had assaulted that core, and when you watch the video of John McCain in that hearing room, he is slumped over and he just looks so miserable and you know, so—and you can tell this angry frustration that he had done anything that would ever put him in that chair and I think as well the anger and frustration that—that and what's—you know, he doesn't deserve to be in that chair, and they needed a republican and they needed it bipartisan and he got stuck but—you—when you know John McCain and you watch that video, you can just tell the devastating consequence it had for him to be in that position.

**QT: 01;02;15;02**

**TITLE**

On John McCain's popularity

**QT: 01;02;19;16**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

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John McCain, he's funny. He's a very engaging, funny guy. And number two, he—he—I think when you see him on the road with people, he's genuine, he does kind of connect with people and he's interested in what they say and there's sincerity to that and three, the guy has—the guy's committed. I mean, there's stuff he believes in, he won't back off from it and in today's politics and over my 25, 27 years with him, it sort of makes him a unique figure in American politics. But that sort of personal quality of—kind of the sense of humor and then the perspective he has about himself and his ability to make fun of himself. Those are all things that don't come easily to the average elected politician.

**QT: 01;03;14;17**

**TITLE**

On public perception of McCain

**QT: 01;03;18;20**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

I think John McCain is a unique United States Senator. He has not only a national standing but actually international standing. I think of him sometimes and you look at all the travel he's doing. Even now, he's sort of America's Prime Minister all over the world and I'm not impugning the character of any US Senator but I'm saying I think John's got a unique standing in the public mind. He's seen as a little different than the average elected official, a little more candid, tougher, and—and much more independent than they perceive most politicians these days who they see as too connected to either political party.

**QT: 01;03;54;20**

**TITLE**

McCain has transformed over time

**QT: 01;03;59;10**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

I—I think running for president is a transformational experience and in John's case and in most of the men and soon to be more women that I know who've run for President, they're better for the experience. There's the process of going around this country and asking people to vote for you for President. This country has an expectation for what they want to see in their next President. In John's case, I think that led to greater patience, I think he worked even harder at controlling his temper, even harder at working and making sure that he could know how to work across party lines and I think, you know, the guy tried to be the person that the American electorate would like him to be, I mean, because look, part of who he is, he is an American hero.

**QT: 01;04;51;01**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

And he's all the other complicated stuff and he's all the other stuff that's not perfect, but he is also that. And people want him to—they want to see the best of him and I think he works really, really hard to control the other side to be that person that they would like to see him and like him to be.

**QT: 01;05;09;15**

**TITLE**

On leadership

**QT: 01;05;13;19**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

I don't know what makes John McCain or anyone else when they—when they talk about being a leader, I don't know how to quite capture it. What I think is—that he is self-possessed, that he has enough internal knowledge about himself, that he sort of knows what he knows and knows what he doesn't know. And I think people forget that a leader isn't somebody who thinks they're right all the time. A leader is also someone smart enough to ask for help when they need it. And—but number two, I think when he knows what he knows, he's pretty confident, and he conveys a, 'look, I've got the answer, this is what we ought to do. It's gonna work.'

**QT: 01;05;52;05**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

And his conviction is compelling. And three, as I said, he has a humor and an affectionate quality that sort of binds people and make people believe in the guy and then look, there's—when he talks about—when he talks about believing in something greater than yourself, when he talks about being separated from this country and the love of country, these just aren't things he says, this is stuff he believes to his core and so when other people watch him talk about that, and he says, "Look, I'm appealing to you, let's do something bigger, let's do something better for the country, let's do something bigger than for our own self-interest." These are things he really, really believes. And they're powerful and most people want to be part of that cause, or a cause, and I think he has the capacity to mobilize that because he so fundamentally believes that about America and what this country can be and that's a pretty powerful vision.

**QT: 01;06;52;04**

**TITLE**

McCain's POW experience and its influence on public perception of him

**QT: 01;06;57;11**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

Well it's you know, a little bit of that's faded, it's now a long time ago but look, there's no question his career in the early 1980's when he was first elected was premised about that and the way he'd been tested and what he had gone through and—and you know, his POW story is not like the other people, he could've left. He was offered to leave and what's also not very well known is the commanding officer, when everyone agreed like, we're gonna—the first guy that goes is the guy who's been here the longest, they thought he was gonna die. And they said, "John, you're so sick, you're going to die, it's ok, you can go." He was kind of offered not only by the North Vietnamese but by his own commanding officer telling him we don't want you to die here, take the deal, to—to—for anybody to imagine what he's been through and to volunteer to stay under those circumstances, wow, that's pretty powerful and it speaks volumes to what was important to him and it speaks volumes about his character.

**QT: 01;07;58;15**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

And that story, it isn't just the story of being a POW, it's the story of a choice he made that no other POW had to make and the way he handled that, and yeah I think that's enduring and—and it ought to be important to people. It's—it's—I mean I—I mean, again, most of us, no one wants to imagine being in a situation that John and those men were in but who would imagine given what his commanding officer said making the decision to stay and when that story when his prison guard says, "Now it's going to get very, very bad for you." And it's like, what, I mean how bad was it already? I mean, those are pretty powerful stories that separates you from all but a very, very small handful of people in this country.

**QT: 01;08;44;18**

**TITLE**

McCain's 2000 presidential run

**QT: 01;08;49;22**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

Ok, here's some good stories. It's November of 1998 and I do the first kind of premise poll. We do a poll in four early primary states and we kind of compare the John McCain biography to the George Bush biography and then the one or two other leading candidates. And normally, when you do that, you make up ground. In other words, everyone knew George W. Bush, no one—very few people knew John McCain in Iowa and these—New Hampshire and these early states.

**QT: 01;09;17;04**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

So when you describe their bio and background, especially, my gosh, ya know, McCain's bio, you do a post ballot and you make up ground. The race gets closer, except it didn't. John McCain was getting crushed in the beginning, and he was getting crushed at the end and he was losing and Bush was in the mid-forties, he was in the single digits, we didn't make up ground, nothing about that poll was promising. And so you present that to the Senator and to his—ya know, the small group of people that've been with

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him for a long time. And then he—and with that good n—Jeremy(?) says, “So in other words, they know everything about me and I still get crushed?” I said, “Yeah, yes, that’s true.” And then he says, “Tell me then, what the hell’s the point? I mean I don’t want to do this if I can’t win, why would I do this?”

**QT: 01;09;58;05**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

And I said—and I said, my answer was, “Because guess what, you believe in stuff. Let me tell you what you believe in. You believe in campaign finance reform. No—no republican is gonna talk about that issue and it’s never gonna happen in this country until someone proves that the American electorate cares about it and no one’s ever gonna move on that issue until we can prove that it’s a voting issue.” And I went through the two or three things he wanted to talk about in the campaign and I said, “Hey, guess what, who else is gonna talk about that stuff? No one. There’s one candidate in this race who would talk about those issues and it’s you.” And guess what the US presidency allows you to do, guess what this campaign will allow you to do? It will allow you to demonstrate and talk about what you would do as President that would transform this country and transform this party that nobody else would do.”

