

## ***A VOTE FOR MCCAIN-PALIN?***

By Michael Ventura

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Are you a pissed-off Hillary Clinton supporter? I am. Do you think that Barack Obama's legislative record is pretty thin and may not fit him for the presidency? That's what I think. Are you going to vote for a third party? Not me. A third-party vote is a decision to stay on the sidelines, and this is no year for sidelines. Which means I'm also not going to sit this one out. Either it's Barack Obama-Joe Biden or John McCain-Sarah Palin – so, if one is to vote for McCain-Palin, what, precisely, would one be voting for?

Like most citizens, I want a president devoted to noble principles but who recognizes that compromise is always part of governance – who, when necessary, compromises fairly and wisely, without caving in to powerful special interests. In South Carolina, during the 2000 primary, John McCain backed off his stand that the Confederate flag is a "symbol of racism and slavery" and called it instead "a symbol of heritage." He's since admitted: "I feared that if I answered honestly, I could not win the South Carolina primary. So I chose to compromise my principles" (*The New York Times*, Jan. 1, p.10). McCain has spoken forcefully against torture, and, as we know, he was severely tortured for five years. Yet he voted against a bill to "curtail the Central Intelligence Agency's use of harsh interrogation tactics" (*The New York Times*, Feb. 17, p.27). He used to be against water-boarding; now he won't rule it out (*The Economist*, July 5, p.18). "[H]e favors a proposed referendum in Arizona that would ban affirmative action, reversing a position he took a decade ago" (*USA Today*, July 28, p.14). He was against the Bush tax cuts and offshore drilling until recently, and "he has surrounded himself with former protégés of Karl Rove, whose tactics he once denounced" (*The New York Times*, Sept. 4, p.1). Well, taxes, energy, and Rove-ish tactics are expediencies I expect from politicians. But expediency on issues like racism and torture – does one want to vote for that? McCain may be steadfast on foreign policy, but he has a long record of giving in to the far right.

And what about foreign policy? McCain pushed for what's known as "the surge" in Iraq, risked his candidacy on it, and the surge has made a great difference – I was sure it wouldn't, but it has. What is less known is that not a month after the 9/11 attacks, and offering no evidence as to why, McCain told CNN, "Very obviously Iraq is the first country" on America's to-do list; in fact, as early as Jan. 2, 2002, McCain "was on the aircraft carrier *Theodore Roosevelt* in the Arabian Sea, yelling to a crowd of sailors and airmen: 'Next up, Baghdad!' ... Mr. McCain began making his case for invading Iraq to the public more than six months before the White House" (*The New York Times*, Aug. 17, p.1). Anyone contemplating a vote for John McCain needs to read that twice. McCain pushed for this useless, wasteful war long before Bush and Cheney. What does that say about his judgment?

It's worth noting that though Iraq has been very much on McCain's agenda for at least seven years, he "has had trouble in his public comments distinguishing Sunnis from

Shiites ... [and] has referred to an Iraq-Pakistan border when the two countries do not share a border" (*The New York Times*, July 26, p.17). In a candidate making stump speeches, this seems no great thing. In a president answering the now-famous phone call at 3am, when swift orders may be necessary, such confusions weigh more heavily.

Then, as to foreign policy, there is the matter of Georgia. On Aug. 8, Russian tanks rolled into Georgia, and McCain famously declared, in the name of you and me and all Americans, "We are all Georgians." What McCain and virtually the entire American news establishment neglected to mention was that, on Aug. 7, Georgia's President Mikheil Saakashvili ordered a "withering artillery barrage [on South Ossetia] hours after [declaring] a unilateral cease-fire ahead of negotiations set for the next day" (Associated Press online, Aug. 8). The accurate timeline is: South Ossetian separatists and Georgian troops had been skirmishing; Saakashvili announced a cease-fire, after which he attacked, "resulting in many civilian casualties" (*The Economist*, Aug. 30, p.14); the targets were, in fact, civilian, and Saakashvili attacked with "tanks, artillery and jets" (Associated Press, quoted in *The Wall Street Journal* online, Aug. 9); the next day, Aug. 8, Russia attacked Georgia in retaliation, and John McCain declared that you and I are Georgians, never mentioning that Georgia attacked first.

