

Evangelical Voters Energized by McCain VP Pick

Conservative Christian leaders say the selection of Gov. Sarah Palin is generating grass-roots support for the Republican ticket.



[] Sen. John McCain's selection of Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin as his running mate has energized conservative Christian voters who see her as one of their own.

"What I'm picking up on this end is so many people have been inspired to vote and inspired to get out and get involved in the Republican cause right now because of Sarah Palin's faith, the values she holds," said David Pepper, pastor of Church on the Rock, a charismatic congregation in Wasilla, Alaska, that Palin and her family attended before she was elected governor in 2006. "I don't think people realize the extent of what's happening just by word of mouth. People are wanting a high-integrity leader, someone with strong Christian values."

A self-described hockey mom who says she is "as pro-life as any candidate can be," Palin, 44, is the first woman elected governor of Alaska. Running on a clean-government platform, she has sometimes broken with the state Republican establishment, and has opposed corruption and wasteful spending. A longtime member of the National Rifle Association, Palin supports

traditional marriage as well as drilling for oil in her state as part of efforts to achieve energy independence.

Married for 20 years, Palin is also a mother of five, the youngest of whom, Trig, was born in April and has Down syndrome. Her oldest son, Track, enlisted in the Army on Sept. 11, 2007, and is to be sent to Iraq this month.

"John McCain is to be commended on his choice of Sarah Palin, a true Christian for vice president," said Gary Cass, chairman and chief executive officer of the Christian Anti-Defamation Commission (CADC). Last spring his organization launched a campaign advocating that both presidential candidates choose born-again running mates who are pro-life and pro-traditional marriage.

"Palin, an evangelical who is pro-life and pro-marriage, meets all the criterion that CADC set forth for a VP pick," Cass said. "Unfortunately, Obama chose Joe Biden, a liberal Catholic, who is not in compliance with Christian moral teaching on abortion or homosexuality."

Born into a Catholic family, Palin was baptized as a teen at Wasilla Assembly of God (AG), which she and her family attended until 2002. During high school she was president of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. "She's always portrayed great leadership qualities," said Pepper, who attended high school with Palin. "As long as I've known her she's always been a very solid Christian

and great woman of faith. Solidly pro-life.”

In a statement posted on the church Web site, Wasilla AG leaders called Palin “a woman of integrity,” a “servant of the people” and “a strong leader.”

Former Wasilla youth minister Ted Boatsman, who until recently was the district superintendent of the AG in Alaska, said Palin has taken on tough issues during her tenure as governor. “She kind of bucked bureaucracy, you know the way it was all established there,” he said. “She’s a gutsy lady, a strong lady, believes in her faith, walks her faith out. ... I think McCain showed great wisdom. This lady is the genuine thing. She’s got a lot of courage; she’s authentic.”

Palin currently attends Wasilla Bible Church and visits Juneau Christian Center (JCC), an AG congregation, during the legislative sessions. JCC pastor Mike Rose described Palin as “a wonderful woman of God.” He said he has had a “chance to watch her ... improve our state. Her character is above reproach.”

Before McCain announced his running mate, many Christian conservatives were fearful that he would choose a pro-choice vice president. But leaders such as Focus on the Family founder James Dobson are calling Palin an “outstanding choice,” pointing to her pro-life and pro-family positions as well as her support for tax cuts and opposition to pork barrel spending.

Although at one time he said he would not vote for McCain, Dobson told the *Washington Times* that McCain's selection of Palin has won his full support for the Republican ticket. "If flip-flopping is a sin, I'm a sinner," Dobson told the *Times*. In a subsequent statement, Dobson said Palin gives conservative voters "confidence [McCain] will keep his pledges to voters regarding the kinds of justices he would nominate to the Supreme Court."

Mathew Staver, chairman of Liberty Counsel and dean of Liberty University School of Law, said Palin is an "absolutely brilliant" choice who has "electrified conservatives."

"Gov. Palin can work with both parties and has shown she can clean up government corruption," said Staver, who endorsed McCain in July. "She has not merely talked about the energy crisis, she has actively worked to create solutions. ... Personnel is policy. With the selection of Gov. Palin, Sen. John McCain has proven that he can exercise sound judgment."

Even Palin's announcement Saturday that her 17-year-old daughter, Bristol, is five months pregnant did not curb evangelical enthusiasm for the presumptive vice presidential nominee. "This is the pro-life choice," Richard Land, president of Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, said in a statement. "The fact that people will criticize her for this shows the astounding extent to which the secular critics of the pro-life

movement just don't get it.

"Those who criticize the Palin family don't understand that we don't see babies as a punishment but as a blessing. Barack Obama said that if one of his daughters made a mistake and got pregnant out of wedlock, he wouldn't want her to be punished with a child. Pro-lifers don't see a child as punishment."

Conservative supporters also reject the idea that Palin is too inexperienced to be vice president. Although Palin has been governor of Alaska for less than two years, they argue that her state's budget is larger than Arkansas' was when Bill Clinton was elected president in 1992.

"It is interesting to hear all of these liberals whine about foreign policy experience," said Andrea Lafferty, executive director of the Traditional Values Coalition "Where were they when the Democrats were nominating Bill Clinton, a governor of Arkansas, to be president? How about Jimmy Carter, a peanut farmer from rural Georgia? The audacity of their hypocrisy is galling.

"This was a very wise move by Sen. McCain. He has done what Sen. Obama refused to do—pick a qualified woman to be his running mate. Instead, Obama picked a Washington insider who has been part of the old guard of radical liberals who are still trying to raise taxes, protect the abortion industry and pack our federal courts with activist judges."

Phil Burress president of Cincinnati-based Citizens for Community Values

Action, expects Palin's selection to generate significant grass-roots support for the Republican ticket in the swing state of Ohio. "The choice of Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin as vice-presidential running mate has just converted thousands of McCain voters in Ohio to McCain-Palin volunteers and workers," Burress said in a statement.

"Sarah Palin is a working mom; a woman who is unabashedly and personally pro-life; a lifetime member of the NRA; a true frontierswoman who, while challenging the influence of big oil companies and while being environmentally conscientious, is in favor of oil drilling in her own state as part of a program to achieve energy independence. And, like McCain, she's a maverick—a woman who is in no way attached to the Washington bureaucracy. What more could conservative voters ask for? ... The selection of Sarah Palin is exactly what they were waiting for." — **Adrienne Gaines**