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**CBS News**

# **FACE THE NATION**

**Sunday, June 19, 2005**

**GUESTS: Senator JOSEPH BIDEN, (D-DE)  
Ranking Member, Foreign Relations Committee**

**KAREN TUMULTY  
Time Magazine**

**MODERATOR: BOB SCHIEFFER - CBS News**

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**FACE THE NATION - CBS NEWS  
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BOB SCHIEFFER, host:

Today on FACE THE NATION, Senator Joe Biden on Iraq, politics and Congress. The US is bogged down in Iraq, the Bolton nomination is staled, and a Supreme Court nominee battle may be looming. Where are the Democrats on all these issues? More and more, Delaware Senator Joe Biden is emerging as one of their main spokesmen. We'll talk to him about all of this and more. Karen Tumulty of Time magazine will join in the questions, and I'll have a final word on the importance of being important. But, first, Senator Joe Biden on FACE THE NATION.

Announcer: FACE THE NATION with CBS News chief Washington correspondent Bob Schieffer. And now from CBS News in Washington, Bob Schieffer.

SCHIEFFER: And joining us here in the studio, Senator Joe Biden.

Senator JOE BIDEN (Democrat, Delaware; Ranking Member, Foreign Relations Committee): Hi, Bob.

SCHIEFFER: Joining in the questioning, Karen Tumulty of Time magazine.

Senator, I think it was last week that the vice president said he thought the insurgency in Iraq was in its last throes. This morning Karen's magazine, Time, quotes CIA director Porter Goss as saying, "Well, not quite in the last throes but getting there." And this morning, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, in the most optimistic assessment of what's going on in Iraq of all, said, quote, "In terms of the security situation, yes, there are a few terrorists and so-called insurgents who are plying their wares," but she goes on to say she thinks that progress is being made there.

Now you're back. You've been there--What?--five times?

Sen. BIDEN: Five times.

SCHIEFFER: You're just back from Iraq. What's your assessment of the situation there today, Senator?

Sen. BIDEN: It's nowhere near the last throes. I wish Porter Goss would speak to his intelligence people on the ground. They didn't suggest at all it was near its last throes. As a matter of fact, it's getting worse, not better. And what's happened is the mix, Bob, has changed from the old Ba'athist insurgents, who are still real, they're still there, to a larger proportion of jihadists coming across the border. All you got to take a look at--30 car bombs a month when there were only--What?--three the year before. I mean, it's gotten a lot worse.

SCHIEFFER: Well, what do the people on the ground tell you there?

Sen. BIDEN: They tell us three things. Number one, the border can't be guarded so they're having now it's become--that Iraq is becoming what--becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy. It's becoming a training ground for terrorists. You actually have people--there's actually talk about training not only to blow themselves up in Iraq and do damage but training people that they're sending back out of the country into other parts of the region. And so it's gotten considerably worse because there's not an ability to generate a counterinsurgency as the military guys call it. That means they got to be able to secure the borders and they've got to be able to get greater progress in the cities. And they close in that way. They go out, send 1,000 Marines out to

Anbar province, they do a great job. They clean everything out. Then they got to leave. The insurgents roll right back in. And so there was a lot of candor on the part of the military, as well as the intelligence people out there.

SCHIEFFER: Well, when you say that, do you mean that what they're telling you is not what we're hearing in Washington?

Sen. BIDEN: There's a gigantic gap, Bob, between the rhetoric here in Washington and the reality on the ground. I don't know anybody who knows the situation if you strapped on a lie detector test--device on them wouldn't tell you that--a gigantic gap. And I'd respectfully suggest, and I have suggested, to the president, that he should direct--through Mr. Hadley, who asked to see me when I came back last Monday...

SCHIEFFER: The national security adviser.

Sen. BIDEN: ...that--I'm sorry. Yes, the national security adviser. That, in fact, he should level with the American people. We need time. There's one last shot at getting this right in Iraq. It's gonna take at least a year to another two years and I think you better start to level with the American people about it because if you don't you're going to see more of what you're seeing out there now. The American people concluding in larger numbers that this is not winnable so why are they going to sacrifice their sons and daughters for something they think there's not a real plan for?

