REMEMBER JOHN MCCAIN AS A WARMONGER AND A CUNNING OPPORTUNIST AND LEAVE THE HERO WORSHIP TO HIS LACKEYS

THE STAINS OF JOHN MCCAIN

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If the Emmys had a category for mawkishness, Lesley Stahl’s 60 Minutes segment on Arizona senator John McCain this past fall would be a formidable contender. Chatting with McCain and his wife Cindy at their ranch outside Sedona, Stahl noted that the Republican legislator had been undergoing treatment for an aggressive form of brain cancer. She then proceeded to fawn over McCain, 81, gushing that he looked “terrific” and twice referring to him as “the indestructible man.”

Earlier, introducing the segment, Stahl quoted a recent press release from McCain, stating that if another effort to repeal the Affordable Care Act (ACA) came to the Senate floor as anticipated, he intended to oppose it, just as he had in his dramatic, nationally televised thumbs-down on a similar measure back in July.

“And so, the senator from Arizona has lived up to his reputation as a maverick and a fighter,” the veteran TV journalist proclaimed.
The numbers would appear to back Stahl’s encomium. A CNN poll in mid-December 2017 found that 54 percent of adults expressed a “favorable” opinion of McCain. Notably, only 46 percent of Republicans agreed with the majority, while 68 percent of Democrats gave McCain a thumbs-up.

The reverse split owes much to the senator’s frequent criticism of President Donald Trump, and, specifically, his midsummer vote to derail the Trump-led effort to kill the ACA.

It was a shameless about-face that will personally benefit John and Cindy McCain. Admirers tie McCain’s maverick-osity to his capacity for “straight talk” and his support for campaign-finance reform and immigration reform. They laud him as an outlier in the universe of mealy-mouthed politicians who keep a finger to the wind and a sharp eye on the polls. Invariably, they cite his half-decade as a prisoner of the North Vietnamese.

Conveniently, their sanctimonious tributes leave out McCain’s racism and misogynistic moments such as the joke he told at a 1998 GOP fundraiser:

*Do you know why Chelsea Clinton is so ugly?*

*Because Janet Reno is her father.*

A cruel taunt about an opponent’s teenage daughter is only the tip of a cravenly opportunistic public life that began with McCain’s enthusiastic participation in an unjust war that killed millions of men, women, and children in Southeast Asia.

No one would wish brain cancer on their worst enemy.

But we all pass on.

Closer scrutiny of his tenure in office reveals that John McCain is neither a maverick nor a reformer.

He is a cunning promoter of his own self-interest, a charlatan with a knack for playing both sides of an issue to his advantage. It is political expediency, not courage, that defines McCain’s 35 years in Congress.

One year he poses as an immigration moderate; the next year he wholeheartedly embraces nativism. He crusades against the influence of money in politics, yet he rakes in millions in campaign contributions from special interests and lobbyists, and carries water for them in return.

When he had the opportunity to make a significant impact on the nation’s political landscape, he used that moment to foist Sarah Palin upon voters.
Many are unaware that John McCain had nothing to do with Arizona before packing his carpetbag and moving there in 1981 because a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives was ripe for the plucking.

Few know that he left his handicapped first wife for a fetching beer heiress whose father gave him a job and a leg up in politics. That he cozied up to con men and hustlers, including savings-and-loan swindler Charles Keating, who abetted his relentless climb to power.

Once in office, the son and grandson of four-star admirals proved a tireless warmonger, playing cheerleader for interventions in other countries to the detriment of U.S. interests abroad – not to mention the deaths of soldiers and civilians.

McCain’s namesake nonprofit, the McCain Institute for International Leadership, took $1 million from Saudi Arabia – a nation known for human-rights abuses, war crimes, and sponsorship of international terrorism.

He even schemed to cover up his heiress wife’s prescription-pill addiction – drug abuse that began behind the sheltering curtain of a medical-rescue mission for the poor.

In reckoning the life of a man who sought out the microphone and the camera, it’s important to keep an eye out on the all-too-easily blurred line that separates ambition from duplicity, calculation from deception, and expediency from misdeed.
Chapter 1: McCain the MiNO: Maverick in Name Only

He cultivated the image of a political iconoclast, but McCain's track record as a flip-flopper with the ethical conscience of a weathervane earned him the sobriquet “Jukebox John.”

The American Conservative Union, a lobbying powerhouse for conservative causes that rates members of Congress according to their voting records on conservative issues, gives McCain a lifetime score of 81.62 percent for his tenure through 2016.

Another organization that calculates ideological ratings, Voteview.com, rates McCain at 93 percent for party loyalty during the 115th Congress, the two-year legislative session that convened in January 2017.
McCain himself has proudly worn the “conservative” label. In 2006, he told a reporter that he’d always been right of center politically:

“I think my voting record clearly indicates that on economic issues, national security issues, social issues – I’m pro-life – so I think I’ve had a pretty clear twenty-some-year record basically being a conservative.”

Yet whenever McCain deigned to dislodge his toe from the Republican line, the commentariat invariably labeled him a “maverick” – a trope that has been around at least since the late 1980s, David Brock and Paul Waldman write in their 2008 book *Free Ride: John McCain and the Media*. It’s an image that appeals to reporters, who lapse into a “peculiar groupthink” when it comes to McCain, homing in on the few instances when he “diverged from party orthodoxy.”

A look back at McCain’s career exposes the mythical selfless iconoclast for what he is: a flip-flopper whose carefully calculated political gymnastics and ideological acrobatics have led perceptive observers to refer to him as “Jukebox John” and suggest he affix a weathervane to his skull.

Highlights from a career of hypocrisy include:

**Wealthcare:** The lead-up to the July 2017 Senate roll-call vote on the Republican effort to repeal the Affordable Care Act – the bill failed 51 to 49, with every Democrat opposing the measure – makes McCain look more like a scriptwriter than an iconoclast.

Days earlier, when McCain arrived in Washington from Arizona after his diagnosis, he’d voted in favor of moving the bill forward for debate and called for lawmakers from both parties to work together in the spirit of compromise.

*Washington Post* correspondent Philip Bump noted in an analysis of the repeal’s demise that two fellow Republicans joined McCain in voting no on the repeal: Lisa Murkowski of Alaska and Susan Collins of Maine. McCain had stolen the spotlight by the “genius” act of claiming until the very last minute to be undecided, Bump wrote.

By early December, McCain had morphed back into a run-of-the-mill Republican, just in time to vote in favor of Trump’s massive tax overhaul, which passed the Senate along nearly clean partisan lines, with only Tennessee Republican Bob Corker breaking ranks.
What happened to all that bipartisanship? In a statement signaling his intention to vote yes, McCain said the legislation was “far from perfect” but the American people were long overdue for a hike in their paychecks.

Yet analyses have shown that the ultra-wealthy will benefit most from the bill – multimillionaires such as John and Cindy McCain, the latter of whom owns Hensley & Co., Arizona’s largest beer distributorship. Various sources have estimated her net worth at $100 million to $200 million.

Adding injury to insult, McCain’s December vote for self-enrichment undercut his July vote against the Obamacare repeal. The tax bill subverted the Affordable Care Act by repealing the ACA’s individual mandate, which requires nearly all Americans to acquire health insurance.

The Congressional Budget Office estimates that by 2027, 13 million fewer Americans will have insurance coverage, resulting in a 10 percent hike in premiums for everyone.

**Campaign Finance Reform:** In the late 1980s, McCain was exposed as one of the so-called Keating Five – five senators who accepted contributions from con artist Charles Keating and then intervened when federal regulators homed in on Keating’s cash cow, Lincoln Savings and Loan. McCain had reaped $112,000 in campaign contributions from Keating and his associates, plus free plane trips to the millionaire’s vacation home in the Bahamas.

Keating went to prison, leaving taxpayers with a $3.4 billion tab to cover Lincoln’s collapse.

McCain set out to unsully his reputation by championing campaign finance reform. This eventually resulted in the passage of the Bipartisan Campaign Finance Reform Act of 2002, cosponsored by McCain and Russ Feingold, a Wisconsin Democrat.

McCain–Feingold aimed to stop political parties from funneling unlimited funds – so-called soft money – to individual candidates. It also prohibited corporations and unions from funding issue-oriented advertisements during election seasons – a provision the U.S. Supreme Court overturned in Citizens United v. FEC in 2010. Though McCain denounced the ruling at the time, calling it the court’s “worst decision ever,” in 2014 he voted against a constitutional amendment to overturn it.
The soft-money ban, meanwhile, was no skin off McCain’s schnoz. He was a master at raising hard money: contributions that are subject to donor limits but that are given directly to a candidate by PACs and individuals.

A 1999 Phoenix New Times investigation into McCain’s fundraising prowess found that he was also an expert at wooing contributions from donors who had business before the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, which McCain chaired at the time. New Times found that McCain had received nearly $800,000 from donors who testified before the committee.

**The NRA’s No. 1 with a Bullet:** The day after a deranged former student armed with an AR-15 massacred 17 people at a South Florida high school on Valentine’s Day 2018, John McCain tweeted, “Cindy & I are praying for all those impacted by the senseless shooting.”

It was a familiar platitude.

“Praying for all impacted by horrific shooting,” he’d tweeted on November 5, 2017, the day a man used a similar weapon, to kill 26 and injure 20 others at a Baptist church in Sutherland Springs, Texas.

And a month before that, on October 2, 2017, the day after an AR-15 toter killed 58 people and wounded more than 800 from the 32nd floor of the Mandalay Bay hotel: “Cindy & I are praying for the victims of the terrible #LasVegasShooting & their families.”

Social and mainstream media alike have been quick to respond to the bromides offered by McCain and his fellow lawmakers, by pointing out that many of them have hauled in tremendous amounts of money from the National Rifle Association (NRA).

And when it comes to the NRA’s largesse, the senator from Arizona is at the top of the list in loot collected since 1989: $7.7 million in donations and money spent on his behalf. The bulk of the money came during McCain’s unsuccessful presidential bid in 2008.

Though McCain has feigned the occasional moderate stance on gun control, he is ordinarily to be found nestled snugly inside the NRA’s holster.
In 1993, he was among the minority in the Senate to vote against the **Brady Act**, which established mandatory federal background checks for nearly all gun purchases. The following year he likewise voted “nay” on an **assault-weapons ban** that expired in 2004.

Over the years, McCain has supported **closing the loophole** that allows private citizens to purchase and sell firearms at a gun show without a background check. He also has voted against **similar legislation**.

During 2016, a re-election year, McCain helped to kill a bill designed to deny suspected terrorists on the “no fly” list from **purchasing a gun**.

The bill was inspired in part by a deadly rampage at Pulse, a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida, in June of that year. The perpetrator, who was armed with a rifle similar to an AR-15 and killed 49 people and wounded another 58, reportedly swore allegiance to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

At the time, McCain pointed the finger in a different direction: at Barack Obama. When reporters asked him whether he believed that the nightclub slayings might affect the gun-control debate on Capitol Hill, McCain responded by saying that it was the president who was **“directly responsible”** for the Orlando attack, by virtue of the fact that he’d pulled U.S. troops out of Iraq, which led to the rise of ISIS.

Though McCain later walked back those remarks, he had nothing to say about the possibility that the nation’s gun laws might need to be strengthened.

He did **tweet his prayers** in the hours after the shootings, though.

Legislators avail themselves of Twitter to broadcast their prayers, but they send their regards to the NRA via the halls of Congress. So it was that in early 2017, McCain helped to rescind an Obama-era rule designed to **keep firearms out of the hands of people with severe mental disabilities** such as schizophrenia.

**Immigration Reform:** Second only to his work on campaign finance reform, McCain earned the most kudos for his advocacy for bipartisan immigration reform. But the senator consistently turned nativist whenever politically expedient.

Beginning in 2005, he partnered with fellow senator Ted Kennedy on legislation that included a path to citizenship for undocumented residents.
The effort was unsuccessful, but in the run-up to the 2008 GOP presidential primary, McCain’s rivals used his support for immigration reform to paint him as pro-amnesty for illegal immigrants. Eyeing the nomination, McCain bent like a pack of warm Twizzlers. He said he’d no longer support his own bill and vowed to seek immigration reform as president only after the U.S.-Mexico border was secure. The flip-flop may have helped him land the Republican nomination, but ticked-off Latinos voted overwhelmingly for Barack Obama, helping the upstart Illinois senator best McCain in the general election.

