

# KARMA: MCCAIN'S VEEP ANNOUNCEMENT TIMING BACKFIRES

John McCain's campaign thought they were being very clever, scheduling their VP announcement for the morning after Obama's historic speech in Mile High. They calculated—correctly—that they could blunt the media excitement about that speech by staging their own big media event.

But their determination to pull off this nasty timing trick appears to be one of the biggest things that prevented them from managing the Palin announcement for maximum benefit. I have no doubt that Sarah Palin's speech tonight will be the highlight of the Republican Convention (not least because she will be the only non-wrinkled speaker of the lot, and she is a great speaker on her own right). But it's not clear the McCain campaign will repair the damage they did to themselves by managing the announcement as poorly as they did. In other words, their maneuvers to bigfoot Obama's press coverage may be precisely the thing that prevents them from winning maximum benefit from what, handled differently, might have been a game-changer.

Here's a timeline:

"Late" in week of August 17-23: Rove still trying to convince Lieberman to withdraw from VP consideration

Saturday, August 23: Obama names Biden as his running-mate

Sunday, August 24: Christian Conservatives finally convince McCain to give up on Lieberman pick; McCain speaks to Palin by phone

Tuesday, August 26: Hillary gives a great speech at DNCC, warmly endorsing Obama

Wednesday, August 27: Arthur Culvahouse

conducts first in-depth face-to-face vetting interview of Palin; Palin also speaks to Steve Schmidt and Mark Salter; campaign first learns of Bristol's pregnancy

Thursday, August 28: McCain campaign still researching Pawlenty; at 11 AM, McCain first meets face-to-face with Palin, he offers VP spot to Palin; Obama accepts nomination before 80,000 people at Mile High

Friday, August 29: McCain introduces Sarah Palin as his running mate

Monday, September 1: After the Enquirer tells the campaign it will reveal the news, McCain campaign reveals Bristol Palin is pregnant; McCain team dispatches team to Alaska to conduct more research on Palin; at 10 PM, McCain campaign informs Phyllis Schlafly that Palin will cancel her appearance at Tuesday afternoon Republican National Coalition for Life event, which was set to honor the Governor

Tuesday, September 2: McCain releases email and video introducing Sarah Palin

A couple of things stand out from this timeline. As was already pretty clear, McCain first called Palin only after he knew Obama had not selected a woman for his running mate and he decided on her only after Hillary did so well at the DNCC.

More stunning, though, is that McCain first learned of Bristol Palin's pregnancy less than two days before they announced Palin as the running mate. According to the Enquirer, Sarah Palin was pushing her daughter to get married right after the Republican Convention, but Bristol refused; this family squabble had to have happened over the last weekend (since otherwise the RNC timing would have been irrelevant). But even if Governor Palin had been able to win that argument, it would have been

too late. Had the campaign not revealed the pregnancy, the Enquirer already would have long before the marriage. Because the McCain campaign decided on Palin just a day before they announced it, it left no time to straighten up that little family mess. And, it appears, it was only after that announcement of Bristol's pregnancy that the campaign put Palin into seclusion, notably canceling an event that would have galvanized the pro life community in supporting Palin.

And note, the campaign did not even formally introduce Palin until well after the press had done it for them—it took them five days after the announcement to actually send out an email introducing their candidate.

Finally, none of the stories on the Palin vetting process refute my supposition yesterday: that the campaign did not learn of Todd Palin's membership in—and Sarah Palin's friendliness towards—a secessionist political party until after it was already out in the press. They sent out proof of Palin's continual Republican registration yesterday, at about the same time as TPM was verifying that Todd Palin had been an AIP member until his wife first ran for state-wide office. And I have no idea whether they knew of Palin's fondness for earmarks or of her ties to a Ted Stevens 527 before they picked her. Did she lie to them about the Bridge to Nowhere the same way she lied to us?

Taken together, this timeline makes it clear that the McCain campaign made its decision at least partly in reaction to Obama's actions, and they only learned of some damaging aspects of Palin's background at the same time as the rest of the world was learning of them. They failed to do their own oppo research on Palin, and as a result, were (and are) much more vulnerable to those of us doing some of our own.

Now imagine how it could have been, had the campaign decided on Palin sometime between the cantankerous resolution to the Democratic primary in June but before the DNCC in August.

That would have given the campaign two months to dig up these details on Palin, which would have (in turn) allowed them to try the head fake they tried last night, denying all association between Governor Palin and her separatist friends using her voter registration data. Bristol would have had an opportunity to marry Levi quietly (though presumably she's already had four months to do so and hasn't done so yet). And the Republicans could have laid the ground work to play up Palin's anti-choice credentials with the Christian conservatives, rather than having to minimize that exposure by canceling an event already designed to honor her.

To say nothing of giving Sarah Palin the time to actually learn some national and foreign policy, rather than asking her to cram on how to run the world's most powerful country in 72 hours as they are.

More and more observers are judging the story of the Palin nomination to be about McCain's rash judgment. But one of the biggest reasons they've reached that conclusion is because the McCain campaign chose to play nasty by bigfooting on Obama's convention buzz.

Update: Typo fixed per FrankProbst.