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WOMEN IN PARTICULAR SAY PALIN ADDS STRONG CONSERVATIVE CREDENTIALS TO MCCAIN
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BODY:

Maryland Republicans - especially women - applauded the addition of Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin to their party's presidential ticket yesterday, saying she delivered strong conservative credentials and a youthful complement to John McCain's maverick reputation.

"I think she is a great choice," said former Republican gubernatorial candidate Ellen R. Sauerbrey, saying the 44-year-old mother of five, abortion opponent and lifetime National Rifle Association member would "do a great deal to shore up the conservative base."

Former Rep. Helen Delich Bentley of Baltimore said Palin "should appeal tremendously to all of the mothers, the women."

Sauerbrey lauded Palin's anti-corruption positions in Alaska, and predicted the selection would prove attractive to female voters, including Democrats still struggling with the defeat of Hillary Clinton.

"The big group that is up in the air as to who Republicans can go out and get is female voters," Sauerbrey said. "John McCain was not my first choice - but I am a lot more excited today than I was yesterday."

As moderate potential running mates such as Sen. Joseph I. Lieberman and former Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Ridge were floated, "like a lot of conservatives, I was holding my breath," Sauerbrey said. "I can speak as one conservative woman: This energizes me quite a bit."

In introducing Palin to the nation yesterday, McCain called the former television broadcaster and small-town mayor, who has a son deploying to Iraq and another recently born with Down syndrome, "exactly what the country

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needs."

The announcement came the morning after Democrat Barack Obama accepted his party's nomination with a speech at a Denver football stadium that was equal parts rock concert and rapturous revival.

The surprise pick seemed designed to deflate Obama's post-convention bump, setting up the first female nominee since 1984, when Walter Mondale selected Geraldine A. Ferraro.

Palin, in remarks at McCain's side in Dayton, Ohio, acknowledged Ferraro and Clinton for paving the way for her selection.

"The women of America aren't finished yet, and we can shatter that glass ceiling once and for all," Palin said.

Watching the speech from the site of the Republican National Convention in St. Paul, Minn., McCain delegate Carmen Amedori, a former lawmaker from Carroll County, said she was in tears.

"It's going to really boost the ticket and the energy of the base, wherever it was lacking, because it is a first for the Republicans, and a good pick," Amedori said. "We've gone out of the realm of the manly look of the Republican Party. We have a pretty face on the Republican Party, and not just a pretty face, but a woman who is accomplished in many ways."

Palin was elected Alaska governor two years ago, with 48 percent of the 238,307 votes cast - fewer than the 282,537 votes cast in Baltimore County alone in the Maryland gubernatorial race that year.

Her selection by McCain turned the heads of some prominent Republicans after weeks of chatter had focused on former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney and Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty.

During a taping of a television show at the Tribune Broadcasting studio in Washington, former Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. declined to give a full-throated backing of her candidacy, saying on air that he didn't know much about her.

Afterward, speaking with acquaintances, he said: "I gotta go digest this choice."

Maryland Republican Party Chairman Jim Pelura called Palin a "phenomenal pick" who echoed one of McCain's central messages of bucking against party and Washington interests.

"The common theme from Obama and Biden is that for every problem, government is the solution," Pelura said. For McCain and Palin, he said, "the common theme is that solutions reside in American citizens."

Pelura rejected concerns that voters would think twice before electing a ticket that includes a relatively young and inexperienced politician as second to a person who would be older than any other candidate on first election to the office. "The top of the ticket still pulls the votes," Pelura said.

Former Maryland GOP Chairman John M. Kane called Palin a "game changer" who brings much-needed management experience to the ticket.

"He's taken an executive who has 15,074 employees [in Alaska], which is probably 15,000 more employees than Obama and Biden combined."

Sauerbrey, the former congresswoman, said she appreciated the toughness that earned Palin the nickname "Barracuda" on her high school basketball team. "I relate to that because I played basketball," Bentley said. "I was a mean barracuda."

Like Ehrlich and some other Republicans, Bentley said she had not been planning on attending the St. Paul

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convention. But because of the Palin pick, "I might even take a day and go. ... I'm very proud of the party."

Daniel Clements, an Obama campaign leader in Maryland, said that by selecting Palin, McCain "can no longer question Obama's experience."

"He's picked a running mate who has far less," Clements said.

Chicago Tribune reporter Andrew Zajac and the Capital News Service contributed to this article.

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