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VP nominee questions judgment, policies of Sen. Barack Obama

BY BROCK LETCHWORTH
The Daily Reflector

Republican vice presidential nominee Sarah Palin energized a crowd of about 8,000 Tuesday night by lauding Sen. John McCain's military service and vision for reform and questioning the judgment and policies of Sen. Barack Obama.

Palin, who spoke for about 30 minutes at East Carolina University's Minges Coliseum, said McCain, the GOP presidential nominee, is offering "real and pragmatic solutions to move the country forward," while claiming that Obama, the Democratic nominee, has surrounded himself with questionable personalities.

"This election is important because it is about truthfulness and judgment," Palin told the crowd. "I can tell you John McCain has it and Barack Obama does not."

The Alaska governor said McCain will propose a spending freeze on the

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federal government to address the current economic troubles and noted that the GOP ticket would make health care more affordable by offering a $5,000 tax credit for middle-class families to help them pay for coverage.

Palin praised McCain for his commitment to winning the war in Iraq, calling him the only candidate willing to use the word victory. She added that the Arizona senator would help the country gain energy independence by tapping into American energy resources, a comment which prompted a “Drill baby drill” chant from the crowd.

“We’re circulating nearly $700 billion dollars a year to other countries asking them to wrap up production of energy sources so we can purchase it,” Palin said. “Those dollars should stay here in America.”

Palin’s most specific comments throughout the night were directed at Obama.

She questioned the Demo-

GOV. SARAH PALIN makes her entrance into Minges Coliseum.

cratic nominee’s judgement for surrounding himself with controversial figures such as former ’60s radical William Ayers and former Fannie Mae executives Franklin Raines and Jim Johnson.

Palin called Ayers one of Obama’s earliest supporters, saying he hosting a 1995 meeting kicking off Obama’s bid for the Illinois State Senate. She dismissed claims by the Obama campaign that he did not know about Ayers’ past before they met. Ayers was a founding member of the Weather Underground group, which claimed responsibility for bombings at the Pentagon and U.S. Capitol in the early 1970s.

“You mean to tell me he didn’t know he had launched his own political career in the living room of a domestic terrorist,” Palin said.

In response to Palin’s comments, the Obama campaign said “Senator Obama strongly condemns the violent actions of the Weathermen group, as he does all acts of violence. But he was an 8-year-old child when Ayers and the Weathermen were active, and any attempt to connect Obama with events of almost 40 years ago is ridiculous.”

Palin also called Obama’s claim to cut taxes the “phonyest claim in a campaign full of them.”

She guaranteed the crowd that Obama would raise taxes on the middle class if elected next month, citing 94 times he has voted for higher taxes as an Illinois senator.

“(Obama) has committed to nearly $1 trillion in new government spending and yet he hasn’t told you where that money is going to come from,” Palin said. “You can do the math and go with your gut and you’re going to draw the same conclusion, and that is that Barack Obama is going to raise your taxes.”

Palin’s comments drew chants of “Nobama” throughout the speech.

She closed her speech by saying the GOP would embrace the values of democracy and virtues of freedom worth fighting for.

“Understand that from now until election day, you are going to hear our opponents go on and on about how they will fight for you,” Palin said. “But since my running mate won’t say this on his own behalf, I will take it upon myself to say it for him. And that is truthfully, John McCain is the only man in this race who has ever really fought for you.”
Expert: It’s vital that U.S. modify health care

BY TOM MARINE
The Daily Reflector

The hardest question facing health care reform in the United States is how to simultaneously extend coverage, improve quality and make delivery of care more efficient and less costly, said Henry Aaron, senior fellow in economic studies at the Brookings Institute in Washington, D.C.

Speaking at the health care forum held Tuesday at East Carolina University, Aaron addressed that question and compared the different health reform plans proposed by the two presidential candidates, Sens. John McCain and Barack Obama.

