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Drawing Women's Attention, Maybe Not Allegiance

By JACKIE CALMES

Correction Appended

Judith France and her daughter Holly France-Kremin have been torn about their choice for president ever since Senator [Hillary Rodham Clinton](#) lost the Democratic nomination to Senator [Barack Obama](#). Now Senator [John McCain](#) has made up their minds, but in different ways, by his surprise pick of [Sarah Palin](#), the little-known Alaska governor, as his Republican running mate.

"It made me like McCain a little more," said Judith France, 62, of Thornville, Ohio. "They always say he was a maverick, and this made me think, well, he really is. He went all the way to Alaska — there aren't that many people up there, they don't have that many electoral votes — and he picked this person. I know people will say she's inexperienced. But she's been a governor for 20 months. That's more experience than Obama has."

Ms. France-Kremin, 36, who lives nearby in Dublin, an affluent suburb of Columbus, likewise has qualms about the seasoning of Mr. Obama, a first-term United States senator after eight years as a state senator. But she also strongly favors abortion rights, and Ms. Palin — more prominently than Mr. McCain — does not.

"That sealed my decision," said Ms. France-Kremin, who added that she would no longer consider voting for Mr. McCain.

At offices, plant floors, stores and parks across America, voters who had barely started hashing over Mr. Obama's acceptance speech Thursday night at the Democrats' convention were beginning a new national conversation about Mr. McCain's unexpected decision to put the first woman on a major party national ticket since [Geraldine A. Ferraro](#) was the Democratic vice-presidential choice of [Walter F. Mondale](#) in 1984.

The choice is playing out in complicated ways, judging from interviews with dozens of women nationwide.

Some, particularly women leaning toward a Republican ticket or who share Ms. Palin's staunch anti-abortion views, see it as a winning choice that they can happily embrace. But others, particularly the undecided women Mr. McCain is trying to reach, say this is the wrong woman, lacking experience and on the wrong side of the issues, like abortion, the Iraq war and the environment, that matter most to them.

Some Clinton stalwarts took offense, saying they felt as if Mr. McCain had decided that, for women disappointed that they could not vote for Mrs. Clinton, any woman would do. "It's an insult," said Jan Roller, a Clinton delegate from Cleveland, as she arrived home from the convention. "You have to be qualified for the job."

Darlene Pace, a 65-year-old corporate accountant and independent voter from southeastern Pennsylvania — which, like Ohio, is an election battleground — voted for Mrs. Clinton in the Democratic primary last April. Weeks ago, Mrs. Pace told a caller for a New York Times/CBS News poll that she was undecided about whether

to vote for Mr. Obama or Mr. McCain. It would depend on their vice-presidential picks, she said then.

“So I was very disappointed” to learn of Mr. McCain’s choice, Mrs. Pace said Friday, hours after the selection of Ms. Palin was announced. “No one in my office has any idea about her, and the only comment I’m hearing, which is not good, is that ‘she’s a woman and that’s why she was picked.’ ”

Still, while Mrs. Pace says she now leans toward Mr. Obama, she is withholding judgment until she has watched the Republican convention this week.

But some Republican-leaning women immediately showed new enthusiasm for a Republican ticket that badly needed it, given the energy of Obama supporters.

Shopping at a suburban mall in Michigan on Friday, Cathy Gates, 40, a registered Republican and a mother of two who calls herself a “football mom,” said that the Palin pick was “a big risk” but that it “makes me feel a little better” about voting for Mr. McCain.

“She does appeal to me,” Ms. Gates said. “You would feel she has the same values as you. Having a child with Down syndrome, and being the governor, and she calls herself a hockey mom. I was impressed. She’s very pretty and seems very smart. I hope it works out.”

Some Democratic-leaning women, as well, welcomed Mr. McCain’s barrier-breaking choice as some consolation after their dashed hopes of having a woman at the top of the ticket.

“I wish the [Democratic Party](#) had the courage” to pick a woman, said Kimberly Myers, a retired transit worker in Pittsburgh who supported Mrs. Clinton in Pennsylvania’s primary and said she now planned to vote for Mr. McCain.

Ms. Myers said she also saw a bonus in the choice of Ms. Palin: “The fact that she’s a working mom will send a message to America that you don’t have to choose children over career.”

But many saw her as intrinsically unfit, an obscure governor from the faraway 49th state, with no national standing and no experience on the foreign stage.