**QT: 01;10;47;19**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

And he said, “Can I win?” I said, “Well hey, here’s what I believe: In this campaign, George Bush is in the semi-finals. He’s got a slot. There’s going to be somebody that will run against Bush because this country and the press is not going to tolerate a race where somebody is just handed the nomination. So I don’t know if you can beat George Bush, let me ask you a question. Do you think you can beat Steve Forbes, Lamar Alexander, Liddy Dole, can you be the second guy in this race?” And he says, “God, I hope so.” And I said, “Me too. I hope so too, but if you want to run and you want to—if you want to transform environment—the environmental stuff you want to do, campaign finance reform, the stuff you want to do with military security, you’re the only guy running who’s gonna talk about this.”

**QT: 01;11;31;23**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

“So, the reason you run is because those issues are so important, they’re an opportunity for you to fight for those issues, this party, this nomination and by the way, what do I believe? I believe that given your bio, given the caliber of those other candidates, and given the power of that s—your story with those issues, yes, I absolutely believe you’re gonna be the guy standing in the semi-final with Bush and when that happens, I don’t know, we have a shot. Anything can happen, but those issues are not going to be on the front table of this country without your race.” So I—look, he wanted to do it. I mean that’s a nice speech, that’s a nice Bill McInturff—I liked saying that story but it—John McCain had already I think the year before in his heart decided to run.

**QT: 01;12;21;00**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

And he was waiting for Cindy, he was waiting for his family, the guy wanted to run for President. Now, the other part of the story that I like is, he goes, “Ok, I got it.” He was like, another half president(?), “Ok, I think I’m gonna run.” And then he has to go to vote and then some of the new people who don’t know him said, “Ok, now this is very important, very important, we’ve got to keep this under wraps and we have to think about the timing of the announcement. And Mark Salter says, “Are you nuts? He’s going to tell five people between here and the vote including the guy in the elevator. By the time he comes back, everyone in Washington’s gonna know he’s decided to run.” He said, “There’s no secrets, there’s no we’re gonna keep it in the tubes, I mean the guy’s gonna run. He’s just—he’s gonna tell everybody and everyone’s gonna know by the time he gets back.”

**QT: 01;13;06;16**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

And so when people ask about the straight talk express, what I say is, “Look, in a John McCain campaign, you had these two choices. One, choice number one is the conventional. Let’s have a disciplined campaign where our candidate says something we can predict every day and we’re gonna control the message or two, let’s have what John McCain’s gonna say and do which is whatever he wants every single day to every single question. That’s what he’s going to do so why don’t we have the good sense to make up a campaign that makes that a virtue and tells people, “Hey, you want a candidate who’s a little



bit different, who'll say whatever you want all day long? That's John McCain." And let's make it a virtue and sell it because that's what he's going to do."

**QT: 01;13;50;17**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

"And anybody who's worked with him for the previous decade who thinks he's gonna be a conventional candidate and under control and message—I mean, that's not who this guy is." And the people around him and knew him had the very good sense to say, this is this guy's strengths and we better create the campaign around what he is going to do as a candidate." And that's—and I mean I—I didn't—ya know, I sure didn't think of things like this but that's where the straight talk express came from. Because, it was taking what he auth—authentically what he's like, which you can't control and can't change and making it an attribute in a campaign.

**QT: 01;14;26;10**

**TITLE**

The media's love of the Straight Talk Express and the Zeitgeist of 2000

**QT: 01;14;32;02**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

He's charming, he's funny. Sitting around talking with John McCain driving around a bus? I mean, it's a pretty—he's good at it. And here's the other thing you have to remember. People—candidates run at a—in a certain Zeitgeist. You have to go back to 1998, early 1999. You have to think about President Clinton, you've got to think about the Monica Lewinsky story, you have to think about how American's embarrassed they were by that story. You have to put yourself in that perspective. And so when we ask people what are you looking for in terms of a president, in terms of who you want to vote for, we always vote for the opposite person that we've just had. In Clinton's case, despite those personal skills and his job approval, all of that stuff was the Zeitgeist of 1999 and 1999—19—and 2000.

**QT: 01;15;25;23**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

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They were looking for a person where they could feel proud of the American President and his in those era, his character. So what do you—what do you have? You’ve got a POW war hero that—and then that embodies those qualities and then when you were with him, the other thing that this country wanted, you coul—it was so powerful. When John talks about love of country, of military duty, of service and Vietnam. Vietnam, you gotta go back to 1999. It was still very raw. And so when he wrote the book and the book came out, you—people would be in lines, they would be at events, they would have the book and here’s what they did. They would show pictures of themselves serving in Vietnam, they would show pictures of their family, they would show pictures of their loved one. And all they would kept saying to him is, “Thank you. Thank you for talking about service, for what Vietnam meant for the pride you should feel because you tried to serve your country.”

**QT: 01;16;32;09**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

And they would—they were so powerful wanting somebody to express that pride in the service they had committed to this country and including the poor men and women who were there with pictures of people we lost in Vietnam, and John became a way to—I think for people to express that. And—and—and of course what I’m saying is, every day when you’re on the road and you’re John McCain and people are—have that kind of reaction to you and expectation, I’m saying John—you—as I said, for somebody who’d known him a long time already and seen him in campaigns, he worked so hard to be that guy and it was—I mean, there’s—we all—look, we all have good sides, bad sides. John’s got a good side, he’s got a bad side. But this was John McCain’s good side day after day after day after day, over and over and over again because he worked hard—so hard to be that guy and John McCain’s good side is a pretty attractive site to see every day.

**QT: 01;17;36;22**

**TITLE**

The New Hampshire win during the 2000 primaries

**QT: 01;17;42;06**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

Ok. So now it's—it's right after Thanksgiving, it's early December and we didn't have any money to speak of, so we had not done our own New Hampshire polling in like a year and we were looking at public polls. We didn't have our own polls with our own screens and the way I would look at the electorate. So when you design a survey, you have what's called a clean ballot. How's McCain, Bush, and all the other candidates. And then we did a whole series of John McCain will say this, George Bush will say this, here's the campaign, now how would you vote?

**QT: 01;18;11;11**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

And so—so we do the first nine interviews and of course I mean, I'm—I can't sleep or ya know, it's like—my—'cause once you do the first couple of interviews with it, you know, you don't have everything you need about a poll but you know what's going to happen. So Elizabeth, the project director, Harrington, calls me at two in the morning 'cause I said I want to see these partials as soon as they call and I ask her and I say to her, "What's the ballot?" And she says, "McCain plus five." And I—I sort of—I said, "I don't want the post ballot, I want the clean ballot in the beginning." And she goes, "I know that, I gave you the clean ballot, McCain plus five." And then I—I—I—**(Hyperventilates)**—I can't breathe, I mean, you're telling me we have a poll in December where we're already ahead?

