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Ottawa*Watch* 187: Attention to life and to Canada

By Lloyd Mackey

Sarah Palin proved to be a bit of a flash in the pan – an unabashed evangelical and proliferator who, as it turned out, did not really help John McCain in his presidential bid. Nevertheless, the point made about her being more conscious of Canada than most other American politicians, except those coming from border states, remains valid.

In one BC-oriented piece, I compared Palin to Sharon Gaetz, a charismatic pastor from Chilliwack who eventually served a decade as mayor of my old home city. Both of them emerged as evangelical populists whose success, in the long term, came from their moderating of radically populist viewpoints in order to broaden their bases. Of course, the opposite proved to be equally true.

Sarah Palin has our attention this week, along with word that the leaders of Canada's political parties ignored last week's *OttawaWatch* tongue-in-cheek hint that it would be quite in order for Parliament to run until October, 2009.

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Palin, the spitfire governor of Alaska is Republican John McCain's choice for vice-president. And one might expect that she has a little more reason to pay attention to Canada than any of those politicians in the 49 states to the south.

Undoubtedly, she was flying for several hours over our fair nation, in order to get from her home turf to Dayton, Ohio, where McCain introduced her.

And, perhaps more to the point, she has indicated backing for a Canadian pipeline proposal for shipping Alaska energy resources to the rest of the United States.

Evangelical Christian leaders, while surprised at McCain's choosing her, expressed strong support, even when they learned that her oldest and unmarried daughter, Bristol, is five months pregnant.

As it turns out, that news provided an opportunity for Palin to articulate a very contemporary form of evangelical faith. She is a bonafide "feminist for life", which means, among other things, that on the political side, she successfully fought off the Alaska "old boys' club" to clean up that state's apparently endemic corruption. On the social side, she is unabashedly for life, to the point of keeping and loving her infant son, Trig, who was diagnosed, in the womb, with Down's Syndrome.

Then came word of Bristol's pregnancy.

Evangelicals, a few years ago, would have sent the young woman away in shame, to give birth in a distant “home for unwed mothers,” with a set of adoptive parents waiting in the wings.

Palin is “proud” that her daughter is choosing to keep the child and marry the father, an 18-year-old high school hockey player apparently named Levi Johnston.

There will be many opportunities to compare Palin with Hillary Clinton. Both are avowed feminists, one coming from the choice side of the spectrum, the other from the life side.

I leave the consideration of Palin’s emergence with this thought regarding her feminism: It means that she is likely able and willing to make decisions independent of those three “p’s” – the partner, pastor or physician. The sometimes oppressive influence of these categories of people, especially when they were male, is what has often shaped the thinking of the Sarah Palins of the world.

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As of now, it looks like a federal election on October 14, 2008, rather than October 19, 2009.

Having articulated for the latter in last week’s *OttawaWatch*, I have to say that if the writ is dropped this weekend, it will not really be a surprise.

I spoke of collaborative governance and opposition and, as it happens, that is what has occurred. All three opposition leaders, in effect, collaborated not to keep the government alive until 2009.

So I will undertake to help my publisher sell the last few hundred copies of *Stephen Harper: The Case for Collaborative Governance*. That means I will likely be in southwestern Ontario and the prairies some time in the next few weeks, and possibly in other parts of Canada as well.

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