SCHIEFFER: Karen?

Ms. KAREN TUMULTY (Time): There's a lot of talk on the Hill suddenly about an exit strategy. You're going to be giving a speech in a few days talking about setting benchmarks for succeeding in Iraq.

Sen. BIDEN: Yes.

Ms. TUMULTY: But with everything going in the direction that you say it is, how can you--you say you're not in favor of a timetable for getting out. But what if you set benchmarks and we don't meet those benchmarks?

Sen. BIDEN: Then I think you end up in a circumstance where it becomes clear to everyone that without setting a timetable, you're going to have to leave. But the fact is I think it can still be won, Karen.

Ms. TUMULTY: What are the chances? What are the odds at this point?

Sen. BIDEN: The chances--60 percent, if we do everything right. But there's still a chance--I know what--I feel very strongly, absent a change in the politics at home, meaning leveling with the American people, or not leveling, and absent a change in policy on the ground, meaning change in the way we distribute the money, going for low-level projects, not big ones, employing Iraqis, getting more forces trained more quickly, bringing in those who have agreed to train Iraqi forces, other nations, and allow them to participate in this process, getting the Sunnis more involved in the process by bringing in the new national community to put pressure on them to do that. Absent those things happening, I think there is virtually no shot that we're going to end up a year from now with an elected government that has the capacity to maintain order and security within a defined country.

Ms. TUMULTY: So do you think the administration is telling the American people the truth?

Sen. BIDEN: No, they're not telling the truth. Look, I try to put the--let me put the best face on this as I can. Why would the vice president say what he said? Well, why would Secretary Rice characterize it the way she says it when I don't know anybody who believes that to be the case? 'The last throes.' 'We're almost there.' 'Great progress.' Only thing I can figure is they don't trust the American people.

I mean, I've been saying on this program, and God love you, you've had me on this program a lot over the last two years, that I think the American people know how tough this is going to be. I think the American people if you lay out a plan and tell them the truth about how hard it's going to be and why you think it's important, they'll stick. I think the administration figures they've got to paint a rosy picture in order to keep the American people in the game, and the exact opposite is happening. The exact opposite. Otherwise, I believe with all due respect they're either not fully informed or, well, they won't care.

SCHIEFFER: You talk about not fully informing the American people. There's no question that the administration has at least discouraged people from reporting on casualties there. For example, the casualties all the people who have been killed in Iraq come back through the...

Sen. BIDEN: True.

SCHIEFFER: ...Air Force base in Delaware.

Sen. BIDEN: In Dover.

SCHIEFFER: Do you ever go out to meet those flights out there?

Sen. BIDEN: I've tried to and they will not allow me to. As a matter of fact...

SCHIEFFER: Who will not allow you to?

Sen. BIDEN: The Defense Department. Look...

SCHIEFFER: Wait a minute. You're a United States senator.

Sen. BIDEN: I'm a United States senator. Well, let me be very...

SCHIEFFER: They're not letting you on a military base?

Sen. BIDEN: I'm allowed in the military base. I'm not allowed to go to the mortuary. I'm not allowed to be there when the flag-draped casket comes in. As a matter of fact, Bob, one family asked me whether I would meet their son who was tragically gunned down, actually car bomb in Iraq. This is several months ago. I said I would be honored to be with them. They wanted me to come with the minister. They wanted me through the whole process. The commander of the base told me that he couldn't allow that to happen and he's a friend--this is not like there's no hostility there; I'm on the base all the time--until he cleared it with the Pentagon. And I'm told the civilian leadership in the Pentagon.

So in order for me to literally go in and accompany a mom and a dad and a son to pick up the body of a dead son, a young Marine killed in Iraq, I was not just able to do it as a senior United States senator, former chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee--not like I'm new to this.

