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February 5, 2009 2:34 pm

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GOP: Organize This!

Posted by [Bobbi Murray](#) on September 5, 2008

I kind of knew it before, but watching John McCain’s speech as I write, it’s easy to see how the GOP VP pick Sarah Palin’s speech on Wednesday was planned to be the shock-paddle portion of the McCain campaign.

But holy smokes. Despite the “USA” chants, the senator’s pitch seems a predictable snooze.

But not Gov. Palin’s. Hers got the crowd—dutifully positioned front and center at the Xcel Center by party handlers—all buzzed and rowdy.

She got the best lines—I guess. Overall, from what I can tell, the GOP-ers evidently want us all to believe that community organizing really means sitting around in the Inner City and hanging out. Or something.

Former Gov. George Pataki: “[Barack Obama] was a community organizer. What in God’s name is a community organizer? I don’t even know if that’s a job.”

Rudy Giuliani: “On the other hand, you have a resume from a gifted man with an Ivy League education. He worked as a community organizer. What? [Laughter]I said, OK, OK, maybe this is the first problem on the resume.”

Ha ha: Rudy Giuliani talking about resumes. He who has turned 9/11-based “security consulting” into his own cottage—er—mansion industry.

Then there’s the GOP Woman of the Hour. Sarah Palin steps to the plate:

I guess a small-town mayor is sort of like a community organizer, except that you have actual responsibilities.

She supplied the sneer during her speech; here youll have to add your own.

The above quotes, by the way, [come from the Web site](#) introduced in [Matthew Hersh’s Rooflines post](#) on the subject, one launched by community organizers themselves.

Some Republican attack dogs have already insinuated that Barack Obama was just hanging out when he was a community organizer, not someone who brought together poor people in a public housing project, almost all African-American, to pressure authorities to test for asbestos.

Let’s just call a subtext a subtext. Or maybe not so sub.

Community organizing takes place across the U.S., in towns big and small in many forms,

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[as the National Housing Institute's John Atlas points out in his Rooflines post.](#)

Community organizing can produce all kinds of results, from PTAs to hockey teams.

Or maybe only when the Hockey Moms don't have, you know, "actual responsibilities."

Still, it's reasonable to assume that a lot of well-intentioned people don't understand what "community organizer" means in the urban development sense—beyond someone with a clipboard who is, um, organized.

But as people around the community development scene know, an organizer brings together a group of largely disenfranchised persons to define the most pressing local problems, arrive together at a policy goal, do a complicated power analysis that everyone debates to devise a strategy to win.

[Note the Wiki definition](#)—and feel free to weigh in.

If you are a really good community organizer, you can all pull off big-picture policy changes that tie local conditions into a larger power analysis of who runs what and where the money is.

That's all tricky stuff, to say the least, requiring endless hours of meetings, planning, training andum—other "actual responsibilities."

[And even then, it doesnt always go the way you hope, as Obama found.](#)

Thursday night's [CBS Evening News report](#) made a spot-on point:

How many of the Republican delegates, 93 percent of whom are white, are familiar with community organizers is debatable. More than half have a net worth in excess of \$500,000 and may have no need for someone like Julio Medina of New York.

'We're talking about being in touch with the homeless, being in touch with the under-educated, being in touch with the unemployed,' said Medina. 'A community organizer is that presence for hope when hope doesn't exist.'

The nasty undercurrent in the Palin remarks suggests that community organizing is something that doesn't happen in small towns, only in cities. And we know who lives there—people of color who demand Big Government respond to their "grievances" by draining taxes from the honest (white) small towns.

Along with latte-sipping elitists like the Obamas. Or the rest of us Others.

It's a repudiation of the "One America" ideal expressed in Obama's DNC speech. Palin's polarizing equation leaves out all the rural, largely white communities organizing in Kansas to keep their land from being gobbled up by agribusiness. Or the Kentucky residents fighting the strip-mining destroying their mountain tops.

From Ms. Palin's barn-burner speech:

A writer observed: 'We grow good people in our small towns, with honesty, sincerity, and dignity.' I know just the kind of people that writer had in mind when he praised Harry Truman.

I grew up with those people.

They are the ones who do some of the hardest work in America—who grow our food, run our factories, and fight our wars.

They love their country, in good times and bad, and they're always proud of

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America. I had the privilege of living most of my life in a small town.

This followed a bit later by Palin’s canard about Obama wanting to tax her sister’s new gas station.

Crikey.

More from Palin’s speech:

The Democratic nominee for president supports plans to raise income taxes ... raise business taxes ... and increase the tax burden on the American people by hundreds of billions of dollars. My sister Heather and her husband have just built a service station that’s now opened for business—like millions of others who run small businesses.

How are they going to be any better off if taxes go up?

The GOP may revel in organizer-bashing but only when they are attacking, you know THOSE community organizers. Or, to be clear THAT community organizer, the one with the initials Barack Obama.

A smart organizer pal of mine points out that the religious right would never have gotten as far as they have without community organizing.

“Why don’t they ask the staff of the Christian Coalition if they had real jobs or real responsibilities?” she asked in an e-mail.

Exactly the reason I say—let the Repubs take schoolyard potshots at Obama and his background. [Obama has already shown what community organizing is all about.](#)

The first African-American Democratic nominee for president has advanced to that position with focused base-building, careful planning, and a disciplined organization that follows the plan.

We’ll see how sarcastic low-road bluster stands up to that.

COMMENTS

[Andrew Macurak](#)
7 Sep 08, 3:54 pm

Interesting piece in the NYT (by a self-described rightie, at that!) today points out that rampant inequality makes people lean left:
<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/07/magazine/07Inequality-t.html?em> And in an era of ever-increasing inequality, that can only mean one thing...

[Bobbi Murray](#)
7 Sep 08, 9:47 pm

From your keyboard to the email inbox of the universe. Or something. anyway, from the LA Times today, agreeing with your comment:
http://www.latimes.com/news/printedition/front/la-na-women7-2008sep07_0.22111156.story?page=2
Hope you all can read it. The women here have to bust butt to survive and are not buying Ms. Palin’s load o moose pockey.
or is that hockey? me not know, as a Big City Elitist and all.

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