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Going Rogue? You Betcha!

Dolores Bujnowski

“She stands up for what’s right, and she doesn’t let anyone tell her to sit down. [...] She’s fought oil companies and party bosses and do-nothing bureaucrats, and anyone who put their interests before the interests of the people she swore an oath to serve...My friends and fellow Americans, I am very pleased and very privileged to introduce to you the next vice president of the United States – Governor Sarah Palin of the great state of Alaska!” (Palin 226) This quote, taken directly from John McCain’s vice presidential announcement speech discusses only a few of the reasons why Sarah Palin was selected as the Republican nominee for Vice President in the 2008 Presidential election. While history did not turn out quite like McCain’s speech enthusiastically predicts, the principles and actions exemplified by Palin are both admirable and are worthy of political success. However, in today’s society, Sarah Palin is portrayed as unintelligent, unaccomplished and essentially unsuccessful. As defined by Merriam-Webster Dictionary, success is a favored or desired outcome; that being said, this writer questions how society has the basis to deem someone unsuccessful merely on the result of a failed political election. After reading Sarah Palin’s autobiography, *Going Rogue*, this writer has arrived at the conclusion that Sarah Palin’s political career should be considered successful, regardless of the result of the 2008 Presidential election. Sarah Palin is a successful politician because she remained true to her values and principles despite continuous attacks on her character and morals. The following essay will examine Sarah Palin’s life and political career, with an emphasis on her successes, achievements and accomplishments.

Sarah Palin, born Sarah Louise Heath, was born on February 11, 1964 in Sandpoint, Idaho; her family moved to Alaska when Palin was only three months old. After moving around

different parts of Alaska, the Heath family settled in Wasilla, which is approximately forty miles north of Anchorage. In high school, Palin was a member of the school's Pep Band and the girls' basketball team. Being a member of the basketball team played a significant impact on Sarah's morals and principles. Her basketball team, the Wasilla Warriors, was usually considered to be the underdog team; this motivated the girls to strive and play harder towards their goal of a victorious season. Week after week, the determined team began to pile up victories. One week, during regional tournament play, Sarah twisted her ankle. Fearful that after a thorough exam her doctor would not permit her to play for the rest of the season, she minimized the injury, played through the pain and her team eventually won the championship game. Sarah states, "That victory changed my life. More than anything else to that point, it proved what my parents had been trying to instill in me all along; that hard work and passion matter most of all." (Palin 41) Sarah leveraged the attributes of hard work and passion all throughout her high school career, by becoming involved in student government. She states, "Every year in school I ran for something in student government—vice president, treasurer, something." (Palin 28) This involvement in high school politics ultimately foreshadowed her future political career.

Growing up, Palin's family was not particularly partisan or political. At the age of eighteen, Palin became a registered Republican. She states, "I had read both major party platforms, and the GOP just made sense for someone like me. A believer in individual rights and responsibilities rather than heavy-handed government; in free market principles that included reward for hard work; respect for equality; support for a strong military; and a belief that America is the best country on earth." (Palin 45) In 1992, Palin was recruited to run for the Wasilla City Council. During her campaign, she focused on specific issues such as reducing property taxes and redefining government's role in constituents' lives. Wasilla Councilman Nick

Carney noticed Palin's drive to provide tools that would enable the city to prosper; he is quoted as saying, "The city would do well to have you serve." (Palin 66) It was Sarah's emphasis on constituent concerns that helped her win the election. After winning the election, Palin became the youngest member of the city council and subsequently found that the rest of the council, including the de facto leader Nick Carney, was not too pleased when Palin voted independently, or not in lockstep with the rest of the council. Palin states, "[...] I had to live with my own conscience, so I voted according to my own principles and let the chips fall where they may." (Palin 66)

After serving six years on the city council, Wasilla's current mayor, John Stein, was up for reelection; it was then that Palin decided that Wasilla needed new leadership. She states, "I decided to challenge the mayor in the upcoming election in order to effect a greater change than I could as a council member." (Palin 70) She promised new energy and "an end to politics as usual", cuts to property taxes and wanted to embrace laissez-faire principles. During a mayoral debate, one of Stein's supporters sarcastically commented to Palin that she could not possibly win the election with three strikes against her; these three strikes were her three children, Track, Bristol and Willow. "Oh man, the Mama Bear in me rose up then," notes Palin, "[...] After that I was more fired up than ever. All the more reason to get out there, work hard, win and start shaking things up." (Palin 71) Palin did wind up winning that mayoral election, by a large margin, thereby ensuring she would continue to serve the people of Wasilla, Alaska.

After officially taking office, it became clear to Palin that other government officials and department heads were not on her side; for example, Nick Carney vowed to make her job especially difficult. In her role as mayor, Sarah still emphasized constituent ideas and concerns, so every Friday morning she would visit a different local establishment to meet her constituents.