Mr. McCain’s elevation of Ms. Palin “just blew me away,” said Rachel McBride, 52, a mother of three in Houston and an independent who had supported President Bush. “It’s so blatantly a political move — picking a woman at all, and then picking a woman with so little experience when he keeps ramming Obama about his experience.” The result? “I’m definitely leaning toward Obama now,” Ms. McBride said.

With women a majority of all voters, and increasingly favoring Democrats, Mr. McCain clearly was trying to draw some back to his party. (At the Republican convention, male delegates will outnumber women by more than two to one. The majority of delegates at the Democratic convention that ended Thursday were women.)

Mr. McCain was also offering an alternative to those voters disappointed that, with Mr. Obama’s choice of Senator [Joseph R. Biden Jr.](#) as his running mate, Mrs. Clinton will not be the nation’s first female president, or vice president, after all. Even before the Palin announcement, Mr. McCain’s political surrogates were in Denver last week to lobby Clinton delegates, and his campaign ran television advertisements to stoke their anger.

How it plays out depends on what voters learn about Ms. Palin, 44, in the two months before Election Day, and how she performs. Not a single woman interviewed had heard of her before Friday.

As word of the Palin choice spread, some women said they were intrigued by what they saw as her unusual mix of last-frontier pioneer and suburban supermom. She is a sportswoman, hunter and onetime local beauty queen who married her high school sweetheart, as well as a self-described hockey mom and PTA member. She has five children, the oldest a teenager in the Army who will leave for Iraq in September, and the youngest a 4-month-old with Down syndrome.

In their initial curiosity or even enthusiasm for Ms. Palin's selection, women said they rushed to the Internet or their television sets to learn more, and swapped information with family and friends. While some said they were impressed by Ms. Palin's poise in her debut Friday, by accounts of her public ethics and by her family life, they hesitated on learning of her social conservatism and relative inexperience.

"I think she's a great choice," said Teri Reid, 51, a civil servant for the [Navy](#) in Ventura County, Calif. But Ms. Reid did not know of Ms. Palin's anti-abortion stance. "That's a big issue for me, that and gay rights," she said.

Ms. Palin's anti-abortion record alienates a number of Clinton loyalists still undecided about Mr. Obama but for whom abortion rights are a threshold issue.

Ms. France-Kremin, whose mother has sided with Mr. McCain, said she, too, might have done so had he chosen a pro-abortion rights Republican like [Tom Ridge](#), the former Pennsylvania governor and homeland security chief. "But now? Absolutely not," she said. Mr. McCain, she said, "is definitely pandering to the Christian right."

Ms. Palin's experience and her fitness to serve were especially worrisome to some women, who noted Mr. McCain's age, 72, and his past bouts with cancer. Just six years ago, she was the mayor of Wasilla, an Anchorage suburb of just over 6,000 people.

The worriers include some of those otherwise most likely to support Mr. McCain, like Sue Angers, a 43-year-old business analyst from Macomb County, Mich., well known as a home of swing voters. She said she leaned Republican and had voted for President Bush. "Hate to say it," Ms. Angers said of the Palin pick as she left a Babies R Us store, "but it makes me less likely to support McCain."

Ms. Angers had never heard of the Alaska governor, and immediately figured Mr. McCain was simply angling for Clinton voters. But, she said, "You don't picture McCain surviving his whole term," and "with her being so unknown, to be that close to taking over?"

Traditionally, running mates prove to have little if any impact on the election result. But Ms. Palin is not a traditional choice.

Terri Hammerschmitt, 53, a Democratic-leaning office manager from suburban Pittsburgh, said of Mr. McCain, "If he really wants change, it's a good start."

Reporting was contributed by Christopher Maag in Ohio, Ellen Piligian in Michigan, Jodi Kantor in Colorado, Sean D. Hamill in Pennsylvania and Paul Cuadros in North Carolina.

This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:

Correction: September 2, 2008

An article on Sunday about the reaction of women to Senator John McCain's choice of Gov. Sarah Palin of Alaska as his running mate misidentified the 50th state to enter the union in some editions. It was Hawaii — not Alaska, which was the 49th. The article also misspelled, in some editions, the name of a woman who said the choice of Ms. Palin made her less likely to support Mr. McCain. She is Sue Angers, not Angiers.

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