

DID MCCAIN KNOW THE RNC BOUGHT PALIN THE SHOPPING SPREE?



WT has been chronicling Sarah's extreme makeover, including this picture (AP/Carolyn Kaster) she captions, "YOU told me I could keep the clothing!" I think she's right—there's a load of tension there.

And I think several things suggest the breaking news of Sarah's spree is the precipitating factor in recent chilliness between McCain and his Caribou Barbie. There's the terse way McCain responds to questions about it.

Presidential candidate John McCain isn't happy about having to explain why the Republican Party has had to buy running mate Sarah Palin \$150,000 in clothes, hair styling and accessories.

McCain was asked several questions on Thursday about the shopping spree – and he answered each one more or less the same way: Palin needed clothes and they'll be donated to charity.

There's the "tenseness" that Chuck Todd notes. Todd's wrong to suggest McCain and Palin weren't comfortable with each other, yet—after all there was plenty of chemistry about four weeks ago (at least on the part of McCain; Palin's always been a little uncomfortable when he leered at her), and they traveled together and hung out in Sedona for a good chunk of that period of time. So I think Todd's other suggestion—that McCain is blaming Palin for their failing campaign—makes more sense. And given the timing, the blame seems focused on the latest absurdity of the \$150,000 shopping spree.

Add in the well-reported history of McCain—the

guy formerly known as a maverick reformer—attacking precisely this kind of campaign expenditure.

MCCAIN: Madam President, the amendment before the Senate is a very simple one. It restricts the use of campaign funds for inherently personal purposes. The amendment would restrict individuals from using campaign funds for such things as home mortgage payments, clothing purchases ... and vacations or other trips that are noncampaign in nature. [...]

The use of campaign funds for items which most Americans would consider to be strictly personal reasons, in my view, erodes public confidence and erodes it significantly. [emphasis TP's]

Not that ignorance would exonerate McCain one bit—he still owns responsibility for allowing his campaign to do something that, in his own view, "erodes public confidence." But this signals the degree to which even McCain (who after all has better than average self-delusion skills) has to recognize that his campaign refutes everything the myth of the maverick reformer was supposed to be about.

Mostly, though, I'm still wondering about Cindy's role in all this. I imagine this exchange, occurring back in September:

Cindy: So we've got Levi coming down for a public show when you arrive in St. Paul, and I've taken Sarah out for a few items to spiff her up a bit, and I've got Jeff arranging to take care of Todd and the rest of the family.

John: That's nice dear ... [treating this latest chat about shopping as he treats all of Cindy's reports about her own shopping]

With Cindy then approving the expenditure for the spree.

That's all my imagination, of course, but this is actually the second time the McCain campaign's been caught spending big sums at Barneys. And we know Cindy has a history of charging up \$500,000 in a month without blinking an eye. So maybe this is all just a misunderstanding, on Cindy's part, because she can't fathom that politicians who don't already have a fortune have no ethical way to spend \$4000 a day on clothes.