

Profile of Alaska's Sarah Palin: Governor, Reformer, Mother

By JIM CARLTON
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When a hockey mom named Sarah Palin ran for governor as a Republican outsider in 2006, she took on not only a sitting governor from her own party but also Alaska's Republican establishment -- vowing to clean up a political system that had been rocked by an Federal Bureau of Investigation corruption probe.

After handily winning, her popularity in Alaska soared as she went on to sack political appointees with close ties to industry lobbyists and shelved pork projects. Gov. Palin has shown similar fearlessness in going after Big Oil, whose money has long dominated the state. She appears, for example, to have forced Alaska's dominant oil producers, **ConocoPhillips** and **BP PLC**, to finally get serious about a natural-gas pipeline -- without making any tax or royalty concessions.

VP NOMINEE COMPARISON

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Sarah Palin

Current Office: Governor of Alaska

Date of Birth: Feb. 11, 1964

Age: 44

Place of Birth: Sandpoint, Idaho

Home: Wasilla, Alaska

Education: University of Idaho, 1987

Religion: Lutheran

Party: Republican

Political Experience: Wasilla Mayor, 1996-2002. Alaska Oil and Gas Conservation Commission Chairman, 2003-04. Elected governor in 2006.

Misc.: Palin's son Track enlisted in the Army in 2007, and is scheduled to be deployed to Iraq in September.

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Joe Biden

Current Office: U.S. Senator

Date of Birth: Nov. 20, 1942

Age: 65

Place of Birth: Scranton, Pa.

Home: Wilmington, Del.

Religion: Catholic

Education: University of Delaware, 1965; Syracuse University College of Law, 1968

Party: Democrat

Political Experience: U.S. Senator from Delaware, 1972-present

Misc.: Biden's son Beau, a captain in the Army National Guard, is scheduled to be deployed to Iraq in October.

"People see her as the symbol of purity in an atmosphere of corruption," says Anchorage pollster Marc Hellenthal. "She's more like Saint Sarah."

Republican presidential candidate John McCain drew on that image in choosing Gov. Palin as the first woman to run on a Republican Party presidential ticket.

The 44-year-old Gov. Palin is a mother of five. She served as mayor of Wasilla, Alaska, (pop. 8,500) and was winner of the Miss Wasilla pageant. She has been featured in a photo spread in *Vogue*.

Although Alaska only has about 700,000 people, the state has outsized strategic importance because it contains some of the richest mineral resources in the world, including some of the largest known oil reserves in the U.S.

Before her selection as running mate, Gov. Palin served as an informal energy adviser to Sen. McCain, saying she has spoken with the Arizona senator about the need to drill more in places like Alaska.

But Gov. Palin hasn't been completely free of controversy as governor. A flap blew up after she fired Alaska Department of Public Safety Commissioner Walt Monegan on July 11.

He said afterwards that Gov. Palin and her husband had pressured him to remove a state trooper who was a former brother-in-law she and her family had feuded with. Gov. Palin denies that, saying she removed the commissioner she appointed 18 months ago because she wants "a new direction," and offered him a job as liquor board director which he turned down.

The case stemmed from a messy divorce between the trooper, Mike Wooten, and his wife, Molly, who is Gov. Palin's younger sister. In 2005, Gov. Palin alleged the trooper had threatened to harm her father and sister and that he had engaged in numerous instances of official misconduct, including using a Taser on his 10-year-old stepson and shooting a moose without a proper permit, according to state documents. In one instance, she told state investigators, she overheard him on the telephone threatening her sister: "I'm gonna f—shoot your dad. He's gonna get a lead bullet."

Mr. Wooten told investigators he tested a Taser on the boy at his request, thought he was within his rights to kill the moose and never threatened the Palins. An internal police investigation substantiated the moose and Taser charges, but threw out most of the rest. He was ordered suspended for 10 days in 2006. He declined comment through a spokesman with the Public Safety Employees Association.

Many of Gov. Palin's supporters dismiss the trooper matter as trouble being stirred up by her enemies. "Many of those who had been in positions of power and authority have been very envious over the past year and a half with Gov. Palin's great popularity," says David Carey, mayor of Soldotna, Alaska.

Her choice to replace the commissioner, Chuck Kopp, resigned after two weeks on the job after reports surfaced that he had been issued a letter of reprimand for sexual harassment of a subordinate in his previous job of Kenai police chief. Mr. Kopp, who denied the charges, stepped down a day after the governor's office said it heard of the reprimand for the first time. At a news conference with Mr. Kopp in Anchorage, Gov. Palin didn't take any reporters' questions but said: "As your governor, I apologize. I know Alaska will overcome inevitable bumps in the road as we just traveled this week."

The state's Legislature has since called an investigation into what some Alaskans have taken to calling "Troopergate."

