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No One Who Disagreed With McCain Allowed on ABC, CBS or NBC Morning Interview Shows

Twenty (Softball) Questions For McCain

In last week's *Newsweek* (the March 19 issue), Jonathan Alter explained that, to advance his campaign regulation bill, John McCain's strategy was "to trade on his rock-star status (and wartime heroics)," and that "to do so, **he needs his old allies in the press.**" It appears that the media got the memo.

Last night, all three broadcast networks aided McCain's push for tighter restrictions on individual contributions and the activities of independent groups, moves which would give the media even greater campaign clout. On the *Evening News*, CBS's Bob Schieffer openly worried that the so-called reform bill might not pass because Senators are greedy money-addicts. **"This money is like a narcotic to politicians,"** Schieffer told fill-in anchor John Roberts, **"and they're having a hard time breaking the habit."**

To illustrate the ir point that McCain-style reform is needed, CBS broadcast a second story insinuating that President Bush's decisions are based on money his campaign received from special interests, rather than on the facts or his own policy preferences. **"No presidential candidate ever raised more money from business than George W. Bush,"** asserted reporter Anthony Mason. **"For corporate America, those investments may be paying off."** No White House spokesman or other pro-Bush source was allowed on CBS to offer a competing point of view.

All three broadcasts portrayed McCain as a one-man cavalry charge. **"Can John McCain and Congress fix a system many say is broken?"** wondered NBC's Brian Williams at the start of *Nightly News*. ABC's Linda Douglass claimed **"McCain's unexpected popularity as a presidential candidate has forced the Senate to take up campaign finance reform, after successfully blocking it for six years."**

McCain, of course, lost the GOP primaries to Bush.

McCain also appeared on all three morning interview shows on Monday, chatting with NBC's Katie Couric on *Today*, ABC's Jack Ford on *Good Morning America*, and CBS's Jane Clayson on *The Early Show*. None were balanced presentations — McCain wasn't paired with anyone with an opposing point of view, and none of the 20 questions he faced challenged him to defend the premise or the merits of McCain-Feingold.

Instead, the sympathetic questions focused on the prospects for the bill's passage. **"You have waited a long time to get this bill before the Senate,"** noted ABC's Ford. **"Now that it's there, do you believe you have the votes to get it passed?"**

"I know you're worried this is gonna get amended to death, right," fretted NBC's Couric.

But she also pushed Mc Cain to consider tougher regulations: **"What about those who say...that, no matter what you do, smart people will be able to get around this system....Are you worried that no matter what you do that the system is so entrenched it's gonna be next to impossible to change?"**

When the legislative issue involves a conservative priority such as tax cuts, network reporters become poll-pushers, citing any public hesitation as proof that compromise, delay or "bipartisanship" are required. But no one in the media is asking McCain to compromise or dilute his legislation, even though practically no one — at least outside the media — is clamoring for his brand of "campaign finance reform."

— Rich Noyes

"What do you think are the two most important issues for the federal government to address?"

Education	32%	Balanced Budget	4%
Health Care	23%	Employment/Jobs	4%
Economy	19%	Abortion	4%
Social Security	15%	Environment	4%
Taxes	13%	Welfare	3%
Medicare/ Medicaid	10%	Gun Control	2%
Crime/Drugs	7%	Federal Deficit	2%
Defense	7%	Poverty/Homelessness	2%
Foreign Policy	6%	Campaign Finance	
Moral Decline	5%	Reform	1%
		Immigration	1%

— Source: Fox News/Opinion Dynamics Poll of 900 registered voters, January 10-11, 2001. Multiple responses were permitted.

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