

The War Secrets Sen. John McCain Hides

Former POW Fights Public Access to POW/MIA Files

By Sydney Schanberg

NEW YORK (APBnews.com) — The voters who were drawn to John S. McCain in his run for the Republican presidential nomination this year often cited, as the core of his appeal, his openness and blunt candor and willingness to admit past lapses and release documents that other senators often hold back. These qualities also seemed to endear McCain to the campaign press corps, many of whom wrote about how refreshing it was to travel on the McCain campaign bus, “The Straight Talk Express,” and observe a maverick speaking his mind rather than a traditional candidate given to obfuscation and spin.

But there was one subject that was off-limits, a subject the Arizona senator almost never brings up and has never been open about — his long-time opposition to releasing documents and information about American prisoners of war in Vietnam and the missing in action who have still not been accounted for. Since McCain himself, a downed Navy pilot, was a prisoner in Hanoi for 5 1/2 years, his staunch resistance to laying open the POW/MIA records has baffled colleagues and others who have followed his career. Critics say his anti-disclosure campaign, in close cooperation with the Pentagon and the intelligence community, has been successful. Literally thousands of documents that would otherwise have been declassified long ago have been legislated into secrecy.

For example, all the Pentagon debriefings of the prisoners who returned from Vietnam are now classified and closed to the public under a statute enacted in the 1990s with McCain's backing. He says this is to protect the privacy of former POWs and gives it as his reason for not making public his own debriefing.

But the law allows a returned prisoner to view his own file or to designate another person to view it. APBnews.com has repeatedly asked the senator for an interview for this article and for permission to view his debriefing documents. He has not responded. His office did recently send APBnews.com an e-mail, referring to a favorable article about the senator in the Jan. 1 issue of Newsweek. In the article, the reporter, Michael Isikoff, says that he was allowed to review McCain's debriefing report and that it contained “nothing incriminating” — although in a phone interview Isikoff acknowledged that “there were redactions” in the document. Isikoff declined to say who showed him the document, but APBnews.com has learned it was McCain.

Many Vietnam veterans and former POWs have fumed at McCain for keeping these and other wartime files sealed up. His explanation, offered freely in Senate hearings and floor speeches, is that no one has been proven still alive and that releasing the files would revive painful memories and cause needless emotional stress to former prisoners, their families and the families of MIAs still unaccounted for. But what if some of these returned prisoners, as has always been the case at the conclusion of wars, reveal information to their debriefing officers about other prisoners believed still held in captivity? What justification is there for filtering such information through the Pentagon rather than allowing access to source materials? For instance, debriefings from returning Korean war POWs, available in full to the American public, have provided both citizens and government investigators with important information about other Americans who went missing in that conflict.

Would not most families of missing men, no matter how emotionally drained, want to know? And would they not also want to know what the government was doing to rescue their husbands and sons? Hundreds of MIA families have for years been questioning if concern for their feelings is the real reason for the secrecy.

Prisoners left behind

A smaller number of former POWs, MIA families and veterans have suggested there is something especially damning about McCain that the senator wants to keep hidden. Without release of the files, such accusations must be viewed as unsubstantiated speculation. The main reason, however, for seeking these files is to find out if there is any information in the debriefings, or in other MIA documents that McCain and the Pentagon have kept sealed, about how many prisoners were held back by North Vietnam after the Paris peace treaty was signed in January 1973. The defense and intelligence establishment has long resisted the declassification of critical records on this subject. McCain has been the main congressional force behind this effort.

The prisoner return in 1973 saw 591 Americans repatriated by North Vietnam. The problem was that the U.S. intelligence list of men believed to be alive at that time in captivity — in Vietnam, Laos and possibly across the border in southern China and in the Soviet Union — was much larger.

Possibly hundreds of men larger. The State Department stated publicly in 1973 that intelligence data showed the prisoner list to be starkly incomplete. For example, only nine of the 591 returnees came out of Laos, though experts in U.S. military intelligence listed 311 men as missing in that Hanoi-run country alone, and their field reports indicated that many of those men were probably still alive. Hanoi said it was returning all the prisoners it had. President Nixon, on March 29, 1973, seconded that claim, telling the nation on television: “All of our American POWs are on their way home.” This discrepancy has never been acknowledged or explained by official Washington. Over the years in Washington, McCain, at times almost single-handedly, has pushed through Pentagon-desired legislation to make it impossible or much harder for the public to acquire POW/MIA information and much easier for the defense bureaucracy to keep it hidden.

