

# New revelations on VP choice heighten crisis of McCain campaign

Patrick Martin  
3 September 2008

After a series of politically damaging reports about Alaska Governor Sarah Palin and her family, there is mounting speculation that Republican presidential candidate John McCain may be forced to replace her as his vice presidential running mate. As ABC News asked on its web site, “how long a trip is it from there to Tom Eagleton/Harriet Miers territory?” (both nominees who were compelled to withdraw.)

The candidate herself has not been heard from since her first weekend of campaigning with McCain. She has given only a single media interview—a family-oriented piece of puffery in *People* magazine, conducted last Friday—and will apparently accept the vice presidential nomination at Wednesday night’s session of the Republican convention without having answered a single press inquiry about her qualifications or political views.

Palin cancelled the one public appearance she was scheduled to make—a speech to the Republicans for Life caucus, a grouping of the most fanatical anti-abortion activists headed by Phyllis Schlafly. The group had planned to give Palin an award for her opposition to abortion rights even before the vice presidential selection was announced.

On Monday, Palin and her husband Todd issued a brief written statement acknowledging that their oldest daughter Bristol, 17, was pregnant and planning to marry the father of her unborn child, subsequently identified as Levi Johnston, 18, a former hockey star at Wasilla High School.

While one cannot but feel sympathy for the two young people, barely more than children, now the subject of a media frenzy, there is little basis for extending that sympathy to Governor Palin or the array of reactionary, moralizing preachers and pundits who have suddenly discovered the value of privacy (something they routinely deny to young pregnant women who make a different choice than Bristol Palin).

As for claims that the candidate’s children should be off-limits in the campaign, Palin made her model family the main selling point on her fitness for the vice presidency, speaking at length of her son’s enlistment in the military and deployment in Iraq and her own efforts to combine motherhood and a political career.

In the *People* magazine interview, she went out of her way to mention that she was still breast-feeding her four-month-old son Trig, declaring, in response to a question about whether she was a “morning person,” that she occasionally had to “in the middle of the night, put down the BlackBerrys and pick up the breast pump.” She brought her four youngest children from Alaska to Dayton, Ohio to display on stage at the announcement of her candidacy, including the pregnant Bristol.

There is an overpowering element of hypocrisy in the whole affair. The Christian right seeks to impose fundamentalist precepts on the entire American population—by banning abortion, contraception, sex education, the teaching of evolution, stem cell research, etc. Yet they blithely defend Governor Palin on the grounds that Bristol’s pregnancy (as well as Todd Palin’s drunk-driving charge and similar incidents) are proof that the Palins are just regular folks. As McCain speechwriter Mark Salter declared, “These things happen. This has probably happened to millions of American families.”

It is certainly true that every American family has its issues and problems, immensely exacerbated by the deepening social and economic crisis of the profit system. And that is precisely why tolerance, sensitivity and social support are required, rather than the punitive, moralizing and dehumanizing strictures of those who claim to derive all of the governing principles of society from a literalist interpretation of the Bible.

There have been so many new facts uncovered about the Palin family over the last 48 hours, or assertions about her by the McCain campaign that have proven to be false, that it is possible here only to refer to them briefly.

\* It was reported that Palin has hired a personal lawyer to respond to the investigation voted by the Republican-controlled state legislature of her efforts to fire her former brother-in-law from his job as a state trooper. The ethics panel was scheduled to report October 31, four days before the presidential election. Palin evidently aims to postpone this until after the vote.

\* State election officials have confirmed that Todd Palin registered in 1995 and again in 2000 as a member of the Alaska Independence Party (AIP), a right-wing group dedicated to achieving a statewide referendum on secession from the United States, and whose slogan, “Alaska First,” contrasts ironically with the official McCain campaign slogan, “Country First.” Sarah Palin claims never to have been a member of the AIP, but AIP party chairwoman Lynette Clark told ABC News that both Palin and her husband belonged to the party in 1994 and attended its convention that year. Palin also addressed the AIP state convention as governor in 2007, by video hookup.

\* Former officials of the town of Wasilla have said that Palin not only removed the police chief after she took office, but also sought to remove the town librarian and “asked the library how she could go about banning books.”

\* While the McCain campaign has cited Palin's titular role as head of the Alaska National Guard as constituting national security experience, officials of the Guard have rebutted this ludicrous claim. Maj. Gen. Craig Campbell, adjutant general of the Alaska National Guard, said neither he nor Palin play any role in national defense activities of the Guard, which are conducted entirely under federal control. Campbell himself was appointed in 2003 by Palin's predecessor.

