

FROM THE FRONT PAGE

McCain and Palin bring the house down



Delegates waves signs as Republican vce presidential candidate Sarah Palin takes the stage to speak at the Republican National Convention in St. Paul, Minn., Wednesday, Sept. 3, 2008. AP Photo by Ron Edmonds

lacked the soaring oratory skills of Obama—a man she attacked as a tax-raising, terrorist-coddling, self-indulgent liberal. But the former TV sportscaster spoke in calm, TV-friendly tones reminiscent of Ronald Reagan. Like the former GOP president, Palin warmed the crowd with quips and jokes.

“What’s the difference between a hockey mom and a pit bull,” she said, pausing for a beat and a smirk. “Lipstick.”

She left the crowd smiling.

“For too many times, we’ve brought knives to gun fights,” said Chuck Gast, a delegate from Maryland.

When asked if Palin brought a gun to the fight, Gast said: “Yes, I think she brings a big gun, like a moose gun.”

It was the crowning moment of a roller-coaster week in which the first woman ever on a Republican presidential ticket has faced questions about how closely the McCain campaign scrutinized her. She also has heard a wide range of inquiries about family issues, her policy positions and her record of public service.

“Our family,” she said, “has the same ups and downs as any other.”

One speech does not a campaign make. Kept at arm’s length from the media in the days leading up to the address, Palin now heads out on the campaign trail, where events are less rehearsed, crowds less friendly and the environment less controlled. Even as she spoke, airplanes in Alaska were unloading reporters and political operatives sent to pore through her personal and public life.

A big test comes at the Oct. 2 vice presidential debate with her Democratic counterpart, Joe Biden.

But tonight was hers.

Facing down her critics with smiling resolve, Palin took crowd-delighting swipes at Obama and what she called the Washington elite. “Here’s a little news flash for all those reporters and commentators: I’m not going to Washington to seek their good opinion. I’m going to Washington to serve the people of this country,” she said.

A new celebrity herself, Palin cast Obama as a little more than a fancy speaker with a compelling biography.

“The American presidency is not supposed to be a journey of ‘personal discovery.’ This world of threats and dangers is not just a community, and it doesn’t just need an organizer,” Palin said, a clear reference to Obama’s time as a community organizer in Chicago.

The Obama campaign had less than a warm greeting, saying Palin’s speech was “written by George Bush’s speechwriter and sounds exactly like the same divisive, partisan attacks we’ve heard from George Bush for the last eight years.” The speech was written by Matthew Scully, who met Palin for the first time last week.

Selected by McCain only last Friday, Palin addressed the convention amid questions about her qualifications and relative lack of experience.

The first-term governor had top billing at the convention on a night delegates also lined up for a noisy roll call of the states to deliver their presidential nomination to McCain.

Watching her speech were her husband Todd and their children, including daughter Bristol Palin, whom the Palins disclosed earlier in the week was five months pregnant. Bristol’s 18-year-old boyfriend and apparent fiance, Levi Johnston, was seated with them.

McCain shook up the presidential race by picking Palin, a little-known governor less than two years in office. Since then, a bright spotlight has been trained on the life and record of the Republican governor who has bucked the state’s political establishment.

Days after Palin made her debut on the national stage with McCain, the campaign announced her unmarried daughter’s pregnancy. Other disclosures followed, including that a private attorney is authorized to spend \$95,000 of state money to defend her against accusations of abuse of power and that Palin sought pork-barrel projects for her city and state, contrary to her reformist image.

“Our family has the same ups and downs as any other ... the same challenges and the same joys,” she said.

Noting that the couple’s oldest son, Track, 19, was shipping out to Iraq in eight days with the Army infantry, Palin praised McCain as “a true profile in courage, and people like that are hard to come by.”

“He’s a man who wore the uniform of this country for 22 years, and refused to break faith with those troops in Iraq who have now brought victory within sight. And as the mother of one of those troops, that is exactly the kind of man I want as commander in chief,” she said.

Largely unknown outside her home state, Palin told the convention: “I had the privilege of living most of my life in a small town. I was just your average hockey mom, and signed up for the PTA because I wanted to make my kids’ public education better,” she said, speaking of her home town of Wasilla, Alaska, with a population of about 6,500.

“When I ran for city council, I didn’t need focus groups and voter profiles because I knew those voters, and knew their families, too,” she said.