Two years later, facing a Senate primary challenge from far-right radio talk-show host J.D. Hayworth, McCain doubled down on the anti-immigration rhetoric, running on a ten-point border-security plan and enlisting the aid of nativist Pinal County (Arizona) Sheriff Paul Babeu for a TV commercial in which McCain demands that the United States “complete the danged fence” on the border.

Hayworth derided his foe as a “political shape-shifter.” But McCain’s right turn worked: He trounced Hayworth and buried a weak Democratic challenger in the general election.

In 2013, McCain sidled back to the middle, joining the bipartisan “Gang of Eight” to propose a comprehensive immigration-reform package. McCain and 13 fellow Republicans voted in favor of the bill, which garnered the full support of Democrats and passed, 68 to 32. But House Speaker John Boehner would not allow the lower chamber to take up the measure, and the effort died.

His 2016 re-election campaign found McCain up to his old Janus-faced tricks. After fending off three opponents in the GOP primary, he launched a Spanish-language website, ostensibly to mirror the English-language version. But while the English-language site found McCain pledging to “secure and protect Arizona’s border community” and “address the crisis of unaccompanied children coming across Arizona’s border with Mexico,” the Spanish-speaking side portrayed him as “the central figure who has brought together...Republicans and Democrats to work on immigration reform that is humane and sensible to the needs of the immigrant community.” The Washington Post promptly called attention to the selective translation.

Having subdued his hapless Democratic rival in the general election, McCain resumed his centrist stance. But in early 2018, after Donald Trump declared a March 5 deadline to do away with the Obama-era Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals
(DACA) program, McCain swung into action, joining Delaware Democrat Chris Coons to introduce legislation that would protect those who were covered under DACA. Predictably, Trump \textit{vehemently opposed} the bipartisan effort, which the Republican-controlled Senate \textit{voted down} along with several similar measures.

**TORTURE:** As Brock and Waldman describe in \textit{Free Ride}, McCain was brazenly duplicitous in 2006 during the debate over the use of so-called alternative interrogation methods in the war on terror.

McCain, whose time in captivity left him with lifelong physical disabilities, objected to a bill pushed by President George W. Bush that would reinterpret the 1949 Geneva Conventions and allow U.S. interrogators to use the controversial techniques.

After McCain and other senators successfully bargained for compromise legislation, the press lauded the Arizona senator for taking a stand against the inhumane treatment of prisoners. But Brock and Waldman write that when human-rights and legal experts parsed the new bill, they discovered that it “granted the president the power to designate and detain indefinitely any noncitizen he decides is an ‘illegal enemy combatant.’”

The Bush administration caught hell for the bill, which eventually passed both houses and was signed into law. McCain largely eluded criticism. (In 2018, the U.S. Supreme Court declared the law’s denial of habeas corpus rights unconstitutional.)

**JERRY FALWELL:** During his run for the GOP presidential nomination in 2000, McCain referred to fundamentalist TV preacher Jerry Falwell as one of America’s chief “agents of intolerance.” Six years later McCain delivered the commencement address at Falwell’s Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia.

When a reporter asked McCain whether he still believed Falwell was an agent of intolerance, McCain said, “No, I don’t.” That same year Falwell was quoted in the \textit{New York Times} praising McCain as a great conservative, saying, “I know of no reason I could not support him.”
**Sarah Palin:** The syntax-challenged “mama grizzly” would become a darling of the Tea Party a couple of years later. But in 2008 she was a running joke and a walking, talking symbol of McCain’s desperation.

In 2012 McCain told a reporter that he’d chosen Palin over former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney because Palin was “the better candidate.” Though McCain tried to walk it back, the remark was widely seen as a snub to Romney, the GOP’s presumptive nominee for president that year.

**Playing His Race Cards:** McCain’s *Straight Talk Express* hit a brick wall of duplicity during South Carolina’s GOP primary battle in 2000, when the senator faced off against then-Texas governor George W. Bush. At the time, the Confederate flag flew over the Palmetto State’s capitol and remained a contentious issue.

On a Sunday news program, McCain said he considered the flag a “symbol of racism and slavery.” Twenty-four hours later, he released a statement calling the flag “a symbol of heritage.”

The reversal didn’t help. Bush creamed McCain by double digits, 53 to 42. After a crushing Super Tuesday defeat in March, McCain bowed out.

A month later, he was back in South Carolina to speak at a luncheon, where he apologized for his U-turn on the Confederate flag, confessing that he copped the “heritage” line because he wanted to win. “I broke my promise to always tell the truth,” McCain said, admitting he’d lied.

In 1987, when Arizona governor Evan Mecham, a wingnut Republican of epic proportions, repealed the King holiday in Arizona, McCain supported the move.

Of course, running for president can inspire a man to see the error of his ways. During a 1999 appearance on NBC’s *Meet the Press*, McCain told host Tim Russert that he regretted his vote against the holiday. And when he ran for president again in 2008, he offered a mea culpa to a crowd in Memphis, the city where King was killed, on the 40th anniversary of the assassination, admitting his opposition to the holiday was a “mistake.”

**Temper, Temper, Temper...Ratfucker?:** If John McCain isn’t a maverick, then how ought one to characterize him?
Well, for a man who likes to pontificate about civil discourse, civic high-mindedness, and statesmanlike conduct, the senator has earned reputation for mean-spirited, spiteful, and at times downright pugilistic behavior, and a vulgar tongue, for good measure. If political payback were a martial art, McCain would have a black belt.

His fellow senators have been frequent targets of McCain’s invective.

In 2000, in an effort to explain why only four of the fifty-five Republicans then in the Senate supported his bid for the presidency, Newsweek enumerated McCain’s most memorable meltdowns.

There was the time at a GOP conference when McCain called Pete Domenici of New Mexico an “asshole.” When Domenici responded politely that he’d never been addressed by a fellow senator in that manner, McCain snapped back, “I wouldn’t call you an asshole unless you really were an asshole.”

He once called Iowa’s Chuck Grassley a “fucking jerk.”

He told Ted Kennedy to “shut up” on the Senate floor.

Following a tense exchange with Strom Thurmond during a committee hearing in 1995, McCain is said to have scuffled with the South Carolina lawmaker, who was 92 years old at the time.

And those are just his colleagues in the Senate.

In 1999, Arizona governor Jane Hull told the New York Times that McCain’s temper was “something that John has to keep control of.” Hull, a Republican, held her telephone receiver “several inches from her ear” to demonstrate how their conversations were often conducted. Not surprisingly, Hull backed George W. Bush in the subsequent GOP primary.

Another Arizona governor, Rose Mofford, offended McCain simply by being a Democrat. In 2000, onetime Arizona Republic and Phoenix Gazette publisher Pat Murphy wrote a column for the lefty magazine In These Times in which he described how McCain went out of his way to ensure that Mofford was humiliated when she testified at a congressional hearing. Murphy quoted McCain gleefully telling him, “I’m duty bound to embarrass a Democrat whenever I can.”

That said, you didn’t have to be a politician to incur McCain’s wrath. In 2008, in “McCain: A Question of Temperament,” the Washington Post’s Michael Leahy recounted an eyewitness report wherein McCain screamed at the head of Arizona’s Young Republicans during a 1986 victory celebration in Phoenix. “McCain jabbed an index
finger in [the young man’s] chest. ‘I told you we needed a stage,’ he screamed.... ‘You incompetent little [expletive]. When I tell you to do something, you do it.’” The twentysomething’s crime? He’d neglected to adjust a lectern platform to compensate for McCain’s short stature, with the result that the TV cameras cut him off at the chin. (The expletive, according to other news accounts, was “shit.”)

Meddlesome reporters might be called liars or excluded from the Straight Talk Express. And McCain wasn’t above getting personal. Phoenix New Times’s Amy Silverman, who has long chronicled McCain’s temper and his predilection for vindictiveness, wrote a piece for Salon.com in 2000 in which she told of how McCain refused to speak with her for five years after New Times exposed Cindy McCain’s opiate addiction. (For more on that episode, including how the McCains sought the prosecution of the man who informed the DEA that Cindy McCain was using her own medical-relief nonprofit to feed her habit, see Chapter 5.) Silverman went on to tell how her father, an executive and lobbyist for a local utility, had caught hell from McCain about her reporting: After cussing him out in the Senate dining room, McCain screamed at Silverman père, “Why can’t you control your daughter?”

Then there’s McCain’s role in the circulation of the so-called Steele dossier, the 35-page intelligence report compiled on Donald Trump for the U.S. research firm Fusion GPS. The dossier’s author, former British spy Christopher Steele, reportedly got a copy of the document into McCain’s hands. In December of 2016, the senator passed it on to then-FBI director James Comey.

As it turned out, the FBI already had a copy. But McCain’s involvement may not have ended there.

The dossier was made public on January 10, 2017, when BuzzFeed published a copy. At the time, the online news site took heat for airing the unverified (and salacious) details the document contained. BuzzFeed has not said who supplied the site with a copy of the dossier.

Some speculate that it was... John McCain.

Farfetched?

McCain has the track record and temperament to execute such a ratfuck. As for motive, one need look no further than Trump’s smirking campaign-trail dismissal of McCain as “not a war hero,” owing to his capture by the North Vietnamese. The remark surely stung: More than a year later, during an interview about the Vietnam
War, McCain took a swipe at the wealthy Americans who’d finagled deferments from military service. Though there were many avenues to deferment, McCain expressed his disdain by citing the particular mitigating circumstance that allowed Trump to avoid the draft.

“One aspect of the conflict, by the way, that I will never ever countenance is that we drafted the lowest-income level of America, and the highest-income level found a doctor that would say that they had a bone spur,” McCain said. “That is wrong. That is wrong. If we are going to ask every American to serve, every American should serve.”
The Stains of John McCain

McCain and Sarah Palin with their spouses at a rally in Fairfax, Virginia, in September 2008 (Rachael Dickson via Flickr [cropped])

The Mac is back! McCain at a VFW hall in Merrimack, New Hampshire, during the runup to the 2008 Republican presidential primary (Marc Nozell via Flickr [cropped])

McCain (center) waits as his fellow POWs disembark from a bus after being released in Vietnam (Department of the Navy, via Wikimedia Commons)
In his race for re-election in 2010, McCain teamed with Pinal County Sheriff Paul Babeu for a TV spot in which the incumbent senator demanded that the USA “complete the danged fence” along the Mexican border. Babeu, in uniform, was “appearing only in his personal capacity” as a virulent anti-immigration nativist. (screenshot via YouTube)

The cast of the Keating Five scandal (clockwise from top left): John McCain, John Glenn, Alan Cranston, Dennis DeConcini, Charles Keating, Donald W. Riegle, Jr.

Clockwise from top left: In his dealings with fellow senators, John McCain...physically scuffled with Strom Thurmond on the Senate floor...told Ted Kennedy to “shut up”...called Chuck Grassley a “fucking jerk”...called Pete Domenici an “asshole” (all images are public domain, via Wikimedia Commons)
As publisher of the state’s most widely read daily paper, Darrow “Duke” Tully helped pave the way for McCain’s political rise in Arizona. He also blatantly lied about his (nonexistent) military service (screenshot via Williston Herald).

On November 2, 1983, President Ronald Reagan signed legislation declaring a national holiday to honor Martin Luther King, Jr. McCain had voted against the measure. At far left is King’s widow, Coretta Scott King. (National Archives and Records Administration via Wikimedia Commons)
In the early 1980s, John McCain was a man on the make. After leaving his first wife back east, he married a beer baron’s daughter and moved to her home state of Arizona to launch a political career.

As a result, McCain was on the hunt for new friends in high places. He found them in two charismatic charlatans. Like McCain, both were newcomers to the Grand Canyon State. Each was to have a hand in McCain’s out-of-the-gate political successes. And each would come to disgrace in separate scandals that stained McCain’s reputation.
Duke of Deceptions: Darrow “Duke” Tully was the boisterous, hard-charging publisher of the state’s best-read daily, the Arizona Republic, and the Republic’s now-defunct evening counterpart, the Phoenix Gazette. A lifelong media executive who hailed from Charleston, West Virginia, Tully became publisher of the Republic and the Gazette in 1980.

Clout and connections were what Tully supplied McCain. At the command of two newspapers with a combined readership of 400,000, the swaggering, dictatorial publisher was proud of saying, “I tell Arizona what to think.” Not long after encountering the former POW, Tully would be urging fellow Arizonans to vote for the up-and-coming political neophyte.

In a 2000 interview with the New York Times, Tully said he met McCain at a private club in Phoenix “shortly before he married Cindy.” Only four years apart in age, the two men bonded over perceived similarities in their military records. “He is an extremely likable guy,” Tully said of McCain, “and I had a lot of hero worship for him.”

