GUESTS: Senator JOHN McCAIN, (R-AZ)

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CBS News

LEON PANETTA
Former Clinton White House Chief of Staff

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FACE THE NATION - CBS NEWS
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BOB SCHIEFFER, host:

Today on FACE THE NATION, John McCain and new excerpts from Dan Rather's interview with Bill Clinton. The 9-11 Commission has concluded it can find no direct link between Iraq and al-Qaida, but President Bush and Vice President Cheney insist there was. Where does Senator McCain come down on that question? We'll ask him about that and the situation in Iraq.

Then we'll turn to the book everyone's talking about, former President Clinton's memoir. We'll hear more of Dan Rather's "60 Minutes" interview with the former president, and we'll talk to former Clinton Chief of Staff Leon Panetta.

Our FACE THE NATION Flashback is about another time of terror, and I'll have a final word on Father's Day.

But first, John McCain, the war on terror and presidential politics on FACE THE NATION.


SCHIEFFER: And good morning again. Joining us from San Diego, California, Senator John McCain, who is making his 51st appearance today on FACE THE NATION. He ranks second only to Bob Dole.

Senator McCain, a very unusual development, many of us thought, on Friday. You campaigned down the West Coast with George Bush. I suppose I should ask you: Does this finally put to rest the idea that you would somehow wind up running with John Kerry on the Democratic ticket?

Senator JOHN MCCAIN (Republican, Arizona): Well, I certainly hope so. On this program and every other, I steadfastly said that I was supporting President Bush's re-election and that I would not accept vice president--offer, and so I hope it puts it to rest. And it should surprise no one that, if I continue to say I was supporting President Bush--as I'm his co-chairman in the state of Arizona, it should surprise no one that I'd be campaigning with him.

SCHIEFFER: Whose idea was this particular campaign swing? Was it yours or was it that of the White House?

Sen. MCCAIN: We were requested to do that by the White House, and I was pleased to accept.

SCHIEFFER: Let me ask you this. I--I'm hearing more and more people in Republican circles--and it's just a kind of a buzz, an undercurrent--where people are beginning to say, should Senator--should Vice President Cheney be on the ticket the next time around? If the vice president should decide not to be on the ticket for some reason, perhaps his health, would you be interested in serving on the ticket with President Bush?

Sen. MCCAIN: Well, I would not, and I believe that Vice President Cheney has done a fine job. But more importantly, the relationship between President Bush and Vice President Cheney is excellent, and I think they work very well together. And I'm sure they both believe that very strongly.

SCHIEFFER: Senator McCain, the 9-11 Commission concluded there was no collaborative effort between al-Qaida, the terrorist organization, and Saddam Hussein. The vice president
and the president say there was a connection. Where do you come down on that?

Sen. McCAIN: I don't think there's any doubt there were connections. Zarqawi was in hosp-- in the hospital in Baghdad. He went there for a medical treatment. I'm sure that that's-- wasn't the best place in the world where you could get treatment. And there's no doubt that there was a number of communications, there was exchange of information. Now exactly what role the Iraqis played in the 9/11 tragedy, I don't know. I don't know the answer to that. W--I think we need to look into it. Apparently, the vice president has some additional information, or so he says. But look, there's no doubt that there was communications, meetings, connections between various terrorist organization, al-Qaida in particular, and-- and the y-- and the Iraqi government.

SCHIEFFER: Do you believe that the vice president should make that information available to the 9-11 Commission if he has some information that shows a stronger connection or that they worked together?

Sen. McCAIN: Sure. I--I-- I don't-- I see no reason why not. They've been cooperative with the 9-11 Commission throughout, at least that's what I hear from 9-11 Commission members.

SCHIEFFER: Senator, you have been very critical of how the administration has run this effort in Iraq. Once they got there, you supported them going there. What do you think they need to do now?

Sen. McCAIN: I think they need to even increase the number of troops on the ground more, especially the kinds that we need which are Special Forces, Marines, civil affairs, those kinds of people. We're paying a very heavy price, Dan, for the actual drawdown and low number of troops we had there for a six- or seven- or eight-month period and that gave a lot of bad guys an opportunity s--to take advantage of a situation. I don't believe we should have given a sanctuary to Fallujah, and I'm still worried about what's coming out of Fallujah, but mistakes are made in conflicts. That's one of the reasons why we try to avoid them. I believe we are correcting some of those mistakes.

I hope and pray every night that we'll make this transition, that the Iraqi people will begin to want to defend themselves and stop these acts of espionage and terror that are being orchestrated by those people that were not only from outside the country but dissatisfied from within. And I--I'm--I remain hopeful. I think we need to do whatever is necessary and I regret we did not do that for a period of time which including beginning with allowing the looting to go on which caused us, I believe, some unnecessary casualties to be sustained by brave Americans.

