

THE CAPITAL TIMES

The mother of all insults

Joan Fischer — 9/30/2008 5:47 am

So Sarah Palin's participation in the vice presidential debate is going to be the sparring equivalent of bumper bowling. The McCain camp insisted upon a tightly formatted structure for Palin's debate with Joe Biden, one that is designed to protect her from spontaneous questions and discussion.

Geraldine Ferraro was granted no special protection when she debated George H.W. Bush in 1984, and it is inexplicable why the nonpartisan Commission on Presidential Debates gave in to McCain's demands now. It's hard to call this progress. An experienced, knowledgeable female candidate should not require special treatment.

But Sarah Palin is a female candidate who exists as a token. Nobody except Palin herself believes she is qualified to be vice president, not even McCain and his campaign managers. Palin was put in place to bring in the evangelical right and toss a bone to women voters who might somehow fail to notice that Palin does not support women's issues.

Those who shudder at the thought of Palin being VP should worry even more about her becoming president. This is a very real danger with a 72-year-old president who has a history of cancer.

Here's what we know about Sarah Palin before the debate begins:

1. We know she lies. She said thanks to that "bridge to nowhere" until it became a national embarrassment, and then she kept the designated \$223 million from U.S. taxpayers for other uses in her state. She has been corrected many times but continues to lie, in keeping with the Rovian finding that a lie repeated becomes a fact in voters' minds.

2. We know she is under investigation for abuse of power. "Troopergate," in which Palin allegedly fired the Alaska public safety commissioner for refusing to fire a state trooper who is Palin's former brother-in-law, points to a larger chronicled morass of friendship hires, personal vendettas, questionable per diem charges, and the involvement of her husband in policy decisions.

3. We know she is a poor fiscal manager. As mayor she left Wasilla, a town roughly the size of McFarland, around \$15

million in debt after building a sports complex.

4. We know her life has been marked by a scant education and apparent incuriosity about the world. She attended five colleges in six years to get a bachelor's degree. (Who does that?) She has barely left the U.S. in her lifetime. Within the United States, Alaska is sparsely populated, has a relatively small range of racial diversity, and is in many ways isolated from the Lower 48, thus limiting even her experience of this country. In the 1980s, greed was good. What's good now, ignorance? Haven't we had enough of that?

5. We know she is no friend to women. She supports abstinence-only sex education (and we see how well that worked for Bristol). She opposes abortion even in cases of rape or incest. Along with McCain, she opposes equal pay for equal work.

6. We know her handlers are terrified of what Palin would say to the news media if reporters were allowed unfettered access, to the point where they are denying access that is essential to our democracy. The plan is to get the public to vote for someone we have not been allowed to question. We've talked so much about pigs during this campaign. Ever heard of buying a pig in a poke?

And so we have a female VP candidate who was raised to the White House by powerful conservative men who appreciate her backward views and her beauty queen looks (and her gun-toting, moose-hunting ways; this lends a note of feisty pizzazz). During these long weeks of campaigning, she has been seen much more than heard, a woman whose voice has been either scripted or muzzled. Consider her the Stepford Veep.

But here's the most important thing about Sarah Palin: what selecting her says about John McCain. Choosing Palin to be a heartbeat away from the presidency was irresponsible beyond redemption. McCain's formerly admiring biographer, Elizabeth Drew, now says that "John McCain is not a principled man."

That's obvious.

Joan Fischer is a writer and editor based in Madison.