According to a 2007 profile of McCain in the Republic, Tully allowed McCain to write guest columns in the paper, such as one about spending Christmas as a POW in Hanoi.

Tully also made sure the Republic endorsed McCain in the 1982 contest for the First Congressional District. And he helped McCain earn the backing of a group of local power brokers known as the Phoenix 40, which called the political shots at the time. As a member, Tully successfully lobbied the Phoenix 40 to anoint McCain as successor to longtime Republican Congressman John Rhodes, whose retirement gave McCain an opening in his adopted state.

“I was a very, very strong John McCain advocate,” Tully told the Times. “He was basically picked by the power structure as the guy who could get it done, and I helped with that.”

The two men were so close that the McCains chose Tully to be godfather to their daughter Meghan. And his devotion to John McCain is sometimes credited as scaring away a possible rival after Barry Goldwater announced that he wouldn’t seek re-election in 1986: Bruce Babbitt, Arizona’s popular Democratic governor, who passed on a Senate run to focus on a 1988 presidential bid.
Tully had flown jet aircraft and spent a lot of time on air force flight simulators. So he could talk the talk of a veteran pilot. The *Republic* profile says he once bragged about shooting down McCain’s virtual plane during a “simulated dogfight” on an Arizona military base.

Tully played his John Wayne persona to the hilt, *grousing about his aches from old war wounds*, displaying photos of himself in lieutenant colonel’s garb in his bathroom, and regaling listeners with tales of being shot down during the Korean War and flying 100 missions in Vietnam.

He claimed to have been awarded several medals: Purple Heart, Distinguished Flying Cross, Air Medal with four oak leaf clusters. He’d display them on custom-tailored dress uniforms that he wore when he gave speeches. Standing six-foot-four with an outsize personality and a penchant for all things martial, he undoubtedly looked and acted the part.

But it was all a Walter Mitty-esque fantasy, which collapsed when one of Tully’s enemies, then-Maricopa County Attorney Tom Collins, sniffed out the publisher’s true history and called a press conference on the day after Christmas in 1985.

Reportedly peeved that *Republic* reporters were singling him out for critical coverage, Collins disclosed that Tully wasn’t a fighter pilot – in fact he had never served in the military. What Tully was, said Collins, was a fraud who “does not deserve his position as a community leader.”

Tully apologized, resigned from his job, and eventually left Arizona. In various interviews after he was outed, he’d explain that the elaborate ruse began while he was a young ad rep for his hometown newspaper.

“I started to tell a fib, and one fib led to another,” Tully confessed. “I helped it grow. Once it got going, it just picked up steam and I fed it.”

McCain claimed to be as shocked as everyone else, saying he “*almost fainted*” when he found out. *He told the Los Angeles Times* that Tully “had studied and knew all about these fighter planes and wars and war battles and had developed a pretty good story.”

Added McCain: “[Y]ou get a guy in uniform with medals and I don’t say, ‘Let me see your citations and service record.’”
McCain certainly wasn’t the only vet to have been taken in by Tully’s masquerade. And yet the two men were locked for a while in a symbiotic relationship. McCain benefited from the fabulist publisher’s political influence. And as biographer Robert Timberg observed in his 1999 book *John McCain: An American Odyssey*, “The friendship reinforced [Tully’s] lies, allowed him to bask in reflected glory.”

**ENTER CHARLES KEATING:** McCain developed a sinister alliance with Charles Keating, a flamboyant millionaire known to toss handfuls of banknotes into the air in front of worshipful employees, crack open bottles of chilled Dom Perignon at the slightest provocation, and pay himself and his family exorbitant salaries and bonuses – all while recklessly gambling federally backed funds on junk bonds and high-risk commercial real estate.

Keating was a champion swimmer in college and began his professional career as an attorney. An anti-porn zealot who got the Russ Meyer film *Vixen!* banned from screens in his native Cincinnati, by the time he turned 50 he’d moved on to a $1 billion outfit called the American Financial Corporation, where he served as executive vice president.

He moved west in 1976 under a cloud, as the Securities and Exchange Commission had begun an investigation of his employer.

It was a taste of troubles to come.

In Phoenix, Keating took over the leadership of a flailing home-building company that – largely thanks to the desert destination’s real estate boom – he turned around, diversified, and renamed American Continental Corporation (ACC).

McCain met Keating in 1981 at a Navy League dinner, and the two became fast friends. Keating backed McCain’s inaugural bid for Congress as a direct contributor and fundraiser, hustling and collecting donations on behalf of the candidate.

In 1982, McCain accepted $11,000 in campaign contributions from Keating and the financier’s family, friends, and employees. During McCain’s first Senate run in 1986, Keating raised more than $50,000 for him. By 1987, McCain had accepted a total of $112,000 in donations tied to Keating.
Keating also did business with McCain’s family. In 1986 Cindy McCain and her dad plunked $359,100 into a shopping center that an ACC subsidiary was developing in North Phoenix. (They reportedly didn’t cash out until 1998, when the shopping center was sold.)

But Keating was more than a benefactor and business associate. McCain took nine flights on Keating’s corporate jets and helicopters, three of them to the investment tycoon’s vacation home on Cat Cay in the Bahamas, which McCain referred to as “Charlie Keating’s Shangri-La.” On some of the trips, John and Cindy McCain brought along their daughter Meghan and a nanny to mind the child while her parents lived it up.

Keating was a study in contrasts. He relocated his anti-smut brigade, Citizens for Decency Through Law, to Phoenix. And from the millions he siphoned from Lincoln Savings and Loan, he donated huge sums to Catholic charities, including more than $2 million to Mother Teresa.

But Keating also used S&L depositors’ money to throw wild company parties where he and his employees guzzled Champagne and threw each other into swimming pools fully clothed.

The bizarre S&L “Animal House,” as the *Washington Post* called it, came crashing down in 1989, when federal regulators seized Lincoln one day after ACC filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy. The tales of Keating’s profligacy and McCain’s close personal and financial ties would incense the American public, who were on the hook for the travesty.

All told, the collapse of Lincoln, which ACC had purchased for $51 million in 1984, cost taxpayers $3.4 billion. It was the largest failure of its kind, part of a nationwide crisis that forced more than 1,000 thrifts to shutter in the 1980s and ’90s, leaving Uncle Sam to cover a $481 billion tab.

Convicted of fraud, racketeering, and conspiracy, Keating spent four and a half years in prison. He died in Phoenix in 2014 at age 90.
**Six Sleazy Men:** At Lincoln’s branches, the staff would steer customers – many of whom were retirees – away from federally insured accounts and toward high-yield junk bonds from ACC. When Keating died, the *New York Times* obituary noted that “[a] witness in a lawsuit years later produced a Lincoln memo advising its bond salesmen to remember that ‘the weak, meek and ignorant are always good targets.’”

Lincoln became Keating’s personal piggy bank; ACC siphoned cash from the thrift to pay for $34 million in salaries and compensation for ACC employees, including breast enhancements and shopping excursions to Rodeo Drive for Keating’s statuesque secretaries, who referred to themselves as “Charlie’s angels.”

But Keating’s wheeling and dealing ran afoul of a rule put in place by the Federal Home Loan Bank Board (FHLBB), which oversaw the S&L industry. The regulation limited direct investments to 10 percent of an S&L’s assets. By 1987, Lincoln was $600 million over that limit and headed for a fiscal cliff.

As regulators sought to rein in the runaway S&L, Keating enlisted the aid of five U.S. senators to get the FHLBB off Lincoln’s back.

The group that came to be known as the Keating Five consisted of John McCain and four Democratic senators: Dennis DeConcini, McCain’s Arizona counterpart; Don Riegle of Michigan; John Glenn of Ohio; and Alan Cranston of California.

All told, Keating had raised nearly $1.4 million for the politicians and causes they supported, including a get-out-the-vote campaign in California aimed to benefit Cranston.

At Keating’s behest, four of the senators met with FHLBB chairman Ed Gray in DeConcini’s office.

In their 1993 book *Trust Me: Charles Keating and the Missing Billions*, reporters Michael Binstein and Charles Bowden write that the meeting (which Riegle did not attend) was “designed to remain in the shadows.” Referring to “our friend at Lincoln,” DeConcini wanted to know why the investigation was taking so long and suggested that the FHLBB suspend the 10 percent rule to allow Lincoln to come into compliance. Though McCain told Gray the senators didn’t want to do “anything that’s improper,” Gray later described the meeting as an effort to “subvert” the regulatory process.

A second meeting was arranged with regulators from San Francisco who were overseeing the Lincoln probe. All five senators participated.
McCain told regulators he was duty-bound to assist a constituent, as ACC was located in Arizona and a major employer. But he claimed he didn’t want any “special favors.”

When the senators pressed for information, the regulators detailed Lincoln’s infractions and its risky investments. One called the institution “a ticking time bomb.” Another said a criminal referral to the Department of Justice was in the works.

After that meeting, McCain cut ties with Keating.

A few years later, the Senate Ethics Committee gave McCain and Glenn a slap on the wrist, finding that they’d shown “poor judgment.” The other three senators came in for harsher condemnation. (Cranston received a formal reprimand.)

Over the years, McCain expressed remorse for the “appearance of impropriety” the meetings caused, glumly referring to the scandal as “my asterisk.”

But the meetings may not have been the only quid pro quo between Keating and McCain.


“Charlie Keating is a friend [of McCain],” said the flack, adding that McCain had spoken to ACC employees “on several occasions.”

In November 1989, McCain told the press that “[i]f I had it to do over again, obviously, it should [have been] a one-on-one meeting,” rather than with others. “I did not set up the meeting,” he added. And then: “But no one twisted my arm, either, to attend.”

That same month, McCain was quoted in the New York Times as saying he’d “done this kind of thing many, many times.” The senator compared the situation to “helping the little lady who didn’t get her social security” – an unfortunate reference, given that thousands of senior citizens lost their life savings when they bought uninsured bonds issued by ACC.

Keating, however, was bald-faced about his pay-to-play political contributions. At one press conference, he addressed the lingering question of “whether my financial support in any way influenced several political figures to take up my cause.”

Said Keating: “I want to say in the most forceful way I can: I certainly hope so.”
**The Damage Done:** The regulators who’d met with the Keating Five shared Keating’s cynical appraisal of the episode.

FHLBB attorney William Black, who was present at the second meeting between the senators and bank regulators, testified to the ethics committee that he and his colleagues felt menaced during the session, at which “one-twentieth” of the Senate was present. Black said he felt Keating “clearly had set up the meeting to be intimidating.”

The years passed, but Black did not forget. In a 2008 interview with CNN’s John King, Black opined that McCain was also compromised by the real estate deal his wife and father-in-law entered into with Keating.

“Senator McCain was unique among the five senators in having a direct financial conflict of interest involving direct investments,” Black said.

Questioned by an Arizona Republic reporter in October 1989 about Cindy McCain and Jim Hensley’s shopping-center investment, McCain erupted. He called the reporter a “liar” and said he’d signed a prenuptial agreement so there was no conflict. “That’s the spouse’s involvement, you idiot,” McCain scolded. “You do understand English, don’t you?”

McCain reimbursed ACC $13,433 for the air travel. An accounting oversight, the senator said, and blamed his wife.

The trips had taken place during McCain’s House tenure and his failure to report them was a violation of House rules, according to a Boston Globe examination of the Keating Five scandal in 2000. But the House Committee on Ethics had declined to pursue the matter because McCain had moved on to the Senate, and the Senate said it didn’t have jurisdiction because the violation took place in the House.

McCain attempted to minimize the damage by repeatedly going on TV to deny wrongdoing and by leaking sensitive materials to the press that made the other Keating Five senators look like worse offenders.

Though McCain swore under oath in a 1992 inquiry that he had nothing to do with the leaks, Globe investigative reporter Walter V. Robinson found otherwise. Clark Hall, the General Accounting Office’s lead investigator in its probe of the case, told Robinson that the evidence against McCain was overwhelming. “You don’t betray other people to protect yourself, and that’s what he was doing,” Hall said. “And he was breaking Senate rules to do it.”
The Keating Five scandal continued to rear its head whenever McCain ran for president. But the senator/candidate’s newfound enthusiasm for campaign finance reform helped to buff his tarnished image.

A 2008 *Phoenix New Times* assessment of McCain’s career laid out how McCain’s stance on campaign finance reform evolved over the years.