\* Palin claimed to have played a leading role in rejecting the "bridge to nowhere," a highly publicized \$225 million boondoggle connecting the town of Ketchikan, Alaska to a nearby island populated by 50 people. The *Washington Post* reported Tuesday that she had initially supported the project, only reversing her position when the project came under attack in Congress. And in her capacity as mayor of Wasilla, she secured \$27 million in federal earmarks for her town of 6,700 people—an average of more than \$4,000 for every man, woman and child. The earmarks were inserted into legislation by Alaska's senior senator, Ted Stevens, and Congressman Don Young, one indicted and the other now facing a corruption probe.

The McCain-Palin campaign was in increasingly defensive mode as media inquiries mounted. Although the Republican campaign was running television ads as recently as August 27 branding Democratic candidate Barack Obama as "dangerously unprepared to be president," the Palin nomination has compelled them to unceremoniously scrap that line of argument, given 72-year-old McCain's selection for his vice presidential running mate of a virtual unknown with less than two years' experience as governor of the nation's least populous state. Senior McCain adviser Charles Black blandly declared, "We never used experience as the big argument."

Equally hollow were the complaints that false Internet rumors about Sarah Palin were now driving the media coverage of the election campaign. Chief campaign organizer Steve Schmidt blustered, "It used to be that a lot of those smears and the crap on the Internet stayed out of the newsrooms of serious journalists. That's not the case anymore." In reality, the McCain campaign has been profiting from Internet smears for months. A whole host of Republican Party-linked organizations have been flooding the Internet with scurrilous rumors against Obama, most notably attempts to link him with Islamic fundamentalism.

Some press accounts have begun to shed additional light on the extraordinary backstage maneuvers that produced the Palin nomination, detailing the inordinate influence of the Christian fundamentalists in vetoing McCain's initial inclination to name Senator Joseph Lieberman or former Pennsylvania governor Tom Ridge as his running mate, because both support abortion rights.

The *New York Times* reported Tuesday, "With time running out—and as Mr. McCain discarded two safer choices, Gov. Tim Pawlenty of Minnesota and former Gov. Mitt Romney of Massachusetts, as too predictable—he turned to Ms. Palin. He had his first face-to-face interview with her on Thursday and offered her the job moments later. Advisers to Mr. Pawlenty and another of the finalists on Mr. McCain's list described an intensive vetting process for those candidates that lasted one to two months. 'They didn't seriously consider her until four or five days from the time she was picked, before she was asked, maybe the Thursday or Friday before,' said a

Republican close to the campaign. 'This was really kind of rushed at the end, because John didn't get what he wanted. He wanted to do Joe or Ridge.'"

NBC Political Director Chuck Todd reported on the network's web site, "more and more reporters are learning just how close McCain came to picking [Lieberman] as his running mate. In fact, if my sources are correct, Lieberman was virtually a done deal inside McCain's mind as of 10 days ago. But then, he was talked out of his pick by top adviser Charlie Black and campaign manager Rick Davis. Both believed a pro-choice running mate would create convention chaos."

*National Review Online* underscored the influence of the Christian fundamentalists, noting that as the McCain campaign was drafting the statement announcing Bristol Palin's pregnancy, a group of top McCain aides met. Their assignment "was to call a list of about 40 top evangelical and other cultural conservative leaders. Each one would get a personal explanation of the story, and each was asked for his or her reaction. The McCain people reached nearly everyone before the story broke, and the verdict was unanimous—all the leaders supported Palin and her place on the McCain ticket."

While media criticism of the Palin nomination remains tentative and muted, there are reports of intense recriminations within the Republican camp. David Frum, a former Bush speechwriter and right-wing activist, told the *Los Angeles Times*, "I really hope McCain did his homework. I cannot stifle a growing sense of unease that he didn't."

The *Times* also reported Tuesday: "One Republican strategist with close ties to the campaign described the candidate's closest supporters as 'keeping their fingers crossed' in hopes that additional information does not force McCain to revisit the decision. According to this Republican, who would discuss internal campaign strategizing only on condition of anonymity, the McCain team used little more than a Google Internet search as part of a rushed effort to review Palin's potential pitfalls. Just over a week ago, Palin was not on McCain's short list of potential running mates, the Republican said."

The picture is extraordinary: a campaign flailing about in desperation, and, for all of McCain's professions of "independence," completely in thrall to the most reactionary elements in American political life.

The only thing which sustains the Republican Party and the McCain-Palin campaign is the complicity of the media and, most importantly, the Democratic Party itself. Obama issued a well-publicized statement denying that his aides were responsible for the Internet rumors about Sarah Palin, and declaring that candidates' families should be off-limits in the political campaign. But neither Obama, nor his running mate Joseph Biden, nor any other Democratic Party representative dares to put the spotlight on the critical political fact demonstrated by the Palin nomination: the ability of extreme right-wing and fascistic elements to dictate the policies and even the candidates of the Republican Party.



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**