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CBS News

FACE THE NATION

Sunday, November 18, 2007

**GUESTS: Senator JOHN EDWARDS (D-NC)
2008 Presidential Candidate**

**JEANNE CUMMINGS
Politico**

MODERATOR/PANELIST: 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, 46 days before Iowa and the polls are tightening among the Democratic candidates. We'll talk with one of them, John Edwards. The top three Democrats are only points apart in Iowa. Can John Edwards break out? Will his aggressive attitude hurt the Democratic presidential nominee, whoever it turns out to be? We're going to ask him this morning.

And we'll get a campaign quick check from Jeanne Cummings of Politico.

I'll have a final word on Congress and its never-ending quest to find ways to do nothing.

But first, John Edwards 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 good morning again.

Senator Edwards is in Los Angeles this morning. He really got an early wake-up call today.

Senator, thank you for coming in. Let's get right down to it. This debate in Las Vegas was one of the roughest yet. You went directly at Hillary Rodham Clinton, and she went right back at you. Here's what she said.

Senator HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON: I don't mind taking hits on my record, on issues, but when somebody starts throwing mud, at least we can hope that it's both accurate and not right out of the Republican playbook.

SCHIEFFER: So are you operating out of the Republican playbook, senator?

Former Senator JOHN EDWARDS (Democrat, North Carolina; Presidential Candidate): I don't--good morning, Bob. I don't--I don't--I don't think so. What she was responding to was me telling the truth about some differences that we have on issues of war. I mean, I was talking about Iraq, what I want to do in Iraq, which is get all combat troops out and end combat missions--she has a different view about that--and differences we have about Iran. In fact, I believe we have to be very, very strong in stopping George Bush in his march to war with Iran, and she voted in a different way and voted with Bush on that issue. And I was just pointing out those differences, and I think she's completely entitled to take her position and defend her position, it's a--it's a presidential campaign. But the idea that this is mudslinging, I mean, we're talking about substantive issues of war that are going to affect the next president of the United States.

And I might--I might add, having been through a general election, I mean, if anybody, including Senator Clinton, thinks this is mudslinging, they got things--they--this is milquetoast compared to what we're going to see next fall.

SCHIEFFER: All right, well...

Fmr. Sen. EDWARDS: We need to have--we need to have a candidate who's actually ready for that battle.

SCHIEFFER: Well, all right. Well, let me just ask you this, senator. Did you believe that Hillary Clinton shouldn't be elected president, or that she can't be elected president? Do you believe she is not electable?

Fmr. Sen. EDWARDS: Oh, I wouldn't say either one of those things. I think that--I think that, first of all, Democratic voters are going to have real choices in this election. We have different approaches. I have a different approach to Washington. I think there're some real changes in--that need to be done in Washington with respect to the way the system operates, and what I see is some corruption of the system over time. She has a different view about that. As I just mentioned, she has different views about Iraq, Iran and some other issues. So we--I want to be certain that the voters know that they have very clear choices in this election, and in my case it's somebody that's going to fight for them, fight for working people and fight for that change.

Now, as to who can best be elected, what I...(network audio difficulties)...is I'm the candidate who's actually won in a red state. I grew up in a small town in rural America. So I think I can go anywhere in the country and campaign and compete. And I'll let Senator Clinton make the case for herself.

SCHIEFFER: You mentioned that she is a defender of a system that you have called "rigged" and "corrupt." Do you believe that she is corrupt?

Fmr. Sen. EDWARDS: No. No, and I've never said that. I think that very good people get pulled into this system and get accustomed to it--and can I just say, on my own behalf, I myself have been guilty. I mean, there's no way I'm holier-than-thou about this. I've turned my head myself. And I think we've just now reached the stage that we can't continue to do it.