“You may be surprised to know that in 1987 and 1988, McCain voted *against* federal legislation reforming the campaign finance system,” Amy Silverman wrote. “It was only in 1990, in the aftermath of Keating and the shadow of an upcoming re-election campaign, that he started supporting reform.”

**Blood Money:** In a 21st-century echo of his bromance with Charles Keating, McCain was a vociferous booster for Silicon Valley wunderkind Elizabeth Holmes and Theranos, the scandal-tainted biotech company she founded in the Silicon Valley.

During the last election cycle, McCain netted thousands of dollars in contributions from executives at Theranos and others associated with the company. In return, the senator played PR rep for the venture online and supported a change in Arizona law that gave the company unfettered access to consumers in his home state.

Once the toast of the tech world and formerly valued at an estimated $9 billion, Theranos is now a byword for the industry’s “fake it till you make it” culture. With the Palo Alto-based company’s laboratories shuttered and its claims of revolutionary blood-analysis technology exposed as pure hype, the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) dropped what might be the final bomb on March 14, 2018, charging Theranos, its charismatic founder and CEO Elizabeth Holmes, and its former president Ramesh “Sunny” Balwani with an “elaborate, years-long fraud,” during which the fledgling firm raised $700 million from credulous investors.

In a press release announcing the federal charges against the company, the SEC alleged that Theranos’s proprietary blood analyzer, which Holmes dubbed “Edison,” “could complete only a small number of tests,” and that the vast majority of blood analysis was actually carried out using “modified and industry standard commercial analyzers manufactured by others.”
Company execs falsely claimed that Theranos technology was used on battlefields in Afghanistan and widely misrepresented the amount of revenue the company was generating, according to the commission.

Holmes and Theranos agreed to settle the fraud charges without admitting or denying the allegations. Holmes has promised to pay a $500,000 fine and relinquish her majority voting shares in the company.

Holmes, whom the media hailed as “the next Steve Jobs” and the world’s “youngest self-made woman billionaire,” now has a net worth of “nothing,” according to Forbes. Her settlement with the SEC bars her from serving as the officer or director of a public company for the next decade. (Balwani did not settle with the SEC, which will continue to litigate its claims against the ex-Theranos president.)

McCain was conspicuously mum on the subject as Theranos slowly flamed out. He has plenty to answer for, however. (His office did not return phone calls and emails seeking comment.)

According to filings with the Federal Elections Commission, between October 2015 and June 2016, McCain’s re-election committee, the Friends of John McCain, accepted a total of $15,000 in campaign contributions from Theranos bigwigs, including Balwani, general counsel Heather King, and vice president of communications Brooke Buchanan.

Buchanan is McCain’s former press secretary. She left Theranos in 2016 to become a top flack for the Whole Foods grocery chain, which has since been acquired by Amazon.

In addition to the $15,000 from Theranos executives, McCain accepted contributions totaling nearly $60,000 from Theranos investors and members of the company’s board of directors and other advisory boards. Notable donors include former U.S. secretaries of state Henry Kissinger and George Shultz and their wives, as well as Betsy DeVos (now the Trump administration’s secretary of education) and various members of her family.

During much of 2015, McCain championed Holmes and Theranos on Twitter, praising the founder as a “remarkable young innovator” and posting photos of the two of them together. Holmes participated in the McCain Institute’s Sedona Forum at the Enchantment Resort that year, providing a Twitter photo op against the backdrop of the location’s stunning red rock formations.
With her **signature black turtlenecks** and claims that Theranos could perform hundreds of blood tests using mere drops of blood from a finger-prick – as opposed to several vials filled from veins – Holmes wowed press and politicians alike, promising that the privately held company’s revolutionary medical advancements would allow patients to obtain lab results for blood tests from a pharmacy, within a matter of hours, for a fraction of the current cost.

In 2013, Theranos partnered with the Walgreens chain to open “wellness centers” in 40 locations throughout metro Phoenix, where customers could have pinprick blood tests done. The following year, Theranos announced that it would break ground on a new clinical lab in Scottsdale.

Arizona law already allowed for some limited testing without a doctor’s authorization, but Theranos wanted to make the Grand Canyon State its “model” for expansion, so it pushed for state legislation to lift the remaining restrictions on such tests.

Theranos helped write **House Bill 2645**, which allowed consumers to obtain lab results directly from a licensed clinical laboratory “on a direct-access basis,” without the request or authorization of a healthcare provider. Holmes personally lobbied for the bill, testifying before committees in the state house and senate, wooing legislators with her free-market rhetoric and Silicon Valley cachet. The measure sailed through both chambers of the legislature with scant opposition and was **signed into law with much fanfare** by Republican governor Doug Ducey on April 6, 2015.

McCain celebrated the big event by issuing back-to-back tweets, one showing a photo of himself with Holmes, another declaring that he was “Proud to support bill signed today to expand @theranos in #Arizona & provide cost-effective, quality healthcare for entire state.”

In July 2015, as the new law was about to go into effect, McCain tweeted out a **Washington Post article** that reported on the Federal Drug Administration’s approval of a Theranos finger-prick test for herpes. The story quoted McCain praising the Arizona law and taking credit for endorsing the legislation.

“It basically empowers the individuals to own their own health, and I think it’ll bring about competition in laboratory pricing, making it dramatically less expensive,” McCain told the *Post*.

Also in July, McCain tweeted op-eds by Holmes in the **Arizona Republic** and the **Wall Street Journal** in which she heralded a “new era” in healthcare.
In the *Republic* opinion piece, Holmes made guarantees that her company would be unable to keep.

“Tests need to be convenient, and accessible on nights and weekends,” she wrote. “Results should be available real-time. And all lab tests should be validated to the highest quality standards – standards set by the FDA – because you deserve results you can trust.”

McCain’s last pro-Theranos tweet, dated October 15, 2015, shows a photo of the senator inside a Theranos lab with Holmes and a technician who’s holding up what looks like a small sample of blood.

“Enjoyed visiting Elizabeth Holmes @theranos lab last night & seeing their innovative blood test in action! #Theranos,” the caption reads.

The timing was ironic. That week, the *Wall Street Journal* published the first of several exposés about Theranos’s business practices by investigative reporter John Carreyrou. On the condition that their names not appear in the story, senior employees told Carreyrou that by the end of 2014 Theranos “did less than 10 percent of its tests” on its blood analyzers. The rest were either done on traditional machines using larger blood samples or on traditional machines rigged to accept smaller but diluted samples.

In other words, Theranos’s “Edison analyzers” weren’t the miracle machines the company maintained they were. Carreyrou wrote that Theranos had “struggled behind the scenes to turn the excitement over its technology into reality.” He revealed that a whistleblower had filed a complaint with federal regulators, alleging that Theranos had not reported “test results that raised questions about the precision of the Edison system.”

A subsequent investigation by the federal Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) resulted in the agency revoking the certification for Theranos’s Newark, California, lab in July 2016. CMS also banned Holmes from owning or operating a blood-testing facility for two years. The month prior, Walgreens severed its partnership with Theranos, shuttering all 40 wellness centers. Later that year, Theranos laid off nearly half of its full-time staff nationwide.

At the beginning of 2017, Arizona Attorney General Mark Brnovich filed suit against Theranos, alleging violations of the state’s consumer-fraud act, for making false claims and providing consumers with “unreliable, inaccurate, and misleading
test results.” Without admitting guilt, Theranos entered into a consent decree, reimbursing Arizonans for the full cost of every blood test Theranos performed, a $4.6 million tab.

McCain’s dalliance with Theranos suggests that his mutual-back-scratching relationship with Charles Keating was no mere one-off. The Theranos saga itself has become such a modern-day morality play that a film is already in the works. Adam McKay, who won an Academy Award for Best Adapted Screenplay in 2015 for The Big Short, will write and direct. Jennifer Lawrence has signed on to play Holmes.

Should a cameo role become available for an appropriately ancient actor to portray McCain, Betty White and Danny DeVito come to mind.
Chapter 3: Sweetheart of Saudi Arabia

A serial human-rights abuser and suspected backer of international terrorism, Saudi Arabia furnished $1 million to McCain’s namesake nonprofit, the McCain Institute for International Leadership. A grateful senator promotes the Middle Eastern nation’s interests in Congress.

Given McCain’s past advocacy for campaign finance reform, repurposing unused campaign cash to bankroll a monument to his ego might raise an eyebrow or two. But according to a 2012 report in the Arizona Republic, that’s precisely what he did, using nearly $9 million left over from his failed 2008 presidential run to jump-start the McCain Institute for International Leadership.
On its website, the nonprofit McCain Institute pledges its commitment to “upholding freedom, democracy and human rights as universal human values; supporting humanitarian goals; maintaining a strong, smart national defense; and serving causes greater than one’s self-interest.”

All of which makes it reasonable to ask how those priorities justify the fact that the self-proclaimed do-tank – as opposed to think tank, get it? – accepted a $1 million donation in 2014 from the Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia.

U.S. federal law prohibits foreign citizens, companies, and countries from making donations to American politicians, but foreign nationals and their governments can and do get around this restriction by donating to foundations associated with those politicians, as the Saudi Embassy did with the McCain Institute.

The institute’s acceptance of the Saudi handout puts the lie to the do-tank’s lofty language about democracy and human rights. The desert kingdom is infamous for the size and scale of the atrocities it commits, for its repression of its own people (women and religious minorities in particular), for its alleged support for international terrorism, and for its promotion of Wahhabism, a strict Islamist ideology that advocates violence against the West. (Fifteen of the nineteen 9/11 hijackers were Saudi nationals. Al-Qaeda founder Osama bin Laden, who graced the FBI’s “Ten Most Wanted” list from 1999 until U.S. forces killed him in 2011, was the scion of a wealthy Saudi family.)

Of course, McCain and his institute are well aware of Saudi Arabia’s many misdeeds. In September 2016, the nonprofit issued a three-page white paper on Saudi Arabia that calls the country “one of the world’s most authoritarian regimes.” The paper argues that the United States should press Saudi rulers for democratic reforms in “a friendly but firm way.”

Presumably, refusing a $1 million gift would be considered unfriendly, if firm. Perhaps that also explains why the McCain Institute proudly lists the Saudi embassy alongside fellow major contributors like FedEx, Wal-Mart, GE, Chevron (which partners with ARAMCO, the Saudi national oil company), and defense contractor Raytheon, whose missile-systems division is headquartered in Tucson.

Reached for comment, Luke Knittig, the McCain Institute’s senior director of communications, said the Saudis’ $1 million contribution was “given without restrictions” and has no influence on the institute’s mission.
“The institute is not political by design, and there’s a huge firewall where it can’t do anything connected to Senator McCain’s political responsibilities,” Knittig said. Asked to comment specifically about the institute accepting of money from a tyrannical regime guilty of flagrant human-rights violations, Knittig said, “They can do better. We’d love to help them do better.”

**Intolerance and Torture:** Even as the McCain Institute stages polite panel discussions and hosts an annual invitation-only retreat at the posh Enchantment Resort in Sedona, where donors can rub shoulders with the senator, Saudi Arabia remains a brutal theocratic monarchy, devoid of freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and basic human rights.

According to Amnesty International, Saudi authorities torture detainees in order to obtain confessions, which then are used against the accused in court. The country also regularly stages public beheadings, often for nonviolent crimes.

Adherents of faiths other than Islam are not allowed to publicly practice their religions. Leaving Islam for another faith is punishable by death. Anyone critical of the monarchy or Wahhabism is subject to arrest, torture, imprisonment, and corporal or capital punishment.

Case in point: **Raif Badawi**, a Saudi dissident and blogger whom the European Parliament honored with its Sakharov Prize for his human-rights advocacy, was arrested in 2012 for “insulting Islam through electronic channels,” according to Human Rights Watch. He was convicted on several charges and sentenced to ten years in prison and 1,000 lashes, the latter to be meted out at the unsurvivable rate of 50 per week. (Since the first whipping was publicly administered in January 2015, Badawi has remained in prison but has not been subjected to further lashings.)

In a rare move toward modernization, Saudi Arabia recently granted women the right to drive. But the Saudis continue to treat women as second-class citizens. In public women are restricted in their dealings with men and must wear a headscarf and a body-length cloak called an **abaya**.
**Human Trafficking Hypocrisy:** One of the McCain Institute’s priorities is to **aid in the international fight against human trafficking**, a scourge the United Nations defines as **“the acquisition of people by improper means such as force, fraud or deception, with the aim of exploiting them.”**

But when it comes to this form of modern-day slavery, Saudi Arabia is far from an ally. It is, in fact, a grievous offender.

