



November 21, 2009

Palin visit stirring both friends and foes

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Staff writer

As the national Republican establishment appears unsure about what to make of Sarah Palin, the upper echelon of the local GOP wants very much to be a part of tonight's book signing, in which the most talked-about figure in their party comes to town.

But this visit is not for them.

Former vice-presidential candidate Palin will visit Borders in Henrietta tonight to promote *Going Rogue: An American Life*, part of a tour with over 30 stops, all geared toward her energetic, devoted grass-roots base.

Elected official or not, everyone who wants to meet her will be standing in line. There will be no VIP receptions or meet-and-greets at the airport.

The Monroe County Republican Party and County Executive Maggie Brooks showed interest in hosting a gathering for Palin while she's in town, according to their spokespeople.

But Palin's book tour isn't a political event, it's meant for those supporters who say she speaks for them, who admire her candor in an age of political correctness and who are looking for a conservative voice during a time when the national government has moved to the left.

"She's like us," said supporter Wendy Nowak, 49, of Canandaigua. "You insult her, you insult us."

It's Palin's ability to speak to the anger in conservative circles across the country over the stimulus package, bank bailouts and health care reform that allows her to inspire such devotion in her base, according to experts.

"People identify with the fact that she can get up there and tell people off," said Elayne Rapping, professor of American Studies at the State University of New York at Buffalo. "They really like the fact she'll say whatever she thinks."

Whether her appeal is enough to take her into serious consideration for the presidency in 2012 is debatable.

Republican radio host Bill Nojay, who helped plan Palin's visit to Henrietta and says he's fielded calls from the top ranks of the local GOP with inquiries to meet her, said she "clearly is the leading Republican figure in the United States today."

Nojay compared her charisma to that of President Ronald Reagan's and said her views are "catching fire."

But winning elections requires attracting more than half the votes, and a CNN poll this week found that only 28 percent of Americans think Palin is qualified to be president.

"I think she has a very excitable base but it's limited," said Iva Deutchman, professor of political science at Hobart and William Smith Colleges. "If the party is only made up of a very narrow group, you can't win. ... She has a little bit of very loud and enthusiastic support, but that doesn't translate into numbers."

Palin's opponents find plenty not to like about her and say she isn't a threat to the left if she chooses to run for president in 2012, citing her poll numbers.

A *Washington Post-ABC News* poll from Sunday found that 43 percent of Americans view her favorably and 53 percent do not, while 46 percent would consider voting for her.

However, she appears popular in her party, as a *Fox News/Opinion Dynamics* poll also conducted this week found that 70 percent of Republicans, 49 percent of independents and 25 percent of Democrats viewed Palin favorably.

The Democratic National Committee promoted recent polls in an effort to show her weakness, part of a blitz from the left in response to her book tour.

It is clear that her opponents cannot ignore her.

Webster resident Vicky Ryder, 67, planned a protest against Palin last year in Rochester after Republican Sen. John McCain picked the former Alaska governor as his running mate.

When Ryder heard that Palin would be visiting tonight, she contacted Democratic women she knew and encouraged them to mark their disagreement with Palin with a letter to the editor, a call to the bookstore or some other kind of activism.

"I think that Sarah represents the worst in what American women should be all about," Ryder said, noting Palin's environmental record, opposition to abortion and single-payer health care. "It's hard for me to understand as a woman ... how anyone could think her positions are laudable."

A Facebook notice of a Palin protest organized by students at Rochester Institute of Technology has attracted 250 responses.

But her supporters say the left protests too much.

"You have to wonder why the left is so attacking and so vocal of her if they're not afraid," Nowak said.

Nowak, who is part of We Surround Rochester, a group affiliated with conservative commentator Glenn Beck, planned to pick her husband up from work about 10:15 p.m. Friday in Canandaigua and travel to Henrietta to stay out all night for a wristband, required attire to attend this evening's signing.

She's hoping Palin runs in 2012.

"The people who love her, we just love her to death," Nowak said.

Sarah and Dale Cameron are some of those people.

The Camerons drove to the Henrietta store from Medina on Thursday to buy copies of the book to get them signed tonight.

"She's the only woman I'd ever vote for president," Dale Cameron said. "She's for gun rights, which I'm for. She's pro-life, which is a big thing for us. She really shares our values."

Like a lot of Palin supporters, Sarah Cameron said she admires Palin's candor.

"I was puzzled why so many people seemed to be so against her," she said. "Was it her beauty? What was it? I came to the conclusion that it was because she was honest and some people don't like that. She's not a long-winded politician and I think her common sense and honesty goes a long way."

Palin's book seeks to settle scores from the McCain campaign and in what is becoming her trademark, she's not afraid to attack the left, the media, and big government, or even those in her own party. Those targets are shared by her supporters.

"People feel like they don't trust anybody," said Rapping, a pop culture expert.

"She's really plugged into this sense of confusion and betrayal."

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Includes reporting by staff writer Meaghan M. McDermott.



http://www.democratandchronicle.com/graphics/091121_Borders_Palin.jpg border="0"/>

Additional Facts

If you go

The book signing will be from 6 to 9 p.m. today at the Henrietta Borders store, 1000 Hylan Drive. Wristbands, which are available today starting at 9 a.m., are required and only available to those who purchase Palin's book at the Henrietta store. Only 1,000 wristbands are available. Only two books will be signed per wristband.

Bill Nojay, who is a lead organizer of the event, said plenty of parking should be available, but the size of the crowd is unpredictable. All police and fire agencies, as well as property owners, have been involved in the event planning, Nojay said. Visitors to the store should expect crowds typical of Black Friday shopping and should arrive early.