**QT: 01;19;03;01**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

And so I'm gasping for air, I can't breathe, I'm like—and then she goes, "Are you ok, are you gonna die? Should I call the ambulance?" And I said to her later, "Could you show to express some emotion, could you express like you were concerned that I couldn't breathe?" That I—and I sa—I finally s—**(Hyperventilating)**—"What's the post ballot?" She goes, "We're up by 19." And I said, "Oh my God." And I said to her after I could breathe again, I said, "You understand that—you understand the following things Elizabeth. Two, he's going to probably win New Hampshire unless the Bush campaign has this data and radically changes what they're doing, we're gonna win New Hampshire and two, it's not going to be close." And I said, "Three, you understand something really, really, really important and friggin cool. There are two people in all of the world who know this and it's you and I at two in the morning."

**QT: 01;19;59;00**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

And she says, “Do you really think so?” I said, “No,” I said, “Elizabeth, I wrote the survey. I know what’s going to happen. The Bush people aren’t going to change. We’re going to—ya know, unless they get this right now and they understand what’s happening, they’re going to lose and it’s going to be big, it’s going to be tran—it’s—like you know, the guy could be President, that’s what this means, that’s why I couldn’t breathe, that’s what this poll’s about.” So—so, ok. So, the Bush campaign stays positive. They don’t—I—unbelievably they stay positive. They never react, we get to run the campaign, we did run the campaign. And so our internal tracking keeps getting better, and better, and better. And so then it’s the Sunday before New Hampshire, it’s actually the Super Bowl. We’ve got to do all the calls and you know, before the Super Bowl.

**QT: 01;20;52;11**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

Elizabeth calls me and we’re 16, 7—16, 17 points ahead and I said, “Oh my God, I can’t—I c—no, Liz—no, I can’t—I can’t give him plus 16. Oh my God.” And I—so I weighed down independents and I—I do everything you can do to a survey and so she finally calls back, says, “Well we got it down to nine, but unless you want me to make up a ballot, that’s the lowest it gets.” And I said, “Ok, ok.” So John’s doing his last events and Rick Davis and Mark Salter and the guys are in the follow up car. And so I call Rick Davis and he says, “McInturff, what’s the number?” And I say, “Well, you know, first, you understand it’s the Super Bowl, it’s a weird day to call and you don’t know about independents and I’m giving”—and he says, “That’s—Bill”—and he’s like. “Come on, stop the bullshit. What’s the number?” And then I finally say, “Plus nine.” He bursts out laughing and he—he hold—and he holds the phone and he turns around and says, “Oh my God, it’s so big he can’t get it below nine. I know McInturff, he was desperate to make it as bad as possible, the worst he could make it was nine. Oh my God, we’re going to win by so much.”

**QT: 01;22;06;12**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

And of course everyone’s laughing and then you know, I had gotten—my friend got fired from the Dole campaign four years earlier so our numbers

were right but that didn't change what happened. So on election day, New Hampshire, everyone else is feeling pretty good, I'm kind of wrapped in a—like you know, like wrapped in a fetal position whimpering. And so the first exit polls come out and we're like 16 or 18 ahead and so Dave said, "Ok, ok, get off the couch, quit your whimpering, your stuff is exactly right. You know, I know, America knows, it wasn't nine. You know how big it was gonna be, that's what's gonna happen." And of course yes, it was, I was—and Elizabeth Harrington got to be there. We were one of four or five people who got to tell John McCain what that number was going to be.

**QT: 01;22;54;04**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

And—and of course you know, John McCain's word is steady strain. The steady strain is when you're a POW for those years, you hold yourself together by not going too low, steady strain. All the talk about we're gonna get out, you got to keep that under wraps, it's steady strain and so when I got to tell him that number, he was shocked and you could see the shock in his face and he said, "Really, is that really what's going to happen?" I said, "Really." And then he s—and then he said, "What's that mean?" And then Mark Salter said, "What it means is you really—you might have a shot to be the next US President." And—and of course you know, that really—that hits you.

**QT: 01;23;40;20**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

Well I mean, there's a difference between you run versus you really think like, "Oh my God I could be the next President," and then he kind of shut down and you could see him going into his steady strain mode, which is a very quiet, disciplined and you know—he's in steady strain mode. So, the reason that was not a happy night for me is I'd also been doing all the work in South Carolina and I could never get him above 45 or 46 and I didn't—you know, and so while everybody else was celebrating, I was already in the—we're tracking that night in South Carolina and how different that was gonna be. But you know, so the happy night for me was not in New Hampshire, my happy night was in that early December when I was one of the two people who knew where—where that campaign was headed.

**QT: 01;24;31;12**

**TITLE**

The polls for South Carolina in the 2000 primaries

**QT: 01;24;37;08**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

Well, people forget my job which is, I was also the person who told John and Cindy the numbers in South Carolina, so you don't get very many days in between those two things. And of course you know, John's John. He loves polling, he loves what we do and he's—and he has a really good sense and so when he said same thing, "Are you sure?" I mean, "South Carolina when you said is this gonna happen?" And he said, "You sure?" I had to give him the—here's the Veteran's cross tab which is, we're kind of breaking even and—and of course look, it's very simple. In New Hampshire, independents were 40% plus of the sample and we were crushing Bush. In South Carolina, religious conservatives were 40% of the sample and John's losing by 25 or 30 points. There's none of the vote left. You can't beat the guy by enough votes to make that up.

**QT: 01;25;36;15**

**TITLE**

The Confederate flag debate in South Carolina and McCain's internal sense of right and wrong

**QT: 01;25;42;20**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

I know again, he personally—John personally feels and this is John, John personally feels that the Confederate flag was a moment where he drifted away from his own standard. He has—he apologized for it that year. Obviously he still carries that forward. It had zero to do with the outcome of that election. And so for John, this is a moment where he did not live up to his own standards and again, what I tell people is if you want to understand John McCain, you have to read the book.

**QT: 01;26;17;04**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

And there's like a page where his dad's in Hawaii and he goes through the officer code and he says, "This is the officer code if you're a US naval officer." Now, I've been with—I've been around John for whatever, 26, 7 years. He's not a perfect guy. On every single day, on every single occasion, I've seen him slip off that code. The difference is, this is what good people do. They say, "Oops, I made a mistake. That's not the way—I didn't handle that right. I didn't live up to the own—my own internal standard of how I want to see myself." The guy has a corrective instinct to try to be a decent human being and get back to that. My point is, compared to lots of other people who run for office, I know that there is an animating core to John McCain and how he wants to see himself and how he wants to see himself and the way he wants to operate in his life and it's a pretty attractive standard.

**QT: 01;27;08;18**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

And then I—but the point was, I'd known him a long time before I read the book, and then when I read the book, and I said, "Oh my God, I got it. This is the standard he's trying to live up to." The point of that story and the reason it's in the Hawaii chapter is because it's a terrible story about a naval officer who killed somebody, then used enlisted men to help try to cover it up and obviously is, you know, it's a horrible story but the point of that story was, oh my God, you can't be an officer in the US Navy and then use your power and rank to try to take advantage of enlisted people because there's no—there's nothing that violates that core in terms of one of the things you cannot do as a naval officer. And so when I read that and I read the standards of like, that—what his dad would impart and what's expected, that's when I realized, "Ok, I got it."