I mean, just in the last week, we saw that there was an effort made by the Congress to get cheaper generic drugs on the market more quickly to help people who were going to the pharmacy to buy their prescription drugs. And the drug companies and their lobbyists spent millions of dollars lobbying to Congress last year, I think almost \$40 million, and they managed to kill it. And basically, what they killed was an effort to stop the bribing of generic companies by big drug companies. I mean, this is just one indication of a symptom of a much more pervasive problem. And I do believe that we have to weed that corruption out of the system and make it work for the majority of Americans in order to do the big things we need to do: attack global warming, have universal health care, the big issues that face America.

SCHIEFFER: What are the differences between taking money from the drug company lobbyists and from trial lawyers, which you take money from?

Fmr. Sen. EDWARDS: Well, as I said just a minute ago, I don't claim purity and I don't claim holier-than-thou. I've raised over \$30 million in this campaign. I think all of us share some responsibility in that regard. Now, it is true that I've never taken any money from a Washington lobbyist the entire time I've been in public life, or from a PAC--a special interest PAC. And I--and I'm proud of that.

But this is not about me or Senator Clinton, this is about what we have to do to clean up this system. And I think the difference is that lobbyists--registered lobbyists in Washington--their job is to pedal influence. Their job is to ensure that their clients, the people--big companies, in most cases, that they represent--get their way and the way laws are written.

SCHIEFFER: But...

Fmr. Sen. EDWARDS: So I think, particularly in that case, we have to be very, very careful about limiting their influence.

SCHIEFFER: But you--you're not trying to tell me here this morning, are you, senator, that trial lawyers don't have an interest in what happens in Washington and what happens in the Congress?

Fmr. Sen. EDWARDS: Oh, lord, no. No, of course not. No, not only wouldn't I say that, trial lawyers have lobbyists in Washington, just like every other group that's trying to influence the Congress. No, far from it. I'm not saying that.

And what I would say is we ought to--we ought to take all of their money influence out. None of them should have--all of them are entitled to a voice, Bob. The lawyers are entitled to a voice, the doctors are entitled to a voice, even the big corporations are entitled to a voice. The problem is, because they have so much money, particularly the big corporations, and because they spend so much money in lobbying--drug companies, insurance companies, oil companies--I mean, the net result is their influence is way out of proportion to the influence that ordinary Americans have, and I think they distort the laws that result from that influence. And what we have to do is start making this democracy work for everybody.

SCHIEFFER: Let me ask you this, senator, about one of your recent ads. One of your ads says that if you are president and Congress doesn't pass universal health care by July 2009, you are going to use your power as president to take Congress' health care plan away from them. How do you go about doing that?

Fmr. Sen. EDWARDS: Well, can I just add one thing?

SCHIEFFER: Sure.

Fmr. Sen. EDWARDS: There is another piece to that. I also say that I will take away--do--use my power, the power that I have available to take away the health care for members of my administration. And the basic idea is I don't think politicians in Washington should be protecting their health care when we have 47 million people in this country who don't have health care coverage.

But to answer your question, the most powerful tool that the president has is the bully pulpit. And that means making the case to America, submitting legislation to support exactly what I just said, and then making the case to America in any place--any congressional district or any state where a senator is opposing it--saying 'your senator, your congressman is defending their health care at the same time that they're not providing health care for you.'

SCHIEFFER: So...

Fmr. Sen. EDWARDS: And I think that's the most powerful tool. But I would add to that, there are other tools. I mean, the president of the United States has veto power over budgets. So there are other tools available. But the most important thing is, Bob, wit--somebody's got to shake that place up.

SCHIEFFER: Mm-hmm.

SEN. GRAHAM: I mean, people have gotten complacent. The politicians take care of themselves, the lobbyists are everywhere, and I think we axe to--actually need to shake the place up. And that's what I'm talking about doing.

SCHIEFFER: But what you're talking about here, you would actually propose legislation to force Congress to give up its own health care and force them to vote on that? Is that--is that what you're saying, if they don't come around to providing health care for the rest of the country?

