WILL OBAMA THROW A "HAIL HILLARY" PASS?

In what now seems the long ago days between the time Sen. John McCain chose Sarah Palin as his running mate on August 29 and her acceptance speech on September 3, there was considerable speculation in the news media that Sen. McCain would drop her from the ticket.

This was entirely a media invention. There was no sentiment among Republicans for replacing Ms. Palin, and Sen. McCain -- whose loyalty to his friends nearly cost him his life in Vietnam -- is not the kind of person who would desert his choice.

And there was a very practical reason why this option never was considered. Sen. George McGovern was going to lose in 1972 no matter what, but the final nail in his coffin was when he dumped running mate Thomas Eagleton after it was revealed Sen. Eagleton had had shock treatments for an unspecified mental illness. With one stroke, Sen. McGovern called into question both his judgment and his loyalty.

There has, of course, been no further speculation about dropping Sarah Palin from the ticket after her boffo performance in St. Paul. But my friend Steve Maloney (who first got me interested in Sarah Palin) says his sources in the Democrat Party are telling him Barack Obama is being pressured to dump Sen. Joseph Biden from the ticket and replace him with Hillary Clinton, the switch to come just after the vice presidential debate Oct. 2.

Speculation about such a switch has emerged on several left-wing blogs. "It's time to dump Biden and replace him with Sen. Hillary Clinton," said Andy Ostroy on the Huffington Post today (9/15). "I'm starting to think that if Team Obama doesn't do something dramatic fast, it's gonna lose this election."

What might prompt such an act of desperation? The polls -- which indicate the race is a statistical dead heat -- are cause for concern, but not for panic.

This might be the reason:

"Party elders also believe the Obama camp is in denial about warnings from Democrat pollsters that his true standing is four to six points lower than that in published polls because of hidden racism from voters," wrote Tim Shipman in the London Telegraph Sunday ((/14).

"While the polling is close I believe it is far worse than the numbers reflect given social apprehension of middle of the road uncommitted respondents to appear racist by not supporting Obama," wrote former Democrat congressional candidate Paul Hackett on the Daily Kos blog. "Thus instead of being down in Ohio by 3 or 4 points I would argue that for planning purposes the working assumption should indicate that Obama is down in Ohio by roughly 10 points."

If this is true (and I don't think that it is), then Sen. Obama is in very deep kim chi. There are 12 states in which this election will be decided. Seven -- Florida, Ohio, Virginia, Iowa, Colorado, New Mexico and Nevada -- were carried by President Bush in 2004. Five -- Pennsylvania, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota and New Hampshire -- were carried by Sen. John Kerry.

To win, a candidate must amass 270 electoral votes. President Bush won 286 in 2004, so, Sen. McCain has 16 to play with. He could lose Iowa (7) and either Colorado (9), New Mexico (5) or Nevada (5) and still win the election.

As a practical matter, Sen. McCain can't win unless he carries both Florida (27) and Ohio (20), but he's already leading in both states, and if Mr. Hackett is right, then they're already out of Sen. Obama's reach.

Also as a practical matter, Sen. Obama can't win if he loses either Pennsylvania (21) or Michigan (17). The public polls indicate both states are tossups, but if Sen. McCain has a hidden 4-6 percentage point advantage, then he has the lead in both.

New York, New Jersey, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Washington state and New Hampshire might also switch from blue to red, while the only red state in which Sen. McCain would be behind is Iowa.

State by state polls should be taken with a grain of salt. A recent poll indicated a 20 percentage point lead for Sen. McCain in North Carolina, and a statistical tie in Virginia.
North Carolina was, on average, three percentage points more Republican than Virginia in the last two presidential elections.

It's inconceivable nearly 20 percentage points could be separating them now. The massive turnout at a McCain-Palin rally in one of the bluest counties in Virginia - Fairfax - a week ago suggests the North Carolina poll may be the more accurate.

Could a "Hail Hillary" pass change the grim arithmetic facing Sen. Obama? We may find out.

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