**QT: 01;28;00;09**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

I didn't know what it was or like I didn't—I couldn't be so articulate but this is what the guy's been trying to do. So the Confederate flag story is a point where John says, "I didn't—I have my own internal standards and I failed." And as I said in an attractive way in my mind, he apologized and my God, that's you know, what is that, 2000? That's 17 years ago and he's still talking

about the ways in which he sees that as a personal failure. I find that to be an attractive quality.

**QT: 01;28;30;11**

**TITLE**

Regarding the effect of the smear campaign in the South Carolina primary on John and Cindy

**QT: 01;28;34;19**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

You know, here's another thing that's made me a little different in my career and why I'm only a small footnote in most of these books. I think candidates and their wives should have a zone of privacy so—so I've been telling stories from my perspective about things that I've seen about John, I think John and Cindy should have a zone of privacy so you know, what I tell people is well, when you are with these people—you know, when you read the press about oh, the bam—Obama this or Trump or any of these people, Clinton, any of these people. We talk about them like they're robots. They're—they're sort of like mystical political figures. If you work with these men and women every day, they're real people and obviously—and—but and I also say people, "Look, they're real people who are under enormous strain who don't get a lot of sleep and guess what? Like seven billion other human beings, if you don't get much sleep under your enormous pressure, you're not really at your best."

**QT: 01;29;35;06**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

And you know what, the people around you ought to be loyal enough to say, "You know, that's not this guy at his best and you know, I've known this guy a long time and I don't think that's the way he would like, normally say or do things and I should give him a little slack and—and occasionally, very rarely, I would s—when John, I'd say, "John, you know what? Before you get going, I don't think I've seen you at your best, why don't we take a breath here John." And then, you know, and then he says, "you'll be,"—and "oh, ok." 'Cause he's been pretty nice to me for the most part. So yes, John and Cindy, I was—when you—I was there telling 'em what was gonna happen but I think that ought to



be John and Cindy's private moment and the private moment would happen in that room and that's up to John and Cindy to tell.

**QT: 01;30;18;11**

**TITLE**

The 2000 primaries according to the polls

**QT: 01;30;23;16**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

Yeah, well here's what I hoped to happen. I mean, New Hampshire was so big that it wiped out Steve Forbes and their campaign. My hope was in South Carolina, my hope was, ok, ok, here's what's going to happen. We can get to 45 or 46, Bush is gonna be right around there but Steve Forbes and this other guy, maybe they get 10 or 12, and that we can drain off enough of this vote so that a 45 can win this race. What happened was, New Hampshire was so massive and it so instantly became Bush-McCain that we wiped out all of the other places for votes to go and structurally in South Carolina it's a very simple polling issue. The very simple polling issue is, if 40% of the electorate is religious conservatives and you lose them by—here's the math, it's—you're—it's 40% is religious conservative, you're losing by 30 points, you're down 12 points. That means with the 60% of everybody else, you've got to beat George Bush by you know, like 20 points to get even and you can't beat a Bush in South Carolina by that much to make up for that margin.

**QT: 01;31;27;09**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

And look, you know, there was the debate when in the fall of 1990 and 9 where they asked the candidates who's your favorite phil—you know, who's your favorite philosopher? It was sort of like an off the wall question, how much did these—you know, at that time men, they were all men, how much did these guys thought up—oh no, actually Liddy Dole was there. But you know, their—everyone's picking their favorite philosopher, they had something to say, and George Bush said Jesus Christ. George Bush in his personal life is a genuinely committed Christian and when he said Jesus Christ, I think he meant that really is someone whose philosophy he saw himself adopting, that was a genuine part of who this guy was.

**QT: 01;32;06;16**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

The—he had incredibly strong support in the religious community and then in the—the bridge of the Republican structure, of the leadership of the Christian conservative part, they were Bush people. And you combine sort of the Bush family with the religious conservative part and you put yourself in South Carolina, you know, the remarkable stuff is if it weren't for the huge surge in who voted, it shouldn't have been—I mean, we made this a very close campaign despite all of that stuff. And by the way, I'm a Bush person. I started my career working for—in the 1990—1999 Presidential Campaign for his dad. I've done Jeb's stuff, I'm a long, long, long, long-term Bush person and I understand the structural advantage that he had in the race, it's very simple.

**QT: 01;32;58;02**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

Look, Texas was essentially—you can see Texas, California that time was winner take all. Once you lose California, you can't—there are no delegates left. If—as Rick Davis one time joked when we were talking about the rules of the 2016 race and California no longer being winner take all and the new rules and he said, “Wow, if we had those rules in 2000, John would still be running.” But that wasn't the structure of the 2000 campaign.

**QT: 01;33;26;19**

**TITLE**

Running for president and not becoming president can enhance a politicians popularity

**QT: 01;33;33;03**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

Well first let me—let me be honest with you, ok? Which is, there's nothing that helps your numbers than not being President. So when people look at, “Oh look, John McCain was ahead of Al Gore by whatever, 14 points in the spring.” I mean, so Geo—we lose, McCain's out and you look at these polls and like George Bush is ahead by four and Gore and McCain's winning by 12. Ya know, well yeah, because George Bush is running and he's getting trashed

every day. John McCain's the guy who's not getting trashed every day. So, I have to be honest with you and say as a pollster, nothing becomes you like not being a President or being in the race. You become what John is, you're an American hero who people saw as a straight shooter who bridges party divides and you're not getting trashed every day and that's a lot more attractive than being the American President where every single day somebodies dumping on ya.

**QT: 01;34;33;08**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

But again, I think that what happened is, in this campaign and what happened in 2000 as when—because again it was very hard to make the decision to get out of the race when he did. He made the right decision but it was very hard. Rick Davis said to him, “Look, you’re not the same person going back to the US Senate.” ‘Cause what McCain had in his mind was, his friends who he’d seen run for president, you get embarrassed and it’s like you come back tail between your legs. And Rick said, “Look John, this is like the opposite. You—two years ago, you were like ok, people knew who you were but today, you are kind of America’s leading kind of independent political figure and when you go back to the US Senate, you’re going back as a national hero with the strongest possible approvals, you have now literally a two million person donor list.”

**QT: 01;35;28;14**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

“You have the largest donor list in the country other than the Bushes and you’re going to be the guy that every single Republican is going to want campaign for them and you’re going to be the lynch pin of what does and does not happen in the US Senate. You left with this sort of status, you’re gonna come back as along with Ted Kennedy the two most famous, best known, most influential Senators and you’re going to come back enhanced in stature and you’re gonna—and for—and like campaign finance reform, look, it worked.” That issue got passed because of that campaign and the way John dragged the issue for it and Bush had to live with it. That would have never happened without that campaign and all the other stuff that John’s done with that leverage has been because of that campaign.

**QT: 01;36;10;02**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

And you know, we're watching an analogue today, because again, Bernie Sanders, you know, no one likes Bernie in the US Senate, he's not even a democrat but today he is sitting here as again, arguably one of the most—handful—single most influential US Senators because he went back to the US Senate enhanced in power. It's very, very rare but John McCain did it and now 16 years later so did—so did Bernie Sanders.