She states, "I loved listening to their ideas and showing them I cared." (Palin 75) In her first term alone, Palin cut small business inventory taxes and property taxes, built new roads and paved worn ones to encourage businesses to expand into Alaska, and also started construction on a multiuse sports center. In her second term as mayor, she continued to fulfill her campaign promises, and was selected to serve in the prestigious position of president of the Alaska Conference of Mayors. At the age of thirty eight, Palin was finishing her second term as mayor of Wasilla; mayors in Alaska are limited to only two terms. In 2004, Palin received positive encouragement from constituents, from both the Republican and Democratic parties, to run for the office of governor. During her campaign, she ran on a campaign theme of "change". Palin states, "I made it clear to voters that I would gather the information I needed and base my decisions on principle and sound ideas [...]" (Palin 113) This message led Palin to victory in November 2006. According to Whitney Pitcher, who wrote an article solely dedicated to Palin's executive accomplishments, "Sarah Palin was the first female and youngest governor ever elected in Alaskan history" (Pitcher) As governor, Palin drastically reduced Alaska's statewide budget, and among other things, passed pieces of legislation dealing with ethics reform and the proposed natural gas pipeline. Joshua Green discusses one of her major gubernatorial achievements in his article entitled "Sarah Palin's Secret Success". He states, "Through sheer force of will (and a willingness to cooperate with Democrats), she managed to solve, at least for a time, the problem that lay at the heart of Alaska's politics for a generation: how to break the oil companies' grip on the state and to return a fair share of their profits for Alaskans. Palin's major achievement was enacting an oil tax that did just that and was called Alaska's Clear and Equitable Share (ACES)." (Green)

In August 2008, only two years into her governorship, Palin received a phone call that would change her life forever; this writer wonders if her life was changed for the better or for worse. The phone call was from Senator John McCain asking her to run as his vice presidential candidate in the 2008 Presidential election. Running as a candidate in the 2008 Presidential election allowed Palin's unconventional political style to be seen on a national spectrum. Liz Sidoti, of The Huffington Post states, "She says what she wants, does what she wants and makes no apologies. And love her or hate her, you can't really argue with this: Politics as usual has never been Sarah Palin's style." (Sidoti) This unconventional style facilitates Palin's ability to spread her message, while simultaneously sticking to her personal principles and morals. However, Palin's political style wasn't necessarily favored or wanted on the 2008 campaign. In *Going Rogue*, Palin notes that most of her speeches were prewritten by McCain campaign "headquarters" which she was told to memorize; whenever the governor would veer off the memorized speech even the slightest bit, the campaign would call it "going rogue"; which is where the title of her book stems from. Randy James, of The Skimmer, states in a book review of *Going Rogue*, "[...] the book reveals [...] an eager player in the blame game, ungrateful to the McCain campaign. [...] Palin reserves her most aggressive attacks for McCain's campaign staff, rather than President Obama and the Democrats." (James) Based on this quote, this writer finds it easy to assume that Palin blames the McCain campaign for many of her unsuccessful moments that were consistently portrayed in the media during the campaign.

Around the majority of the country, Sarah Palin is and perhaps always will be a topic of conversation, but in Alaska, they've managed to push her legacy aside almost completely. From the eyes of this writer, even though Palin is an occasional topic of discussion, she is on the minds of many for all of the wrong reasons; this is especially true in Alaska. Joshua Green, of The

Atlantic, states “During a week spent traveling there recently, I learned that Palin occupies a place in the minds of most Alaskans roughly like that of an ex-spouse from a stormy marriage: she’s a distant bad memory, and questions about her seem vaguely unwelcome. [...] Alaska has moved on.” (Green) This quote essentially labels Palin as an unsuccessful politician; if the population of Alaska virtually would like to dismiss the idea and essence of Palin from their minds completely, it shows how she is characterized as unsuccessful in the eyes of her former constituents. This writer is reasonably convinced that this recent dismissal of Palin as an unsuccessful politician only occurred after the national election; Palin had many notable achievements in each of her political offices held in Alaska’s governmental system.

Other accounts cite Palin’s dwindling influence in the political sphere and her attitude on the 2008 campaign trail. John Avlon’s article entitled “Why Sarah Palin’s Reputation Has Plummeted as Bill Clinton’s Has Grown” discusses the ideas advanced as to why Sarah Palin’s once solid reputation among the Republican Party has drastically changed since the presidential election of 2008. Avlon states, “Palin no longer stirs the kind of passion that sold magazines and divided families.” (Avlon) While this statement may be true, this certainly does not automatically label Palin as unsuccessful; one cannot easily be dismissive of her past successes and political victories in Alaska. In addition, Guy Adams wrote an article in The Independent which discusses Palin’s hypothetical dark side. Adams’ article quotes an excerpt from Meghan McCain’s recently published book which discusses Palin’s attitude on the campaign trail. McCain cites Palin’s behavior as causing “drama, stress, complications, panic, and loads of uncertainty.” (Adams) At first, this might seem like a valid argument. However, after reading Palin’s autobiography, it has become clear to this writer that Meghan McCain’s accusations may not be all together true and accurate. Perhaps the “uncertainty” was caused because Palin was

hesitant to parrot prewritten statements that the Republican Party had prepared, rather than speak her mind openly and freely like she initially intended to do on the campaign trail.

