



# Attack dog from Alaska puts new life into McCain's mojo

**T**HE national conventions for the Republican and Democratic parties over the past two weeks have turned upside down the race for the White House.

A week after Democrat Barack Obama played it safe, picking Senate lifer Joe Biden as his running mate and outlining a traditional Democratic big government agenda, Republican John McCain swung for the fences.

McCain got back his maverick mojo and a bounce in the opinion polls, leaving him neck and neck with Obama as the campaign enters the final straight — something that would have seemed impossible six months ago.

Pulling the pro-life rabbit Sarah Palin out of the vice-presidential hat seemed a desperate and reckless act until the self-styled “pitbull with lipstick” gleefully savaged Obama, all the while flashing a big smile to go with her schoolteacher glasses and talking up the wonders of life far from Washington’s beltway.

Palin’s attack dog verve freed McCain to assume the gentler guise of a wise man fuelled by a quiet storm of patriotic determination — a long way from his firebrand reputation.

## GEOFFREY GARRETT



That McCain’s speech played long on his heroic personal biography was to be expected.

What was more surprising was his effort to wrest from Obama the mantle of America’s change agent.

Time and again McCain resorted to the well spring of his political career, his 5½ years as a prisoner of war in Vietnam, to show he is made of the right presidential stuff.

But only a day after Palin had pilloried Obama as nothing more than a traditional tax-and-spend Democrat, McCain called for an end to Washington’s “partisan rancour”, showing due respect for Obama while taking a pot shot at the Bush Administration.

“We were elected to change Washington, and we let Washington change us,” McCain said.

The Republicans deserve high marks for this clever political

theatre. But their bold tactics raised questions they will have to answer if McCain-Palin is to be November’s winning ticket.

Can Palin’s feisty charm overcome the fact that she is the least experienced vice-presidential candidate in at least a generation, which is all the more important because McCain would be America’s oldest president and one with a history of cancer?

Can Palin really woo Hillary Clinton’s phalanx of disaffected female supporters when the mere fact of Palin’s selection immediately enraged many of them?

Can McCain claim the change mantle when he is an unwavering supporter of the unpopular Iraq War and a recent convert to the divisive Bush tax cuts?

Can McCain-Palin capture the independent voters who are so tired of biting partisanship when they know going negative is one of their best weapons against the Obama hype?

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