**QT: 01;36;35;06**

**TITLE**

McCain's decision to run again in 2008

**QT: 01;36;40;06**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

Well ya know, in defense of some decisions that were made, had Rudy Giuliani not run, the presumption was that look, the Republican party nominates the next guy in line. John McCain is the next person in line. He can run and raise 100 million dollars. We can do what Bush did eight years earlier and we can be that guy, that wasn't crazy. All of that could've been possible. And in a race where Rudy Giuliani did not run, I think that would have happened. Instead, Rudy Giuliani did run and guess what, he and McCain were sitting on the same sort of block of people, voters, and money and arguably it might've been a little better in the campaign people if much, much, much earlier people would've acknowledged that the assumptions they made were no longer correct but that didn't happen. And instead, you know—you know, instead, Rudy Giuliani and John are—are splitting the vote and the money and you built a campaign based on the wrong assumption about funding levels and you know, and you end up broke and you end up with where—where John ended up.

**QT: 01;37;51;19**

**TITLE**

Ann Landers and McCain's loss in 2008

**QT: 01;37;55;23**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

I love Ann Landers, I would read Ann Landers every day. There is now a PHD thesis, this woman wrote a book about how America changed through the filter of Ann Landers response to some of her questions by decade. So this woman writes to Ann Landers and she says, "Look, my husband keeps having affairs, he promised me he'd stop but he keeps doing it. What can I do—what's gonna stop my husband from having affairs?" And Anne Landers wrote back, rigor mortis. So during the—during the death watch of the—August of 2008, all these reporters would call saying, "Why doesn't McCain get out?" "I'd hate to see John like this," "I love John, it's so humiliating, it's so embarrassing," "When's he gonna quit, why would he quit?" "When's it gonna happen?" "Isn't he gonna quit?"

**QT: 01;38;43;13**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

And I would say to them, Look, I mean it isn't—did you ever—do you know anything—did you read the bio? Ok, let's forget, let's forget the POW stuff. Do you actually know how the guy won his first congressional race? He won his congressional race in—in a competitive race where if you're the Republican nominee, you get to meet members of Congress, there's seven people running, no one knows who he is. He went to 25,000 doors for a year and a half, four to six hours a day; 25,000 doors, four to six hours a day of door to door campaigning, do you know how hot it is in—I mean, who does that? People say they "go door to door." That means you have a picture taken with some pre-arranged person at the door shaking your hand who loves ya. Four to six hours in a campaign for 25,000 people. Well first, of course he won, because people like the guy. You meet John McCain, you like him.

**QT: 01;39;35;20**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

But two, nobody does that, and I said, "So here's what's gonna happen." I said, "He's gonna fly to New Hampshire and he'll go door to door. There'll be no money left and he'll say screw it and he'll go door to door and you know what, they're gonna like him because he's—becau—and—and number two, he's not gonna quit because guess what he believes in, he believes in saving Iraq. There's no other person in this race who's going to say this every day

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and he's not going to stop because he believes in something for this country's future that no one else believes in and when he's like that, he's never gonna stop, and I told him my Anne Landers story and I said, guess what will make him stop, rigor mortis. Failing that standard, John McCain can be beaten, he could lose his nomination but for God sakes he's not going to quit.

**QT: 01;40;21;17**

## **TITLE**

McCain's favorite memory of the 2008 campaign

**QT: 01;40;26;00**

## **BILL MCINTURFF:**

Have you ever heard my story about John's story to me about his favorite part of the campaign?

## **PETER KUNHARDT:**

No, please tell it.

**QT: 01;40;31;01**

## **BILL MCINTURFF:**

Alright, so it's a year later. We've lost—it's 2009, it's the one-year anniversary and Rick Davis always has these nice events. He has a private dinner with the McCain loyalists and McCain and there's Joe Lieberman, ya know, and—and the—like the 30 people who have been with John forever and so he—I got to sit next to John at the table. And so I'm trying—you know, I'm saying, "Hey John. Hey, you ran for President, you know. John, what's your favorite memory from the campaign in 2008, what's your favorite memory?" Because a lot of grim stuff happened but what's your favorite memory. And he says, "Well, I guess it was August of 2007." And I said, "Really? That's—aw, that's—that's a surprise, John. What—what about August of 2007 is your favorite memory?" He said, "We were in Michigan and my press crowds were way up again, all of which because they wanted to be there when I quit." He said, "So once again I had the press with me. We were campaigning in Michigan and we were supposed to do an outdoor event and it started raining. So the geniuses on my advance team decide the only place

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they can find that's big enough to fit the little crowd that I had was a funeral home."

**QT: 01;41;43;20**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

"And we—and he put the event in like one of the rooms of the funeral home across the street from the park. And I'm looking around and I'm saying, what? They put me in a funeral home? What are they thinking, the lead writes itself today. The dying John McCain campaign was literally in a funeral home as they hear the last gasp of the dying campaign." He said, "That was my favorite memory." So when I tell people the guy has sort of a sardonic sense of humor and an ability to laugh at himself, ya know, telling me a year after you've lost the presidency that your favorite memory is the funeral home event in Michigan in 2007 is sort of the McCain moment.

**QT: 01;42;23;17**

**TITLE**

The RNC's nominating process and the reality of choosing Lieberman as VP in 2008

**QT: 01;42;28;00**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

**(Expletive)** I'm gonna have to have another long talk with John.

**QT: 01;42;31;12**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

**(imitating strangling a neck)** This is—let me tell you, this is—what this means is for God sakes. Look, we had this conversation. John wanted to pick Joe Lieberman. Ok? Ok? Guess what? So we're in the room and John's with Cindy and we're—it's late and he says, "Look, I want to ch—ya know, like, I think to bridge America we ought to have like, I—ya know, pick Lieberman." And ok, there's—I mean it's an exciting campaign if you're just sitting around the abstract, that's sort of interesting. But I said, "Ok, here's—like, time out. Time out. Has anyone in this red—room actually read the rules of the

Republican National Committee and its convention rules? Has anybody here read them? Do you understand what's in them? What's in them is, "That if four del—a majority of four delegations ask for a roll call vote, they can demand a roll call vote." So, if you pick a pro-choice Democrat to be the Vice President of the United States of America Republican ticket. Hey guys and women around the room, you've lived in the Republican party all your life, do you think there's four delegations who are gonna take a pause and say, "I'm sorry, I'm not gonna vote for a pro-choice democrat to be my party's vice president." So what do you think they're going to do? First, they're going to have a roll call vote and instead of having us pick a vice president, there's gonna be a roll call vote and two, they're going to nominate somebody and somebody by the way, probably credible."