Fmr. Sen. EDWARDS: That's exactly right. The whole point of this is not to take Congress' health care away. The point of this is to get health care for America. And I actually believe every Democratic member of Congress in the House and the Senate would vote for that, so it wouldn't be an issue for them. And I suspect a lot of Republicans would, too, because they don't want to have to go home and defend, in their congressional district, having supported their own health care and not having supported health care for their constituents.

SCHIEFFER: All right. Well, senator, let's take a break here.

We'll be back and continue this conversation in 60 seconds.

(Announcements)

SCHIEFFER: Back again with Senator John Edwards.

Senator, I'd like to--you talked and we've talked about Senator Clinton. I'd like to talk about some of the differences. You talked about her plans and what you see her doing regarding Iran and also Iraq. What's the difference in what you would do about Iraq and what she would do?

Fmr. Sen. EDWARDS: Well, I think there are some basic questions that all of the presidential candidates should answer. Basically, all of us are saying rhetorically that we will end the war. But I think people are entitled to more specific information than that. I mean, do you have a specific plan, how many troops will you get out over what period of time, and is there some point at which all combat troops will be out of Iraq? Will combat missions cease in Iraq? Will you keep permanent military bases in Iraq? The answer to those question for me, Bob, is I would get all combat troops out within nine to 10 months, cease combat missions, and no permanent military bases.

And I haven't heard a specific plan from Senator Clinton. I don't think she's said exactly what she would do, except that I have heard her say on a stage standing next to me that she would keep combat troops stationed in Iraq and she would continue combat missions in Iraq. And, for me,

that's a continuation of the occupation of Iraq, which is a huge issue for America and the world. So we have a different perspective about that.

SCHIEFFER: Don't we have to be very careful, senator, that what we do and if we draw down, that if we draw down too fast that this may be misread by others in the neighborhood out there? How do you address that?

Fmr. Sen. EDWARDS: No, absolutely. And I think the president of the United States has a responsibility to do this the right way, and what I would do is take 40 to 50,000 combat troops out immediately, intensify the effort to make--to push the Shia and Sunni leadership to reach a political compromise. I would also engage in really intense diplomacy with other countries in the region, particularly the Iranians and the Syrians. It--they have an interest in a stable Iraq.

And then we have an interest in the region, which means we need to maintain a naval presence in the Persian Gulf, we may need to beef up our presence in Afghanistan, we probably should keep a quick reaction force in Kuwait. So it's not like we're abandoning the region. But I think we need to make it absolutely clear that we're ending our occupation of Iraq, which is why I laid out the proposal I did.

SCHIEFFER: President Bush says we cannot allow Iran to gain the knowledge to build nuclear weapons. Do you agree with him?

Fmr. Sen. EDWARDS: I'm not entirely sure what he means by that. I think that what we know is that we have a president, Ahmadinejad, who's radical and bellicose in his rhetoric about us, about Israel, about our allies, and I also--we also know that the Iranian people have historically been among the most moderate in the Muslim world and the most pro-American in the Muslim world. I think that presents a huge opportunity to America if we're smart. If we work with our European friends and the European banking system to put a clear proposal very publicly on the table for the Iranians, that we will help them with their economy in a serious way--because their economy's in shambles--if they give up their nuclear proliferation ambitions. But if they don't, there will be severe economic consequences.

But I do believe that we--the vote on the Iranian Revolutionary Guard and whether to declare that group a terrorist organization was a critical moment for the Democrats, and I think it was really important for us to stand up to Bush and Cheney. And Senator Dodd and Senator Clinton voted, as I believe was--took the correct position and were strong. Senator Clinton voted the other way and she's entitled to do that. I just have a strong disagreement with her about it. And then recently, as you well know, the administration declared the Iranian Revolutionary Guard a terrorist organization and a proliferator of weapons of mass destruction, which is exactly what a lot of us had feared.

SCHIEFFER: Some Democrats, some critics of the administration, say the president is really just looking for an excuse to get into Iran, to go in there with bombing strikes or some kind of military action. Are you one of those who believe that?

