

The Swamp

GOP's strawman: 'Community organizer'

by Mark Silva

ST. PAUL - The Republicans are giving community organizers a bad name here - that's their goal, anyway, for at least one former community organizer: Barack Obama.

"Before I became governor of the great state of Alaska, I was mayor of my hometown," vice presidential nominee Sarah Palin said here last night. "And since our opponents in this presidential election seem to look down on that experience, let me explain to them what the job involves. I guess a small-town mayor is sort of like a community organizer, except that you have actual responsibilities."

That was after Rudy Giuliani already had smeared the job, pointing with ridicule to the career path that Obama had taken after graduation from the nation's top law school.

"You have a resume from a gifted man with an Ivy League education. He worked as a community organizer," Giuliani said to laughter. "Okay. Maybe this is the first problem on the resume. He worked as a community organizer. He immersed himself in Chicago machine politics."

Time for the community organizers of America to stand up for themselves, we think:

"As a life-long Republican, the comments I heard last night about community organizing crossed the line," said Bishop Roy Dixon, prelate of the Southern California fourth ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Church of God in Christ, member of the San Diego Organizing Project and former board chair of PICO National Network.

"It is one thing to question someone's experience, another to demean the work of millions of hard working Americans who take time to get involved in their communities," the bishop said in a statement released today. "When people come together in my church hall to improve our community, they're building the Kingdom of God in San Diego. We see the fruits of community organizing in safer streets, new parks, and new affordable housing. It's the spirit of democracy for people to have a say and we need more of it."

Laura Barrett, national policy director for the Gamaliel/Transportation Equity Network, a multi-faith community organizing network in 60 metro regions, says this:

"We can thank community organizing for the weekend, the eight-hour day, integrated swimming pools, public transportation, health care for children and safe neighborhoods. Community organizing is behind most of the family-oriented initiatives we benefit from every day. I am proud to work for change in my country, my state, and my city as a community organizer, following the great traditions of Dr. Martin Luther King."

Kim Bobo, executive director of Interfaith Worker Justice, says:

"Contrary to Palin's disparaging remarks, organizers have major responsibilities for creating policy changes. Feeding the hungry and housing the homeless are clearly responsibilities of people of faith. We do that by providing food and shelter and more importantly, by organizing to address the causes of injustice and inequity which lead to hunger and homelessness."

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