

The Palin Bounce

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We live in crazy times. A general election looms, the most vital for a generation, one in which real options are at stake. For once, politics actually matter: and because they do, it seems reasonable to expect that people will think carefully before casting their vote.

But apparently not: if the Republicans have their way, this election will be dumbed down to a political equivalent of American Idol. One speech by an unknown governor from a state almost as far removed from Washington as it's possible to be, and suddenly Barack Obama is behind in the polls and Sarah Palin is the woman of the moment.

No matter that she has less foreign policy experience than any vice-presidential candidate in living memory.

No matter that she was chosen after only the most modest of background checks.

No matter that her conservative views put her on the farthest right-wing edge of American politics.

No matter than John McCain is old enough to remember Pearl Harbor.

No matter he has been a Washington insider since his running mate was in high school.

Let us hope so uninformed a Palin-boost to Republican fortunes is short lived. It may be if we remember the following.

** Much of what is currently claimed about her is misleading. Yes, she opposed the 'bridge to nowhere' – but only after initially supporting it and pocketing the federal money. Yes, Alaska is close to Russia – but that no more makes her a foreign policy expert than me, just back from a vacation in Europe. Yes, she fought corruption in her own party – but only before landing in an ethics crisis of her own. And yes, she is a hockey mom – but she's no more typical an American mother than any other moose-shooting born-again Christian on a mission from God.*

** Sarah Palin put herself in a direct line of feminists from Geraldine Ferraro to Hillary Clinton. But she is no Hillary Clinton. She is really a latter day Margaret Thatcher. That British prime minister did indeed break the glass ceiling – the first woman to head the UK government – but she broke it only for herself. She promoted no other cause liberating of women, not even advocating 'equal pay for equal work'. You don't break glass ceilings by opposing abortions for victims of rape and incest. You break them by fighting for women's rights. There is no Palin track record on that.*

** The manner of her selection also tells us a lot about the character of her would-be boss. It reminds us of McCain's propensity to shoot from the hip, head for the unconventional, follow his gut, not his head. That style of leadership has just given us a disastrous war and a broken economy. Do we really want more of the same? Do we really want Bush plus McCain's famous temper?*

For all the claims about change and reform in Washington, political life under a McCain-Palin administration will be more of the same.

The same Republican trickle-down economics that has left so many of us struggling for jobs and savings.

The same de-regulation and small government philosophy that has given us the sub-prime loan crisis, and a wave of house repossessions.

The same immigration policy that has given us ICE raids in the night and the demonizing of the entire Latino community.

The same politics of division and intolerance.

Rush Limbaugh loves her. He calls her 'a babe'. That should be warning enough.