

The Last Laugh:

I've been wondering for some time now why, exactly, John McCain made the choice of Sarah Palin to be his running mate in the recent and still ongoing election. There are two reasons, more or less obvious, but I don't think that they provide the entire answer.

First, of course, is that Mrs. Palin is female. It was a good political move to choose a woman. It looked for a very long time like Senator Clinton would be the nominee of the other party. So it made sense that there might be a significant number of voters who were already predisposed to and looking forward to a woman in the White House.

Secondly, she is attractive and energetic. It made sense for Senator McCain to choose a much younger and more vibrant person than himself as a balance against his image as a crotchety older man, the kind of guy who would keep your baseball if it rolled into his yard. Governor Palin has the zip and the juice to get people going and is the same age as the voters her party needs to energize and win away from the Democrats.

But that's where the qualifications stop. That's it. That's all she brought to the show. There are many Republican women who are far more experienced and knowledgeable than she. There are Senators and business leaders to choose from. The list from Senator Dole to business powerhouse Meg Whitman is an impressive one. There must be ten viable female candidates in the party. Governor Palin was surely eleventh on that list.

So why? Why did John choose Sarah? I have come to the conclusion that he was ticked off, that he wanted to teach the right wing of his own party a lesson that will haunt them for years.

He wanted Lieberman or Ridge as his running mate, guys who would have been completely in tune with the McCain notion of reasonable conservatism mixed with a sprinkling of change. But no, the wing nuts, chest beaters, San Juan Hill and hell fire branch of the GOP (still the folks in control) couldn't abide his wishes. There would be a fight at the convention and that would be the death knell for 2008. The more than holy conservative conclave was actually willing to trash the campaign if McCain went with his own guy.

So John did what any red blooded fly boy would do. He took his thumb and stuck it directly in the eye of his party. He chose the goof. He chose Dopey and Happy too, all in one person. He went all the way to where the sun don't shine to pick the Mayor of Wasilla as his partner in governance. He chose the enormously inadequate Sarah, the poster child of mediocrity. He chose a politician whose achievements included harassing librarians and employing her Dude.

John knew she would play well with the base and he was right, ridiculously right. She plays well and will play well for years. And that's the fiendishly clever part of McCain's brainstorm. Governor Palin will run and probably get nominated in 2012. The Neanderthals who run her Party will be deliriously happy with her. She will run again in '16 and for who knows how long after that. She will bear the standard high and wide. She will campaign tirelessly, "Hey everybody, look at me. I'm a star." And she will lose, big time. And John will laugh, big time. McCain has given his Party a one way ticket to also-ran and the Party to running to board that train even as we speak.

Did you notice what the polling data showed us in this last election? The Democratic ticket won or tied or was close in every demographic category, every one. Women, men, age, you name it. There is one glaring exception, southern white folks. That's right the Republican Party won the southern white vote by thirty-eight percent! The country as a whole went 53% to 46% for Obama and southern whites went 68% to 30% for McCain.

Sarah Palin will be the standard bearer of this purely Regional Party. She will do well in the old South and she will do well in the Plains and she will do well in the Wilderness. And that's it. If she gets 200 electoral votes it will be a miracle. Sarah's "Real Americans" and the bigots and the nineteenth century cellar dwellers will march loyally to the polls for their candidate and she will get trounced.

John McCain has always had a certain sideways sense of humor. He enjoys jabbing at his colleagues and the press. He is known as a practical joker who can set up the gag and wait for his victim to walk into it, smiling. Well, he's set up the doosey of all times, by elevating Governor Spice to the national stage. He has given his old nemesis, the traditional wing of his party, the gift they thought they wanted. They deserve Sarah and John has graciously given her to them. The players are in place and the joke is set. The Senator from Arizona is looking forward to the last laugh.