

Obama, Palin, and Their Sixteen Years of Experience

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Let me get this straight. Senator Barack Obama is qualified to be the President of the United States, but Governor Sarah Palin is unqualified to be the Vice President of the United States. In what can only be considered the “hey kettle” comment of the campaign, Senator Obama’s spokesman noted upon hearing about Senator John McCain’s selection of Governor Palin: “Today, John McCain put the former mayor of a town of 9,000 with zero foreign policy experience a heartbeat away from the presidency.” This statement comes from the party that a mere twelve hours before had nominated a former state legislator from the south side of Chicago with zero foreign policy experience for the presidency. That is rich.

The fact of the matter is that both Senator Obama and Governor Palin can claim twelve years of elected office experience since 1992. That fact alone should have dissuaded the democrats from raising experience as an issue. Given that Senator Obama quickly distanced himself from his campaign’s comments indicates that he knows that the last debate he should get engaged in is a debate on experience with the republican vice presidential candidate. After all, the mere existence of the debate is proof of his experience deficit as compared to Senator McCain. Nonetheless, a review of each candidate’s activities over the last sixteen years leads to one, incontrovertible finding: Senator Obama’s experience pales in comparison to Governor Palin’s experience.

In 1992, hockey mom Sarah Palin decided to fight a tax proposal in her hometown of Wasilla, Alaska, so ran for the Wasilla City Council. Palin won that election and served on the Wasilla City Council until 1996. In 1996, Councilwoman Palin, frustrated by wasteful spending and high taxes, challenged the incumbent mayor of Wasilla, and won. She served as mayor until 2002.

Over the course of these ten years, especially the six as Mayor of Wasilla, Palin presided over a \$6 million budget and a staff of 80 city employees. Wasilla is home to an estimated 1,100 businesses, including steel fabrication, agricultural, manufacturing, and distribution companies. During Mayor Palin’s tenure, Wasilla experienced one of the strongest employment expansions in the state of Alaska.

In 2002, Mayor Palin ran for Lieutenant Governor of Alaska. In a five-way primary, she lost by a mere 2,000 votes.

Given her strong record of reform, Mayor Palin was appointed as the Ethics Commissioner to the Alaska Oil and Gas Conservation Commission in 2003. She successfully rooted out republican corruption, but when other republican

commission members sided with the status quo, rather than “go along to get along,” Commissioner Palin resigned her position in 2004.

In 2006, Governor Palin challenged the republican establishment in Alaska and ran for the Governor’s Office on a reform agenda. She not only beat the republican machine in Alaska, but also overcame the democrat machine in the general election.

As Governor of Alaska, Governor Palin presides over a \$6.6 billion budget and thousands of state employees. She is the only governor in America that shares a border with Russia and Canada, which requires some foreign policy experience given the thawing of the Arctic Ice and the current race by the U.S., Canada, and Russia to claim the now available oil and gas deposits. Because Alaska is a vital energy producing state, Governor Palin quickly has earned her stripes in advancing an energy agenda that helps free the U.S. from its dependence on foreign oil. She spurred the development of a new pipeline from Alaska to the continental United States. As Governor, she traveled to the Middle East to gain a better perspective on the issues there and to support America’s troops in Iraq, including her oldest son.

As the CEO of Wasilla and Alaska, there was/is no decision above Governor Palin’s pay grade. As with all mayors and governors, she knows the buck always stops with her and that she was/is ultimately accountable to the voters for results.

In stark contrast to Governor Palin’s twelve years as an elected CEO and appointed ethics commissioner, Senator Obama’s career from 1992-2008 is thin on substance.

First, Senator Obama spent 3 years practicing law as a civil right lawyers and part-time law professor. He did not manage a budget or employees in either position.

Next, Senator Obama was elected to the Illinois State Senate in 1996 to represent the south side of Chicago. At most, Senator Obama oversaw a handful of staffers and a small office budget. As a state senator, Senator Obama focused his time and attention on social welfare issues. In eight years, Senator Obama famously voted “present” 130 times, or over sixteen times per year. A “present” vote was an attempt by the caster to escape accountability on a particular piece of legislation or issue.

In 2000, Senator Obama ran for the U.S. House of Representatives. In a two-way primary, he lost by a 2 to 1 margin.

In 2004, Senator Obama ran for the U.S. Senate, and won. Just as with the Illinois State Senate, Senator Obama oversees a handful of staff and a small office budget. In his three and a half years in the U.S. Senate, based on the lack of accomplishments listed during the Democrat National Convention, Senator Obama hasn’t done much. Given that he has spent the last year and a half campaigning for the presidency, such a lack of outcomes isn’t that surprising. Senator Obama has toured foreign countries, including the Middle East.

So, at a time when wasteful spending pervades Washington, D.C., oil and gas prices are too high, reform is desperately needed, Russia is invading a democratic neighbor, partisanship is at an all-time high, and economic growth is anemic, who has the experience to make a real difference? Over the last 16 years, Governor Palin, having lived her life a missile's throw from the Soviet Union and a resurgent autocratic Russia, has managed anywhere from \$6 million to \$6.6 billion and thousands of employees, lowered taxes, grew the economy, enhanced America's energy supplies, reformed government, took on her own party, and added 4 children to her family. During that same time, Senator Obama practiced and taught law, voted on legislation, and ran for the presidency. In his time in the Illinois and U.S. Senate, Senator Obama, despite his call for bipartisanship, has not bucked his party on a single major issue. Not one.

There is a reason voters prefer governors in favor of legislators for the presidency. Legislators talk about change. Governors create change.

Another way to state it: Actions speak louder than words.

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