

# Chicago Tribune

## Trump and Palin: An alliance for the angry

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Can this presidential election year get any weirder?

Reality seems to have run off the rails. Let me count the ways:

In the "How Can We Miss You If You Won't Go Away" Department: Sarah Palin is back, much to the delight of comedy writers everywhere. (I'm talking about you, Tina Fey.) And she's stumping for — who else? — Republican front-runner and fellow former reality TV star Donald Trump.

Yes, this is the Grand Old Party's former vice presidential candidate, who endorsed Trump's closest opponent, Sen. Ted Cruz, in 2012 in Cruz's runoff as a tea party-backed insurgent against establishment-backed Texas Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst.

Now Palin is treating Cruz in much the same way she treated Alaska in 2009 when she walked away from the governorship after serving three years of her four-year term.

Cynics immediately speculated as to how much the billionaire Trump paid Palin for her endorsement. I think it was plenty reward enough for her to be back on the national stage where, as she put it in her rambling announcement speech in Ames, Iowa, "media heads are spinning."

Actually, media heads that I know sound delighted by the boost that Palin and Trump, love 'em or hate 'em, give to the size of our audiences.

And those Democrats who are not petrified by the thought of a "President Trump" are delighted to let him and his pal Palin take attention away from their own heated divisions over self-described "democratic socialist" Sen. Bernie Sanders of Vermont catching up to centrist front-runner Hillary Clinton in early state polling.

I told you this was a weird election year. But, wait, there's more:

In the "Chickens Come Home to Roost" Department, we find Palin's "spinning heads" rising in the deep thinkers of the GOP and the conservative movement.

As Palin was talking in Iowa, the conservative National Review magazine published a special issue headlined "Against Trump" and featuring more than 20 conservative thinkers, leaders and commentators, including David Boaz of the libertarian Cato Institute, editor William Kristol of the Weekly Standard and David McIntosh, president of the Club for Growth, all calling for the GOP to nominate someone other than Trump.

"The (party's) establishment is AWOL, or even worse," said National Review editor Rich Lowry, "so it's up to people who really believe in these ideas and principles, for whom they're not just talking points or positions of convenience, to set out the marker."

The irony for those of us who have long memories is in the magazine's famously deep-thinking founder William F. Buckley's immortal quote that he would rather be "governed by the first 2,000 names in the Boston telephone directory than ... the 2,000 faculty members of Harvard University."

Be careful what you wish for. Buckley's sarcasm has manifested itself in the rise over the past half-century of a right-wing populism — from George Wallace in the 1960s to Pat Buchanan in the 1990s and today's tea party movement in the Age of Obama — born out of backlash against not only liberals but also moderation within the GOP itself.

In the "Hooray for Our Tribe" Department, the Republican Party that usually decries "identity politics" by the left struggles in the grip of its own tribal divisions. Identity politics is more than race, gender or ethnicity politics. It is in defense of a way of life and a way of viewing the world that has Trump's brigades banding together as an alliance of the angry and aggrieved.

Ever since Trump entered the race, he has been called a Conservative-In-Name-Only by George Will and other prominent thinkers on the right — and they've been right. The same is true of Palin, whose identity as a small-town "real American" always has been more cultural than political or intellectual.

So what if she handles speeches as though English were her second — or maybe third — language? Like a jazz musician or rap star, she knows how to connect with her audience, which she described in her rambling speech as "right-wingin', bitter clingin', proud clingers of our guns, our God, and our religions, and our Constitution."

She gives voice to others who, like her, feel persecuted, disrespected and exploited by the GOP and other "establishments." Trump and Palin are only letting their audiences have what the establishmentarians failed to think was important.