

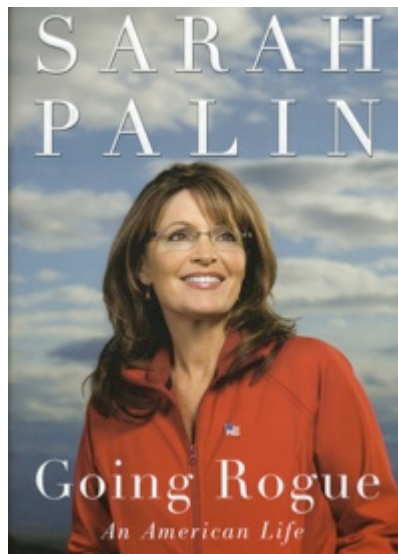


Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on December 1, 2009

Book Review: Sarah Palin's "Going Rogue"

"I love to write, but not about myself," wrote Sarah Palin on page 409 of a book that is almost entirely about herself. *Going Rogue* is subtitled "An American Life," but Sarah Palin is hardly the typical American "hockey mom."

How many women have won a local beauty contest, finished second runner-up in the state pageant, then gone on to be Mayor, Governor, and vice presidential candidate of one of the two major parties, all while giving birth to and raising five children? How many have earned the nickname "barracuda" for toughness in athletic competition and "Miss Congeniality" in the aforementioned state beauty pageant? Lord, it must be hard to pretend you're just a typical American career mom when your book about yourself sits atop the bestseller list a week after it hit the bookstores.



No doubt about it: Sarah is special. So is her special-needs child, Trig, born with Down's Syndrome only a few months before his mother was tapped to run for Vice President. That was child number five for Todd and Sarah Palin, with their eldest, Track, already in the military and headed for Iraq. "She's got a baby, what is she doing?" asked one woman I know when she heard of Sen. John McCain's choice of a running mate. But the governor of Alaska knew what she was doing then and, contrary to the speculations of some in the Washington punditocracy, she did not take leave of her senses in July of this year when she resigned as Governor of Alaska to... well, she didn't say exactly what she was going to do.

Was it because she hadn't made up her mind? Or was it that she wanted to get an early start in campaigning for the 2012 Republican presidential nomination. Obviously, she had committed to writing a book and received a princely sum for a simple, 45-year-old hockey mom — \$1.5 million, in fact — as an advance. But is the book tour an end in itself? Or is it the prelude to a campaign to be (sorry, Hillary) the first woman ever nominated for and perhaps elected to the office of President of the United States?

Unlike a couple of book tours done over the years by Newt Gingrich, the Palin parade has not yet included a stop in New Hampshire, the state with the nation's first presidential primaries every four years. I don't know if it has taken her to Iowa either, but the campaign cycle is still young.

But art, including political art, is long, and time is fleeting. Sarah's heart, though stout and brave, still like muffled drums is beating past the last election grave. The GOP was soundly beaten in '06 and again in '08, but there are signs of new life in the old Party, and who better than a youngish mom with battle scars to point the way to a better tomorrow, to offer a Republican version of "hope" and "change"?

But before you shell out \$28.99 at your local bookstore or even a reduced price wherever you can find



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or order the book, be advised if you are looking for a hint or confirmation of her future plans, you won't find it. The conventional wisdom is she is already running for the White House. That, more than sexism, may be why *Newsweek* chose the *Runner's World* magazine shot of the glamorous Palin posing in running shorts for its cover of November 23. She is, like, running, get it? The issue that followed George Bush's win in the Iowa caucuses in 1980 showed "Poppy" Bush out jogging. True he was wearing a sweat suit instead of shorts, but who would want to see Bush's legs, anyway?

So it seemed a bit chippy of Palin to object to the cover on the grounds of "sexism." She is supposed to have a tough hide, after all. But the book makes only scant mention of Palin's reputation as "Sarahcuda," a word she recalled seeing on a T-shirt somewhere on the campaign route. She describes her days as a student athlete, making mention of "the liberating effect Title IX on women's sports." It might have been refreshing if, at that juncture or later in the book, Governor Palin would have pointed out something that used to be a talking point for conservative Republicans: the role of the federal government in elementary- and secondary-school education. Simply put, there isn't one, constitutionally speaking. But school districts, hooked on federal grant money, are required to make athletic opportunities equally available to both (all?) genders as well as students of all races, religions, and ethnic derivations. So if not enough girls come out for the high-school wrestling team, then the school jolly well better let the girls who do want to wrestle get down on the mat and wrestle with the boys. What does Sarah Palin, champion of traditional family values, think of that? Her book doesn't tell us.

Take this, Governor Palin, and label it sexist if you wish: the book is like a woman's bikini. What it reveals is interesting; what it conceals is essential. The politically interested reader has to ask himself: Do I know any more about Sarah Palin's political ambitions or core beliefs at the end of the book than I did at the beginning? Aside from a few vague hints of something deeper, the answer is "no."

The question is important because nearly every vice presidential candidate is considered among the "top tier" of candidates for the next opportunity to run for President. But running mates do not speak their own minds. They articulate — even parrot — the talking points of the presidential candidate and his handlers. So at the end of the campaign, you know as little, or even less about the VP candidate's belief than you did at the beginning. To recall 1980 again, George Bush the Elder started out as a "pro-choice" candidate who thought Ronald Reagan's combination of tax cuts, defense spending increases, and safety-net entitlement guarantees would yield a balanced budget only through the magic of "voodoo economics." Then he became Reagan's running mate, and by the time he was elected Vice President, no one knew what he stood for anymore.

But Palin has the advantage of having been on the losing team in '08, an experience that could, if she would let it, be even more liberating than Title IX. Vice President Joe Biden is saddled with the duty of being the spokesman for the Obama administration. Sarah Palin, for the first time since she entered the national spotlight, is in a position to speak for herself. And what she says is rather muted.

