

# THE ISEMAN COMETH

✘ Only, she says she didn't. Ahem.

Now, after more than seven months of silence, [Vicki] Iseman, who just turned 41, has decided to speak out and aggressively defend herself. In a series of interviews and e-mail exchanges with *National Journal*, she said she and McCain had a "strictly professional" and cordial relationship.

"I did not have a sexual relationship with Senator McCain," she said in a three-hour interview last month in a seventh-floor conference room in the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center. "I never had an affair or an inappropriate relationship with Senator McCain, and that means I never acted unethically in my dealings with the senator."

I love how Iseman believes the only unethical thing she could have done with McCain is to have fucked him—rather than to inappropriately influence him with gifts and money.

Curiously, though, Iseman knows **precisely** who might leak a story that she asked McCain to share a blanket with her once.

Iseman told *National Journal* that [John] Weaver was the unidentified aide who *The Times'* story said flew back to Washington on Paxson's corporate jet with Iseman and McCain after the Florida fundraising event in February 1999. She says that ***The Times* had asked her, in an e-mail, about an incident on the plane in which she reportedly asked McCain to share a blanket with her. Only Weaver, she says, could be the source for that allegation,** which she heatedly denied. *The Times* did not publish the

allegation, and Weaver strongly denies being the source of that information. [my emphasis]

This is what I don't get. If she's certain that only Weaver could be the source of the allegation, doesn't that suggest she knows he—the only aide on the plane—was witness to something that only he would know? If she **hadn't** asked to share her blanket with McCain, couldn't **anyone** be the source for the allegation?

But Iseman doesn't deny several other allegations the NYT made about her in its story. For example, she makes it quite clear that she plied McCain with money.

One of her principal assignments in the lobbying firm was to work the Senate Commerce Committee – and work it, she did. She established ties to committee staffers, including Mark Buse, who has been one of McCain's closest aides and is now chief of staff in his Senate office. She recalls meeting McCain at the committee "in the mid-to-late 1990s." McCain was chairman of the panel from 1997 to 2001, and again from 2003 to 2005.

Describing her role with the committee and McCain's first run for the White House, Iseman says she supported McCain's bid and raised money for him. She thinks that she attended three fundraisers for him during that campaign. There is no question that she could get clients in to see McCain and the committee staff, she says, but she maintains that she had no "special" access to the senator.

And Iseman doesn't deny she bragged about her close ties to McCain (though she does dispute John Weaver's claim that they talked about it).

In responding to the *Times* reporters by

e-mail, Iseman acknowledged the meeting with Weaver but wrote, "I never discussed with him alleged things I had 'told people,' that made their way 'back to' him."

[snip]

"The conduct I was talking about," he says, "was her telling people that she had unusual access to the [Senate] Commerce Committee and the Senate office" of McCain.

And finally, she didn't make a convincing case that she wasn't flirting with McCain (aside from the blankie, I mean, which I'm sure she only did because she was cold).

Former Senate aides, speaking anonymously, say that they saw no evidence that Iseman had a personal relationship with McCain, but they add that she could be flirtatious while working the Hill. "People see what they want to see," Iseman says, insisting, "I have not done anything" to justify such talk. These same former staffers also say that Iseman worked extremely hard for her clients.

[snip]

Former Senate staffers who know Iseman well say that she faces an uphill battle to re-establish her credentials on Capitol Hill. "This town can eat you up – and that's what happened to her," a former McCain aide says. "That's what happens sometimes in the Washington fast lane." Separately, another former Senate aide says that Iseman has become "kind of toxic" on the Hill. "She will be forever linked," he says, "as the lobbyist in question with John McCain."

Which is ultimately what the NYT said: that

Iseman bragged about her ties to McCain, that that hurt his claim to be a maverick, that McCain did do unethical favors for her clients, and that campaign staffers intervened to try to get her away from McCain.

So the big news here, I guess, is that Vicki Iseman denies she ever asked McCain to share her blankie.