A native of Idaho who grew up in Alaska hunting and fishing, Gov. Palin gained a reputation for political purity early on. In 2004, she resigned as chair of the Alaska Oil and Gas Conservation Commission over ethical grounds. Among her concerns was that the chairman of the Republican Party in Alaska took a seat on the commission while keeping his partisan post. The official ended up resigning from the body after Gov. Palin, among others, disclosed he was conducting Republican business in his state job. He agreed to pay a \$12,000 state fine.

"Someone has to take a stand and change some things," Gov. Palin said in an interview in June in her office in downtown Anchorage, which is adorned with Alaskan knick-knacks including the skin of a brown bear killed by her father.

In 2006, when she was running to unseat then-Gov. Frank Murkowski in the Republican primary, Gov. Palin says she got a call from Ben Stevens, then president of the Republican-run Alaska Senate and son of U.S. Sen. Ted Stevens, the powerful Alaska Republican. "He told me, 'You're not just running against Murkowski. You're running against me, my dad, the whole state Republican party,'" Gov. Palin says.

The younger Mr. Stevens didn't return calls for comment. He opted not to seek re-election after his was one of six legislative offices raided by federal agents in 2006. Four other state legislators have been sent to prison or are awaiting prosecution in the case, which has focused

on bribery and other influence by oilfield contractor VECO Corp., whose chairman and a top lieutenant have pleaded guilty to bribery and conspiracy charges. The elder Mr. Stevens, who handily won the Republican primary this week to face re-election in November, was indicted in the case and has pleaded not guilty.

In office, Gov. Palin -- whose husband, Todd, works as an oil-field worker and fisherman -- set an earthier style than her predecessors. For one thing, she sold the private jet Mr. Murkowski used to get around Alaska, relying instead on commercial airlines and her family's Jetta and a state-issued black Suburban. "I love to drive," she says. She also waved off a security escort, driving herself to and from work every day from the Anchorage suburb of Wasilla, about 45 miles away.

That penchant for independence has occasionally caused some complications. In early July, for example, she escaped serious injury when her Suburban was rear-ended in a fender bender on her way to the office. And on June 18, she blamed her half-hour delay in arriving to a bill signing ceremony in Kenai on road construction. "Todd kept reminding me to bite my tongue, saying 'Good roads are comin'!, Good roads are comin'!," Gov. Palin said to laughter from a small crowd in a converted fish cannery, where she signed a tourism-marketing bill.

Gov. Palin said in an interview afterwards that she ducked down to keep state troopers from seeing her as the family negotiated road construction on the 160-mile drive from Anchorage to Kenai. "I knew they would wave me through," says the 44-year-old Gov. Palin, sipping a Diet Pepsi in the booth of a restaurant in the cannery as her husband -- a four-time winner of Alaska's Iron Dog snow-machine race -- held their baby, Trig.

One of the governor's top priorities has been getting a natural-gas pipeline built from Alaska's vast North Slope oilfields. With Prudhoe Bay and other fields being steadily depleted, state officials have long pegged their economic future on a pipeline to transfer the huge amounts of natural gas on the North Slope to the rest of the U.S.

But she took the bidding process outside the state, rather than continue negotiating primarily with Alaska's existing oil producers as her predecessor had done. In a snub to the oil majors, she has proposed TransCanada Corp., a Calgary-based energy company, be given the primary contract to lead the \$30 billion job along with \$500 million in matching grants. She just signed a bill the legislature passed allowing that to happen.

BP and ConocoPhillips, meanwhile, have come up with their own proposal to build a gas pipeline. Gov. Palin says she has privately assured oil executives there will be more than enough business for everyone, and outside observers give her credit for getting the ball rolling after years of inertia. "She has created momentum every step of the way," says Drue Pearce, head of the Office of Federal Coordinator for Alaska Natural Gas Transportation Projects.

Gov. Palin has raised eyebrows in other ways. Many environmentalists are livid, for example, over her support of aerial shooting of wolves in Alaska -- despite ballot measures in the state in which voters twice since 1996 have voted to end the practice. "So far, people have been forgiving of her, but I don't know how long that can last," says Tom Banks, Alaska representative for Defenders of Wildlife, a Washington-based environmental group.

The governor says she is pro-environment and has defended the aerial shooting as necessary to build up moose and caribou herds in parts of Alaska to help improve local food supplies.

Gov. Palin's opted to board a jet from Dallas in April while about to deliver a child. Gov. Palin, who was eight months pregnant, says she felt a few contractions shortly before she was to give a keynote speech to an energy summit of governors in Dallas. But she says she went ahead with it after her doctor in Alaska advised her to put her feet up to rest. "I was not going to miss that speech," she says.

She rushed so quickly from the podium afterwards that Texas Gov. Rick Perry nervously asked if she was about to deliver the baby then. She made it to the airport, and gave birth hours after landing in Anchorage to Trig, who is diagnosed with Down Syndrome. "Maybe they shouldn't have let me fly, but I wasn't showing much so they didn't know," she says.