It has become quite apparent to this writer that there are mixed reviews regarding Sarah Palin's political career. However, this writer still remains attached to her initial hypothesis; Sarah Palin is a successful politician. As previously discussed, Palin made a huge impact on the state of Alaska while she served in office; in each different capacity, she managed to put her constituents first, while simultaneously benefiting them and their needs. Not only has Sarah Palin emphasized her morals and principles in her various governmental roles, but she has also demonstrated the importance of her principles in her personal life, such as the issue of abortion. For example, there are several situations in Palin's life where she has firmly stood against abortion, ultimately displaying her adherence to her values. When Palin's daughter, Bristol, unexpectedly became pregnant as a teenager, Palin encouraged her daughter to look into other options other than abortion, such as adoption. Palin and her husband Todd were "proud of Bristol's selfless decision to have her baby and her determination to deal with difficult circumstances by taking responsibility for her actions." (Palin 234) In addition, Palin was faced with a similar decision when she found out she was pregnant with her fifth child. Growing up, Palin was taught that "every child has value and a purpose and a destiny". (Palin 172) At twelve weeks along with her son Trig, there was a high chance that he could be born with certain abnormalities, such as Down Syndrome. Palin insisted that "abortion was not going to be an option." (Palin 174) In 2008, Palin gave birth to her son, Trig, who was born with Down Syndrome. Palin did not see this as a detriment; instead, she used her own experiences to serve as an advocate and ally for special needs families during the 2008 presidential campaign. She states, "I pledge to you that if we are elected, you will have a friend and advocate in the White House." (Palin 241)

Moreover, by remaining true to her ideological beliefs, she demonstrated sincerity and fortitude to her ideological base; she managed to appeal to traditional Republican voters primarily on the basis of her political stances and beliefs. However, some voters might have felt disconnected to Palin's "tell it like it is" attitude, which can often "brand" a government leader. Government officials must be able to modulate his or her principles and attitude, to ensure more bandwidth as applies to voter turnout and support. One example of the discomfort with her "tell it like it is" attitude comes from the McCain campaign team. After reading *Going Rogue*, it has become apparent to this writer that Sarah Palin perhaps was not ready to tackle politics on a national level. Even more so, it appears that her reputation took a serious downturn once she joined the McCain campaign team. In the autobiography, Palin discusses the strong importance that the McCain campaign administrators put on packaging and her appearance; it seemed that these administrators were trying to alter who she was or essentially transform her into someone she was not. This writer is baffled why the McCain administration even chose Palin to run on the ticket if they intended to alter her image and attempt to veer her away from her "tell it like it is" attitude. Yes, her political successes in Alaska are very compelling and she had a very clean record and level of appeal with her constituents. However, if her attitude and appearance weren't what the McCain team was looking for in their candidate, she ultimately should not have been chosen at all.

Today, Sarah Palin is still involved in politics, without holding a public office. She briefly held a position at Fox News as a political commentator, which she left in January 2013. In a parting interview with Fox News, Palin emphasized the importance of the 2014 elections. She states, "It's going to be like 2010, but this time around we need to shake up the GOP machine that tries to orchestrate away too much of the will of constitutional conservatives who

don't give a hoot how they do it in D.C. D.C. is out of touch, obviously." (Lavender) This quote shows Palin's constant involvement in politics and the political sphere regardless of holding an elected government position. In addition, Sarah Palin has also served as a guest speaker for the Conservative Political Action Conference, which was held this past March. Al Cardenas, the American Conservative Union Chairman, stated "We are pleased to again welcome Governor Sarah Palin to CPAC in March. Governor Palin electrified the crowd in 2012 and we are thrilled to welcome her back this year." (Lee) This excitement demonstrates that Palin still plays an important role in conservative politics and serves as an icon in the conservative political sphere. While Palin is still relevant in politics today, Larry Mendte offers some advice on how Palin can make a political comeback, while still sticking to her morals and principles. Mendte cites Palin's past successes and moments on the 2008 campaign, in which she served as an advocate for special needs children. Mendte states, "Why doesn't Palin keep her convention pledge and be a friend, an advocate and a hero to families with special needs children? She could use her name, her charisma and her impressive fund-raising ability to help those families. It would be the best thing Sarah Palin could do for America ... and for Sarah Palin." This writer believes that Mendte's advice is both sound and reasonable; if Palin followed this path, it would allow her to advocate for families all across America on an issue that is close to both her family and her heart.

In conclusion, Sarah Palin is a successful politician, not only because she remained true to her principles and morals, but also because she remained true to herself and her character despite attempted altering from outsiders. A phrase from one of Whitney Houston's songs, "Greatest Love of All" sums up Palin's attitude towards the political sphere perfectly. Houston states, "I decided long ago, never to walk in anyone's shadows. If I fail, if I succeed, at least I'll live as I believe. No matter what they take from me, they can't away my dignity." All throughout

her political career, including the 2008 campaign, Palin was belittled for her principles and her actions. As Whitney Houston's song suggests, Palin lived as she intended, thereby assuring her personal success. Although the final chapter in the life and times of Sarah Palin remains yet to be written, this writer feels assured that she will ultimately remain true to the ideals of the person who began the journey.