The Truth Bill

In 1989, 11 members of the House of Representatives introduced a measure they called “The Truth Bill.” A brief and simple document, it said: “[The] head of each department or agency which holds or receives any records and information, including live-

sighting reports, which have been correlated or possibly correlated to United States personnel listed as prisoner of war or missing in action from World War II, the Korean conflict and the Vietnam conflict shall make available to the public all such records and information held or received by that department or agency. In addition, the Department of Defense shall make available to the public with its records and information a complete listing of United States personnel classified as prisoner of war, missing in action, or killed in action (body not returned) from World War II, the Korean conflict, and the Vietnam conflict.”

Opposed by Pentagon

Bitterly opposed by the Pentagon, “The Truth Bill” got nowhere. It was reintroduced in the next Congress in 1991 — and again disappeared. Then, suddenly, out of the Senate, birthed by the Arizona senator, a new piece of legislation emerged. It was called “The McCain Bill.” This measure turned “The Truth Bill” on its head. It created a bureaucratic maze from which only a fraction of the available documents could emerge. And it became law. So restrictive were its provisions that one clause actually said the Pentagon didn’t even have to inform the public when it received intelligence that Americans were alive in captivity.

First, it decreed that only three categories of information could be released, i.e., “information ... that may pertain to the location, treatment, or condition of” unaccounted-for personnel from the Vietnam War. (This was later amended in 1995 and 1996 to include the Cold War and the Korean conflict.) If information is received about anything other than “location, treatment or condition,” under this statute, which was enacted in December 1991, it does not get disclosed.

Second, before such information can be released to the public, permission must be granted by the primary next of kin, or PNOK. In the case of Vietnam, letters were sent by the Department of Defense to the 2,266 PNOK. More than 600 declined consent (including 243 who failed to respond, considered under the law to be a “no”).

Hurdles and limitations

Finally, in addition to these hurdles and limitations, the McCain act does not specifically order the declassification of the information. Further, it provides the Defense Department with other justifications for withholding documents. One such clause says that if the information “may compromise the safety of any United States personnel ... who remain not accounted for but who may still be alive in captivity, then the Secretary [of Defense] may withhold that record or other information from the disclosure otherwise required by this section.”

Boiled down, the preceding paragraph means that the Defense Department is not obligated to tell the public about prisoners believed alive in captivity and what efforts are being made to rescue them. It only has to notify the White House and the intelligence committees in the Senate and House. The committees are forbidden under law from releasing such information.

At the same time, the McCain act is now being used to deny access to other sorts of records. For instance, part of a recent APBnews.com Freedom of Information Act request for the records of a mutiny on merchant marine vessel in the 1970s was rejected by a Defense Department official who cited the McCain act. Similarly, requests for information about Americans missing in the Korean War and declared dead for the last 45 years have been denied by officials who reference the McCain statute. (Read a denial letter.)

Another bill gutted in 1996

And then there is the Missing Service Personnel Act, which McCain succeeded in gutting in 1996. A year before, the act had been strengthened, with bipartisan support, to compel the Pentagon to deploy more resources with greater speed to locate and rescue missing men. The measure imposed strict reporting requirements.

McCain amended the heart out of the statute. For example, the 1995 version required a unit commander to report to his theater commander within two days that a person was missing and describe what rescue and recovery efforts were underway. The McCain amendments allowed 10 days to pass before a report had to be made.

In the 1995 act, the theater commander, after receiving the MIA report, would have 14 days to report to his Cabinet secretary in Washington. His report had to “certify” that all necessary actions were being taken and all appropriate assets were being used “to resolve the status of the missing person.” This section was stricken from the act, replaced with language that made the Cabinet secretary, not the theater commander, the recipient of the report from the field. All the certification requirements also were stricken. ‘Turn commanders into clerks’ ‘This,’ said a McCain memo, “transfers the bureaucracy involved out of the field to Washington.” He argued that the original legislation, if left intact, “would accomplish nothing but create new jobs for lawyers and turn military commanders into clerks.”

In response, the backers of the original statute cited the Pentagon’s stained record on MIA’s and argued that military history had shown that speed of action is critical to the chances of recovering a missing man. Moving “the bureaucracy” to Washington, they said, was merely a way to sweep the issue under a rug.