McCain has since made many statements about protecting the democratic country of Georgia. Well, not so democratic. "Earlier this year, NATO quashed Georgia's drive to get a so-called road map for alliance membership amid alarm that President Mikheil Saakashvili was backtracking on democracy with his violent suppression last year of opposition rallies" (Associated Press online, Aug. 8). To the shame of American journalism, no one has questioned McCain's loyalty to Saakashvili – and loyalty it is. Saakashvili told *The New York Times* (Aug. 25, p.5) that he speaks on the phone with McCain "as often as twice a day." That's not surprising, since Randy Scheunemann, a McCain adviser who "has steered foreign policy in McCain's two White House bids," was formerly employed as a lobbyist for Saakashvili and Georgia (*USA Today*, Sept. 3, p.9). When the Obama campaign pointed this out, McCain's Rove-ians shot back in no uncertain terms that to do so was unpatriotic, undemocratic, etc. – a standard argument of the Bush-Cheney White House.

Given all that, one can only conclude that, in terms of foreign policy, a vote for John McCain is, well, problematic. Lots of problems.

Let's see, what else? Like Bush, John McCain wants to privatize Social Security (*The Wall Street Journal*, March 3, p.1). "On the day Hurricane Katrina hit, McCain laughed it up with [Bush] at a birthday photo-op in Arizona" and didn't criticize the Bush administration's response to the disaster until last April (*The New York Times*, Aug. 16, online). He's "[railed] against a piece of pork he in fact voted for" (*The New York Times*, Aug. 4, p.WK15). In his acceptance speech, McCain declared, rightly, "Education is the civil rights issue of this century" – but his sincerity is suspect, since McCain "didn't even include an education policy on his Web site during primary season" (*The New York Times*, Aug. 24, p.WK9). As for alternative energy, "McCain deliberately avoided voting on all eight attempts to pass a bill extending the vital tax credits and production subsidies

to expand our wind and solar industries" (*The New York Times*, Sept. 3, p.25). On the economy, McCain "has offered big tax cuts for business and the rich that he is unable to pay for. ... People on middle incomes would see little benefit. Independent analysts agree that Mr. McCain's plans would increase an already huge deficit" (*The Economist*, Aug. 28, p.13).

John McCain's choice for vice president is Alaska's Gov. Sarah Palin, about whom he said, "When you get to know her, you're going to be as impressed as I am." But does he know her? Their contact prior to her selection was "perhaps" a 15-minute conversation when they met last February (*USA Today*, Sept. 3, p.1), a telephone talk five days before he picked her (*The Washington Post*, Sept. 3, p.1), and one face-to-face conversation the morning he chose her (*The New York Times*, Aug. 30, p.1). Choosing Palin may be the most important decision McCain has ever made. That's how he made it.

What so impressed McCain that he selected Sarah Palin to be a heartbeat away from the presidency? She is against abortion even in the case of rape (MSNBC, Aug. 29). She's against stem-cell research and gay marriage and believes "creationism should be taught alongside evolution in schools" (*Newsweek*, Sept. 8, p.29). "In a speech last June to her former church in Wasilla, Ms. Palin said that the war in Iraq was 'a task that is from God'" (*The New York Times*, Sept. 3, p.24). As mayor of Wasilla, "she approached the town librarian about the possibility of banning some books." The librarian, "Mary Ellen Emmons, pledged to 'resist all efforts at censorship.'" Palin fired her "but changed course after residents made a strong show of support." Under Mayor Palin, "No employee was [allowed] to talk to the news media without her permission" (*The New York Times*, Sept. 3, p.1). On CNN's *The Situation Room* with Wolf Blitzer, Sept. 4, an uncredited female viewer e-mailed: "Sarah Palin is Dick Cheney with lipstick."

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