Fmr. Sen. EDWARDS: I think it's possible. I can't read George Bush's mind. I gave that up...(network audio difficulties). But what I--what I do see is I see a continued pattern of behavior that's very similar to the pattern of behavior leading to Iraq. And I think that's why it's

crucial for us, between now and January of 2009, to take every step we can take to stand strongly against Bush and Cheney continuing to move forward and on the march to military action in Iran.

SCHIEFFER: And one more question about foreign policy, and that is Pakistan, President Musharraf. The United States' Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte delivered a very blunt message to him yesterday, told him to lift the emergency rule and restore the constitution. He's given no sign that he's going to do that. Should we begin to cut off military aid to Pakistan?

Fmr. Sen. EDWARDS: Well, we ought to, at a minimum--that is the leverage that we have--and we ought to, at a minimum, reform that aid. Because essentially what we've been doing is we have been aiding Musharraf. I mean, we helped Musharraf with F-16s. We helped Musharraf in supporting his power base as opposed to doing what we need to do for the Pakistani people. And I believe we ought to reform the nature of the aid we're providing. We ought to make certain that we're pushing toward fighting against terrorism, toward protection, toward doing what we need to do in the northwest--what needs to be done in the northwest territories, providing help directly to the Pakistani people to move them in the right direction.

I also think that we have some very basic things that we ought to be doing that we're not doing. We ought to be approaching this problem multilaterally with our friends around the world.

SCHIEFFER: Mm-hmm.

Fmr. Sen. EDWARDS: We ought to--we ought to have a better knowledge base within our own government about the Pakistani people, their history. There was a report just a few days ago indicating we had very little expertise in that regard. And we need intense diplomacy. I mean, I think all those things are the comprehensive way of dealing with this issue.

SCHIEFFER: All right. Forty-six days to the Iowa caucuses. The polls suggest it's a dead heat. Do--is it--is it Iowa for you, and if you don't win there or do well, is your campaign done?

Fmr. Sen. EDWARDS: I think anybody who doesn't do well in Iowa's going to have a struggle. I mean, we know that over the last few election cycles the winner of the Iowa caucus ended up being the Democratic nominee. As you point out, it's a--it's basically a tie there, at least according to the public polls. And I think if--I think it'll be a very intense campaigning process for the next--what did you say, 46 days? I haven't kept track of--track of the exact days. But I know we're getting close. And I've lived through this before, I know what Iowa caucus-goers care about, I know what they're concerned about. I think they're looking for the candidate who they believe is ready to be president; who, second, has specific, very specific ideas about what needs to be done, and I've lead on all the big, major issues in laying out a positive, very specific agenda. And third, they're looking for somebody who can win in the general election, because they don't want--they don't want to see four, eight more years of Republican--of a Republican White House.

SCHIEFFER: All right. What do you think 'doing well' means? You said anybody who doesn't do well will have a struggle from here on. What is doing well for you in Iowa, senator?

Fmr. Sen. EDWARDS: Well, obviously for any of the three of us who are tied--Senator Obama, Senator Clinton or myself--winning is doing well. But if it's close, and it's a close contest, then that could also be doing well. Finishing second or close could be doing well. So...

SCHIEFFER: All right.

Fmr. Sen. EDWARDS: ...I think it's very hard to say in advance what that means. But I think it's--I do want to say, I think it's a very important place, just as New Hampshire, South Carolina and Nevada are to all three of us.

SCHIEFFER: All right. Thank you very much, senator. We'll be talking to you again before then, I hope.

Fmr. Sen. EDWARDS: Thank you.

SCHIEFFER: And we'll back with a little analysis in just a minute.

Fmr. Sen. EDWARDS: Thank you, Bob.

(Announcements)

SCHIEFFER: And joining us now for a campaign quick check, Jeanne Cummings of Politico.

Good morning, Jeanne.

Ms. JEANNE CUMMINGS (Politico): Good morning.

