

McCain Says Citizenship Issue Put to Rest Long Ago

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Republican presidential hopeful John McCain said Thursday the question of whether he can run for president, despite being born in the Panama Canal Zone, was put to rest 44 years ago in Barry Goldwater's run for the White House.

McCain added that he doesn't know why his campaign sought legal analysis of whether his birth outside the continental United States might disqualify him from the presidency.

The Constitution says only a "natural-born citizen" may serve as president.

McCain's campaign asked former Solicitor General Ted Olson for a legal interpretation of the issue.

McCain himself insists the issue was put to rest when fellow Arizonan, Barry Goldwater, ran for president in 1964.

"Barry Goldwater was born in Arizona when it was a territory, Arizona was a territory, and it went all the way to the Supreme Court," McCain told reporters Thursday on his campaign plane. "And there's no doubt about that. And it was researched again in 2000."

The Panama Canal Zone was a U.S. territory when McCain was born on Aug. 29, 1936.

As for the reason for seeking Olson's opinion: "I don't know," McCain said. "Maybe my staff talked to him, but I didn't. But I have absolutely no concern about that."

"It's very clear that (the idea that) an American born in a territory of the United States whose father is serving in the military would not be eligible for the presidency of the United States is certainly not something our founding fathers envisioned." McCain's father was stationed in the Canal Zone by the Navy at the time of his birth.

McCain spokeswoman Jill Hazelbaker said the request for Olson's help was routine, and it wasn't necessary to bring it to the attention of the senator.

Olson said he is still researching the issue but is certain McCain is qualified. The plain meaning of "natural-born citizen" includes those born to parents who are citizens, particularly when they are born on a U.S. military base as McCain was, Olson said.

"I am confident that the United States Supreme Court, should it ever address the issue, would agree," Olson said in a statement.

According to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, people are born U.S. citizens if they are born in the U.S. or their parents are U.S. citizens. The question arises because Article II of the Constitution limits the office of president to a "natural-born citizen," a term on which the Founding Fathers did not elaborate.

Missouri Sen. Claire McCaskill, a prominent backer of Democratic candidate Sen. Barack Obama, introduced legislation Thursday that would define a "natural-born citizen" as anyone born to any U.S. citizen while serving in the active or reserve components of the U.S. armed forces. Obama's campaign announced late Thursday that he will co-sponsor the bill.

"Those who serve and sacrifice for their country, like John McCain and his father, deserve every honor and privilege that our nation can possibly provide, and that includes the ability to run for the highest office in the land," Obama said in a statement.