

GOP CIVIL WAR: WARDROBEGATE EDITION

CNN seems to have access to McCain's cattiest advisors. The other day, they got the "Diva" slam on Palin. And yesterday, they got the news that Palin had gone "rogue" with her statements about her rent-a-wardrobe in Tampa.

Ensuring that news of the Republican National Committee's sartorial spending spree will remain in the headlines for at least one more news cycle, Sarah Palin on Sunday sounded off on the \$150,000 wardrobe that was purchased for her in September, denouncing the report as "ridiculous" and declaring emphatically: "Those clothes, they are not my property."

A senior adviser to John McCain told CNN's Dana Bash that the comments about her wardrobe "were not the remarks we sent to her plane this morning." Palin did not discuss the wardrobe story at her rally in Kissimmee later in the day.

Now, aside from the latest rumor—that Mitt's advisors are the source of the anti-Sarah leaks—I am fascinated by the lingering damage of WardrobeGate.

Former **Mitt Romney** presidential campaign staffers, some of whom are currently working for Sen. **John McCain** and Gov. **Sarah Palin**'s bid for the White House, have been involved in spreading anti-Palin spin to reporters, seeking to diminish her standing after the election. "Sarah Palin is a lightweight, she won't be the first, not even the third, person people will think of when it comes to 2012," says one former

Romney aide, now working for McCain-Palin. "The only serious candidate ready to challenge to lead the Republican Party is Mitt Romney. He's in charge on November 5th."

[snip]

Some former Romney aides were behind the recent leaks to media, including CNN, that Governor Sarah Palin was a "diva" and was going off message intentionally. The former and current Romney supporters further are pushing Romney supporters for key Republican jobs, including head of the Republican National Committee.

You see, it amazes me that, given how badly WardrobeGate damages both McCain and Palin, McPalin campaign staffers are still addressing it. Sure, McCain tried to squelch any discussion of it early on, and if CNN's correct and Palin went "rogue" with her extended comments yesterday, then they're still trying to shut down discussion of the issue, even while insisting that they didn't quite spend \$150,000, after they sent the returns back to the store.

So perhaps it's just a matter of Sarah, now invested more in her future going forward, trying to absolve herself of any responsibility for the \$150,000 wardrobe.

Still, I can't help but wonder how it became such a big issue. In the original story on this, Jeanne Cummings doesn't describe any insiders tipping her to the expenditure; rather, it looks like she stumbled upon it doing old-fashioned reporting.

According to financial disclosure records, the accessorizing began in early September and included bills from Saks Fifth Avenue in St. Louis and New York for a combined \$49,425.74.

The records also document a couple of big-time shopping trips to Neiman Marcus

in Minneapolis, including one \$75,062.63 spree in early September.

The RNC also spent \$4,716.49 on hair and makeup through September after reporting no such costs in August.

The cash expenditures immediately **raised questions among campaign finance experts** about their legality under the Federal Election Commission's long-standing advisory opinions on using campaign cash to purchase items for personal use.

Politico **asked the McCain campaign for comment** on Monday, explicitly noting the \$150,000 in expenses for department store shopping and makeup consultation that were incurred immediately after Palin's announcement. Pre-September reports do not include similar costs.
[my emphasis]

In other words, the only potential sources she lists who might have tipped her off are the campaign finance people—the only McCain camp contacts she lists are formal requests for comment.

Still WardrobeGate is the nugget that has set McCain and Palin off at each other, and I can't help but wonder whether there's something more to its continued currency as a story.