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The Big Question: What must Palin accomplish on her book tour?

By Tony Romm - 11/16/09 09:23 AM ET



Some of the nation's top political commentators, legislators and intellectuals offer insight into the biggest question burning up the blogosphere today.

Today's question:

What does Sarah Palin need to accomplish on her book tour to promote her political prospects?

Peter Fenn, Democratic strategist, said:

Sarah Palin must stop whining, complaining and attempting to settle scores about the past and talk about the here and now...and the future. She has to show some semblance of understanding of the issues facing the nation, not focusing on the issues she faces. Can she transcend petty and personal and show leadership? I doubt it. But she should brush off the internecine fights with McCain staffers and talk about what she believes. Now, exactly why am I giving her advice?

Glenn Reynolds, blogger at [Instapundit](#), said:

Whatever else Sarah Palin has done, she is positioned to be the kingmaker -- or, more accurately, the kingbreaker -- in the Republican 2012 contest. Even if she doesn't run, she commands enough loyalty and support from the most committed voters and activists to ensure that any candidate she comes out against will be dead in the water for the GOP nomination. And, should she choose a third party run, she can doom the chances of anyone the GOP nominates. Expect to see a lot of GOP candidates sucking up to her in coming months and years. The GOP establishment treated her badly, and payback will be forthcoming, I suspect.

David Boaz, executive vice president of [The Cato Institute](#), said:

Sarah Palin can sell a lot of books and hear a lot of cheers in her extended tour of tertiary cities. There are voters and activists in those cities, and she can sign up plenty of supporters. Interestingly, she has no stops scheduled in New Hampshire or South Carolina, and only one in Iowa -- though that could of course change. One can only wonder why her only stop in Arizona or New Mexico is Roswell, NM, the focus of UFO conspiracy theories.

But if she wants to get beyond building a mailing list and selling books -- if she's actually thinking about running for president -- she's going to have to demonstrate a command of both politics and policy that she hasn't shown yet. Her political decisions since the election have been erratic and hard to understand. As for policy, conservatives can complain about a biased media all they want to, but Palin is the one who couldn't answer a wide variety of questions from the media. Has she been studying up while the ghostwriter worked on the book? Some day we'll find out. So far she's a one-hit wonder.

Some conservatives say, "They said Reagan was dumb, too." That's kind of demeaning to Ronald Reagan. Indeed he wasn't dumb, as the handwritten scripts of his radio commentaries demonstrate to anyone who still needed convincing. Can one imagine Sarah Palin dashing off a few coherent, fact-based radio commentaries in the course of a flight? Or out-debating [Bobby Kennedy on international television](#)? At this point Palin is all image and style. What are her considered opinions about policy matters? Is she a Reagan

conservative, a social conservative, a small-government cut-spending conservative, a populist reformer? We're all waiting to see. This tour could answer that question if it involves substantive speeches and interviews, but not if it's just book-signings.

Ronald Goldfarb, *Attorney and author*, said:

Sarah Palin should lip synch her interviews.

John Feehery, *Republican strategist*, said:

She needs to avoid another Katie Couric moment, she needs to look like she knows what she is talking about, she needs to not look like a liar, and she needs to avoid a she said/he said back and forth with Steve Schmidt ... Whoops, too late for that.

Bernie Quigley, *blogger at Daily Kos*, said:

I think she has already achieved it. The waters seem to be opening for her now. The culture today is vastly different than it was in September 2008. The political culture was uniformly hell bent then on getting a black president and Barack Obama seemed like a reasonable candidate. Mission accomplished. What else exactly did we expect from him that might have been suggested on his resume? Speech giving? We have been on a nine-month denial lag regarding bad news, but today main stream pundits like George Will and David Broder are telling us we are adrift in Afghanistan, the dollar is crashing under the burden of national debt and the health care initiatives are adding to the burden. The country is at a critical turning point and Palin is at the turnstile. She was at the front of the tax payer revolts, the town hall dissention and the rise of the Conservative Party in NY-23. If she just keeps doing what she is doing it will come to her.

Craig Newmark, *creator of Craigslist*, said:

She needs to carefully control her audiences and respond only to prepared questions, just as a prerequisite.

Justin Raimondo, *editorial director of Antiwar.com*, said:

David Brooks said on George Stephanopoulos' Sunday program that he considers Sarah Palin "a joke." What he didn't say is that she was and is a joke played by the neoconservatives on the Republican party.

The Washington Post asks: "Is there something that could be called 'Palinism,' defining a political philosophy that could help her party win elections and turn her into a viable national candidate?"

Short answer: No.

Slightly longer answer: Where and when has Palin ever articulated a coherent alternative to the orthodox Republican doctrines of supply-side economics and endless war? She isn't about to do it in her "book," and she isn't capable of it. What is especially irksome, however, is that there is indeed a populist champion of the Tea Party grassroots, someone with the knowledge, the organization, the proven fundraising ability, and the principles to lead the GOP out of its ideological and political morass: Ron Paul.

"Palinism" is a hairstyle. Paulism is a bona fide movement. The first has no future -- no, she won't be a major contender, come the presidential sweepstakes, as George Will predicted on the Stephanopoulos program. The second IS the future, if the GOP is to have a future.

Larry Sabato, *director of the Center for Politics*, said:

Somehow she would have to turn the discussion about the book into a forum for presenting serious, informed viewpoints on domestic and foreign

issues. Good luck with that. The book is a tattle-tale, don't-get-mad-get-even volume that emphasizes Palin's lack of readiness for prime time. Her rabid GOP base supporters will be with her, book or no book. Palin's problem is that a large majority of voters consider her unqualified to be president and unsuited to the enormous challenges of the Oval Office. This book tour won't change that. As a rule, Americans don't put a soap opera in the White House.