

RATHER THAN VETTING PALIN, MCCAIN WILL ORCHESTRATE A COVER- UP OF HER ABUSE OF POWER

"I make [decisions] as quickly as I can, quicker than the other fellow, if I can. Often my haste is a mistake, but I live with the consequences without complaint." — John McCain

It's bad enough that a presidential ticket claiming to run on reform is now orchestrating a cover-up of an apparent abuse of power. What's really stunning is that they're conducting this cover-up **in lieu** of actually vetting Sarah Palin.

The Cover-Up

As you've no doubt seen, Isikoff and Hosenball report that the McCain campaign is attempting to turn the bipartisan investigation into TrooperGate into a whitewash.

Key Alaska allies of John McCain are trying to derail a politically charged investigation into Gov. Sarah Palin's firing of her public safety commissioner in order to prevent a so-called "October surprise" that would produce embarrassing information about the vice presidential candidate on the eve of the election.

In a move endorsed by the McCain campaign Friday, John Coghill, the GOP chairman of the state House Rules Committee, wrote a letter seeking a meeting of Alaska's bipartisan Legislative Council in order to remove the Democratic state senator in charge

of the so-called "troopergate" investigation.

[snip]

Coghill, who told NEWSWEEK that he has the backing of Republican Speaker of the House John Harris in his effort to remove French, suggested Friday that the investigation into Palin's firing of Monegan should be shut down entirely. "If this has been botched up the way it has, there's a question as to whether it should continue," Coghill told NEWSWEEK.

[snip]

Coghill told NEWSWEEK that he decided to write his letter to strip French of his position on his own-without any coaxing by McCain campaign officials.

But a top McCain campaign official acknowledged that the GOP lawyer had given the campaign a "heads up" about his letter and that the McCain campaign approved of the effort to remove French.

"An investigation that was supposed to be non-partisan has become a political circus and has gotten out of control," said Taylor Griffin, a top communications aide dispatched from McCain campaign headquarters to Alaska this week to monitor the investigation and related matters.

And, as I pointed out the other day, since Palin got named the VP candidate, seven people have not so mysteriously changed their minds about cooperating with the investigation; there will be a vote among the Republican-dominated committee conducting the investigation on Tuesday to decide whether or not to subpoena these seven witnesses.

So Palin is chosen—with the McCain team at least sort of knowing about Palin's potential abuse of

power problem in TrooperGate—and all of a sudden the investigation into that potential abuse of power faces all sorts of new hurdles and, with the Republican majority involved, potentially its shuttering. This is, undoubtedly, another reason they've sent Palin to hole up in Alaska, to try to influence the outcome of this proceeding. (I'm trying to figure out whether those she's trying to influence are from the same VECO/Stevens wing of the uber-corrupt Alaska Republican Party that she claims to have such independence from.) And the people who are obstructing this investigation are all up-front: they're altering the course of the investigation **because** Palin is now a candidate to be VP.

What They're Hiding

Before the fate of the national Republican Party depended on it, Governor Palin had happily agreed to cooperate with the probe and insisted she had never asked Walt Monegan, the guy she eventually fired, into firing her ex-brother-in-law Mike Wooten.

To tell you that, truth is, that no pressure was ever put on anybody to fire anybody.

[snip]

We never had a conversation on whether trooper Wooten should be a trooper or not.

That was before several things happened. First, in mid-August a tape of a conversation between Palin aide Frank Bailey and Monegan came out—it revealed Bailey did pressure Monegan to fire Wooten. And then, a few weeks after that, Palin got picked as John McCain's running mate. Shortly thereafter, Walt Monegan showed the WaPo emails written from Governor Palin's **personal Yahoo account** complaining about Wooten.

"This trooper is still out on the street, in fact he's been promoted," said a Feb. 7, 2007, e-mail sent from

Palin's personal Yahoo account and written to give Monegan permission to speak on a violent-crime bill before the state legislature.

"It was a joke, the whole year long 'investigation' of him," the e-mail said. "This is the same trooper who's out there today telling people the new administration is going to destroy the trooper organization, and that he'd 'never work for that b****', Palin'.)"

It's not clear whether the investigation will conclude that Sarah Palin had a direct role in pressuring Monegan before she fired him. But two things are clear. First, she lied about hers—and her husband's—non-involvement in pressuring Monegan. And, just as troubling, Todd Palin was intimately involved, both in direct conversations with Monegan and getting cc'ed on emails discussing the issue. (The WaPo reports that Todd regularly gets cc'ed on his wife's emails and sits in on state meetings.)

In fact, in response to a complaint filed by Wooten's union charging the Governor improperly circulated the contents of Wooten's personnel file, Palin pointed to her husband's involvement as a purportedly legitimate alternative source of the information on Wooten—an explanation refuted by another taped phone conversation.

The McCain/Palin campaign, in a response to NBC News, provided a family twist to the story, saying the governor's husband — Todd Palin — was the source of that information to Bailey. They say the information came from divorce proceedings, and that Gov. Palin never improperly accessed any records.

But whether or not the inquiry will find that Palin abused their power, there is ample evidence that people were pressuring Monegan—on her orders—to fire Wooten. And that her husband

was deeply involved in this and other personnel issues for the state.

And much of this evidence was available before McCain picked Palin as his running-mate.

Perhaps the McCain camp wasn't aware of how much damning evidence there was against Palin, but on this issue (unlike, say, her fondness for earmarks), it appears that they knew the outlines and didn't care. Rather than let clear evidence of a Rovian abuse of power disqualify Palin, the McCain campaign picked her anyway and instead implemented a cover-up.

Lies and Cover-Up as Governing Strategy

And so, Palin's selection followed by the cover-up says more than just that McCain will make rash, dangerous decisions because he hasn't done his homework. It also suggests how he would "live with the consequences" of those ill-thought out decisions if he were President. He'd lie and obstruct his way out of them.

I guess that shouldn't be a surprise. That's not much different than the way the Administration has covered for its poor decision to invade Iraq, to make up stories about ties between Iraq and Al Qaeda, to sponsor whitewash investigations about the intelligence leading to Iraq, to even impede the investigations into the corrupt execution of the Iraq war. And it's similar to the way McCain got out of his own biggest ethical morasse in the Keating scandal—to PR his way out of his own failures.

But the Iraq parallel demonstrates the problem with such a governing strategy: no matter how you try to spin it, such ill thought out decisions can results in thousands of deaths, not to mention the financial bankrupting of the country.

McCain's campaign has just exacerbated their failure to vet, it seems, by embracing a strategy of lies and cover-up.