

On Monday, April 14, Sen. John McCain told the Newspaper Association of America and the American Society of Newspaper Editors that he had “narrowly” decided to support the Free Flow of Information Act, a reporter-source shield bill. The following day, Rep. Mike Pence, R-IN, one of the original sponsors, told the same audience that Sens. Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama had signed on as co-sponsors.

Here are the comments of **Sen. John McCain** on his decision

In the spirit of that commitment to communicating my views fully and honestly to you, I want to address quickly an issue I know is important to you, the so-called "shield law" pending before Congress. I have had a hard time deciding whether to support or oppose it. To be very candid, but with no wish to offend you, I must confess there have been times when I worry that the press' interest in getting a scoop occasionally conflicts with other important priorities, even the first concern of every American -- the security of our nation. I take a very, very dim view of stories that disclose classified information that unnecessarily threatens or makes it more difficult to protect the physical security of Americans. I think that has happened before, rarely, but it has happened. I think the New York Times' decision to disclose surveillance programs to monitor the conversations of people who wish to do us harm came too close to crossing that line. And I understand completely why the government charged with defending our security would want to discourage that from happening and hold the people who disclosed that damaging information accountable for their action.

The shield law would give great license to you and your sources, with few restrictions, to do as you please no matter the stakes involved and without fear of personal consequences beyond the rebuke of your individual consciences. It is, frankly, a license to do harm, perhaps serious harm. But it also a license to do good; to disclose injustice and unlawfulness and inequities; and to encourage their swift correction. The First Amendment is based in that recognition, and I am, despite the criticism of campaign finance reform opponents, committed to that essential right of a free society. I know that the press that disclosed security secrets that should have remained so also revealed the disgrace of Abu Ghraib, a disgrace that made it much harder to protect the American people from harm. Thus, despite concerns I have about the legislation, I have narrowly decided to support it. I respect those of my colleagues who have decided not to; appreciate very much the concerns that have informed their position, and encourage further negotiations to address those concerns. But if the vote were held today, I would vote yes. By so doing, I and others, on behalf of the people we represent, are willing to invest in the press a very solemn trust that in the use of confidential sources you will not do more harm than good whether it comes to the security of the nation or the reputation of good people.

No profession always meets its responsibilities or always meets them perfectly. Certainly not mine, and not yours either. There will be times, I suspect, when I will wonder again if I should have supported this measure. But I trust in your integrity and patriotism that those occasions won't be so numerous that I will, in fact, deeply regret my decision. And I would hope that when you do something controversial or something that many people find wrong and harmful you would explain fully and honestly how and why you did it, and confess your mistakes, if you made them, in a more noticeable way than afforded by the small print on a corrections page. In truth, the workings of American newsrooms are some of the least transparent enterprises in the country, and it is easy to believe that the press has one set of standards for government, business, and

other institutions, and entirely another for themselves. And if you don't mind a little constructive criticism from someone who respects you, I think that is an impression the press should work on correcting.