

North To Alaska

She was not what the Obama team expected. Sarah Palin, that is, the first woman governor of Alaska. At the ripe young age of 44 Palin has a 90 per cent approval rating in Alaska and is praised by the governors of many other states. She has a reputation for being bright, strong-willed, and fearless in taking on the “good old boy” network. She bested the sitting Republican Governor in the primaries and then went on to defeat a former Democrat Governor on election day.

Once in office, she decided the Governor’s office didn’t need the expensive private jet that a prior administration had purchased. She put it up for sale – on eBay – and promptly made a profit for the State of Alaska. As Governor, she fought a sweetheart natural gas pipeline deal the previous Governor had made with ExxonMobil, BP, and ConocoPhillips.

Palin’s history of fighting corruption, saving tax dollars, and working cooperatively with Democrats caught the attention of John McCain. The more he learned about Palin, the more he was impressed. Most Americans have never heard of Sarah Palin, but Americans are likely to be as impressed as was McCain. She is certainly not a good old boy who’s hung around Washington for the last 40 years, but neither is she a lightweight. She’ll be able to hold her own during the campaign, and will bring to the Republican ticket the votes of people who like her feistiness and integrity. Only hours after the nation learned of McCain’s pick, Palin was already the “buzz.” And with his selection, McCain certainly took some of the wind out of the Obama sails – which may now have to rely solely on the palpable puffing of Chris Matthews and Keith Olberman.

The naming of Palin caught the Obama campaign as off-guard as it did the media and most of America. Obama now has to figure out how to combat the now complete team of opponents, and a suddenly energized Republican Party.

McCain’s selection will naturally prompt the Obama campaign to question Palin’s inexperience. But too much criticism will only draw attention to Obama’s own thin resume. Palin has been a governor only two years... but Obama has never had an executive position. Palin was a mayor of a small town... but at least she ran the town successfully, while Obama was merely an errand body for Chicago Mayor Richard Daley while a State Senator in Springfield, Illinois.

Obama can talk about being a “reform” candidate,” but no one can point to anything he did to earn that self-described reputation. (I make it a rule never to trust anyone who brags about being a reformer.) Palin, on the other hand, quit her job as head of the Alaska Oil and Gas Conservation Commission in protest over the corruption she uncovered. Her exposing the abuse led to the filing of ethics violation charges and the resignation of a commissioner. Obama “talks

the talk,” while Palin “walks the walks.” Palin’s got “street cred,” while Obama’s got 50 phony Rolex watches hanging on the inside of his raincoat.

Obama’s running mate, Joe Biden, no doubt thinks he can clean Palin’s clock in the sole Vice-Presidential debate. But he can’t pound on Palin’s age (44) without calling attention to Obama’s (47). Biden “knows a lot about foreign policy,” but one would still be hard-pressed to name anything he has accomplished during his 36 years in the Senate – beyond his obnoxious treatment of Reagan Supreme Court nominee Robert Bork (which created the term “to be Borked”) and his questioning of Anita Hill during her aborted attempt to destroy future Justice Clarence Thomas with her “Coke can” accusations.

Biden, like Obama, can certainly “talk the talk.” But Biden will talk, and talk, and talk, and talk. If Biden gets a debate question about Constitutional “penumbras,” he’ll go off on a tangent that will drive the viewers to something stronger than Coke. Palin can’t match Biden on foreign policy knowledge or legal minutiae, but she’ll give straight answers to questions and impress the viewers as a “real human being.” That will certainly score her points, and Biden being Biden, he may very likely say something patronizing, offensive, or condescending to or about Palin that pushes even more support her way.

Toss in even one debate question about abortion, and Biden will look like the evasive old politician he is. Palin is a mother of five children, the youngest of which is an infant with Down’s Syndrome. No one will be sympathetic to Biden’s view of unlimited, federally-funded, no-questions-asked abortions if Palin talks about her beautiful child and how abortion is a sin, both in the eyes of God and any civilized, compassionate human being. She will “connect,” as they say. Biden’s ability to connect is solely dependent upon his ability to find a sad story from a book that he can then claim as his own life experience. Women who support abortion can still feel more comfortable with Palin than Biden, simply because she is a woman, just as some women prefer having a woman for a personal physician – because she knows how to listen to their concerns. Further, most women voters know that neither McCain nor Palin is a serious threat to overturn Roe v. Wade – not with Nancy Pelosi in Congress and the Democrats having the power to stop any Supreme Court nominee McCain may get the chance to make.

Obama’s team will no doubt be staying up late trying to figure out how to attack a “hockey mom” who is the most liked Governor in the country, who ran her own business, and who isn’t afraid to fight oil companies or entrenched politicians of both parties. Obama needs to tread lightly, or he and Biden will be treading water while McCain and Palin finish laps ahead of them.

Palin is fiercely pro-business and pro-development, in direct contrast to Obama’s anti-business and pro-bureaucracy beliefs. Voters will readily see Palin as someone from the outside who can get things done. Obama entered the race

trying to portray himself in that light, but it was all an obvious act. Palin is the “real deal.” And that will be obvious to everyone – even liberals.

Obama is the abstract art hanging on the museum wall. You need a guide to explain to you exactly why the collection of thick paint blobs signifies “man’s inhumanity to man.” Palin is the landscape on the wall in your living room. The moment you see it you know what it is, a boat fighting a storm out on the ocean. Obama appeals to the wine and brie crowd that pretends to understand modern out of fear of being considered “unsophisticated.” Palin will be glad to have a beer with you down at the pier.

If Obama isn’t worried, he should be.

Many Democrats are worried, because they are suddenly asking, “Why do you think women will vote for Palin just because she’s a woman?” Has it not occurred to them that an awful lot of blacks (and many whites) will vote for Obama simply because he is black? He’s not polling at 95 per cent in the black community because he’s Swedish.

You can’t have it both ways, Dems. If race and gender are not relevant, then why is it such a big deal to have Obama in the White House? And if race should be a strong reason for some people to vote for Obama (i.e., to prove that America has “moved beyond race”), then gender can also be a reason for others to vote for Palin.

I’ve always assumed that the first black or woman President or Vice-President would be a Republican. Why? Because Republicans primarily vote on principle, and generally won’t cross party lines just for the “chicness” of supporting a black or a woman, while for the Democrats, “chicness” and “race guilt” and “gender guilt” would overwhelm them and allow them to cross party lines.

I’ll leave it to the psychoanalysts to define why.

Don Fredrick
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