

Stewart goes to his desk and pulls out a sheet of paper. He starts reading from it, as if he were speaking into a TV camera.

SENATOR STEWART

Hi. This is Senator Michael-

(he stops himself, then starts over)

Hi. This is Senator Michael Stewart. It's been my honor to represent New Jersey in the Senate for the past 12 years. You've probably seen a lot of ads about me recently - calling me a socialist, a communist. And I'm sure they'll get even uglier this weekend. But those ads are politics at their worst. And they're being paid for by lobbyists in Washington who-

A knock at the door.

SENATOR STEWART

Come in.

James enters.

JAMES

What happened?

SENATOR STEWART

He's a mess.

JAMES

Did he say anything?

SENATOR STEWART

Yeah.

JAMES

Think he'll do it? Tell the / press-

SENATOR STEWART

I don't know.

A beat.

SENATOR STEWART

Have you heard anything?

JAMES

Checked with my friends at the DNC: nothing.

An uncomfortable silence.

SENATOR STEWART

So, uh, big day-

(pause)

That North Korea bill - gonna save thousands of lives. Put's everything in perspective, right?

JAMES

...yeah.

Stewart raises the piece of paper in his hand.

SENATOR STEWART

You read this?

James is off in his own world.

SENATOR STEWART

James?

JAMES

Huh?

SENATOR STEWART

The script. What do you think? Too defensive?

JAMES

No. It's fine.

Another awkward pause.

SENATOR STEWART

What were you saying before - about the Wall Street bill? That Lloyd was trying to kill it...

JAMES

Yeah / he said-

SENATOR STEWART

I ran into Baggert on my way in, said he heard-

Sarah enters, visibly upset.

Senator- SARAH

Time for the *Record*? SENATOR STEWART

No. It's something with the *Ledger*. SARAH

The endorsement? SENATOR STEWART

No. They just got an e-mail saying you put the earmark for the bridge in the highway bill as a kickback for campaign donations. SARAH

A long, long beat.

Stewart and James look at each other. Then:

From who? SENATOR STEWART

Anonymous. SARAH

That's bullshit. SENATOR STEWART

So it's not true? SARAH

You think I'm stupid enough to do that? They'd put me in jail / if- SENATOR STEWART

E-mail said the contractor funneled money through shell corporations - no one could find it unless they knew just where to look. *Ledger's* trying to confirm it now. They want us to comment. SARAH

(beat)

What should I say?

Ron enters, noticeably worried.

RON

Senator, I just got a call from the Ethics Office. They got an e-mail about-

SENATOR STEWART
The bridge?

RON
Yeah. How'd you / know-

SARAH
Ledger got it, too.

(beat)
It's Lloyd, isn't it? We'll push back on it, but it's so close to the election that just the allegation's gonna hurt us.

RON
And Leadership's looking to screw you after the Wall Street bill. They won't care if it's true or not.

A cell phone rings. Sarah takes out her phone and answers it.

SARAH
This is Sarah.

(beat)
I thought we said 9:30-

She listens for a second, then puts the phone to her chest.

SARAH
It's the *Record*. They got the e-mail, too. They want a statement.

SENATOR STEWART
Deny it.

JAMES
Hold on.

SARAH
(into the phone)
I'll call you back, okay?

Michelle comes into the office, walking faster than usual.

MICHELLE

The *Times* reporter called – he wants to push back the interview. Says he just got an e-mail and wants to look into it...

SARAH

This thing's gonna be everywhere by lunch.

MICHELLE

What is?

Everything's crashing in.

A cell phone rings. Sarah answers it.

SARAH

This is Sarah.

(back to Stewart)

It's the *Ledger*.

She goes back to the phone call.

Ron looks up from his blackberry.

RON

Ethics Committee just sent a preservation of records request.

Ron goes back to his blackberry.

SARAH

(into the phone)

Can you hold on?

(to Stewart)

They say they've verified some of the sources.

Ron looks up from his blackberry again.

RON

Just got an e-mail from leadership. Minority Leader says he wants you in his office. Now.

Stewart's paralyzed.

SARAH

Senator?

Another cell phone rings. Michelle puts her phone to her ear.

MICHELLE

Hello.

(pause)

One second, Terry.

(to James and Stewart)

It's the *Times*. They want a comment - something about kickbacks.

SARAH

The *Ledger's* gonna put something online -

RON

The Leader's on his way down here-

SARAH

Should I deny it?

MICHELLE

Senator?

RON

Senator?

SARAH

Senator?

JAMES

Senator?

Blackout.