**QT: 01;44;14;17**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

"It's not gonna be some unknown delegate. There's going to be somebody who says, you know what, the right to life issue is kind of important to me and I don't think I want to have a Democrat pro-choicer heading our party ticket and instead of our having a convention, we're going to have a blood bath on the convention floor just to nominate him, that we might lose." So—so in the artificial world that you believe that you can pick who you want to be vice president, A, I would have loved to have done that campaign, it would've been really fun but it's not reality. It would never happen. It would've been a bloodbath on the convention floor even if you could've won the vote. Ok?

**QT: 01;44;58;17**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

And then there was also discussion including John considering, "You know what I should do, I should run as a national unity ticket with Joe Lieberman and say I'm going to run one term and we're gonna fix the country, we're gonna bridge the gap, we're gonna get stuff done, that's what America wants. That's a really fun campaign." And then John reflecting on that said, "Yeah, but guess what, if I did that, every single human being in the US Senate or House would realize that I'm gone in four years and I have zero leverage." People don't understand the leverage of the American presidency is based on the premise that people support you and that you're around to punish them. So if you pull either one of those plugs, it's—it's—it's a nothing burger job



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and so John correctly made the realization like, oh I can't say that. I could even do it internally in my brain, the minute I say it, I have zero power as president.

**QT: 01;45;50;11**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

So—so, this notion that somehow you could've imagined a McCain-Lieberman ticket does not—it does not—you c—it does not flow that that was what's going to happen. And by the way, here's the other thing I keep saying to people. Ok, ok, ok, let's presume that somehow you got—you could've got Lieberman nominated and we actually ran that campaign and the same result happened and this is my other ultimate point in that room. Ok guys, John McCain just became this Republican party's committee nominee. We all know the men and women who have spent 20, or 30, or 40 years as precinct committee people, they're proud of this party and you're telling them, my successor should I die is going to be a democrat, that's number one. But number two, if we lose this campaign, we're—

**QT: 01;46;40;00**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

You know what's going to happen? You're gonna fracture the Republican party around the issue of abortion and social issues. It's not gonna hurt all the other little people running for office everywhere, there's no reunited Republican party. There's gonna be huge chunks of this party that would sit this—sit it out because they're not gonna support the nominee.

**QT: 01;46;54;19**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

You fracture the republican party and then you're not the guy who lost, you're the guy who lost and fractured the republican party. And—and institutionally, my other point was, institutionally, you have an obligation to the Republican party and you are its nominee. So—so, and I said, "Hey it's America. If you want to run with Joe Lieberman who's a great guy, I like it and how much you like him, it's a great pitch but we should have done that a year ago and made up our own political party and made it up a year ago and you could have run as a third party. I think you might have won; it could've been pretty compelling. That, you could've done. You can't sit here in July pretending that you think Joe Lieberman can be the Vice President of the

republican party.” So—so let me tell you, the facts of the case have not changed which is—had—A, it wouldn’t have happened for all of the reasons I mentioned. But had it happened, had he tried to do it, there would not be like you know, the John McCain of today, there only would have been a lot of very, very, very, very angry people who never forgave him for fracturing the republican party.

**QT: 01;48;01;00**

**TITLE**

A message from McInturff to McCain

**QT: 01;48;05;07**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

I—by the way—so you can just tell when you see John, say I’m sorry I missed him. And say, Bill McInturff has two messages for you. For God sakes, he feels badly for you, how bad you feel about the confederate flag, it did not affect the race, and two, you can’t survive a floor vote for a democrat as vice president. He—and say McInturff has not changed his views on these two issues.

**QT: 01;48;25;05**

**TITLE**

On the tactics of the 2008 campaign and the effect of the financial crisis

**QT: 01;48;29;17**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

I think people have—people have sort of this glow about the 2000 campaign that’s a little bit unwarranted and the 2008 campaign was well within—enormously well within conventional limits and again, John was mindful every single day that he was running against an African American candidate and that we needed to bring out the best in this country and this debate. I don’t know anybody—anybody, himself or this campaign that could have worked harder that any fissures that exist in this country that are massive and important around race were not exacerbated because of his campaign. I

think that's a legacy—part of the legacy that he wanted to do personally that I think happened and you know, look, when Lehman Brothers collapsed, you know, sayonara, you know?

**QT: 01;49;27;20**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

My only hope would've been—my only hope would've been I wish Lehman Brothers collapsed in December and we could have run this race without it, I don't know we would have won, it would have been very close but the campaign we were going to run was going to be very ideological, meaning that Barack Obama was not just a modern democrat. If you look at his voting record in the State Senate and US Senate, he was a very liberal guy and ironically, McCain who has been you know, moderate, bridge across both party—all this stuff, we would have run an incredibly illogical campaign and today that would have been perceived as divisive. When Lehman Brothers collapsed, there was functioning of a campaign. We do something, a question called right direction wrong track, pretty much, you think the country's in the right direction, wrong track.

**QT: 01;50;15;13**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

After the collapse of Lehman Brothers, we dropped below 10% right direction. You're not going to reelect an incumbent republican party if only 8% of the people in the country think the countries in the right direction. You're like a goner. So, you know, the Senator has a sense of humor and he said to me, "Have you ever seen right direction this low?" I said, "Yes sir, I have." He goes, "Where?" And I said, "Bulgaria right after they left the Russian orbit. In our first poll in Bulgaria it was this low," and then I said it, "when Mike Dukakis was leaving Massachusetts and they elected Bill Well for the first time, right direction was in the single digits." And then of course he laughed, he said, "So you're telling me that yes, you've seen worse in Bulgaria and in Massachusetts when they're willing to vote for a Republican." I said, "Yes sir, that's the two times."

**QT: 01;51;06;04**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

And he said, "So you're telling me this is not going to go well?" I said, I said, "Look, look we'll c—don't worry, we're gonna keep trying." But you know,

the Lehman Brothers collapse took a horrible environment, horrible, and then just made the campaign impossible and that—at that point, you do—you know, you keep throwing stuff against the wall. And there were some stuff that was not particularly disciplined that you know, that was crazy, that should just—**(Expletive)** just happens.

**QT: 01;51;32;23**

**TITLE**

Robert Bork and increasing polarization

**QT: 01;51;37;12**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

Well I'm a Bork guy. I think the Bork—Robert Bork was an enormously qualified—enormously qualified US Supreme Court nominee and I have an interesting, unusual background, I worked for Elliot Richardson. And so you know, Elliot—Elliot's version is yeah, Bork fired the special prosecutor, he begged him to stay to do it, to not create a constitutional crisis. I think that what happened with Bork was a defining negative moment that's unleashed all the other—unleashed the stuff that's happened and then you know, and look at—you know, it's like spy versus spy in Mad Magazine. Every offense leads to some other offense and we've just been on this massive negative spiral and then I have actually a lot of pollster stuff about the country in terms of how polarized the countries gotten. But in terms of the behavior in Washington, I—I'm a—I think the Bork hearings were a big deal.