"The nation is going to have to confront how to modify its health care system, because the current situation is unsatisfactory," he said. "The most shameful aspect of current U.S. health care policy, in my view, is our persistent refusal to invest in identifying what works best at the lowest cost."

In detailing the two candidates’ health reform plans, Aaron listed what each one offers and the challenges they may face.

McCain’s plan, he said, is genuinely radical, because it fundamentally changes the way Americans would receive their health insurance.

By offering refundable tax credits — $2,500 to individuals and $5,000 to families — it reduces the incentive for businesses to offer health insurance to their employees, he said. It also allows states to have the flexibility to experiment with alternative forms of health access and depends on competition to control costs, Aaron said.

"The chances that Sen. McCain’s plan would become law are zero," said Aaron, referring to the opposition See HEALTH, B3

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he would likely face from a Democrat-controlled Congress.

"It is doubtful, even if the Republicans were able to retain their seats in the Senate and House, enough Republicans would embrace this plan, because it is such a far-reaching transformation of the U.S. health-care system.

"The American public is very suspicious of such radical changes."

As for Obama’s plan, Aaron said, it mandates coverage for children and subsidies to keep the cost of health insurance low.

Also, similar to McCain, it allows for flexibility in state health plans, he said.

Aaron said Obama also will face intense pressure from Congress if elected, to support “one big bill” for universal coverage.

Regardless of the outcome of the November election, Aaron said, health care policy will remain terribly controversial and divisive.

"It’s not the job of the next president," he said. "It is the job of the next generation."

More than 150 people attended the event, including Dr. Paul Cunningham, the new dean of the medical school, and Phyllis Horns, interim vice chancellor for health sciences.

Following the keynote speaker’s remarks, four leading authorities discussed their views regarding regional health concerns and health insurance at the forum, which was hosted by the ECU Chapter of the Phi Beta Phi honor society.

Dr. Pam Silberman, president and CEO of the North Carolina Institute of Medicine, touched on an earlier comment made by Aaron about a state’s ability to promote health-care reform with the help of the federal government.

She said if North Carolina wants to become a national leader, it must first reach the children and low-income adults who do not receive health insurance through their jobs. In addition, she said, there needs to be a way to make this insurance is affordable, so small businesses will offer coverage.

Mark Hall, professor of health law and policy at Wake Forest University, said the most important thing for the next president to know about the current health care system is the concentration of health care spending in the country’s population.

Hall presented a bar graph showing the disparity of health care spending compared to the percent of the population receiving those services.

Half of the population accounted for more than 96 percent of the total health-care spending, according to the graph.

"It’s a question of value," said Dr. Charles Wilson, clinical associate professor at the Brody School.

"We need to value primary care more than specialty services. Most of all, we need our citizens to tell our leaders that now is the time and tomorrow is too late."

Wilson discussed a model of the Community Care of North Carolina program, containing 14 networks of primary care physicians, which provides access every day of the year.

Joel Butler, chief external affairs officer at University Health Systems of Eastern Carolina, said he believes there is a health crisis looming, and that health care extends beyond the hospital. He said there needs to be more collaboration with the community, such as school nurses.

"If we are dependent on our politicians to make this happen, they can’t treat health care reform like they did the bailout," Butler said.

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Early success leads to rush of ECU commitments

Pirate coaching staff facing a numbers game when it comes to available scholarships.

BY NATHAN SUMMERS
The Daily Reflector

The true worth of East Carolina’s pair of Top 25 upset wins to open the season is being measured every day on the recruiting trail.

The nationally televised ECU wins over Virginia Tech and West Virginia resonated not only through the college football landscape, but into the living rooms of plenty of high school players who became enamored with the Pirates because of it.

With ECU recruiting coordinator Donnie Kirkpatrick laying the groundwork and veteran talent magnets like defensive backs coach Rick Smith on the case, the pastures might never get any greener than right now for ECU.

“TV is the best thing going for recruiting,” Kirkpatrick said, noting the Pirates have been nationally televised three times this year. “You could never put that kind of money into a recruiting budget, to reach that many people at one time.”

