

## **PALIN DESTROYS MCCAIN'S CREDIBILITY ON ENERGY AND THE ENVIRONMENT**

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Sarah fouled her own nest, and I can't understand why.

I hate to think it was simply greed or ambition.

--Wasilla schoolteacher Patty Stoll

The meager credibility that McCain had on major issues was essentially lost when he picked Sarah Palin as his running mate. His demand that serious candidates have years of experience has fallen flat by choosing a little known 20-month governor and mayor of a town of 6,000. His long standing criticism of earmarks now rings hollow in the face of Palin's \$800 million as governor and \$27 million as mayor. McCain's already strained credibility on the environment has now collapsed because of Palin's abysmal record.

In 2003 Senators McCain and Lieberman drafted a cap-and-trade bill to contain carbon emissions that got 43 votes in the Senate, a dramatic change after similar restrictions in the Kyoto Protocol were defeated by 95-0 in 1997. But in 2007 McCain refused to support an almost identical bill solely because it did not include nuclear power. People are now wondering if McCain is really serious about

global warming, or is he more concerned, as one critic put it, about "burnishing his maverick reputation."

A principled position on global warming is out the window now that Palin is on the ticket. On Newsmax.com (8-29) Palin said that global warming was not "man-made," and last December she told the Fairbanks *Daily Miner* that "I'm not a doom and gloom environmentalist like Al Gore blaming the changes in our climate on human activity."

Boasting about her position as governor of the nation's only arctic state, Palin appears oblivious to the reasons why the last two summers have seen the greatest melting of sea ice in recorded history. Even though Alaska's own state biologists agree with the threat to polar bears, Palin claims that she has their support in suing the U.S. government over their listing as an endangered species. A 2008 summer survey found polar bears with cubs swimming in the open sea, some 150 miles from shore with no ice flows for refuge.

The federal government has also proposed listing the beluga whales of Alaska's Cook Inlet as endangered. Even though their populations declined 50 percent between 1994 and 1998, Palin resists the move because she wants to lease the waters for oil exploration. Although McCain opposes it, Palin also wants to drill in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

Do we really want to sacrifice the long term survival of Alaska's magnificent creatures on the short term altar of the religion of "Drill, Baby, Drill"? (Palin was also leading chants of "Mine, Baby, Mind" on the campaign trail in Kentucky.) Just as we rejected Idaho Congresswoman Helen Chenoweth's proposal to eat sockeye salmon out of a can than see them swim in the Salmon River, most of us would rather have belugas and polar bears in the wild rather than in the zoo.

In 2007 Governor Palin went ahead with dumping toxic wastes in the Cook Inlet even though the plan was based on the "long-discounted notion that 'dilution is the solution to pollution'—turning the federal Clean Water Act on its

head" (*The New Republic* [10/28/08]). Palin opposed an August 26, 2008 ballot measure which would have forced a clean up toxic metals from mining sites. Researchers believe that these metals are the principal reason that Alaska's birth defect rate is 3 percent higher than the national average. The mining industry took great advantage of the governor's pronouncement and was able to defeat the measure.

As mayor of Wasilla, Palin used federal funds to build a hockey rink rather than fix the town's sewage treatment plant, which is now leaking into the surrounding watershed. This leakage combined with pollution from seaplanes and freeway run-off has killed most of the fish in once pristine Lake Lucille right in front of Palin's home.

Palin's pro-development philosophy, according to David Talbot of Salon.com, has made Wasilla into "a chaotic bazaar of quickie espresso shacks, moose-stuffing taxidermists, Bible churches, gun stores, tattoo and piercing parlors, mattress barns and the inevitable box stores with their football-field parking lots."

McCain has made the incredible claim that Palin knows more about energy than anyone in the nation, but she doesn't even have basic energy facts straight. She claims that her state alone accounts for 20 percent of the nation's energy, when in fact in 2005 Alaska produced only 3.5 percent of energy consumed in the U.S. Even if Palin meant oil, not total energy, Alaska's portion of U.S. oil and gas production, according the Energy Information Administration, was 7.4 percent in 2005.

With regard to Palin's most acclaimed energy achievement—the TransCanada natural gas pipeline—her claim that construction has begun is exaggerated. First, industry critics maintain that the state should not have subsidized the project with \$500 million. Second, an application to the Energy Regulatory Commission will not be filed until 2011, and the project would not be

completed until 2018 at the earliest. As Palin herself admitted: "We are not turning dirt yet."

McCain keeps saying that we need to explore all energy options, including wind and solar, but he opposes tax credits for the latter while recommending a \$3.7 billion hand out for three new nuclear power plants. McCain is simply wrong when he says that the wind and solar industries are "doing fine," because their technological momentum relies heavily on federal help. The tax credits for these industries would be significantly less than the \$24.6 billion that McCain would need to subsidize the 20 nuclear plants that he envisions.

As a fiscal conservative, McCain should know that the nuclear option is the most expensive one. Estimating \$8 billion for each plant, the cost per megawatt is \$2.29 million compared to a coal plant at \$1.7 million and a wind farm at \$1.8 million. The cost of taking care of the nuclear waste is not included, and the U.S. is now 20 years behind schedule in this regard. The coal plant costs do not include a carbon tax, which at \$30 per ton would be \$230 million a year.

With only 2.4 percent of the world's petroleum reserves and 25 percent of the world's consumption (6 times more per capita than Europe), we cannot possibly drill our way to energy self-sufficiency. Only with major investments in alternative forms of energy and concerted efforts to conserve can the U.S. solve its energy crisis and reduce its irresponsible carbon emissions.