**QT: 01;52;32;22**

**TITLE**

The job of a pollster

**QT: 01;52;37;18**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

Well, as a pollster, our job is to go out and interview voters and ask voters how they perceive the candidates and then we do a lot of simulation where we give them different issues and we test a lot of language to figure out how

best to communicate a message. I think one of the misnomers are that somehow pollster's kind of define what a campaign says. That's not true, it's really not true in a John McCain campaign. John McCain's gonna say what he wants to say, he's a little bit amenable to, "Ok John, if you're going to say that's what you believe, here's three different ways you can say it, would you please say it this way 'cause if you say it this way, people are willing to listen and they kind of agree with it more." And you know, I don't change what he's going to say. I hopefully help magnify the impact of what he's going to say but I've been doing campaigns a long time. I've been with John since 1991, I don't think—John McCain does not worry about my loyalty.

**QT: 01;53;30;23**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

He knows that I'm a McCainiac and I love the guy and I want him to do well. And so in addition to that you become hopefully part of a trusted, valuable circle where you can bounce stuff off and ask for advice and help and then in something I was pleased to be part of. In the 99/2000 campaign, we had different issues committees and Rick Davis, the manager, asked me to sit in each of the issue committees to try to influence and give them some outside perspective about each of these different issues, so when the Washington Post did a, ok, here's the profile of the—of the campaign, they had sort of—who were—who were the policy people?

**QT: 01;54;12;00**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

And I was on the political side and I was one of the people on the policy side so that was nice and I had a little bigger role on kind of—on both sides of the 2000 campaign in trying to influence and work with a lot of the new folks who were helping correct(?) policy about how to say what John wants to say in some powerful way.

**QT: 01;54;35;10**

**TITLE**

McCain's last campaign for his Senate seat

**QT: 01;54;40;12**

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**BILL MCINTURFF:**

Well what allowed John McCain to win the last campaign is, guess what, he's worked very hard for Arizona. I mean the guy goes back there all the time. He has maintained personal connections and relationships all around the state and he really works hard at state issues. And so there are US Senators who become big international/national figures and you never see them. I don't think that's John, that's a fair description of John McCain in Arizona. So that's number one. And number two, it could have been terrifying. We had a very difficult primary and we could've had a very terrifying general election but one thing that happened, went behind the scenes that worked really well is that we kept the money out. A lot of the outside groups that could influence republican primary did not get—I mean some families did and there are some groups but the—you know, this enormous, like we just watched in Alabama, 10 million dollars from outside groups, that didn't happen in Arizona.

**QT: 01;55;35;00**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

And then in the general election, that didn't happen. And we ran a really—like the last of the old fashioned campaigns where we got to run against our opponents, not a lot of outside money. And in that—in that world where you keep millions and millions of dollars out, I mean John's a popular enough figure that you could survive both races. But they were very tough and they could have been infinitely tougher given what those numbers looked like.

**QT: 01;56;01;20**

**TITLE**

Understanding McCain

**QT: 01;56;06;08**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

I try to tell people who ask about what John's really like and what I say is he's a combat fighter pilot and you know, there was this—in the 2000 New Hampshire campaign, there was the, gosh, is he mentally unstable, I mean what human being could go through what he went through and is he too aggressive and is he too this—and we interview people on the telephone and

we collect their responses and this very old World War II veteran said, “I’ll tell you what he is, he’s a combat fighter pilot!” Do you ever no—you ever met these guys? We get these little small guys, we put ‘em in a plane and we tell them be incredibly aggressive and blow people out of the sky, that’s what he is!” And what I tell people is, “Guess what, he’s a combat fighter pilot. He’s a pretty cranked up, intense guy that America decided to spend a lot of money to train to put behind a jet pilot to shoot people down and that’s his personality.”

**QT: 01;57;00;08**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

And today maybe in his 80’s he’s a little more temperate than he was in his 20’s but that’s who—he’s a pretty intense, cranked up guy. And he’s an affectionate guy but you know, he’s pretty tightly wrapped and this country picked him to say, ya know what, those are the kinds of guys who make good fighter pilots and that’s the enduring part of who he is. And so he can be affectionate and he—and he’s affectionate in a very gruff way and I can tell you the story about my kid for how he expresses affection in the John McCain way to let you know he likes ya but that’s not the typical way, that’s a very different era. So ya know, that—that part of who he is can be as I s—and then the other thing I need—I tell them is I say, “Look, look at his bio. He barely survived high school, he barely—he talks about barely surviving—as you know, 5<sup>th</sup> from the bottom of his class. Somebody had to lie and cover for him, break the code to keep him in school so he—as he had too many points.

**QT: 01;58;04;10**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

I asked him at the Arizona Primary. I was in his kitchen in 2000 and I—‘cause it really hit me. I’ve known him for a very long time. But it really—I said, God, like the guy could be president. Well, what’s that like? And I said to him, and I said, “John, what’s it like to go vote where you vote for yourself for President and it’s not a joke?” I mean I could write myself in but that’s a joke. I mean it wasn’t a joke. In a rare reflective moment, he really stopped and he said, he said, “Well, not bad for a guy who finished fifth from the bottom of his class.” But the other part of who he is, is you read those stories about high school and college and the rebelliousness and the stand up to authority and the guy who defended the Filipino staff against a senior and all those other—story after story after story and I—what I say to people is, my old boss used to say,

we have the defects of our qualities. Which is, our best qualities when unchecked can become weaknesses. And I said, "John McCain has the qualities of his defects."

**QT: 01;59;09;08**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

Meaning that that terrible rebelliousness and that anti-institutional streak and stand up to authority, all of that stuff, he got put as a POW and you know what, now he really had an enemy of enormous weight and magnitude and consequence but that's a structure of who he was, and so when we had to in the 2000 campaign release his medical records and we let the press read them for hours. We kept them in a room, they could read it for hours and hours and hours. As Rick Davis said, he said, "Boy, John McCain is one lucky guy, just about all the stuff that's happened in his life." I said, "What?" He said, "Well guess what we read. We read his psychiatrist, he said, "Look, anybody was affected but John McCain walked out of that better than any of these other guys because he walked into it with a rebellious streak that found a way to express itself," and two, it said he had an IQ of 140, that he's like, literally a genius."

**QT: 02;00;05;18**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

And they said so aft—"and we learned a lot about hemorrhoids." So you know, so those are—so when you want to understand John McCain, I tell people, you've got to understand combat fighter pilot, and the quality of our defects, that the qualities that were sort of unchecked and uncontrolled as a high s—in high school and his—in the naval academy became the very qualities that allowed him to survive that horrible ordeal and they become the qualities that now have created this incredibly attractive political persona because he's found a way to temper them over time to work with other people and in a way that is you know, really powerful, watching him try to martial those and keep those forces under control.

**QT: 02;00;53;08**

**TITLE**

His son's internship in McCain's office and teasing as a sign of endearment



**QT: 02;00;58;08**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

So my kids'—my kid's in high school and he's—he's already in high school, like 6'4, very, very happy with himself. And so he goes to private school, you get two weeks off to get an internship in February, I call the office and say, "Could my kid please be an intern?" And they said, "Sure, of course he can." This is after the 2008 campaign. And then the nice woman who I've known forever says, "Oh look, we like high school kids, we'll take care of them, they get a little intimidated and they're very un—but we'll take good care of him."