While every team might claim to expect the kind of results the Pirates had in their early run to the No. 14 ranking in the nation, sudden success carries an immediate wave of attention, much of it from players who want to be a part of what they’ve seen.

Kirkpatrick said the two wins to open the season were instant eye-openers to kids who otherwise would never have considered ECU.

“It got to going so good after the second game that every kid that was coming here was saying, ‘I want to be a Pirate,’” Kirkpatrick said.

There has been so much attention aimed at the Pirates, in fact, ECU has found itself in something of a bind in terms of the program’s number of available scholarships com-

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pared with the mass interest from prep players.
A recruit in Georgia recently told the Atlanta Journal Constitution that the word from ECU was the program was in a holding pattern, having already reeled in stores of verbal commitments.
Kirkpatrick said that is true.
"That really is an accurate statement of where we’re at right now because it got going so fast that we did say we really want to just sit back now and wait," he said. "Recruiting is on an early trend right now. If you don’t offer early, then you’re too far behind on these kids because they’ve already got 10 or 12 offers."
According to Smith, who has been the Pirates’ lead dog in landing recruits both in-state and in national hotbeds like Florida, prep stars are now coming out of the woodwork on his travels.
In fact, now they’re coming to find him instead of the opposite. Smith said offensive linemen towering at 6-foot-5, 6-6 and 6-7 have all been hoping to make commitments, along with a star defensive back in Georgia.
"All I can tell them is right now we’re full," Smith said. "The three times being on TV and playing like we did, kids remember those things. It’s amazing."
Smith said it’s a tough balance to try to maintain the high interest in the program without having to turn some of that interest away because of the numbers game.
The only option is to remind recruits that scholarship numbers fluctuate because of grades, injuries, transfers and other factors.
"I’m about to run out of things to tell them, but it’s just one of those years," Smith said.
According to Kirkpatrick, the holding pattern was created by the sudden flood of positive answers to so many offers. Now, the ECU coaches are forced to wait and see what will happen in terms of scholarships available and with how many of the current commits stay on board for the long haul.
As for this year’s class, Kirkpatrick thinks the national attention will have a minor impact. But he thinks it can have a lasting positive effect in years to come.
"We were so far along in recruiting that I don’t know that we’ll see a great difference this year," Kirkpatrick said. "The interest is way up now. What it did was it made the kids that we had already offered jump in the boat that much quicker. We may not see the true effect of it until next year."
Palin goes on attack in first N.C. visit

BY BARBARA BARRETT
WASHINGTON CORRESPONDENT

GREENVILLE — As thousands of supporters cheered, Republican vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin pledged Tuesday night to bring the federal government back to the people, saying she and GOP presidential contender John McCain have the best solution to bring the nation out of its economic slump.

Palin, playing the attacker in a state the GOP is fighting to keep in its column, also unleashed a volley against Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama. She called him untruthful and said he would raise taxes, lose the war in Iraq and increase the size of government.

"Here in North Carolina, you can help put us in D.C. to help put the government back on your side," she said. "We are joining you to look for the future, because that's where you find the solutions."

Palin's was the first public event in North Carolina by a member of the Republican ticket. Tickets disappeared in hours, with some being sold later for as much as $100.

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Palin’s visit came as recent national and North Carolina polls have indicated that the Democratic ticket of Obama and Sen. Joe Biden is surging as the country reels from one economic blow after another.

Obama has targeted North Carolina, which has gone for Republicans in recent presidential elections, as a potential swing state. Obama’s campaign said Tuesday night that Palin’s visit was yet another indication that North Carolina voters could have an impact.

“North Carolina is in play, and her visit here is a sign that they’re running out of time,” said Susan Laguna, communications director for the North Carolina Obama campaign.