SCHIEFFER: All right. Well, Senator, stand by for a moment. Let's turn now to another part of this story and let's bring in for that from Montoway-- Monterey, California, Leon Panetta who was Bill Clinton's chief of staff, and from our CBS News headquarters in New York, Dan Rather. Of course Dan has an interview tonight on "60 Minutes" with the former president. President Clinton has been more or less supportive of the efforts in Iraq up until now, but he tells Dan in this interview that will be seen in its entirety tonight that be believes we went to Iraq too soon. Let's listen.

(Excerpt from "60 Minutes")

Former President BILL CLINTON: In terms of the launching of the war, I believe we made a mi-- an error in not allowing the United Nations to complete the inspections process. Now having said that, we are where we are and I think the most important thing now is for all of us to support a stable, peaceful and pluralistic Iraq. And I--it looks to me like the
administration is moving in that direction.

DAN RATHER (CBS News): President Bush says the world is safer in terms of terrorism because US-led forces invaded Iraq. Do you agree?

Mr. CLINTON: I--let me say this. I think the Iraqis are better off with Saddam gone if they can have a stable government. There have been more terrorists move into Iraq in the aftermath of the conflict.

I still believe, as I always have, that the biggest terrorist threat by far is al-Qaida and the al-Qaida network.

(End of excerpt)

SCHIEFFER: Dan, did he give any more detail on that? For example, did he say where we need to go from here?

RATHER: Bob, he did give some more detail and I think it's important to point out that's an excerpt from tonight's interview and a good one in full, but to put it in complete context and perspective, the president is supportive of President Bush about the war in Iraq. He has reservations. He has questions. He thinks it was a mistake, the timing of the war in Iraq. But what he goes on to say is that if--if we can keep un--Iraq united, doesn't get into a civil war--this is a paraphrase but it's basically what he says--if we can get a stable united Iraq and move to a--a government that has some--at least some semblance of democratic institutions and freedom, basically the bottom line is he thinks it--that's what President Bush is now trying to do and he supports that.

I think in fairness to both President Clinton and President Bush, it needs to be said that the president points out that he had said much of what President Bush said post-9/11, 2001. President Clinton said it in the late 1990s, expressed some deep concern about the possibility that Saddam Hussein had, you know, powerful weapons, but President Clinton said, 'You know, look, I didn't know how many he had.' He pointed out that there were four days of raids, if you remember in 1998 I think it was, and the president said, 'Look, we--we--I never knew from the CIA or anybody else whether we hit chemical and biological weapons, whether we actually hit them, and if so, how many.' So he does put it in context and perspective, but that comes back to the core thing with him, he does support President Bush on the war in many ways and that'll surprise some people.

SCHIEFFER: Let me ask you this, Leon Panetta. You were in the White House; you also served as Mr. Clinton's director of the Office of Management and Budget. In this book he writes about how he sort of led parallel lives, that he was able to concentrate on fighting terrorism when this whole threat being posed by Osama bin Laden came up at the same time he was going through some of this turmoil with the special prosecutor. Looking back on it, do you think he was able to give his full attention that he should have been giving to Osama bin Laden?

Mr. LEON PANETTA (Former Clinton White House Chief of Staff): Well, there's no question that we're dealing with a president that had great strengths and weaknesses, like--like other presidents, and that's--that's what this book is about, is describing in large measure how his life contributed both to his strengths and his weaknesses. But he does talk, and he's--and he's talked to--to me and to others, about the ability to be able to focus on the job that he's in, concentrate on it, at the same time you're sometimes dealing with very tough emotional problems and problems that affect the presidency in other areas. You're got to have that kind of concentration. I think the president's great strength is his ability to concentrate on what he
had to do, and I—I think that while he was facing, obviously, the kinds of pressures and crises that all presidents have to face, the one strength he had was his ability to concentrate on what he had to do. So I—I—I think while, obviously, it does impact—it impacts on anybody from an emotional point of view—I think he was still able to concentrate on the job that he had to get done.

SCHIEFFER: Well, let's go back to Dan's interview and where--the part where he does talk about the situation with Monica Lewinsky. Let's listen again.

(Excerpt from "60 Minutes")

DAN RATHER (CBS News): The central question, if I may--and I know this is difficult, but the central question is why?

Mr. CLINTON: I think I did something for the worst possible reason, just because I could. I think that that's just the most--just about the most morally indefensible reason that anybody could have for doing anything, when you do something just because you could. And I've thought about it a lot, and there are lots of more sophisticated explanations, more complicated psychological explanations, but none of them are an excuse. Only a fool does not look to explain his mistakes.

(End of excerpt)

SCHIEFFER: Dan, that must have been the hardest part of the interview to conduct, to sit down and ask someone those kinds of questions. What was that like?