In 2014, the year the McCain Institute accepted $1 million Saudi donation, the nation was on a U.S. State Department “blacklist” of countries that failed to meet minimum requirements to fight trafficking.

Though Saudi Arabia was **removed from the blacklist the following year**, in 2016 the State Department issued a report labeling the kingdom **“a destination country for men and women subjected to forced labor and, to a lesser extent, forced prostitution.”**

According to the report, foreign domestic workers are often forced to work for months or years beyond the terms of their contracts.

The State Department’s 2017 **“Trafficking in Persons Report”** stated that Saudi Arabia was making “significant efforts” to combat human trafficking but “did not demonstrate increasing efforts compared to the previous reporting period.”

**Wahhabism, War, and Terror:** The United Nations has condemned Saudi Arabia for its war against Houthi rebels in neighboring Yemen, accusing the country of war crimes. Saudi pilots have indiscriminately bombed the civilian population, often carrying out airstrikes against schools, hospitals, weddings, and funerals. The Saudis have also engaged in a naval blockade of Yemen’s ports, endangering the population with famine and the spread of cholera.

A **UN report released in October 2017** added Saudi Arabia to a list of nations that target children in wartime, in violation of international law. According to the report, Saudi-led airstrikes were “the cause of over half of child casualties” in the Houthi conflict, killing at least 349 and injuring at least 334.
According to a 2013 report from the European Parliament, since the 1970s Saudi Arabia has spent upward of $10 billion promoting Wahhabism throughout the world, mainly via Muslim charitable institutions, which have built schools and mosques to propagate the ideology. The same report states that “some of the money destined to charitable activities has been diverted toward rebel and terrorist organizations.”

The European Parliament isn’t alone. A 2009 State Department cable published by WikiLeaks revealed that “donors in Saudi Arabia constitute the most significant source of funding to Sunni terrorist groups worldwide.”

Another WikiLeaks entry: a 2014 email from John Podesta to Hillary Clinton, in which the senior White House advisor (who would go on to chair Clinton’s presidential campaign) warned that Saudi Arabia and Qatar were “providing clandestine financial and logistic support” to ISIS and “other radical Sunni groups in the region.” And former vice president Joe Biden has made similar statements about the Saudis funding extremist groups in Syria in a bid to topple Syrian president Bashar al-Assad.

A 2016 New York Times analysis found that the Saudis have been “both the arsonists and the firefighters” when it comes to terrorism, aiding the U.S. war on terror while continuing to fund the proselytization of extremist Islamist theology.

Questions also persist about the Saudi government’s ties to the 9/11 hijackers.

In a federal lawsuit filed in 2017, family members of hundreds of victims killed on 9/11 allege that Saudi Arabia “raised, laundered and paid substantial financial support to al-Qaeda,” including preparations for the 9/11 attacks. The complaint is one of several pending against the kingdom regarding 9/11.

Among the evidence: a now-declassified congressional report that concluded the hijackers had contact with people who were suspected of being agents of the Saudi government.

The report found that the Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia might have funded a “dry run” for the attacks.

The document describes a 1999 incident in which two Saudi nationals flew from Phoenix to Washington, D.C., to attend a party at the Saudi embassy there. While aboard, the two men asked the flight attendants technical questions. One of them twice attempted to enter the cockpit.

As a result, the report states, the plane made an emergency landing.
The FBI investigated the incident but did not pursue charges. Under questioning, the suspects, each of whom had ties to the Saudi embassy, told FBI agents that the embassy had paid for their flight. The agents believed the men might have been probing commercial flights for security lapses.

Blaster of JASTA: The declassified congressional report notwithstanding, McCain continued to play point man for the Saudis in Congress.

In 2016, two senators – Republican Rand Paul of Kentucky and Democrat Chris Murphy of Connecticut – made a bid to halt a $1.15 billion sale of M1 Abrams tanks to the kingdom.

Paul said the sale would fuel more war and bloodshed. But McCain took the Saudi side, calling the Houthi militia “stooges” of Iran and blaming a breakdown in peace talks on “Houthi intransigence.” Failing to support the Saudis with tanks would be interpreted as the United States shirking its responsibilities in the region, McCain argued. The Paul–Murphy bill was defeated, 71 to 27.

The senators staged a rematch this past June, when Paul and Murphy vainly took aim at a $510 million sale of weapons to the Saudis, part of a $110 billion deal President Trump had recently announced. This time the vote was closer: 47 in favor of halting the sale, 53 against.

Then there’s McCain’s stance on the Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act (JASTA), which passed in 2016 over President Obama’s veto. The law permits civil claims to go forward against nations alleged to have sponsored terrorist acts against American citizens – including the abovementioned suit filed by family members of 9/11 victims.

Though McCain voted with the majority to override Obama’s veto, that move appears to have been a concession to inevitability, as the consensus to override was nearly unanimous.

The Saudis spent millions on lobbyists to oppose the new law. According to several reports, the Saudi government also paid U.S. military veterans to lobby against JASTA.

And since JASTA’s passage, one military veteran in particular has been keen on passing a “fix” to the bill in the Senate.
In late November, McCain and his longtime ally, Republican senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, suggested an amendment to JASTA whereby foreign governments could be sued for terrorist attacks only if they “knowingly engage with a terrorist directly or indirectly, including financing.”

The pair claimed the amendment was necessary in order to avoid retaliatory laws from other nations that might allow, say, a civilian victim of a drone strike to sue the United States for damages, or for U.S. personnel to be hauled into a foreign court for war crimes.

McCain warned that if a country feared that its assets in the United States might be frozen because of a lawsuit, then that country might withdraw those assets, to the detriment of the U.S. economy.

The senator’s pro-Saudi gambit was met with howls of indignation from families of 9/11 victims and their supporters, who called it a betrayal that would nullify JASTA.

So far the proposal has gone nowhere.

In early 2016, when a Phoenix reporter confronted McCain about the $1 million endowment from the Saudis, the senator attempted to put distance between himself and the nonprofit that bears his name.

“I’m proud that the institute is named after me,” McCain said. “But I have nothing to do with it – except that they use my name just as the Goldwater Institute uses Goldwater’s name.”

McCain waved off all further questions.

The inconvenient truth of the matter is that Barry Goldwater did not found the Goldwater Institute. He merely permitted his name to be used.

So absurd was McCain’s claim to the contrary that Reason magazine’s Elizabeth Nolan Brown published a series of photos on her personal website, depicting McCain at the Sedona Forum and other McCain Institute functions, including its Christmas party. She titled the feature “34 Shots of John McCain Having ‘Nothing to Do with’ the McCain Institute.”
The Stains of John McCain

A demonstration on behalf of Raif Badawi outside Saudi Arabia’s embassy in Oslo in February 2017. Amnesty International Norway arranges monthly demonstrations to call attention to the plight of Badawi and other prisoners of conscience in Saudi Arabia. Human-Etisk Forbund via Flickr)

Fifteen of the nineteen 9/11 hijackers (photos shaded in pink) were Saudi nationals (image adapted from “The 9/11 Commission Report”)

U.S. Air Force Col. John A. Dramesi twice escaped the Hanoi Hilton and was twice recaptured. In 2008, Dramesi told Rolling Stone that the war hadn’t changed John McCain, that the senator remained “the undisciplined, spoiled brat that he was when he went in.” (photo via VeteranTributes.org)
McCain with his father, John S. McCain Sr., at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis while the younger McCain was an officer-in-training (family photo)

McCain (standing, right) with his squadron (U.S. Navy photo via Wikimedia Commons)

McCain being interviewed in 1973 after returning from North Vietnam. Owing to injuries from physical torture, he would be forever unable to raise his arms above shoulder level. (Thomas J. O’Halloran via Library of Congress [public domain])
Chapter 4: The Making of a Militarist

McCain should be remembered for his warmongering and jingoism, particularly in regard to the cataclysmic U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, and for milking his status as a former POW throughout his political career, shamelessly using it to further his ambitions.

As Mother Jones noted, dating back at least to the mid-1990s, McCain “has rarely missed an opportunity to call for the escalation of an international conflict.”

It’s a stance that has benefitted him politically, boosting his status as an expert in foreign affairs, while often having disastrous consequences for U.S. interests abroad, and sometimes leading to the deaths of U.S. soldiers and innocent civilians, as well as the rise of terrorist groups.
Much of McCain’s ire has focused on the Middle East and North Africa. He frequently campaigned for increased U.S. military involvement in the region – everything from arming rebel groups and friendly regimes to no-fly zones, bombing strikes, and “American boots on the ground.”

Iran was another favorite punching bag. Addressing a veterans group early in his 2008 presidential run, candidate McCain infamously joked, “You know that old Beach Boys song, ‘Bomb Iran’?” and then crooned the opening lines of the surf-rock classic “Barbara Ann” as “Bomb, bomb, bomb, bomb [Iran].”

McCain opposed the so-called Iran nuclear deal of 2015, which lifted international sanctions in return for limits on the nation’s nuclear program. And he slavishly backed McCain Institute megadonor Saudi Arabia, making sure the Senate rubber-stamped billions in U.S. arms sales to Iran’s rival in the region.

But the most egregious example of McCain’s warmongering was his fulsome support for the Iraq war and his promotion of its spurious provocation: that Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein had acquired or was close to acquiring weapons of mass destruction (WMDs).

McCain supported both the 1990 Persian Gulf War and President George H.W. Bush’s decision not to press on to Baghdad. But in the 2008 book The Real McCain: Why Conservatives Don’t Trust Him – and Why Independents Shouldn’t, Cliff Schecter writes of how the senator then proceeded to ally himself with the Project for the New American Century (PNAC), a faction of hawkish neoconservatives who believed the United States should dominate the post-Cold War world.

After George W. Bush won the general election in 2000, the new president assembled an administration that included a veritable PNAC murderer’s row: Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, and Paul Wolfowitz. And when the Bush White House revived the idea of finishing off Saddam after the 9/11 al-Qaeda attacks, McCain joined them in beating the drum for war.

A Politifact.com assessment of McCain’s record on Iraq found that the senator began suggesting that the United States take on Iraq in the days and weeks after 9/11. By July 2002, he was all in, stating on CBS’s Face the Nation that he and his fellow hawks should “prepare” the American public for the coming storm by telling them Saddam already possessed WMDs.
That bold, shining lie led to the invasion of 2003, in which hundreds of thousands of Iraqis were killed, along with more than **4,500 U.S. military personnel**. The U.S. intervention destabilized the region, leading to the rise of al-Qaeda in Iraq, and later, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), exporting and inspiring acts of terror worldwide.

In a **2016 interview with Britain’s Channel 4 News**, counterinsurgency expert David Kilcullen called the U.S. invasion of Iraq the “the biggest strategic screw-up since the invasion of Russia by Hitler in 1941.” Added Kilcullen, a former lieutenant colonel in the Australian Army who helped Gen. David Petraeus plan and implement the 2007 U.S. “surge” against the Sunni insurgency in Iraq: “There undeniably would be no ISIS if we had not invaded Iraq.”

You might think his gargantuan blunder in supporting the neocons’ costly intervention would have given the senator pause. But no: McCain has continued to seek to expand the U.S. military and to poke at various conflicts where that military can be used.

In January of last year, in his role as chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, McCain issued a white paper, **“Restoring American Power.”** In the document, he argues that the military needs to be rebuilt after years of alleged neglect by the Obama administration.

Never mind that the American military reportedly is already present in **177 of the world’s 196 nations**.

The goal is a “strong U.S. military that can project power globally to deter war,” the white paper states.

The price tag? A $430 billion increase to the national defense budget over the next five years. Those numbers would peg the annual price at more than $800 billion by fiscal year 2022.

In December, President Trump signed the McCain-backed National Defense Authorization Act, which starts the nation on the road toward that goal **by allocating nearly $700 billion for defense** – a 13 percent hike over the prior year.

**War: The Health of the State:** As Schecter details in his 2008 book, McCain wasn’t always so bloodthirsty.
For instance, early in his brief tenure in the U.S. House of Representatives, McCain voted against an authorization for President Ronald Reagan to keep troops in Lebanon.

It was a prescient stance, considering what happened in October 1983, when a suicide bomber drove a truck filled with explosives into a U.S. Marine barracks in war-torn Beirut, killing 241 service members.

In the 1980s, McCain supported assisting the Contras, the guerrilla group that attempted unsuccessfully to overthrow a communist regime in Nicaragua, and he supported the 1983 U.S. invasion of Grenada. But he was skeptical of military operations in Haiti and Somalia in the 1990s, and he initially opposed sending ground troops to Bosnia and Kosovo.