**QT: 02;01;28;06**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

I said, "No, no. This kid's way too happy with himself, please make sure he doesn't steal McCain's voting card and starts showing up in the floor. He needs to be whooped and beaten into shape." So—so we have this picture. You know, McCain, you know, is very nice to him and so we have this—it's his last day, they come in for the classic picture of him and John McCain. You see the picture and I said, "Wow Adam, you look sort of uncomfortable, what happened?" He said, "Oh my God, you can't believe what the Senator said to me." I said, "Well what'd he say?" And he said, "Well I walked in the room, he said, "Hey Adam, this must be so impressive for you. US Senator, private office, a little picture, you must be very, very impressed. But you know what, if it weren't for your effing dad and the stupid effing stuff that he told me to effing do, I would be in the White House and I'd have a rose garden behind me right now, now that would be effing impressive wouldn't it? But no, your effing dad screwed this up and I'm still stuck in this effing little **(Expletive)** office because of your effing dad. You go tell your effing dad I don't like being here anymore, I wish I had a rose garden." Except he didn't use the word effing.

**QT: 02;02;41;03**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

And yeah so my kid looked a little uneasy. And so my kid calls me and I said, "Adam, Adam, Adam," I said, "that is such a compliment." I said, "What?" I said, "Cause you are 16 or 17 years old and he's spent enough time with you he knew you could take it. He was—guess what, Adam, if he really believed

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that, you wouldn't have been his intern. If he really believed that, you wouldn't have been taking the picture in the office and three, you just passed the John McCain test, the guy loves you and he's teasing you and he's showing you what—that's John's way of being affectionate, he's telling you, "I think you're a good kid, I like you, I like your dad." And he's giving you a hard time because he—he likes you and he thinks you can take it. He gave you the ultimate John McCain compliment."

**QT: 02;03;25;11**

## **TITLE**

A story about McInturff's son fighting on behalf of McCain during the 2000 primaries

**QT: 02;03;29;03**

## **BILL MCINTURFF:**

There's a picture of me and John on the New York Times the day after— in 2000. He won Michigan in a huge upset, he won Arizona. And there's a picture of me sitting next to John, front page of the New York Times and John McCain's got his head back and he's just laughing his ass off. And of course it was picked as the picture because it's like, hey happy John McCain picture, he just won these primaries.

**QT: 02;03;50;11**

## **BILL MCINTURFF:**

The reason he's laughing is, I came in to give him the exit polls, happy after South Carolina. And I do all of that and he goes through all of his questions, and then he says, and then I said, "John, I've got to tell you one more story." And he said, "What?" And I said, I said, "Well, I called my wife and I was pretty emotional and I said, "Honey, we're going to win both of these races and we're still in this race." She says, "Well, before you get too happy, I want you to call in the machine and hear the—hear the call from Adam's teacher." Adam was at that point in second grade, this is the kid who—so he's in second grade, I call in, it's the second grade teacher with that second grade teacher voice saying, "Mr. and Mrs. McInturff, I've got to tell you about a little episode today in the school yard."

**QT: 02;04;34;19**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

“I—I’ve been a teacher 26 years, I’ve never seen anything like this.” So what had happened was Adam was in the schoolyard with another McCain boy and all the Bush boys, the other second graders started teasing him and saying, “McCain’s too liberal, McCain’s too liberal, McCain’s too liberal.” But then they said the fighting words. They said, “McCain’s so liberal, he’s like Bill Clinton.” Well, my second grader knows when they drop the Clinton card, you go postal. So they get into a second grade brawl on the—because my kid’s defending John McCain and they get in a brawl, second grade brawl, so the teacher brings ‘em all back in the room. They’re all crying, she puts them in different corners and they talk about, parents can be a little crazy about politics, little guys don’t have to. We can talk about differences; we don’t have to fight.

**QT: 02;05;22;23**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

And she puts them all in the corner, and they’re all talking their feelings and all their stuff, and I said to John, I said, “I think the Bush boys are seeing their ambassadorship slipping between their fingers, you know, for their parents and so then she brings Adam out, outside. And she says, “Adam are you feeling better? And are you feeling calm, are you feeling better?” And she said, “They insulted me, they insulted my father and they insulted John McCain. They insulted everything I believe in in this world and I will do it again if they insult me, John McCain or my father.” That’s the story I told him, and the reason he’s laughing like crazy, I was saying, “I want you to know, this next generation’s out there defending you big guy. We’re not gonna let you be called liberal in our backyard buddy.” And that’s the re—and that picture is why he’s laughing his ass off in the New York Times.

**QT: 02;06;13;20**

**TITLE**

McCain’s diagnosis and the challenge of legacy from a pollster’s point of view

**QT: 02;06;19;08**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

No, I've not—I've sent him some notes but I have not talked to him personally. The note I've sent him is that when his daughter said that he was the most composed of everybody around him, I said, "I know you're being steady strain. And I believe when she wrote about how John is handling this, I know that—I know that he is being steady strain. Whatever the personal consequence to him, that's how he would handle this." But I also said that, "I'm sure he will do, I'm sure he will do what he's done his whole life." Because I've now gotten calls and letters from other people who know cancer survivors or veterans or others who—or people with Cancer who have asked me to have John call them or have John send them a note because they are looking to John to once again I think demonstrate what he's always demonstrated in terms of being a leader which is how you deal with something this bad and this horrible.

**QT: 02;07;20;12**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

And they're asking John to kind of now fill that role. And so I—Rick Davis said to me last time, "Hey this is the last time, this is getting too tough. I won't do any more of these reelects." And I said, "Hey, I just assumed John's gonna call me up at any moment and tell me he's going to do it again." So, legacy is hard because our country—our country moves on very, very quickly. I'm a pollster. After 9/11, six months later, you know, when all the press was running, "We're going to remember this forever," I would say to the press in the one-year anniversary, I'd say to the press in terms of ok, in Washington, New York and in Boston it was still residual because that's—we were attacked here but how much the country had already moved on.

**QT: 02;08;16;09**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

And I said I really wrestled with this question. Is it, say something powerful about this country's capacity for change that even something this horrible that we've moved on this fast or is it depressing in America that we, in a year, we've so much tossed off that terrible event. This country as a pollster has the most extraordinary capacity for change and I wrestle everyday with, is that the genius of this country or is that the defect of this country? And for the most part, like the pace at which this country adopts social change and the record we have in the world of tolerance and all the other things that make up this country, that capacity for change is I think the particular genius

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of this country but it leaves—it leaves everyone behind very quickly and it's very hard to have an enduring legacy.

**QT: 02;09;10;17**

**BILL MCINTURFF:**

It's very hard to have an enduring legacy without being President but my hope—my hope is that the things we should admire about John McCain, they really are a uniquely American story, they represent some of those core American values and what you'd like to think is that when he says, "You should believe in something bigger than yourself and you should devote yourself to some cause bigger than yourself and some cause to move this country forward to any residual way," any of that is what gets remembered, that's a very powerful legacy.

**END TC:**

**QT: 02;09;51;21**