Before becoming governor, Palin served as mayor of Wasilla, she recounted, adding: “And since our opponents in this presidential election seem to look down on that experience, let me explain to them what the job involves. I guess a small-town mayor is sort of like a ‘community organizer,’ except that you have actual responsibilities.”

Palin delivered her speech in a firm, cheerful voice. It was her first chance to introduce and define herself to the American public and, after it was done, her family joined her on stage. She cuddled her 4-month-old son, Trig, and waved at the adoring crowd like the beauty pageant contestant she once was. (AP)

The Miracle Man

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for pilgrims wanting to experience a deeper personal relationship with God.

The Oratory of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Montemaria will include a Rosary Garden, Stations of the Cross, Eucharistic Adoration Chapel, Saint Joseph Chapel, Divine Mercy Chapel, House of Mary, House of Joseph, Scala Santa, Infant Jesus Chapel, and retreat houses that will serve as a way station for pilgrims, complete with board and lodging, souvenir shops, a conference center and an international center for the poor.

Montemaria is an ambitious project that seeks to create an 18-hectare haven for pilgrims and a place for prayer dedicated to Mary, Mother of the Poor. The megashrine is expected to be finished in about five years and the statue of Our Lady of the Poor will stand taller than the Statue of Liberty here in New York and the Christ the Redeemer in Rio de Janeiro.

There have been written reports that in June 1981, six children in the little town of Medjugorje received apparitions from the “Queen of Peace” where in one of them, the Philippines was

mentioned as a global spiritual center.

A true Marian devotee, Fr. Suarez said he felt his love for the Virgin Mary when he was around 2 to 3 years old.

Coming Home
This will be a homecoming of sorts for the healing priest since he was born in Butong in the town of Taal, Batangas in 1967. He went to Adamson University to finish his degree in chemical engineering and worked for an oil company in Batangas for five years before moving to Canada where he was based since 1995.

In 1997 he joined the Companions of the Cross religious community of priests and seminarians, founded by Rev. Robert Bedard in 1985 in Ottawa, Canada, and Fr. Suarez was ordained to the priesthood in 2002.

Fr. Suarez began noticing his gift of healing two decades earlier, when he was only 16 years old. Outside the Quiapo church, the then fresh high school graduate saw an old crippled woman. He asked her to pray with him and he felt her bones growing. The young man got scared, and for 20 years, he kept this secret.

Being a healing priest has propelled him to a celebrity status,

which has its pros and cons and Fr. Suarez said he is mindful of both.

“*Marami kang natutulungan, maraming bumabalik sa simbahan. Nagkakaroon ng conversion, ng healing. Nagkakaroon ng hope ang mga tao.* On the other hand, you live under the microscope, *lahat ng ikinikilos mo, napapansin. Hindi mo rin naman mapi-please lahat ng tao. Pinababaya ko na lang yun,*” he said.

“I never ever thought *na aabot sa level na ito yung paniniwala ng mga tao sa akin.* I did not even consider it was possible before *pero nangyari eh,*” he shared.

From the very beginning, Fr. Suarez said that the calling was there, “I just did not have enough courage to pursue it. I struggled to understand this unusual gift.”

Believing
“As far as I know, *marami pa rin sa ating mga Pilipino ang believers, lalo na sa ministry ko. Karamihan sa mga maysakit can’t help but be believers kasi pag nangangailangan na ang tao, wala na silang ibang mapupuntahan kundi ang Diyos din,*” Fr. Suarez explained.

Early this year, Fr. Suarez had a healing mass in Los Angeles attended by thousands of people

at the LA Sports Arena. It was said to be the biggest healing mass the priest has ever done in the United States.

Fr. Suarez gets really busy during ministry and healing masses. “*Napakaraming maysakit na tumatawag at humihingi ng tulong. Sana lang mapagbigyan ko silang lahat,*” the soft-spoken priest said.

Before he embarks on every healing mass, Fr. Suarez said he prepares by saying a personal prayer. “I compose myself and go to confession. *Nililinis ko ang sarili ko to make sure na wala akong galit, hinanakit o guilt sa katawan,*” he shared.

There are already plans for more healing masses in different US cities but he said that there are things to be ironed out before anything is finalized.

Between now and the time he flies to the Philippines to stay there for good, Fr. Suarez will be holding healing masses in Ottawa and Vancouver in Canada.

A true believer from the start, Fr. Suarez hopes to inspire more people as he continues his quest to spread God’s word around the world through healing masses, retreats and missions. ■



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