She is for free enterprise, she says. And local government. Against bailouts for failing businesses. She is for small business and small government. She knows energy issues, especially in Alaska with its trillions of cubic feet of natural gas and its rich oil reserves. She knows also that the supply is non-replaceable and she knows a thing or two about energy conservation, wind and solar power and she understands the value of keeping a scenic land beautiful and preserving abundant outdoor opportunities, protecting fisheries and standing up to big oil companies. On all of that, she can appeal common sense conservatives and to moderates and even liberals among Republican, Democrat and independent voters. But hardcore conservatives may wonder if she is really "one of us." Yes, she sings hosannas to the



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sainted Ronald Reagan and to Margaret Thatcher as well, but does she still believe in the pre-W conservative agenda and Republican platforms that called for the elimination of the federal departments of Energy and Education? She sued the federal Environmental Protection Agency for putting polar bears on the Endangered Species list, an act of rebellion that might endear her to the Party's conservative base. But curiously, she makes no mention of that in her 413-page book. She shies away from endorsing "abstinence only" sex education and says she supports contraception, though she is strong in her stand against abortion. But that might make you wonder if she is aware that most forms of artificial contraception are really abortifacients and if she can look the culture of death in the face and recognize it for the evil that it is.

On military and foreign policy matters, she seems to think we need to "stay the course" in Afghanistan and Iraq. Our diplomacy, she says, must make it clear that we support freedom for all and, of course, we must be constant in our support of Israel.

On pork barrel spending, she is against Senator Clinton's proposal to build a memorial to the Woodstock celebration in New York and a proposed monument to mules and other pack animals in California and the infamous "Bridge to Nowhere" in Alaska. Pause over that last one before it goes by in a blur. That's all the mention that it gets. She spends several pages recalling her grilling at the hands of CBS News anchor Katie Couric, which did not turn out well, but recalls only one insignificant detail of her interview with ABC's Charles Gibson. Gibson kept looking over his bifocals like a professor giving an oral exam to a college student.

But in fact, Palin flunked that exam. Worse, she flunked on the issue of honesty. In an interview with Palin, Gibson zeroed in on her statement, made at the Republican National Convention and elsewhere, that "I told Congress, 'Thanks, but no thanks, on that Bridge to Nowhere.' If our state wanted to build a bridge, we were going to build it ourselves." In fact, Gibson pointed out, she was lobbying for federal funding for the bridge before she was against it and was against it only after it had become a political embarrassment. Well, every Governor lobbies for projects for her state, Palin countered in a desperate, artless dodge. But Gibson, to his credit, focused in on the duplicity of pretending to have been against it all along. Sometimes those doggone network news people, for all their liberal biases, get it right.

Palin was ground down by all the scripted answers, the talking points, all the orders from campaign "headquarters" to say nothing and only to the right people. Headquarters was risk averse and continually opposed to her "going rogue." Talk in platitudes, give scripted non-answers, play it safe, and don't forget to remind people you're a "maverick," just like John McCain. "And also, too, the great Ronald Reagan," as Tina Fey so often said in her *Saturday Night Live* parodies of Palin.

That has essentially been the Republican strategy for the last 70-plus years, perhaps because it worked so well for Tom Dewey. And, to be fair, it did work for Nixon, for the Bushes and "also, too, the great Ronald Reagan." It is the Republican Party's equivalent of the NFL's "prevent defense." If you employ that strategy when you have a big lead, there is a chance you might not blow all of it.

Palin got "mavericky" — she went rogue — when she dissed the New York liberal the Party bosses chose to run for Congress in the state's District 23 in this fall's special election and endorsed the Conservative Party candidate instead. Newt Gingrich, by contrast, played the male version of Tammy Wynette, saying stand by your left-wing, same-sex marriage, cap-and-trade, pro-abortion if she wears the Republican label. The Democrat won that race but the so-called pragmatists were still wrong in saying you can advance the conservative agenda by electing liberal Republicans.



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Palin needs to do still more to break away from the Party establishment and show her own “true grit.” She could stop listening to the foreign policy “experts” on the Council on Foreign Relations and start reading Pat Buchanan’s books on how America is following in the failed footsteps of past empires. She could stop exulting about how we are “spreading democracy” and “building schools” in Afghanistan and reflect on why civilians who see their loved ones killed by unmanned bombers in Afghanistan and Pakistan may not see America as the “shining city on a hill.” She could recall what Ron Paul said about bridges and how we have been taxing the American people to bomb bridges in Iraq and then taxing (or borrowing) some more to rebuild those bridges. Meanwhile our bridges here are falling apart. She might recall Paul’s admonition that America should try leading “by the force of example, instead of the example of force.”

Okay, that’s trite, too. But it has the advantage of being true. And it doesn’t take 413 pages to say it.

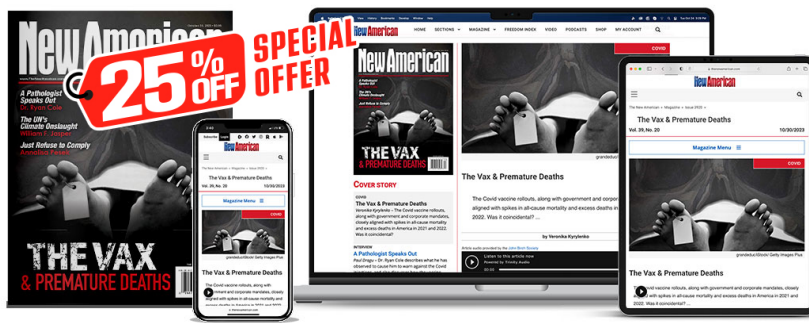


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