I had to get specific permission for that specific event. I wanted to go when more than one Marine came back dead and I just wanted to show my respect. I didn't want any press there. There was no press. We weren't talking about that.

SCHIEFFER: So you think it is the secretary of Defense himself who's blocking you?

Sen. BIDEN: Well, that's my understanding. I don't know that for a fact, but it's not the military. It's the civilian decision in the Defense Department that you're not allowed to be there just to show respects. And let me emphasize here now. No press. No cameras. Nothing. I have made it a practice. The reason I've gone to Afghanistan, Kosovo, Bosnia is to demonstrate to those troops there that I understand what's going on and to be with them. No press. And they won't even let me on the base. Now, look, I'm not...

Ms. TUMULTY: Why? Why do you think that is?

Sen. BIDEN: They have this generic policy that it is a private matter. Well, I don't know any family that would--maybe there is--but I don't know any family that if a member of the government, a high-ranking official, was there just to pay their respects--and, look, this is heart-wrenching stuff. I mean, you were saying--maybe I shouldn't say this--before the show how it gets you on your nightly news broadcast when you talk about these young men and women who die. I mean, I think it's important for the nation to acknowledge and I think part of my job is to demonstrate privately and...

SCHIEFFER: Senator, what would you do right now if the president called you and said, 'Senator Biden, OK, I'm asking you: What should I do right now?' What would you say?

Sen. BIDEN: The first thing I'd do, I'd say, 'Pick up the phone and call General Jones, our supreme allied commander, and he will tell you I believe that NATO has the capacity to take over that border on Iraq now at this late date,' number one. Number two, I'd say, 'Mr. President, please take advantage of what the French, the Germans and the Egyptians have done to offer to train up Iraqi police and Iraqi military.' Number three, 'Change the way you distribute the funds there.'

We had \$18.7 billion--or \$4 billion. Remember that big fight almost two years ago now? We've only sent out \$6 billion of it in projects. It's going to be 117 degrees in heat. Let these military guys like Webster who does the 3rd ID, give him PVC pipe to hook up to the back of houses and run the sewage into the river instead of two feet of sewage in the front steps. You know, there's 40 percent unemployment. As Dick Lugar said, a former mayor of Indiana and the straightest guy I know, 'There needs to be a little walking around money here. Go out in the village and hire the chief and say, "Build this dirt word. Put these people"'--this is important stuff now, now, now, now.

And, lastly, get together. You're going to meeting on, I think, June 24th or 25th with all these European leaders, say, 'Look, we had a former contact group here. Let's bring in the region powers as well as us and sit down as basically a clearinghouse of board of directors and say to the Iraqi government, 'We're here to help you. We're here to clear what you need,' and put pressure collectively on them to bring the Sunnis in the deal.

SCHIEFFER: And if nothing changes here, what happens?

Sen. BIDEN: If nothing changes here, we're going to be out of Iraq by the end of 2006 as a nation that has been viewed by the rest of the jihadists in the world as having been pushed out,

which is a very bad thing for us, and Iraq's going to end up having imported into the center of the Middle East a--radical Islamic terrorist cells and groups that train in the middle of that province. That's going to be a hell of a lot--excuse me--a heck of a lot closer to our interest than Afghanistan was. But if we succeed, if we make these changes, we have a shot of ending up with an Iraq that is essentially a federated country, secure borders, not a haven for terror and not a threat to its neighbors. That's as best as we can get and, I think, best as we ever could have hoped for.

SCHIEFFER: OK. Let's take a break here. We'll come back and talk about this some more and some other issues with Senator Biden.

(Announcements)

SCHIEFFER: And we're back now with Senator Joe Biden and Karen Tumulty. Karen?

Ms. TUMULTY: Senator, your colleague, Senator Dick Durbin of Illinois, this last week generated a fair amount of controversy by comparing the interrogation techniques that are being used in Guantanamo to those used by the Nazis, the--genocide essentially. The se--he said these are techniques you might associate with Pol Pot, with the Gulags. At this point, a number of people, including the majority leader, have called upon Senator Durbin to apologize. He has not. Were those wise comments and should he apologize?

