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## Analysis: Palin more than her resume much more

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Being a mayor of 9,780 is nothing like leading 305 million. Living next to Russia does not make you a foreign policy whiz. And presidential competence is rarely measured in square miles.

But listen closely. Such unexpected comparisons are everywhere as Republicans scramble to inflate the commendable but limited public service resume of vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin. Who knows what you might hear next?

"She's got an incredible resume," John McCain said of his running mate Wednesday. He added an unusual qualification for vice president: "a wonderful, loving, caring family."

Here's Palin's resume as it happened:

Governor, state of Alaska: Dec 2006-Present.

Chair, Alaska's Oil and Gas Conservation Commission: 2003-2004.

Mayor, Wasilla, Alaska (population: 9,780): 1996-2002.

City Council, Wasilla, Alaska: 1992-1996.

University of Idaho; television sports and family fishing business.

Miss Wasilla: 1984

Here's her resume as McCain and his fellow Republicans have been casting and constructing it this week.

McCain: "Alaska is right next to Russia." "Well, the people of Alaska have vetted her." "She's commander of the Alaskan National Guard." "Of course, it helps to be mayor."

Missouri Gov. Matt Blunt: "You could make a strong case that her experience exceeds any others in the race." That's a hard case to make when Senate veterans McCain and Joe Biden, Barack Obama's running mate, have 58 years of congressional experience between them.

Former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani: "She's got an 80 percent approval rating."

Hawaii Gov. Linda Lingle: "You can fit more than 250 states the size of Delaware within Alaska's border." Biden, Palin's Democratic rival for vice president, represents Delaware in the Senate.

This is not to suggest that Palin is unqualified to be vice president or even president. That's for voters to decide after they process what they learn about her record in Alaska. And there's the less substantial but no less important gut-level judgments people make about politicians and products. Experience is just one element by which voters judge a candidate.

It does, however, hint at an intensive strategy to find traits about Palin that will make voters happy and offer deep contrasts with Obama. It's not lying, and it's not exaggeration, actually. It's more like they're using non sequiturs to build up her image.

Resume padding which this may or may not be, depending on one's point of view seems to be a uniquely American trait. People of other societies inflate their background but nobody does it quite like people in the U.S., according to David Callahan, author of "The Cheating Culture: Why More Americans are Doing Wrong to Get Ahead."

Americans see themselves as hardworking strivers who judge each other by the number of rungs they climb at work, a trait that compels some of them to embellish their places on the ladder.

"In America," Callahan said, "when you meet somebody you often ask, 'What do you do?' That is far less common in other cultures. So it's not surprising that in a culture in which status is so linked to careers that people might be inclined to embellish."

Palin passed her first gut check Wednesday night, lacing her convention address with smiles and sarcasm.

"The American presidency is not supposed to be a journey of 'personal discovery.' This world of threats and dangers is not just a community, and it doesn't just need an organizer," Palin said, a reference to Democratic nominee Obama's time as a community organizer in Chicago.

That brings us to Obama's resume. Though a bit longer than Palin's he's about three years older and graduated from Harvard Law School it's not quite what he claims it to be. For one, Obama says he spent "20 years in public service," a time frame that includes his law-school days.

In his first general election TV ad, Obama says he "passed laws" to move people from welfare to work, cut taxes for working families and extend health care for wounded troops. In fact, he sponsored only one of the three bills mentioned and co-sponsored another, according to FactCheck.org. Two of the three laws were accomplishments of the Illinois legislature, not the U.S. Senate.

And here's one resume bullet point to avoid: Biden was driven from the 1988 presidential race for passing off former British Labour Party leader Neil Kinnock's life story as his own.

Exaggeration is a fact of American life. The reality of a hyper-competitive global economy leads some people to stretch the truth to get ahead. Some 80 percent of all resumes include misleading information, Callahan says, and a review of 2.6 million job applications in 2002 found that 44 percent of them contained "at least some lies."

So nobody should be surprised when McCain exaggerates the significance of Palin's command of the Alaska National Guard. Nor should voters be shocked by Obama's liberal interpretation of his public service. Both candidates are, after all, Americans and American politicians to boot.

"There is perhaps no other job where you're selling your resume as much as you are in politics," Callahan says. "Everybody expects politicians to puff themselves up."

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