

# The Boston Globe

## *Palin's daughter, 17, is pregnant*

*Republicans close ranks around family as rumors swirl*

By Michael Kranish

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Republican vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin revealed yesterday that her 17-year-old unmarried daughter is five months pregnant - a disclosure made by John McCain's campaign in an effort to stop what it called "out of control" Internet rumors that Palin's youngest child actually was conceived by her daughter and that the Alaska governor faked her pregnancy to cover that up. Republicans quickly closed ranks around the Palin family, praising the teenager, Bristol Palin, for deciding to have the child and marry the father. At the same time, the revelation focused attention on the GOP's call, in the party platform adopted yesterday, for unwed teenagers to abstain from sex.

In announcing their daughter's pregnancy, the Palins yesterday highlighted her decision to have the baby. "Our beautiful daughter Bristol came to us with news that as parents we knew would make her grow up faster than we had ever planned. We're proud of Bristol's decision to have her baby and even prouder to become grandparents," Sarah Palin, 44, and her husband, Todd, said in a statement issued by the McCain campaign. The statement identified the father only as Levi, saying that "Bristol and the young man she will marry are going to realize very quickly the difficulties of raising a child, which is why they will have the love and support of our entire family."

A campaign official said McCain found out about the pregnancy shortly before he asked Palin to become his running mate last week. Campaign officials declined to provide further information about how the matter came up in the vetting process, saying they wanted to respect the Palin family's privacy.

In another issue that emerged during the vetting, Palin has hired a private attorney to represent her

in a state investigation into her firing of the state's public safety commissioner, and whether it was related to his refusal to dismiss a state trooper involved in a messy divorce with Palin's sister.

Palin's daughter became both the talk of the GOP convention and the latest episode in the national discussion about teen pregnancy. Her story follows debates over whether the movie "Juno" glamorized teenage pregnancy and whether the real-life pregnancy of 16-year-old actress Jamie Lynn Spears provided the wrong role model for teenage viewers.

One third of the nation's girls get pregnant by age 20, the highest rate among fully industrialized nations, according to the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancies. After a 15-year-long decline in the teen birth rate - attributed to more contraception and less sex - the rate rose 3 percent in 2006, according to the nonpartisan group.

Bill Albert, the group's chief program officer, said the reasons for the rise are unclear. But he said it would be "pretty naive to think that things like 'Juno' and Jamie Lynn Spears don't shape the social script. They certainly do."

Asked if he was concerned that the Bristol Palin pregnancy would have a similar impact, Albert said he hoped the matter would prompt more parents to talk with their children about the negative impact of unplanned pregnancies. While he said he was sure that the Palins would provide financial and emotional support, he said many other teens in similar situations do not do as well. Sixty percent of pregnant teens do not finish high school, and many struggle financially for the rest of their lives because of a lack of education and resources, Albert said.

Republican social conservatives balanced their reaction yesterday, expressing concern about out-of-

wedlock teenage pregnancy, but applauding the Palins' support for their daughter. The issue was a sensitive one because many social conservatives simultaneously support abstinence until marriage, while voicing strong support for unmarried women to give birth in most circumstances.

Tony Perkins, president of the Family Research Council, said in a statement that "teenage pregnancy has become all too common in today's society regardless of a family's economic or social status" while congratulating the Palins for "choosing life in the midst of a difficult situation."

James Dobson, the antiabortion leader of Focus on the Family who exulted over the Palin pick, said in a statement yesterday that the Palins should be commended "for not just talking about their prolife and profamily values, but living them out even in the midst of trying circumstances."

Palin, a first-term governor in Alaska, criticized the overturning of a law requiring a parent's permission before a child can have an abortion and suggested a constitutional amendment in its place.

The revelation of her daughter's pregnancy comes as the Republican Party continues to be riven over the issues of abstinence, abortion, and contraception.

Yesterday, GOP convention delegates adopted a platform that urges unmarried teenagers to abstain from sex. "We renew our call for replacing 'family planning' programs for teens with increased funding for abstinence education, which teaches abstinence until marriage as the responsible and expected standard of behavior," says the platform, which also declares there is a "moral obligation" to help women who have unplanned pregnancies.

McCain voted against a 2005 proposal by Senator Hillary Clinton

that would have provided \$100 million to combat teenage pregnancy. Some social conservatives, including Palin, oppose abortion even in cases of rape and incest. McCain had argued for such exceptions. His pick of Palin over two prospects who favored abortion rights - former Pennsylvania governor Tom Ridge and Senator Joseph Lieberman of Connecticut - was viewed as a nod to antiabortion forces in the GOP.

Palin was introduced as McCain's running mate Friday with an emphasis on her antiabortion credentials, highlighted by her decision to give birth in April to her son Trig despite learning when she was four months pregnant that the child had Down syndrome. In March, when she announced that she was seven months pregnant, the reaction in the Alaska media was one of astonishment. Newspaper stories quoted Palin's staff as saying they did not realize she was pregnant.

Upon the announcement of Palin's vice presidential candidacy, the rumors surfaced in e-mails and on some liberal blogs suggesting Palin had not been pregnant, but was hiding her daughter's pregnancy. Bristol Palin, a high school senior, appeared at the Friday rally in Dayton, Ohio, holding Trig, but was not on stage at events over the weekend.

Senator Barack Obama, noting that his mother had him when she was 18 years old, denied yesterday that his campaign had anything to do with the rumors. "This shouldn't be part of our politics, it has no relevance to Governor Palin's performance as a governor or her potential performance as a vice president, and so I would strongly urge people to back off these kinds of stories," Obama told reporters in Michigan. "People's families are off limits, and people's children are especially off limits."