Sen. BIDEN: Look, I spoke to Dick Durbin yesterday. He told me he's written a letter where he points out that in the letter that there was inappropriate comparisons. He wished he hadn't made them, and he understands that that went beyond the point he was trying to make. But the point he was making was an accurate point about we need to do something about Guantanamo, that we can't leave it sitting in the status quo the way it is now. And as far as the majority leader asking him to apologize, I don't think that's a wise place for the majority leader to go. You know, I mean, if you're going to start talking about apologies I haven't heard him apologize for the Schiavo case, and quite frankly I don't think it matters. I think the matter is what do we do now? What do we do now about Guantanamo, and I think that's what Senator Durbin is now focused on.

SCHIEFFER: What do we do about it?

Sen. BIDEN: We set up a commission, Bob, just like we did 9/11, have them report in 60 days. The reason for the commission is to get a bipartisan consensus so that there's no political advantage one side or the other talking about this thing. We deal with how we keep the bad guys and let the good guys go--not good guys; the people that aren't guilty go.

And look, the biggest problem to me is not the question of torture. I'm not suggesting that's not to be looked at, but what I am suggesting is that in the past when we've had enemy combatants--that's the term, enemy combatants--at the end of a war there's an armistice, they get to go home. We acknowledge that. There's--in the hearing we just had the administration argues there's not likely to be any end to this war. So what are we going to do, keep 550 people in perpetuity? And how does that square with America's image worldwide?

The bottom line is here I think that Tom Friedman and others, and I personally believe from my travels around the world, it may be recruiting us--recruiting more terrorists against us than we're keeping. We have to deal with it. It's a new situation, a new kind of war. We have no coherent plan. The administration's never had one. We should get one.

SCHIEFFER: Let's talk about Bolton, the man that the president wants to send as our ambassador for the United Nations. It's coming up for another vote this week now in the Senate. What's going to happen?

Sen. BIDEN: This is about taking a stand, Bob. We're not going to let the administration tell us we're not entitled to exercise our oversight responsibility. If we give up on this, we might as well forget about oversight. You'll be writing articles in Time magazine about why didn't the Senate pay attention to the following things?

I met with Mr. Bolton, had a cordial conversation with him. I was asked by my friend John McCain whether I'd meet with him and I made it clear to him it's not about him now, this vote. We'll win the vote. He will not get a vote up or down. I talked with him about what kind of information we needed in order to move forward. Once we get it, we can have an up and down vote immediately.

Ms. TUMULTY: Well, what if the president bypasses the Senate and does a recess appointment which would essentially give John Bolton the job--What?--till the end of next year?

Sen. BIDEN: My guess is if he doesn't come forward, he may do that. I think that cripples John Bolton when he goes up to the United Nations. I think it does not have him--you know, he's got some very tough fights coming up. He can only poke a stick in the eye of the United States Senate institutionally so many times and it not begin to cost him. And I would respectfully suggest he's not in the strongest position as he was with the public at large and his colleagues, Republicans as well as Democrats in the Senate, as he was three years ago.

So I would hope he would just do what is right, that is, give us the information. I want to make it clear to you, if we got this information, I'm not sure it changes anything. But it's a matter of principle. We cannot allow a president to say, quote, "We do not think this is necessary for your inquiry." 'Who died and left them boss,' as my mom would say?

SCHIEFFER: Let's shift to speaking of some battles that he has coming, it may well be that the president will have to nominate someone to replace William Rehnquist...

Sen. BIDEN: Yeah.

SCHIEFFER: ...as chief justice of the Supreme Court. Some people are saying he might turn to Justice Scalia or even Clarence Thomas, two of the most conservative justices on the court, to be the chief justice. What would be your feeling on that?

Sen. BIDEN: Well, I would not recommend he do that. I got a call from President Clinton...

SCHIEFFER: Either one?