In Greenville, U.S. Sen. Richard Burr, a Winston-Salem Republican, told the crowd of thousands that the city could make the difference in November. The county went solidly Republican in the past three presidential elections as Democrats crossed party lines. But polls show a tightening race in North Carolina, and Pitt County is seeing an influx of newcomers to its medical and higher education sectors. Just a few months ago, Obama campaigned down the road to a similarly sized crowd at Pitt County Community College.

Palin supporters inside East Carolina University’s Williams Arena on Tuesday evening showed plenty of enthusiasm. They chanted “Drill Baby Drill” or “USA” or “No-bama!” throughout the speech. They waved signs, wore Palin t-shirts and hollered through her speech.

“I thought it was great,” Mike Todd, 36, a nurse anesthetist from Greenville, said after the speech. “Truthful. Honesty. Down-to-earth. Energetic.”

“I just think she brings a new outside view, outside of the circle of Washington,” said Scott Rogers, 33, a train master for the railroad in Rocky Mount.

Attacks vs. facts

Palin spoke for about half an hour, reading mostly from a teleprompter and delivering lines meant to charm along with attacks on Obama. Palin called Obama’s plans “a left-wing agenda that’s been prettied up to look like mainstream policies.”

Palin pledged to help families keep their houses and help more youth attend college. She also touted McCain’s plan to offer families $5,000 tax credits to pay for health insurance—a plan she said was better than Obama’s idea for near-universal health care.

“The phoniest claim in a campaign that’s been full of them is that Barack Obama’s going to cut your taxes,” Palin said. She then gave two examples—one of them disproven by independent fact checkers, the other questioned by independent media.

Pitt County wins votes

If Pitt County helps turn North Carolina for one candidate or the other, Palin has helped McCain pick up at least two votes in Greenville: those of Wayne and Terri Hollenbaugh.

“I didn’t like McCain, I still don’t,” said Wayne Hollenbaugh, 46, a stay-at-home dad in Greenville. He would have either stayed home or voted for Sen. Barack Obama—a man he considers both radical and a Marxist.

His wife, Terri, 45, a property manager who works in Raleigh, is a Libertarian who would have voted for Bob Barr in November. Palin’s nomination changed all that. The Hollenbaughs think she should, in fact, top the ticket.

“Cause she’s the best candidate,” Terri Hollenbaugh said. “When you’re a mayor you run a town. When you’re governor you run a state. The next step is president.”

Following the rally, Palin stopped at the Boli’s on the Boulevard restaurant for pizza while she caught the presidential debate between McCain and Obama on television.

Staff Writer Ryan Teague Beckwith contributed to this report.

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Easley: More cuts likely

Gov. Mike Easley said Tuesday that the faltering economy may soon mean more tightening to state spending.

Easley spoke to reporters after a meeting of other elected state officials. He said he hadn't seen September revenue numbers yet.

"Given all the uncertainty, I wouldn't be surprised to see us move a little more with state agencies," Easley said. "I wouldn't be surprised if we went from two to three (percent)."

Easley previously ordered state agencies to hold back two percent of their budgets. That order, plus some other cuts Easley ordered, add up to about $700 million in savings, Easley said.

Easley says he is trying to spare the next governor the massive budget shortfalls he inherited when he took office in 2001.

"It's a whole lot easier to be Gov. Santa than Gov. Scrooge, and when the next governor comes in, if I have held back too much, then they're able to release that money to the agencies and to projects, and that would be good for them."
UNCW chief on panel

UNC-Wilmington Chancellor Rosemary DePaolo is a member of a new national higher education cabinet formed by the New York Times and the Chronicle of Higher Education.

The group is made up of presidents, trustees and leaders from 76 universities, colleges and associations. Members will participate in discussions of the most pressing issues facing higher education.

The panel has other members with North Carolina ties, including former UNC President Molly Broad, who is now president of the American Council on Education; former UNC-Chapel Hill provost Robert Shelton, who is now president of the University of Arizona; and former UNC system senior vice president Gretchen Bataille, who is now president of the University of North Texas.

By staff writers Ryan Teague Beckwith and Benjamin Niolet.