Chilling effect cited

One final evisceration in the law was McCain’s removal of all its enforcement teeth. The original act provided for criminal penalties for anyone, such as military bureaucrats in Washington, who destroy or cover up or withhold from families any information about a missing man. McCain erased this part of the law. He said the penalties would have a chilling effect on the Pentagon’s ability to recruit personnel for its POW/MIA office.

McCain does not deal lightly with those who disagree with him on any of these issues or who suggest that the evidence indeed shows that a significant number of prisoners were alive and cached away as future bargaining chips when he came home in the group of 591 released in 1973.

Over the years, he has regularly vilified any group or person who keeps trying to pry out more evidence about MIAs. He calls them “hoaxers” and “charlatans” and “conspiracy theorists.” He decries the “bizarre rantings of the MIA hobbyists” and describes them as “individuals primarily who make their living off of keeping the issue alive.” Before he died last year of leukemia, retired Col. Ted Guy, a highly admired POW and one of the most dogged resisters in the camps, wrote an angry open letter to the senator in an MIA newsletter. In it, he said of McCain’s stream of insults: “John, does this include Senator Bob Smith and other concerned elected officials? Does this include the families of the missing where there is overwhelming evidence that their loved ones were ‘last known alive?’ Does this include some of your fellow POWs?”

Sightings dismissed

McCain has said again and again that he has seen no “credible” evidence that more than a tiny handful of men might have been alive in captivity after the official prison return in 1973. He dismisses all of the subsequent radio intercepts, live sightings, satellite photos, CIA reports, defector information, recovered enemy documents and reports of ransom demands — thousands and thousands of pieces of information indicating live captives — as meaningless. He has even described these intelligence reports as the rough equivalent of UFO and alien sightings.

In Congress, colleagues and staffers who have seen him erupt — in the open and, more often, in closed meetings — profess themselves confounded by his behavior. Insisting upon anonymity so as not to invite one of his verbal assaults, they say they have no easy way to explain why a former POW would work so hard and so persistently to keep POW/MIA information from coming out. Typical is the comment of one congressional veteran who has watched McCain over many years: “This is a man not at peace with himself.” McCain’s sense of disgrace

Some McCain watchers searching for answers point to his recently published best-selling autobiography, *Faith of My Fathers*, half of which is devoted to his years as a prisoner. In the book, he says he felt badly throughout his captivity because he knew he was being treated more leniently than his fellow POWs owing to his propaganda value as the son of Adm. John S. McCain II, who was then the CINCPAC — commander in chief of all U.S. forces in the Pacific region, including Vietnam. (His captors considered him a prize catch and nicknamed him the “Crown Prince.”)

Also in the book, the Arizona Senator repeatedly expresses guilt and disgrace at having broken under torture and given the North Vietnamese a taped confession, broadcast over the camp loudspeakers, saying he was a war criminal who had, among other acts, bombed a school. “I felt faithless and couldn’t control my despair,” he writes. He writes, revealing that he made two half-hearted attempts at suicide. Most tellingly, he said he lived in “dread” that his father would find out. “I still wince,” he says, “when I recall wondering if my father had heard of my disgrace.”

After McCain returned home, he says he told his father about the confession, but “never discussed it at length.” The admiral, McCain says, didn’t indicate he had heard anything about it before.

McCain’s father died in 1981. McCain writes: “I only recently learned that the tape ... had been broadcast outside the prison and had come to the attention of my father.”

McCain wasn’t alone — it’s well-known that a sizeable percentage of prisoners of war will break down under torture. In fact, many of his supporters view McCain’s prison travails as evidence of his overall heroism. Fears unpublished details?

But how would McCain’s forced confession alone explain his endless campaign against releasing MIA/POW information?

Some veterans and other McCain watchers have speculated that McCain’s mortification, given his family’s proud military tradition (his grandfather was also an admiral), was so severe that it continues to haunt him and make him fear any opening up of information that could revive previously unpublished details of the era, including his own nagging history.

Another question that defies easy explanation is why there has never been any significant public outcry over the POWs who didn’t come home or about the machinations of public officials like McCain who carefully wove a blanket of secrecy around this issue. It can only be understood in the context of what the Vietnam War did to the American mind.

Forgetting the Vietnam War

It was the longest war in our history and the only one in which we accepted defeat and brought our troops home. It had roiled the country more than any conflict but the Civil War — to the point where almost everyone, regardless of their politics, wanted to get away from anything that reminded them of this bloody failure. Only a small band of Americans, led by Vietnam veterans and MIA families, kept asking for more information about the missing men and demanding that the government keep its promise to do everything possible to bring them home. Everyone else seemed to be running away from all things Vietnam.

