

Big-Name Endorsement Fails to Impress

When it comes to influencing the 2016 U.S. presidential race, Sarah Palin's star power is turning out to be dimmer than expected.

There was no ecstasy in the crowd when the former Alaska governor and vice presidential nominee endorsed Republican front-runner Donald Trump at a rally in Ames, Iowa, on Tuesday night. And at Trump's next appearance on Wednesday in Norwalk, people who came to see him—both hard-core Trump supporters and undecided voters—said Palin was not swaying them.

"They're going to have to do an image remake of her," said Joani Estes, 56, of Indianola, Iowa. Estes said her Pentecostal Christian faith made her feel aligned with Palin, but it did not make her feel any more strongly about Trump. She liked him, she said, and was likely going to caucus for him during the state's nominating contest on Feb. 1—but she was also keeping the door open for his closest rival, U.S. Senator Ted Cruz of Texas.

Her friend Jenny Terrell, 55, said Palin's endorsement made her less certain about her support for Trump. A longtime Democrat, Terrell said she had been inspired by Trump but was put off by Palin's extreme opposition to abortion rights.

"I was a little disappointed," she said, adding that even though she knew Trump had declared himself to be against abortion, she did not see him as being as fervently anti-abortion as Palin.

As a strategic move in Trump's competition against Cruz in Iowa, getting an endorsement from Palin made sense, political experts said. She is popular among tea party Republicans who

rail against the political establishment, as well as blue-collar evangelical Christians, two groups from which Cruz draws strong support.

It is not yet clear whether evangelical leaders in the state will follow Palin's lead and choose Trump over Cruz. But Trump had already managed to draw some of those voters with his brash, sweeping talk of keeping refugees out of the United States, building a wall along the Mexican border to stop illegal immigration, and putting education policy back in the hands of local communities.

"I could care less" about Palin's support for Trump, said Scott Heckart, 49, who said he had made up his mind to caucus for the billionaire businessman and former reality TV star.

Even Andrew Haup, 26—who said he decided to support U.S. Senator John McCain of Arizona, the Republican presidential nominee in 2008, only after McCain made Palin his running mate—said her endorsement mattered little to him since he had already made up his mind to support Trump.

Near the back of the room where Trump spoke on Wednesday morning, Matt Burns, 47, a Cruz supporter, stood alone. He said he had only come to see Trump because his teenage daughter had asked him to take her. He said he liked Palin and was not angry at her for choosing Trump over Cruz, but said her choice was not going to sway him.

"For me it doesn't really do a whole lot," he said. "I think most people know who they're going to caucus for." {eo}

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