

OKAY, IT WAS 55% OF THE CAMPAIGNERS

A month ago, I pointed out that the McPalin team's commitment to have Carrie Underwood tour with Lawrence Welk would have a significant impact on the race.

But I'm most interested in what McCain's reliance on Palin will do for his ability to campaign. The race is currently effectively tied both nationally and in a number of key swing states. Barring some other big campaign news, those states will be decided by the amount of close attention each candidate gives them—the number of rallies they have. And by setting it up so that McCain has to appear with Palin to draw any crowd (and given the leers McCain has already made towards Palin's legs, I presume Cindy McCain will continue to chaperone the pair), the McCain team has basically cut their number of potential campaigners by two thirds.

Every day, Barack Obama and Joe Biden split up, head to different swing states, and hit different kinds of voters (Biden, for example, has a much better draw among Catholics and white working class people). In addition, Michelle Obama seems to do at least one event a week, meeting with women to talk about economic issues. Any of the three of these people has the ability to represent Obama and his message proudly. Meanwhile, it looks increasingly like the McCain team will be offering McPalin-and-the-wife, one unit, at one third of the total campaign spots.

While obviously there was other big campaign news (the financial meltdown), the WSJ has found

that it worked out pretty much like I predicted—the McPalin team had 55% the number of events that the Obama team had in the last month.

In the five weeks since the fall campaign officially began, Sen. Obama, his wife, Michelle, and vice-presidential nominee Joe Biden have appeared at a total of 95 separate events in states that both sides are contesting.

Sen. John McCain and his running mate, Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin, have appeared at 55 events in those areas, with Cindy McCain, the nominee's wife, adding only one more to the total, according to a Wall Street Journal tally based on schedules provided by the campaigns.

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The effect: The Democrats are being seen much more often, in free news coverage and in paid advertising, in the states that will determine the winner.

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The Journal totals include events held from the end of the political conventions on Sept. 5 through Sunday. If a running mate or spouse appeared with the presidential candidate at the same event, it was counted only once.

One factor in the travel gap is the McCain campaign's decision to keep Sen. McCain and Gov. Palin together for a series of rallies and town-hall meetings. They believe that together they are a powerful combination, and when she is with Sen. McCain, the crowds are often larger and more enthusiastic.

"The sheer brute force of Sarah Palin and John McCain together is a different tactical tool than Joe Biden and Barack

Obama," said Jill Hazelbaker, Sen. McCain's communications director. "Joe Biden doesn't bring anything to an Obama event."

Now this has begun to change, of course—the McPalin team have sent their bulldog in lipstick out to rile the base in conservative parts of swing states; she's bound to do more of it as she increasingly looks forward to 2012. And this is just one factor that explains Obama's lead in the polls, surely a less important one than the meltdown and McCain's erratic response to it.

Nevertheless, all these things add up—these visits tend to keep volunteers excited, which will have an as-yet unseen impact as we draw closer to the election.