Knowledgeable observers note that it’s quite possible that Nixon, leading the country’s withdrawal, accepted the peace treaty of Jan. 27, 1973, while telling himself that somehow he would negotiate the release of the remaining POWs later. But when Congress

refused to provide the \$3 billion to \$4 billion in proposed national development reparations that National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger had dangled as a carrot to Hanoi, the prospects for the abandoned men began to unravel.

Observers also point out that over the years that followed, Washington continued to reject paying what it branded as ransom money and so, across six presidencies, including the present one, the issue of POWs who may have been left behind remained unacknowledged by the White House and the Pentagon. Hanoi refused to correct the impression that all the prisoners had been returned, and Washington, for its part, refused to admit that it had known about abandoned POWs from the beginning.

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Mainstream press indifferent

Of course, the government and many mainstream scholars reject this theory. And whether any such prisoners remain alive to this day is impossible for the outsider to know. Intelligence sources privately express the belief that most of the men had either died or been executed by the early 1990s. Presumably, these sources say, the POW's lost their bargaining value to Hanoi as time passed and ransom dollars never materialized. Eventually Hanoi began seeking another path to the money — the renewal of relations with Washington. Diplomatic ties were restored by President Clinton in 1994, and American economic investment quickly followed.

One factor in the nation's indifference to the POWs was the stance of the national press. From the very start to the present, the mainstream media showed little interest. With just a smattering of exceptions, the journalistic community, like the rest of the country, ran away from the story. During the war, thousands of American journalists poured into Vietnam in shifts; now only a handful cover the country, most of them filing business stories about Nike and other conglomerates opening up factories to avail themselves of the cheap labor.

Even reporters who had covered the war came to view the MIA story, in the years afterward, as a concoction of the far right. Without doing much, if any, first-hand reporting, such as digging into the available documents in the National Archives, nearly all these journalists dismissed the MIA story as unfounded.

Generated a hero aura

In McCain's recently suspended campaign for the presidency, it was almost as if, in the press's eyes, he was to be treated differently and quite gingerly because of the hero aura generated by his POW experience. None of his political opponents ever dared criticize him for his legislative history on withholding POW information, and the press never brought itself to be direct enough to even question him on the issue.

It's not that he didn't give reporters plenty of openings to ask the right Vietnam questions. For one thing, he used his history as a Vietnam prisoner as a constant campaign theme in his speeches. Rarely did he appear without a larger-than-life photo backdrop showing him in battle gear as a Navy pilot before he was shot down over Hanoi in 1967.

Here is a passage typical of the soft, even erroneous reporting on McCain — this from a March 4 story in The New York Times: "His most striking achievement came when he joined with another Vietnam veteran, Senator John Kerry, Democrat of Massachusetts, to puncture the myth that Vietnam continued holding American prisoners." The piece went on to speak with admiration about "his concern over the prisoners-of-war issue" — but, tellingly, it offered no details.

Tepid veterans' vote

The press corps, covering the state-by-state primary vote, made an assumption, based apparently on sentiment, that McCain, as the war hero, would capture the significant veterans' vote by stunning margins. Actually, he didn't capture it at all. He carried veterans only in the states that he won, like Michigan and New Hampshire, but was rejected by them in the larger number of states that he lost, like New York, Ohio and California. Added together, when the states were tallied up, the veterans' vote went to George W. Bush.

The Washington press corps had gone openly soft once before on the prisoner issue, again benefiting McCain. That was in 1991-93, during the proceedings of the Senate Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs. McCain starred on that committee, working hand in hand with his new ally, Sen. John Kerry, the panel's co-chairman, to play down voluminous evidence that sizeable numbers of men were still held alive after the prisoner return in 1973. One example: At the time of the committee's hearings, the Pentagon had received more than 1,600 firsthand sightings of live American prisoners and nearly 14,000 secondhand reports. The intelligence officers who gathered these reports from refugees and other informants in the field described a large number of them as "credible" and so marked the reports. Some of the informants had been given lie-detector tests and passed.

But the Pentagon's Defense Intelligence Agency, after reviewing all the reports, concluded that they "do not constitute evidence" that men were still alive at the time.