RATHER: Well, I was uncomfortable asking those kinds of questions, but you know, I'm a pro, on my best days, at least, and it was my job to do that. I was surprised that the president sat for as long as he did. He didn't try to cut off that line of questioning. He didn't refuse to answer any question. He didn't answer any question abruptly. I didn't see it as my role to--you know, to hammer him, to hit him on the head time and again but I--the role there of the interviewer, myself, was to try to draw out from him what he has been saying to himself since he's been president and he's had time to reflect on this. And his story, Bob, and which I think is strongly reflected in the book, is that at a very early age he developed the capacity and, for that matter, the ability and desire to lead these parallel lives and to be a keeper of secrets, he said.

Now what--he goes on to explain that, as life went along, he found that was advantageous in reaching some success. On the other hand, it led to some of the--what he called the worst moment in his life: the morning he had to tell Mrs. Clinton, which he also describes in our interview tonight, that he had been lying to her, lying to his child, lying to the Cabinet, lying to the country. It was a i--difficult part of the interview for him. But whether you like Bill Clinton or don't like him, you can say this: No president has ever sat down in front of a television camera, much less put out in a book, these kinds of personal reflections. Each viewer will have to make up their own mind whether or not they think he's sincere and whether he's telling the truth.

SCHIEFFER: Well, let me ask Leon Panetta, you were his chief of staff. Did you feel that he lied to you, Mr. Panetta?

Mr. PANETTA: No, I didn't. You know, obviously we talked policy issues and we talked political issues, and I had a pretty good sense of where his head was on those issues. I never got the sense that--you know, that he would deliberately lie to me, although obviously--look, he lied to the country and he has said that that was morally reprehensible. But I--I think at
the same time, I think all of us have to recognize that, you know, the impeachment period was not a good period in our history. The fact is that while he made the mistake he made, that the elected leaders in this country simply didn't rise to the occasion, act in a statesmanlike way, act in a bipartisan way and--and take steps that would have, frankly, not had the nation go through what we did.

SCHIEFFER: Let me...

Mr. PANETTA: I think everybody--everybody bears some responsibility for that period.

SCHIEFFER: Let--let me ask you this. You have said before that you thought Vice President Gore should have asked Mr. Clinton to campaign for him in the last campaign. Do you now believe that John Kerry should ask President Clinton to campaign for him?

Mr. PANETTA: Absolutely. Absolutely. You've got--you've got a tremendous resource in President Clinton. He's got the ability to reach out, not only to--to minority populations, but he can be very effective in some of the key Southern states, some of the key states in the Midwest. I--I think there is some nostalgia for how this economy was during the Clinton years and--and how we were in terms of our relationship with the rest of the world. Those are all pluses, and I don't--I don't think there's anybody that's more effective on the campaign stump than President Clinton.

SCHIEFFER: Well, let me ask Senator McCain something. Do you believe, Senator McCain, that we would have taken this whole threat of terrorism more seriously had the president not been dealing at the time that Osama bin Laden's name first began to come up--had he not been dealing at that time with Monica Lewinsky?

Sen. McCAIN: I think there was a period, particularly when he was up at Martha's Vineyard when this crisis was at one of its high points, and he launched attacks against suspected targets. He was immediately accused of--of diverting Americans' attention. But, no, I--I think the--that--I think that President Clinton was aware of the problem, but could I just add quickly this--this question where President Clinton says we should have waited longer and gone to the UN again. President Clinton signed a law that called for regime change in Iraq. The inspections procedures had broken down in Iraq. Our airplanes were being shot at daily that were patrolling the no-fly zones. The areas of Iraq that were still--that were--had been subdued with the utmost cruelty, when three times we encouraged them to rise up and--and they did and we didn't help them. I don't know if the--if another trip to the United Nations or 10 more trips or 20 more trips, but I do believe that there was very little progress in what we were trying to achieve in Iraq at the time that we made those attacks.

SCHIEFFER: But the president says--President Clinton says there was no excuse for the whole Monica Lewinsky situation, but he also says in this book, Senator McCain, that the impeachment process, he wears that as a badge of honor. What is your reaction to that statement?

Sen. McCAIN: It's--it's very hard for me to make a judgment on--on this. He was not impeached, but it certainly wasn't a prospect that I would look forward to if I were president of the United States.

SCHIEFFER: Dan, let me go back to you in the interview. I found it rather interesting that he talked, as you said, very, very candidly about his relationship with Monica Lewinsky. At one point, even saying that he slept on the couch. Did he mean that literally? I mean, I--I think of all the rooms that are in the White House and he says he slept on the couch. Was he just talking in a metaphorical way or did he mean literally on the couch?
RATHER: Well, I'm told that he wrote--he slept on a--the couch, and he meant it literally in the book. In our interview he says he was in the dog house and made it clear that he was not sleeping in the family bedroom. I--I don't know--you know, I--I think he meant that he literally slept on the couch.