SCHIEFFER: What struck you about Senator Edwards this morning?

Ms. CUMMINGS: I thought it was interesting that he didn't take any of the opportunities to further his attack on Hillary Clinton. And I guess after being booed out in Nevada by--booed by a Democratic audience in an early caucus state--not a good thing, not a good thing at all. So, you know, I think he--it looks as though maybe he's gone as far as he wants to go there, and maybe he'll ratchet back a little bit. Probably not, though, because it seems--they really think that the areas that they have decided to attack her on are working, and as evidence of that they point out the fact that she attacked him, and that that's evidence that they're working.

SCHIEFFER: What did you make of the booing? Some people are saying, 'Well, the Clinton folks somehow packed the house.' What did you make of that?

Ms. CUMMINGS: Well, it was a different kind of audience, and--but the--it was a big audience. And from what I understand from reporters who were in the room--Ben Smith was there with Politico--and he says, you know, kind of one thing led to another and it escalated in that people started, you know, responding to what they were hearing on the stage. Now, Nevada is a good state for her, but it's a good state for the other ones, too. They've all been working it as well, and a Democratic audience is naturally going to be split among the candidates. So it still is just, you know, you don't want to be booed by the hometown crowd.

SCHIEFFER: The debate pretty much got all the headlines this week and overshadowed what Republicans were up to. Did they do anything that we should know about or take a check on?

Ms. CUMMINGS: There was a bit of under-the-radar activity there. The Republican primary in Iowa is in flux and heating up, and Rudy Giuliani this week seemed to step up his presence a bit, running more ads. He had an organizing meeting with his members there to explain how to go to the caucus. You know, Giuliani had pretty much been tamping down all expectations about Iowa and it looked like Romney was going to have a pretty good run in Iowa, and then Huckabee rose. And now Giuliani may think he might be able to pull out a surprise there and undercut any victory Romney might have.

SCHIEFFER: What does Iowa mean? Let's say, what does Iowa mean for John Edwards on the Democratic side? Is it Iowa or nothing for him, do you think?

Ms. CUMMINGS: I think so, simply because he never left. You know, since 2004 he's still been working it, and if you've been working a state for basically four years and you can't win it, then how do you persuade voters in another state to come on board? I really think he has staked his claim there and that's the one he's got to pocket.

SCHIEFFER: Is that the one that Hillary Clinton could lose and still go on?

Ms. CUMMINGS: Lose, yes, but not badly. She has to do well there. But then, yes, she still could still recover in New Hampshire. And Barack Obama might have a little more wiggle room. Not a lot, but maybe a little. But for John Edwards, I think that, pretty much, that's the one he's got to have.

SCHIEFFER: All right. Thank you so much, Jeanne.

And we'll be back with our final thoughts in just a moment.

(Announcements)

SCHIEFFER: Finally today, Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell made a speech the other day in which he bragged that, even though Republicans are the minority, they had kept many bad things from happening. Well, that's just the half of it. With the help of the Democratic majority, they have managed to keep much of anything from happening, good or bad. Who says there's nothing the two sides can accomplish together? Of course there is: doing nothing.

As Congress ran to the airport Friday for yet another break--they're taking two weeks this year for Thanksgiving; I wouldn't ask how many days you're taking because that would be a digression--but my question is this: What do the following have in common: legislation to provide health insurance for children, education legislation, energy legislation, the farm bill, funding the Iraq war and legislation funding all federal agencies except the Pentagon next year? The answer is, all of it is stalled in Congress, awaiting final action, tangled in the gridlock that Republicans blame on the Democrats, and the Democrats blame on the Republicans.

Breaking the gridlock won't be easy. After all, once Congress gets back from the Thanksgiving break, Christmas vacation will be just weeks away. I've heard all the excuses so many times I've stopped listening. All I know is, Congress continues to bring new meaning to that old phrase, "nothing doing."

That's it for us. See you next week right here on FACE THE NATION.