Sen. BIDEN: Either one. I would--I got a call from President Clinton when he was president and I was chairman of the Judiciary Committee when he had a chance. He said, 'What should I do?' And I said 'Mr. President, pick someone in a divided government that has a consensus.' He went and out picked two people, got 98 votes and 99 votes respectively.

It's time to unite this country. They're solid conservative who, in fact, will not generate--and I'm not suggesting that Justice Scalia's incompetent. He's completely competent. I'm suggesting...

SCHIEFFER: What you are suggesting--you're suggesting...

Sen. BIDEN: ...it would generate a firestorm on the Hill.

SCHIEFFER: You're suggesting he couldn't be confirmed.

Sen. BIDEN: No, no, I think he probably would be confirmed, but it would generate a firestorm. This is not a time to do that. Why doesn't he go out and pick a mainstream conservative that can have the consensus support of the nation. Look, we cannot continue to be divided like this, red and blue. It can't stay this way. We're in trouble. We have a lot of problems.

SCHIEFFER: Senator, let me ask you this. A lot of people are saying that--well, you yourself have said you're thinking about running for president. Since Howard Dean has sort of--so many Democrats seem to be disassociating themselves with remarks that he makes as party chairman, saying, 'Well, he doesn't speak to me.' It seems to me more people are turning to you for comment and for the Democratic side of things. Are you--how far along are you on this idea of running for president? Is that a real possibility, or...

Sen. BIDEN: It's a real possibility. My intention, as I sit here now, is as--I've proceeded since last November, as if I were going to run. I'm quite frankly going out, seeing whether I can gather the kind of support--I've been doing this so long, Bob, I'm not about to compromise on the main points that I believe are needed to be addressed. My message--as my Grandpop used to say, 'I may not be the horse that can carry the sleigh,' so I'm taking my game on the road, letting people know what I think, and...

SCHIEFFER: When do you think you'll know?

Sen. BIDEN: Well, I have to make a decision--arbitrarily, I said, by the end of this year. I mean, I've either got to get in this or get out of this. My intention--I'm acting now in terms of finding that out as if I'm running. My intention now is to seek the nomination. But it may very well be that by the end of the year I find out I can't raise the money, I can't get the support, in which case, then, the best thing for me to do is find someone to support. But that's my intention now. And we'll see.

SCHIEFFER: You said your intention at this point is to seek the nomination.

Sen. BIDEN: My intention is to seek the nomination. I mean, I know I'm supposed to be more coy with you. I know I'm supposed to tell you, you know, that I'm not sure. But if, in fact, I think, that I have a clear shot at winning the nomination by this November, December, then I'm going to seek the nomination. If I conclude that I'm not likely to be able to win the nomination, then I'm going to figure out who to support.

SCHIEFFER: Well, I'll say one thing, I think you made some news today, Senator. Thank you for joining us.

Sen. BIDEN: Thank you very much.

SCHIEFFER: We'll be back in a minute.

(Announcements)

SCHIEFFER: Finally today, did you ever stop and think how much time we spend making sure other people think we're important? Last week, a person I know actually began some tale with the words as the president was telling me the other day. Now I can't think of any reason he'd want to share a conversation with the president except to make sure I knew he was important enough to talk to the president which is fine, but over the years, I've noticed that people presidents consider important are the ones who keep conversations with them confidential.

During the Clinton years, people paid big money to sleep over at the White House, made them feel important. These days for a certain fee you can get your picture taken with the Bushes and get the same feeling. Making people feel important is not just good politics, it's become big business. For a six-figure sum, Paris Hilton will show up at your party so everyone will know just how cool you really are. Some rap artists now travel with their own television crews so people will see the cameras grinding away and say, 'Wow, that must be someone important.'

I don't know much but I think I've stumbled on a much better way. My grandchildren call me Bo-Bo, and the other day, one of them, a four-year-old, looked up at me and said, 'Bo-Bo, I really need your help on something.' In my entire life, I never felt more important than I did at that moment.

Happy Father's Day. We'll see you next week right here on FACE THE NATION.