McCain and Kerry endorsed the Pentagon's findings. They also treated both the Pentagon and the CIA more as the committee's partners than as objects of its inquiry. As one committee staff investigator said, in a memo preserved from the period: "Speaking for the other investigators, I can say we are sick and tired of this investigation being controlled by those we are supposedly investigating."

McCain stood out because he always showed up for the committee hearings where witnesses were going to talk about specific

pieces of evidence. He would belittle and berate these witnesses, questioning their patriotism and otherwise scoffing at their credibility. All of this is on record in the National Archives.

Confrontation with witness

One such witness was Dolores Apodaca Alfond, chairwoman of the National Alliance of Families, an all-volunteer MIA organization. Her pilot brother, Capt. Victor J. Apodaca, out of the Air Force Academy, was shot down over Dong Hoi, North Vietnam, in the early evening of June 8, 1967. At least one person in the two-man plane survived. Beeper signals from a pilot's distress radio were picked up by overhead helicopters, but the cloud cover was too heavy to go in. Hanoi has recently turned over some bone fragments that are supposed to be Apodaca's. The Pentagon first declared the fragments to be animal bones. But now it is telling the family — verbally — that they came from the pilot. But the Pentagon, for unexplained reasons, will not put this in writing, which means Apodaca is still unaccounted for. Also the Pentagon refuses to give Alfond a sample of the fragments so she can have testing done by an independent laboratory.

Alfond's testimony, at a hearing of the POW/MIA committee Nov. 11, 1992, was revealing. She pleaded with the committee not to shut down in two months, as scheduled, because so much of its work was unfinished. Also, she was critical of the committee, and in particular Kerry and McCain, for having "discredited the overhead satellite symbol pictures, arguing there is no way to be sure that the [distress] symbols were made by U.S. POWs." She also criticized them for similarly discounting data from special sensors, shaped like a large spike with an electronic pod and an antenna, that were airdropped to stick in the ground along the Ho Chi Minh trail.

These devices served as motion detectors, picking up passing convoys and other military movements, but they also had rescue capabilities. Specifically, someone on the ground — a downed airman or a prisoner on a labor detail — could manually enter data into the sensor pods. Alfond said the data from the sensor spikes, which was regularly gathered by Air Force jets flying overhead, had showed that a person or persons on the ground had manually entered into the sensors — as U.S. pilots had been trained to do — "no less than 20 authenticator numbers that corresponded exactly to the classified authenticator numbers of 20 U.S. POWs who were lost in Laos."

Other than the panel's second co-chairman, Sen. Bob Smith, R-N.H., not a single committee member attended this public hearing. But McCain, having been advised of Alfond's testimony, suddenly rushed into the room to confront her. His face angry and his voice very loud, he accused her of making "allegations ... that are patently and totally false and deceptive." Making a fist, he shook his index finger at her and said she had insulted an emissary to Vietnam sent by President Bush. He said she had insulted other MIA families with her remarks. And then he said, through clenched teeth: "And I am sick and tired of you insulting mine and other people's [patriotism] who happen to have different views than yours."

Brought to tears

By this time, tears were running down Alfond's cheeks. She reached into her handbag for a handkerchief. She tried to speak: "The family members have been waiting for years — years! And now you're shutting down." He kept interrupting her. She tried to say, through tears, that she had issued no insults. He kept talking over her words. He said she was accusing him and others of "some conspiracy without proof, and some cover-up." She said she was merely seeking "some answers. That is what I am asking." He ripped into her for using the word "fiasco." She replied: "The fiasco was the people that stepped out and said we have written the end, the final chapter to Vietnam." "No one said that," he shouted. "No one said what you are saying they said, Ms. Alfond." And then, his face flaming pink, he stalked out of the room, to shouts of disfavor from members of the audience.

As with most of McCain's remarks to Alfond, the facts in his closing blast at her were incorrect. Less than three weeks earlier, on Oct. 23, 1992, in a ceremony in the White House Rose Garden, President Bush — with John McCain standing beside him — said: "Today, finally, I am convinced that we can begin writing the last chapter in the Vietnam War."

The committee did indeed, as Alfond said they planned to do, shut down two months after the hearing.

Cannot discuss it

As for her description of the motion sensor evidence about prisoners in Laos, McCain's response at the hearing was that this data was in a 1974 report that the committee had read but was still classified, so "I cannot discuss it here. ... We hope to get it declassified."