Why did McCain go from semi-isolationist to leader of the war parade?

Schecter suggests that the ever-ambitious politician needed a base within the GOP to help him run for president. “Since that base didn’t include religious or economic conservatives, perhaps he chose to fly like a hawk.”

There are other factors. Arizona is home to several military bases, including Luke Air Force Base, a U.S. Army installation at Fort Huachuca, and the army’s Yuma Proving Ground, one of the largest military facilities in the world, where major weapons systems are tested and helicopter pilots and parachutists train. The state ranks fourth nationwide in aerospace and defense manufacturing, with major government contractors such as Raytheon, Honeywell, and Boeing all having a presence.

In other words, war is good for business.

In recent years, McCain has received his share of donations from defense contractors.

According to the nonprofit Center for Responsive Politics’ website OpenSecrets.org, of all members of the Senate since 1989, McCain ranks third in donations from defense, with nearly $1.8 million total.

A Very Fortunate Son: John Sidney McCain III’s penchant for military conflict might be present in his DNA.

His great-great grandfather, a Mississippi slave owner, died fighting for the Confederacy in the Civil War.
His grandfather, John Sidney “Slew” McCain, Sr., was a four-star admiral who led a U.S. Navy fast carrier task force – a mini armada consisting of four aircraft carriers and support ships – in the Pacific during World War II and was aboard the battleship Missouri when the Japanese surrendered.

His father, John Sidney “Jack” McCain, Jr., likewise rose to the rank of four-star admiral after making a name for himself as the cigar-chomping commander of a submarine during the Second World War. He would go on to serve as commander of all U.S. forces in the Pacific, including the Vietnam theater from 1968 to 1972, the peak years of the war.

The McCain who would be senator was born on a military base in the Panama Canal Zone on August 29, 1936. In his 1999 memoir Faith of My Fathers, McCain depicts his legendary temper as practically congenital. As a child, when he got angry, he’d hold his breath until he blacked out. His parents broke him of the habit by dunking him in a bathtub filled with cold water.

His father’s Navy career kept the family on the move. McCain changed schools frequently; the perennial new kid on the block and small in stature, he’d resort to fist-fights to prove himself. When the family landed in the D.C. area, McCain was sent to Episcopal High School, an exclusive, all-white boarding school for boys in Alexandria, Virginia. There, his bad attitude earned him the nicknames “Punk” and “McNasty.”

Given his pedigree, McCain’s eventual enrollment at the United States Naval Academy was almost inevitable. He describes his time in Annapolis as “a four-year course of insubordination and rebellion.” McCain graduated 894th in his class of 899 in 1958. (Rebel or not, he was following in his father’s footsteps in one sense: In 1931, Jack McCain graduated Annapolis 423rd out of 441.)

As a Navy flier-in-training, McCain reveled in the life of a playboy, driving a Corvette, whiling away his off hours drinking and womanizing, and generally misusing his youth.

It didn’t seem to bother him that his reputation as a pilot was far from superlative. He crashed two planes even before getting to Vietnam, ditching one in the Corpus Christi Bay in 1960 and another in the woods near Cape Charles, Virginia, in 1965. In between, during a training mission over southern Spain, he caused what he describes in his memoir as a “minor international incident.” He was flying low, engaging in some “daredevil clowning,” when his plane hit a power line and knocked out elec-
trical service to a swath of the countryside. (A 2008 Los Angeles Times investigation compared McCain’s descriptions of the mishaps to accounts found in military documents and offered by witnesses, exposing multiple discrepancies.)

WHERE THE ACTION WAS: Nonetheless, in mid-1967, recently married and the father of an infant daughter, McCain was assigned to the aircraft carrier USS Forrestal, which was headed to the Gulf of Tonkin, off the coast of North Vietnam.

Throughout his life, McCain never expressed regret for helping to prosecute a war that proved unpopular with the American public and one that many regard as having been both immoral and illegal.

But for a brief period following his combat deployment, he evidently experienced some doubts.

McCain was part of a group of pilots assigned to fly a series of bombing missions off the Forrestal. On July 29, a few days into the bombardment, a six-foot Zuni rocket misfired from one of the jets on the flight deck. The rogue missile ruptured the fuel tank on another plane, killing its pilot and setting off a series of explosions that quickly became an inferno. In total, 134 men were killed and another 161 were wounded.

At the time of the misfire, McCain was awaiting takeoff alongside the jet that was struck by the Zuni. He was able to escape unhurt. Interviewed hours after the disaster by New York Times correspondent Bernard Weinraub, McCain said the Zuni had either hit his plane or the one next to it. In later years, McCain said it was his own plane that was hit. The Navy’s investigation, which was not made public for years, would show that the rocket hit the plane next to McCain’s. The discrepancies gave rise to a number of conspiracy theories that implicated McCain in the Forrestal disaster – theories that have been routinely and rigorously debunked.

The day after the disaster, McCain spoke with veteran Times reporter R.W. Apple Jr., who knew of the flier’s lineage and sought him out after the Forrestal conflagration. Three months later, in a story published just after McCain was taken prisoner by the North Vietnamese, Apple described that conversation:

It was almost three months ago that the young, prematurely gray Navy pilot was sitting in a villa in Saigon, sipping a scotch with friends and recalling the holocaust that he had managed to live through....
“It’s a difficult thing to say,” he remarked after a long time. “But now that I’ve seen what the bombs and the napalm did to the people on our ship, I’m not so sure that I want to drop any more of that stuff on North Vietnam.”

The qualms didn’t last much longer than the buzz from the scotch McCain was savoring. He was soon flying more sorties over enemy territory off another carrier, the USS Oriskany.

The missions were part of Operation Rolling Thunder, a 44-month barrage of air-strikes ordered by President Lyndon Johnson. From March 1965 to November 1968, Rolling Thunder launched more than 300,000 missions over North Vietnam, part of a strategy to halt the enemy’s ability to funnel weapons into South Vietnam, and to persuade the North Vietnamese to negotiate an end to the war.

The operation failed both objectives, but it did slaughter a lot of Vietnamese, raining 643,000 tons of bombs on the country and killing at least 52,000 civilians. Overall, the war killed 58,220 U.S. personnel. A 2008 study published in the medical journal BMJ estimated the Vietnamese death toll during the period of U.S. involvement in the war at 1.7 million.

In his 1999 biography, John McCain: An American Odyssey, Robert Timberg writes that McCain remained unapologetic about his participation in the U.S. killing machine. “Nobody made me fly over Vietnam,” he quotes McCain as saying. “Nobody drafts you into doing those kinds of things. That’s what I was trained to do, and that’s what I wanted to do.”

“I have heard there was one B-52 pilot who refused to fly the missions during the [1972] Christmas bombing. You always run into that kind. When the going gets tough, they find out their conscience is bothering them.”

Decades earlier, in a 1973 first-person article for U.S. News and World Report about his experience as a POW, McCain sarcastically addressed those in the military who might have objected to the war.

McCain’s article is liberally sprinkled with the racial epithet “gooks” (which, he took care to clarify, “is what we called the North Vietnamese”). He also offered observations such as, “The Oriental, as you may know, likes to beat around the bush quite a bit.”

Coming so soon after his repatriation, such expressions might be forgiven, even in print. But McCain continued to use the term “gook” decades past his release.
According to several news reports from 2000, McCain regularly tossed out the term while telling old war stories to reporters on his campaign bus. It took a few months for journalists to call him on it. When they did, he bristled.

“I hate the gooks,” McCain stated. “I will hate them as long as I live.”

The senator qualified this, saying he was referring specifically to his captors in Hanoi and that he did so “in language that might offend some people” because of the torture he and his fellow POWs had experienced at their hands. “Gook is the kindest appellation I can give,” McCain said.

McCain pointed out that in 1995 he had helped President Bill Clinton to re-establish diplomatic relations with Vietnam. He also claimed a bond with the Vietnamese who’d fled after the south fell and emigrated to the United States.

Unsurprisingly, Asian-American groups and civil-rights organizations condemned McCain for using bigoted language. They noted that “gook” is as offensive to Asians as the n-word is to African-Americans. The outrage forced an apology from McCain, who promised never to use the ethnic slur again.

**Prisoner of War:** On October 26, 1967, as McCain was flying his 23rd bombing run, an enemy surface-to-air missile downed his A-4E Skyhawk. McCain ejected, breaking both arms and his knee, and fell into a lake near Hanoi’s Old Quarter. North Vietnamese civilians fished him out. Soldiers responding to the crash bayoneted McCain and broke his shoulder with a rifle butt.

The next stop was the infamous Hoa Lò prison complex, which POWs ironically dubbed the Hanoi Hilton.

In *Faith of My Fathers*, McCain writes that he believes his torturers went easy on him because his father was an admiral. And not just any admiral: At the time of McCain’s capture, Jack McCain was commander of all U.S. naval forces in Europe. Six months into his son’s captivity, President Lyndon Johnson appointed Jack McCain commander-in-chief of the U.S. Pacific Command – a post from which he oversaw all military operations in that part of the world, including those in Vietnam.
The North Vietnamese called McCain “the Crown Prince.” He likely would not have received medical treatment at all, he writes, had his dad not been a “big admiral,” as one jailer referred to him. McCain knew he offered “propaganda value” as long as he was, as he puts it, “injured, but alive.”

Like most of the nearly 600 Americans held prisoner by the North Vietnamese, McCain was tortured into signing a false confession, in which he admitted to being a “black criminal” who performed “the deeds of an air pirate.” He also made an audio recording for his jailers, stating that he was “guilty of crimes against the Vietnamese country and people.”

In his memoir, McCain writes that this violation of the military’s Code of Conduct, which holds that a prisoner is permitted to provide to his captors only “name, rank, service number and date of birth” and is forbidden from making any “oral or written statements” in assistance of the enemy, caused a period of “intense despair” that has never completely abandoned him.

McCain did steadfastly adhere to the section of the code stating that a prisoner may “accept neither parole nor special favors from the enemy.” He refused North Vietnamese offers to send him home ahead of POWs who’d been in captivity for longer periods of time, and he was not released until North Vietnam freed all U.S. prisoners in 1973.

If McCain’s military trajectory was the result of a son’s attempt to emerge from the shadow of his father, he accomplished his mission. He and his fellow POWs were welcomed home as heroes. Jack McCain, the top U.S. officer in the Vietnam theater from 1968 until his retirement in 1972, presided over a war that was doomed to failure.

The Jacksonville suburb of Orange Park, Florida, gave Jack’s son a homecoming parade. Jacksonville’s mayor presented him with the key to the city. The Navy awarded him several medals for his courage, including the Silver Star, and promoted him to commander. After serving first as the commanding officer of a Navy attack squadron and then as the Navy’s liaison to the U.S. Senate, he retired in 1981 with the rank of captain.

The “gook” gaffe was one of the rare instances when McCain’s recitation of his Vietnam ordeals landed him in hot water. Otherwise, he successfully touted his war record. Indeed, he might never have gotten elected to Congress without it.
McCain admits as much in his 2002 memoir, *Worth the Fighting For*, a follow-up to *Faith of My Fathers*: “Thanks to my prisoner of war experience, I had, as they say in politics, a good first story to sell.”

In a 2008 *New Republic* feature, reporter Noam Scheiber described a slickly produced TV ad that aired during McCain’s run for Congress in 1982. The ad used footage of the recently freed prisoner of war disembarking from a plane upon his return to the United States.

McCain’s voiceover claims his experience as a POW left him a “better and enriched person.”

The ad ends with McCain waxing philosophical as he drives through the desert. “I can tell you, if you go for six years without being able to see the sunset or the sunrise, like I did, you can truly appreciate the beauty of what we have.”

During a candidate forum that same year, an audience member challenged McCain about being an outsider with no roots in Arizona.

His reply would become the stuff of legend, repeated in subsequent years by fan and foe:

*Listen, pal. I spent 22 years in the Navy. My father was in the Navy. My grandfather was in the Navy. We in military service tend to move a lot. We have to live in all parts of the country, all parts of the world. I wish I could have had the luxury, like you, of growing up and living and spending my entire life in a nice place like the First District of Arizona, but I was doing other things. As a matter of fact, when I think about it now, the place I lived longest in my life was Hanoi.*

**Self-Image, Self-Exploitation:** Occasionally, McCain claimed not to like publicly discussing his time as a POW. In reality, he talked about it all the time.