SCHIEFFER: All right. Now let me...

RATHER: But let me, Bob--go ahead.

SCHIEFFER: And let me just ask you one other thing. He talks about his dark side. He--he gets very psychological, as it were. What did you make of all that?

RATHER: Well, boy, you know, among the things I am not--the many things I'm not--is a psychologist or a psychiatrist, but I do think, Bob, what it is, is he's had a lot of time to think about this and he's tried to explain to himself. He says at one point, 'I have no excuses. This was morally wrong.' He--he makes it clear that he's--he ha--doesn't have any excuses, but in trying to explain it, that there was a dark side in his house, that his father was an alcoholic, beat his mother, even shot at his mother, all that kind of thing, and that--he said he became a keeper of secrets, and as life went along, you know, he's--pretty much says, you know, 'Everybody has their demons,' and he wasn't able to control his. That--those are my words, not his. You'll see and hear him tonight say it.

But what he said was that as ti--life went along and he--he learned that he could keep the dark side of the--of what was happening with him and his family out of public view, as he learned as a child to do with his own household--and so he was--being a keeper of secrets, there was some advantage to indulging himself, if you will, by being able to keep those secrets.

Bob, if I may, I want to return to one thing that Senator McCain, I believe, referred to about the throwing of the missiles into Afghanistan and Sudan in an effort to get Osama bin Laden. What President Clinton said--Senator McCain was talking about being at Martha's Vineyard and--at the time, doing that. I asked Senator--Clinton, was that, as many people have charged, a case of his trying to take attention away from his own personal problems with the Lewinsky matter. He flatly denied it and said, 'Look I had CIA information...'

SCHIEFFER: All right.

RATHER: '...on this, and I--I moved on the CIA information.' He--he presented a situation where he was able...

SCHIEFFER: All right.

RATHER: ...to compartmentalize...

SCHIEFFER: Dan, I'm sorry, we have to end it right there. We'll be back in a moment with another FACE THE NATION 50th anniversary Flashback.

Gentlemen, thank you all very much.

RATHER: You're welcome. Thanks, Bob.

Mr. CLINTON: (From videotape) When I was a boy I--or a young man getting out of law school, I said that one of the goals I had in life was to write a great book. I have no earthly
idea if this is a great book, but it's a pretty good story.

(Announcements)

SCHIEFFER: Nineteen years ago this month, Americans found a new reality in air travel, one that caused one senator to give a prescient warning. That is this week's FACE THE NATION 50th anniversary Flashback.

TWA Flight 847 was en route from Athens to Rome when it was hijacked by two heavily armed terrorists. On FACE THE NATION, Senator Patrick Leahy talked about retaliating for terrorist acts.

Senator PATRICK LEAHY (Democrat, Vermont; Intelligence Committee): (From previous program) We keep saying that, 'Boy, next time, we're--we're going to come back.' And we said this when 250 more Marines got murdered in Beirut, when our embassies get blown up, our ambassadors are killed, our people are kidnapped. I mean, every year there are more and more terrorist attacks, and every year we say, 'Boy, we're going to be tough on this,' but we don't do a darned thing. I think at s--at some point we're going to see terrorism on a larger scale exported to the United States, an--and we're going to face it here. We might as well understand the realities of it. And at some point, everybody's going to have to wake up to the fact that we are going to have to set our priorities right and get better intelligence.

SCHIEFFER: Sadly, Senator Leahy was right. Terrorism has become an ever-present danger in our lives, a danger we're still struggling to combat--another FACE THE NATION 50th anniversary Flashback.

And I'll be back with a final word.

(Announcements)

SCHIEFFER: Finally today, in "Big Russ," my competitor Tim Russert's fine book about his dad, he says hardly a day goes by that he doesn't remember something his dad taught him. It made me think of my dad. He didn't say much. He just worked hard so we could have some of the things he couldn't have, but the greatest gift that he and my mother gave us was the example they set, their values. My dad left most of the talking to our mother. She was the lawgiver in our lives and her rules were simple and certain. You have to work for what you get. Malingering is not an option.

'You've been sick for two days,' she once told me. 'It's time to get up and go to school.' Her main rule? Don't embarrass the family. She believed punctuality was key to all things, 'Better to be too early to the airport than too late.' Showing you're proud of who you are meant a smile on your face and a shine on your shoes. And, oh, how she hated liars, which for us translated into, 'If you lie to me, I'll whip you till you can't sit down,' to which my dad would add, 'Pay attention to your mother. You know how she is.' We did and we did. And by the way, if all this reminded you you forgot a Father's Day gift, get Tim's book. My mother would have loved it. She might even have written a blurb for it.

See you next week right here on FACE THE NATION.