The question to the senator now is: What happened to that report and what happened to the pilots who belonged to those authenticator numbers? Intelligence sources in Washington say the report was never declassified. It became clear over the months of hearings and sparrings that the primary goal of the Kerry-McCain alliance was to clear the way for normalization of relations with Vietnam. They did it in two ways — first, by regularly praising Hanoi for its "cooperation" in the search for information about the unaccounted-for prisoners and then by minimizing and suppressing the volume of evidence to the contrary that had been unearthed by the committee's staff investigators.

Recasting the issue

Kerry and McCain also tried, at every opportunity, to recast the issue as a debate about how many men could still be alive today, instead of the real issue at stake: How many men were alive in 1973 after the 591 were returned? Although much evidence was kept

out of the committee's final report in January 1993, enough of it, albeit watered down by the committee's majority, was inserted by the determined staff to demonstrate conclusively that all the prisoners had not come home. Still, if the reader didn't plow through the entire 1,223-page report but scanned just the brief conclusions in the 43-page executive summary at the beginning, he or she would have found only a weak and pallid statement saying that there was "evidence ... that indicates the possibility of survival, at least for a small number" after the repatriation of 1973. On page 468 of the report, McCain provided his own personal statement, saying that "we found no compelling evidence to prove that Americans are alive in captivity today. There is some evidence — though no proof — to suggest only the possibility that a few Americans may have been kept behind after the end of American's military involvement in Vietnam."

Two defense secretaries

And even these meager concessions were not voluntary. They had been forced by the sworn public testimony before the Senate committee of two former defense secretaries from the Nixon Administration, Melvin Laird and James Schlesinger. Both these men testified that they believed in 1973, from strong intelligence data, that a number of prisoners in Vietnam and Laos had not been returned. Their testimony has never been challenged. Schlesinger, before becoming defense secretary, had been the CIA director. During his committee appearance, Schlesinger was asked why Nixon would have accepted the prisoners being held back in 1973. He replied: "One must assume that we had concluded that the bargaining position of the United States ... was quite weak. We were anxious to get our troops out and we were not going to roil the waters ..." Then he was asked "a very simple question. In your view, did we leave men behind?" "Some were left behind" "I think that as of now," replied the former Pentagon secretary, "that I can come to no other conclusion [that] ... some were left behind." The press went along once again with the debunkers. The Schlesinger-Laird testimony, which seemed a bombshell, became but a one-day story in the nation's major media. The press never followed it up to explore its implications. On Jan. 26, 1994, when a resolution ardently backed by McCain and Kerry came up in the Senate calling for the lifting of the two-decade-old economic embargo against Vietnam, some members — in an effort to stall the measure — tried to present new evidence about men left behind. McCain rose to his feet and, offering no rebuttal evidence of his own, proceeded to chide "the professional malcontents, conspiracy mongers, con artists and dime-store Rambos who attend this issue." The resolution passed, 62-38. 'Isolated Personnel' These days, the Pentagon seems to be moving toward closing its POW/MIA books completely. In recent statements and reports, it has begun describing prisoners not as POWs but as IPs — Isolated Personnel.

And in a 1999 booklet, the Pentagon said: "By the end of the year 2004, we will have moved from the way the US government conducts the business of recovery and accounting [now] to an active program of loss prevention, immediate rescues, and rapid post-hostility accounting." More important, there seems to be no allocation of funds in 2004 for the task force that now conducts POW/MIA investigations, searches for remains and does archival research. As for McCain, he continues to stonewall on his own POW records. Through numerous phone calls, faxes and letters to his office, APBnews.com has been trying since late January to interview the Senator and get his permission to view his POW debriefing. The response has been that the senator has been occupied by his campaign schedule.

Call for openness and disclosure

During the campaign, McCain, who is chairman of the Senate Commerce Committee, had to address a controversy over queries he had made to the Commerce Department on behalf of a major campaign contributor. To deal with the press interest, he announced he was releasing all of his correspondence with the Commerce Department, not just the letters involving the one case. In addition, to show his full commitment to openness and disclosure, he called on every other government agency to release his communications with them. On Jan. 9 on the CBS program Face the Nation, he announced: "Today, we are asking the federal government to release all correspondence that I've had with every government agency."

McCain's staff has acknowledged that this request includes the Pentagon. But the Pentagon says it needs an official document from McCain designating a surrogate before it can show his debriefing report to anyone else. APBnews.com has repeatedly asked the senator for this waiver. He does not respond.

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