In 1985, as McCain began his second term in the House and prepared for his Senate run the following year to fill Barry Goldwater’s seat, McCain accompanied former CBS news anchor Walter Cronkite to Vietnam for a TV special marking the ten-year anniversary of the fall of Saigon. McCain’s onscreen time in *Honor, Duty and a War Called Vietnam* includes a visit to his old cell in the Hanoi Hilton and a stop at a monument the Vietnamese erected at the lake where they captured him.
McCain’s willingness to hitch his POW experience to his campaign wagon rankled some fellow vets over the years. Former Arizona congressman and Korean War veteran Sam Steiger caused a stir in 1985 when he wrote a column for a local magazine in Prescott, Arizona, lambasting McCain.

“Mr. McCain has never failed to invoke his POW experience at any gathering, regardless of the advertised topic,” Steiger wrote of his fellow Republican. “In the past, that would have been the height of bad taste; now it is clearly a recipe for political success.”

In a subsequent interview with an Arizona Republic columnist, Steiger was even more blunt.

“The only reason he was elected is because he was a POW in Vietnam,” he said.

At the time, Steiger was considering his own Senate run, a fact that might explain the shot across McCain’s bow. (Steiger had a contentious relationship with McCain, at one point reportedly working for him in the senator’s Phoenix office and later criticizing him in print.) But he was right about McCain’s trials as a POW alchemizing into ballot-box gold.

David Brock and Paul Waldman dedicate a chapter of Free Ride: John McCain and the Media to McCain’s regurgitation of his Vietnam yarns. “[H]e built his entire 2000 campaign for the presidency around his POW story,” they write, noting that his ads included black-and-white stills depicting his time as a prisoner.

McCain played his POW card as his “political ace in the hole,” write Brock and Waldman. Once, batting away reporters’ questions about the Keating Five, the senator snapped, “Even the Vietnamese didn’t question my ethics.” During an appearance on Meet the Press, he quipped, “I haven’t had so much fun since my last interrogation.”

Even when attempting to poke fun at himself, he reminded audiences of his bona fides. In John McCain: An American Odyssey, Robert Timberg writes about how, in 1999 at the annual Gridiron Club Dinner – the Fourth Estate’s answer to a Friar’s Club roast – McCain took the podium wearing a chestful of fake medals and told a series of rib-ticklers at his own expense.
“Each day while shaving, he said, he asked himself, ‘Okay, John, you’re an incredible war hero, an inspiration to all Americans, but what qualifies you to be President of the United States?’” His answer? “The Hanoi Hilton had been perfect training for the Oval Office. ‘In both cases you know that every time someone walks in the door, it’s gonna be bad news.’”

The laugh line did double duty as a clever way for McCain to invoke his war record. Similarly, it’s no mistake that McCain’s 1999 memoir, which covered his time in Vietnam, was published the year before he ran for president.

That same year, Phoenix New Times writer Amy Silverman explored the realm of hardcore – and mostly right-wing – McCain haters. A substantial number in their ranks were convinced that more than two decades after the Vietnam War ended, the reunified Socialist Republic of Vietnam was continuing to hold POWs – a belief McCain did not share.

Many on the far right would answer the title of the New Times story – “Is John McCain a War Hero?” – with an emphatic “Hell, no!” Some called McCain a “traitor” and a “wimp” for signing a confession under duress. A few believed he was a “Manchurian candidate,” brainwashed by the communists to serve their ends.

Not everyone had broken under torture.

John Dramesi was an air force colonel who was shot down about six months before McCain. He twice escaped from the North Vietnamese, was twice recaptured, and he endured horrific torture as a result.

For his valor, Dramesi was twice awarded the Air Force Cross, the second-highest medal a USAF member can receive. He received numerous other medals, including the Silver Star, three Bronze Stars, and five Purple Hearts.

In Faith of My Fathers, McCain recounted the story of one of Dramesi’s bold escape attempts, calling the colonel “one of the toughest men I have ever known.”

During an interview for an October 2008 Rolling Stone article, “John McCain: Make Believe Maverick,” Dramesi told the magazine that the war had not changed McCain, and that the senator was “still the undisciplined, spoiled brat that he was when he went in.”

That same month, when the Chicago Reader interviewed Dramesi, he all but said he’d be voting for Barack Obama for president.

He also alluded to McCain’s tendency to be rough on his aircraft.
McCain lost at least four planes during his Navy career: two before he shipped out to Vietnam, one aboard the *Forrestal*, and the jet he lost when he was shot down over Hanoi. “Anybody who loses one airplane is lucky to still have a career in the air force,” Dramesi scoffed.

Dramesi was far from alone in concluding that McCain got a leg up because of the admiral’s stars worn by his forebears. It was an impression McCain himself did not deny. In *Worth the Fighting For*, he admits to having lived the life of a rake before shipping out. And after the war, when the Navy rejected his application to the prestigious National War College, he appealed the decision “all the way to the secretary of the Navy, my father’s friend, and now my senate colleague, John Warner."

In his interview with *Rolling Stone*, Dramesi, himself a War College attendee, added a twist to the list of benefits McCain accrued thanks to the family name. The North Vietnamese didn’t know McCain's father was an admiral, Dramesi said, until McCain volunteered the information.

“I had to tell them, or I would have died in bed,” Dramesi quoted McCain as having told him.

Asked to assess his fellow officer’s record as a POW, Dramesi did not seem overly impressed. McCain “wasn’t exceptional one way or another,” Dramesi said.
The Stains of John McCain

Cindy McCain campaigning for her husband in Jacksonville, Florida, in September 2008 (Craig O’Neal via Flickr)

John and Cindy McCain greet the crowd at the 2008 Republican National Convention in St. Paul, Minnesota (Carol Highsmith via Library of Congress)

Cindy McCain’s father, bootlegger-turned-booze-tycoon Jim Hensley (via Wikimedia Commons)

John McCain and Carol Shepp wed in 1965. She raised their three children alone while he was a POW. They divorced in April 1980, and McCain remarried a month later. (family photo)

John and Cindy McCain greet the crowd at the 2008 Republican National Convention in St. Paul, Minnesota (Carol Highsmith via Library of Congress)
Chapter 5: Family Ties

Following his return from Vietnam, McCain left his handicapped first wife for a comely Arizona beer heiress -- a calculating first step on his rise to prominence and power.

During his 2008 run for president, at a church forum in Southern California, John McCain described the demise of his first marriage as his “greatest moral failing.” It was less a moment of truth than it might at first seem. McCain was speaking to a crowd of evangelical Christians, for whom the admission of sin is practically a mantra.

More than a moral failing, the tale of McCain’s divorce in 1980 from Carol Shepp McCain, the woman who had waited five and a half years for his return from captivity as a POW in North Vietnam, rips the curtain back on the real McCain and the overweening ambition that has motivated his every move.
McCain traded in Carol – whom a car crash had left disabled and marred – for Cindy Lou Hensley, a former rodeo queen and heiress whose fortune would provide the means for him to run for Congress in his newly adopted state of Arizona.

**Love Stories:** John and Carol married in 1965. She was a former swimsuit model from Philadelphia. He was a swaggering Navy pilot with a reputation for hard partying and womanizing. After his capture, he’d refer to her among his fellow POWs as “Long Tall Sally” – an allusion to her slim figure and the fact that at five-foot-eight, she was only an inch shorter than he was.

The couple took up residence outside Jacksonville, where McCain was stationed. He’d adopted Carol’s two sons from a previous marriage, and in 1966, she gave birth to their daughter Sidney.

In mid-1967, McCain shipped off for duty in Vietnam. After his plane took a hit from anti-aircraft fire during his 23rd mission a few months later, he’d spend the next half-decade at the Hanoi Hilton.

Unbeknown to McCain, Carol had a car wreck on Christmas Eve 1969 while visiting her family in Pennsylvania. Driving alone, she skidded on an icy road and slammed her car into a telephone pole. When she was found, both her legs and an arm were broken and she’d suffered severe internal injuries. She was hospitalized for six months and ultimately endured 23 operations in order to regain use of her legs. According to Robert Timberg’s reverential 1999 biography, *John McCain: An American Odyssey*, both McCains were on crutches when they were reunited after the North Vietnamese released McCain in 1973.

Owing to the accident, the once willowy Carol had lost five inches in height. She would walk with a limp for the rest of her life.

Timberg quotes Carol as saying, “I thought, of course, we would live happily ever after.”

It was not to be. In 1974, the Navy assigned McCain the command of an air squadron in Jacksonville, and he resumed the life of a playboy.

Timberg suggests that some of McCain’s conquests were his subordinates. When he asked about the alleged indiscretions, McCain admitted to “a series of dalliances” but denied they involved women who served under him.
In 1977, McCain became the Navy’s liaison to the Senate, a position his father had once held. Serving as a political concierge of sorts, he picked up powerful contacts, including Republican senator John Tower of Texas, an infamous boozer and skirt chaser who became his mentor.

At a reception in Hawaii on a Senate junket in 1979, McCain met Cindy Lou Hensley. Eighteen years his junior, she was visiting the islands with her parents, Jim and Marguerite. Jim’s company, Hensley & Co., was one of the largest Anheuser-Busch distributors in the nation, making him one of the richest men in Arizona.

McCain’s time working in the Senate had given him an appetite for politics, and he’d already considered and rejected running for Congress from Florida. Arizona, which was growing in population and about to add a congressional seat, seemed a better bet. Running as the son-in-law of an influential beer baron would tilt the odds even further in his favor.

In his 2002 memoir, *Worth the Fighting For*, McCain claimed he and Carol separated before the affair with Cindy began. But according to a 2008 piece in the Los Angeles Times that cited the divorce paperwork, McCain continued living with Carol for nine months after he began dating Cindy.

When McCain filed for divorce in early 1980, Carol did not contest it. A court granted the divorce in April of that year, and McCain married Cindy in a ceremony at Phoenix’s First United Methodist Church in May. In an augur of McCain’s political future, Republican senator William Cohen of Maine served as best man and Democratic senator Gary Hart of Colorado was an usher.

McCain told biographer Timberg that the divorce came about because he and Carol had both “changed” in the years they were apart. Carol offered a different appraisal. “I attribute it more to John turning 40 and wanting to be 25 again than I do anything else.”

Reportedly, the divorce terms were favorable to Carol, who wound up running the White House Visitors Office during the Reagan administration.

McCain writes in *Worth the Fighting For* that First Lady Nancy Reagan treated him with “a cool correctness that made her displeasure clear” after the divorce. But when the Daily Mail interviewed Carol in 2008, she endorsed her ex-husband's presidential run, calling him a “good guy” and saying they remained friends. She said her physical infirmities had had nothing to do with the breakup.
Billionaire and former presidential candidate Ross Perot was less charitable. A longtime benefactor of POWs and their families, the prickly Texan had paid Carol’s medical bills while McCain was locked up in Hanoi. Perot told the Daily Mail that McCain was “a classic opportunist,” a man who’d do anything for “attention and glory.”

Added Perot: “After [McCain] came home, Carol walked with a limp. So he threw her over for a poster girl with big money from Arizona. And the rest is history.”

**Beer Money:** When Jim Hensley died in 2000, Cindy McCain inherited ownership of [Hensley & Co.](#). The privately held corporation takes in $600 million in sales revenue and employs 1,200 people, according to its website. Cindy is chairman of the board.

Her net worth has been estimated at anywhere from $100 million to $200 million. Though McCain signed a prenuptial agreement, he is regularly ranked as one of the richest members of the Senate – eighth, according to an assessment by the Center for Responsive Politics, which estimated his net worth in 2016 at nearly $15 million.

Other than his Senate salary and Navy pension, McCain’s wealth is directly attributable to his second wife.

Being rich occasionally caused McCain political grief – like the time during the 2008 campaign when he was unable to tell a reporter how many homes he and his wife owned. (Politico reported the number as eight.) Obama used the incident to depict his opponent as out of touch.

When ABC’s George Stephanopoulos asked Cindy McCain about that portrayal, she got defensive.

“Listen, my father built – he had nothing,” she replied. “He and my mother sold everything they had to raise $10,000 [to buy a distributorship]. That was a lot of money then. Now, for what my father built, it’s not much. My father is the great American dream. That’s what we want for every American.”

The truth is that Jim Hensley’s great American dream bears a striking resemblance to that of Al Capone.

Hensley was a bootlegger and a convicted felon.
In a **Phoenix New Times** exposé, reporters John Dougherty and Amy Silverman wrote that James Hensley and his brother Eugene were partners with Kemper Marley in the liquor trade in the 1940s.

In Arizona history, the name Kemper Marley will forever be associated with gambling, organized crime, and the 1976 assassination of *Arizona Republic* reporter Don Bolles, who died after someone used a remote control to detonate a bomb planted under his Datsun.

Police suspected that Marley ordered the hit. Bolles had written several stories accusing Marley of conflicts of interest and corruption on various state boards. The reports led to Marley’s resignation from the Arizona Racing Commission, the agency that oversees the state’s horse- and dog-racing tracks. (Marley, who died in 1990, never faced charges in the slaying, which remains shrouded in mystery.)

Citing federal documents, Dougherty and Silverman wrote that Marley, who’d taken over much of Arizona’s wholesale liquor trade after Prohibition ended in 1933, had a “controlling financial role” in two distributorships the Hensley brothers operated.

Federal agents arrested Gene and Jim in 1948, and they were convicted on charges related to bootlegging. Gene got a year in prison, but Jim caught a break: a six-month suspended sentence.

The *New Times* story doesn’t mention anything about Jim Hensley selling “everything [he] had” to raise money to buy the distributorship. But it does note that in April of 1955, he sold his shares in Ruidoso Downs, a horse-racing track in New Mexico that he and Gene had purchased a few years prior in partnership with Clarence E. “Teak” Baldwin, an alleged bookie.

Baldwin, in turn, was said to have ties to Kemper Marley, who, police at the time believed, put up money for bookmakers and owned a wire service that had been linked to the Al Capone gang’s bookmaking operation.

**Bucks + Booze = A Potent Cocktail:** Its colorful history aside, the Hensley family fortune was instrumental in John McCain’s success as a politician.
When John and Cindy McCain moved to Phoenix in 1981, Jim Hensley gave his son-in-law a $50,000-a-year job as a PR man for Hensley & Co. That allowed McCain to start meeting bigwigs and glad-handing on the old man’s dime as he waited for a House seat to open up.

It was a short wait. In January 1982, former House minority leader John Rhodes announced that he was retiring from politics and would not seek re-election from the state’s First Congressional District, a Republican stronghold just east of Phoenix. According to Timberg’s biography, Cindy purchased a house in the district on the day of Rhodes’s announcement.

The New Times exposé in 2000 noted that in 1982, Cindy “drew more than $700,000 in salary and bonuses from Hensley-related enterprises,” which allowed McCain to lend his campaign $167,000 out of the total of $569,545 he spent to get elected. That same year, Jim and Marguerite Hensley and employees of their company had donated $11,000 to McCain.

Outspending his three rivals, McCain won the GOP primary with a plurality of 32 percent. He went on to clobber the token Democrat he faced in the general election.

McCain continued to accept donations from Hensley & Co. employees, and from the liquor industry as a whole, as he moved to the Senate, where he has served since 1987.

According to the Center for Responsive Politics database, since 1990 McCain has accepted more than $1 million from the booze business, making him the top recipient of alcohol-industry donations in the Senate during that time period.

Reportedly, McCain has recused himself from votes pertaining to the liquor industry. But New Times wrote that in his then-role as chairman of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, he influenced alcohol legislation through “inaction rather than action”: By choosing not to bring up alcohol-related issues, he held up bills that might have hurt the industry.
**Mother’s Little Helpers:** Cindy McCain helped her husband campaign for office, especially in 2000 and 2008, during his two failed stabs at the presidency. She also bore him one daughter and two sons, and in 1991, she brought back another daughter from an orphanage run by Mother Teresa in Bangladesh. The McCains adopted the child, named Bridget.

For the most part, Cindy McCain has been an invaluable asset to her husband’s life and career.

One might also argue that McCain helped his wife escape prosecution in 1994, after the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration investigated her in relation to painkillers she obtained illegally from the American Voluntary Medical Team (AVMT), a nonprofit she founded in 1988.

AVMT flew around the globe, dispensing medical aid in war-torn regions, Third World countries, and disaster zones. But as Phoenix New Times reporters Amy Silverman and Jeremy Voas explained in their 1994 story “Opiate for the Mrs.,” Cindy McCain was using the organization as her own private pharmacy to feed an addiction to Percocet and Vicodin.

Whenever she needed more, she got one of the doctors who worked with AVMT to write a prescription in an employee’s name without the employee’s knowledge. Some at AVMT alleged that Cindy also used doctors’ DEA numbers – Drug Enforcement Administration-assigned registration numbers that are required whenever a healthcare provider writes a prescription for a controlled substance – to obtain opioids.

Tom Gosinski, AVMT’s director of government and international affairs from late 1991 until early 1993, turned over his journal to Silverman, who excerpted it extensively for the New Times article. In the journal, Gosinski processed his thoughts regarding Cindy McCain’s increasingly erratic behavior, which began in the summer of 1992.

An excerpt from that summer:

“During my short tenure at AVMT I have been surrounded by what on the surface appears to be the ultimate all-American family. In reality, I am working for a very sad, lonely woman whose marriage of convenience to a U.S. Senator has driven her to: distance herself from friends; cover feelings of despair with drugs; and replace lonely moments with self-indulgences.”

And another, from October:
“Well, it is done. Last night Jim and Smitty confronted Cindy regarding her dependency to prescription drugs and she admitted to her addiction. I understand that she told the Hensleys her addiction was rooted in her unhappiness – her marriage – and that she took the pills to mask her depression. The Hensleys told Cindy they knew she had a problem because of her severe mood swings and her change in character. They also said her meanness towards others was not excusable and must stop....”

Cindy McCain fired Gosinski in mid-January 1993, telling him her charity could no longer afford to keep him onboard. A year later he sued for wrongful termination. (According to New Times, Gosinski’s suit was vague in referencing his former boss’ drug problem.) Gosinski’s lawyer sought a $250,000 settlement.

In response, John McCain summoned John Dowd, the attorney who’d helped get him off with a mild rebuke from the Senate Ethics Committee after the Keating Five scandal. Dowd, who until recently represented Donald Trump in the U.S. Department of Justice’s probe into Russian meddling in the 2016 presidential election, convinced the Maricopa County Attorney to investigate Gosinski for extortion.

Maricopa County ultimately closed the case without charging Gosinski. And Gosinski’s wrongful-termination suit went nowhere.

Another investigation, however, was ongoing: In early 1993, after Cindy McCain fired him, Gosinski contacted the DEA and told them what he knew.

New Times’ Silverman and Voas had little hope of obtaining documents pertaining to that probe anytime in the near future.

But thanks to John Dowd, the journalists had access to an equally rich trove: the files from the county’s closed investigation of Gosinski, which were accessible under state public-records laws.

That case file contained interviews with Cindy McCain, in which she admitted to investigators that she’d obtained prescriptions for narcotics in the names of AVMT employees. There were also letters from Dowd to the county attorney’s office, stating that Cindy had been addicted to painkillers.

Before turning over the records to New Times, the county attorney gave the McCain camp a heads-up.
Thus forewarned, John McCain’s political strategist Jay Smith quickly rounded up a group of friendly local reporters (Silverman and Voas were not among them) to listen as Cindy McCain tearfully got out ahead of the bad news – and to embargo their stories until the day the county released its documents to *New Times*.

Predictably, the mainstream press painted Cindy McCain as a brave former addict who was coming forward with her tale in the hopes that it might inspire others.

“If what I say can help just one person to face the problem, it’s worthwhile,” she said.

When *New Times* dropped its bombshell, the article caught several inconsistencies in Cindy McCain’s sob story. For instance, some reporters had written that John McCain first learned of his wife’s pill popping in 1994. But Cindy had told county investigators that she’d also been in drug treatment in 1991 and 1992.

And *New Times* noted that had Cindy McCain not been the wife of a senator, the U.S. Attorney’s Office likely would have passed the case to state prosecutors once the DEA finished its investigation. Under Arizona law, she could have faced ten to twenty years in prison. (Ultimately, the feds allowed her to enter a pretrial diversion program and pay a fine.)

Both times John McCain ran for president, in 2000 and 2008, the tale of Cindy’s pill pilfering would dog his campaign.

In 2008, for instance, the *Washington Post* published “A Tangled Story of Addiction.” In combing through the record concerning Cindy McCain’s drug problems, reporters uncovered a previously overlooked inconsistency: In past interviews, she claimed that a 1989 back surgery, coupled with stress from the Keating Five investigation, had been the genesis of her drug dependency.

The *Post* quoted from a first-person account of her struggle with addiction that was published in *Newsweek* in 2000. She’d begun taking Vicodin in 1989, she wrote, after she’d “ruptured a couple of disks carrying my one-year-old, Bridget in a pack on my back.”

The *Post* pointed out that Bridget, the child the McCains adopted from Bangladesh, was born in 1991.
CINDY MCCAIN’S REDEMPTION CRUSADE: In much the same way that John McCain rehabilitated his public image from the Keating Five mess by championing campaign finance reform, Cindy McCain has used her advocacy for ending human trafficking to remake herself as a crusader.

Senator McCain and the McCain Institute have assisted his wife with this PR facelift. Cindy McCain sits on the institute’s Human Trafficking Advisory Council alongside actor Ashton Kutcher and longtime Republican political operative Charlie Black. There’s at least one panel on human trafficking at the institute’s annual Sedona Forum, with Cindy leading the discussion.

The United States and the United Nations have promulgated precise definitions of the term “human trafficking.” But Cindy McCain and many other anti-trafficking advocates often conflate human trafficking, sex trafficking, and consensual sex work. (U.S. law defines human trafficking as inducing any child into labor or commercial sexual exploitation, or using force, fraud, or coercion to do the same to an adult.)

Cindy McCain has parlayed her role as anti-sex-trafficking warrior into a sort of minor celebritydom, complete with TV appearances, testimony at congressional hearings, and a volunteer gig as co-chair of the Arizona governor’s Human Trafficking Council. In the process, she and the McCain Institute have promoted bogus statistics and propagated dangerous myths about sex workers.

One such myth: the widely debunked urban legend that the Super Bowl coincides with a spike in sex trafficking in the event’s host city. Even a study sponsored by the McCain Institute failed to establish any connection.

The McCain Institute has gained dubious allies along the advocacy road. One such accomplice is Dominique Roe-Sepowitz, a professor of social work at Arizona State University who authored the abovementioned McCain Institute-sponsored Super Bowl study.

Among Roe-Sepowitz’s outrageous creations was Project ROSE, a cooperative venture with the Phoenix Police Department, in which cops arrested suspected sex workers and gave them the choice of jail or a diversion program at a local church.

The police department eventually phased out the project in the face of growing opposition and pushback from the ACLU of Arizona. (The program itself was an utter failure. Only 30 percent of those who opted for diversion saw it through to the end.)
For an academic, Roe-Sepowitz has expressed some eyebrow-raising attitudes toward the people she says she wants to help.

“Once you’ve prostituted, you can never not have prostituted,” she told an Al Jazeera America interviewer in 2013. “You are always identified, even by yourself, that way. Having that many body parts in your body parts, having that many body fluids near you and doing things that are freaky and weird, really messes up your ideas of what a relationship looks like, and intimacy.”

The McCain Institute continues to partner with Roe-Sepowitz, who, like Cindy McCain, has a seat on Arizona’s Human Trafficking Council.

In June 2017, after the Trump administration floated Cindy McCain’s name as a possible appointment as an ambassador at-large for human rights, Reason magazine’s Elizabeth Nolan Brown skewered her as a “crony philanthropist.” Underscoring Cindy McCain’s human-trafficking hyperbole, Nolan Brown depicted the Sedona Forum as an annual schmoozefest for plutocrats and high government officials.

The rumored nomination never came to pass. But Cindy McCain continues to garner plaudits for her work.

Already in 2018 she has received ASU’s Martin Luther King Jr. Servant-Leadership Award for her work against human trafficking. And on January 8, Arizona governor Doug Ducey publicly acknowledged her during his state of the state address, thanking her for her “tireless work to shine a light on human trafficking, and to end it.”

When the governor offered her “all Arizona’s love, prayers and support” as her husband battles brain cancer, the crowd gave Cindy McCain a prolonged standing ovation.

For all the accolades, one wonders how Cindy McCain’s public self-reformation might fare after the senator dies. In spite of her wealth, she lives in her husband’s shadow.

That’s not to say John McCain has always been a tolerant spouse.

In plain view of staffers and reporters, Cindy McCain affectionately mussed her husband’s hair, observing that he was thinning up top. Whereupon the senator lashed out at his wife with the sort of fury he typically reserves for his political foes.

“At least I don’t plaster on the makeup like a trollop, you cunt.”
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