McCain Camp Hits Obama On More Than One Front

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Sen. John McCain's presidential campaign launched a broadside against Sen. Barack Obama yesterday, accusing him of a sexist smear, comparing his campaign to a pack of wolves on the prowl against the GOP vice presidential pick, charging that the Democratic nominee favored sex education for kindergartners, and resurrecting the comments of the Rev. Jeremiah A. Wright Jr.

The assault came a day before the seventh anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks, when McCain and Obama are scheduled to appear together at Ground Zero during a mutually declared truce. That cease-fire is not likely to last long. With the airwaves already filling up with some of the most negative imagery of the campaign, Obama aides hinted that they would save their toughest counterpunch until after Sept. 11.

"Enough," Obama declared yesterday while campaigning in Norfolk, Va. "I don't care what they say about me. But I love this country too much to let them take over another election with lies and phony outrage and Swift boat politics. Enough is enough."

The McCain campaign, meanwhile, sought to portray itself as the victim of unfair smears and sexist attacks against Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin even as it pursued its own assaults on Obama. The rhetoric was echoed yesterday on conservative talk radio, the Internet and in the House, where Republican women decried Obama's alleged sexism.

"The Obama campaign has decided that the way to get at Sarah Palin is through personal attacks and sexist insults," Rep. Candice S. Miller (Mich.) said on the House floor.

On a campaign conference call last night, Rep. Marsha Blackburn (Tenn.) lumped together Obama's reference to a female reporter as "sweetie" last May, his decision not to choose Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton (N.Y.) or Kansas Gov. Kathleen Sebelius as his running mate, and his use of the saying "lipstick on a pig" in comments Tuesday to denounce what they call a pattern of sexism.

The attacks over the first three days of this week have come at a sometimes dizzying pace. Within 24 hours, the McCain campaign released a television advertisement saying Obama favored "comprehensive sex education" for kindergartners, produced an Internet ad charging that the Democrat had referred to Palin as a pig, then concluded with another ad saying, "Obama's politics of hope? Empty words."

All three of the spots drew outraged responses and charges of dirty politics from Obama and his supporters. "We've got an energy crisis," the candidate said at a campaign event where he had planned to focus entirely on education policy. "We have an education system that is not working for too many of our children and making us less competitive. We have an economy that is creating hardship for families all across America.
We've got two wars going on, veterans coming home not being cared for -- and this is what they want to talk about."

McCain allies think they have succeeded in knocking Obama on his heels since he accepted his party's nomination in Denver two weeks ago.

"They really are in a meltdown," said Sen. Lindsey O. Graham (S.C.), a McCain adviser.

Obama aides say the assaults will not work, arguing that all of the accusations against him are a reach, if not fabrications. The sexism allegation stemmed from a comment Obama made in Virginia during a talk in which he did not mention Palin.

"Let's just list this for a second," he said Tuesday. "John McCain says he's about change, too. And so I guess his whole angle is, 'Watch out, George Bush. Except for economic policy, health-care policy, tax policy, education policy, foreign policy and Karl Rove-style politics, we're going to really shake things up in Washington. That's not change. That's just calling some -- the same thing something different. But you know, you can't, you can put, uh, lipstick on a pig. It's still a pig."

The McCain campaign seized on the remark, saying that Obama was alluding to Palin's characterization of herself as a pit bull in lipstick. The Internet ad skips over the introductory words from Obama, juxtaposing Palin's line from her nomination acceptance speech last Wednesday -- "They say the difference between a hockey mom and a pit bull: lipstick" -- with Obama's lipstick-on-a-pig phrase, a phrase that McCain also has used, to describe Clinton's health-care plan.

"Ready to lead? No," the ad concludes. "Ready to smear? Yes."

The sex education ad referred to legislation Obama voted for -- but did not sponsor -- in the Illinois Senate that allowed school boards to develop "age-appropriate" sex education courses at all levels. Kindergarten teachers were given the approval to teach about appropriate and inappropriate touching to combat molestation.

The McCain advertisement calls it "Obama's one accomplishment" in education: "legislation to teach comprehensive sex education to kindergartners."

"Learning about sex before learning to read? Barack Obama, wrong on education, wrong for your family," the ad concludes.

Paired with that was another attack. The "wolves" ad alludes to a "mini-army" of lawyers dispatched to "dig dirt" on Palin in Alaska.

"As Obama drops in the polls, he'll try to destroy her," the ad states.

The ad pins the swirl of Internet rumors about McCain's running mate to the Obama campaign. The reference to a mini-army was drawn from a Wall Street Journal column by conservative John Fund. A spokesman for the Democratic National Committee said yesterday that neither it nor the Obama campaign had any researchers or lawyers in Alaska.

It was a McCain surrogate, former senator Fred D. Thompson (Tenn.), who brought back the words of Wright, Obama's former longtime pastor, whose incendiary sermons nearly derailed the Democrat's primary candidacy.

"Frankly, I think Reverend Wright was correct when he says he's just doing what politicians do," Thompson said of Obama as he introduced McCain to a Northern Virginia audience. "That's not the kind of change this
country needs."


"What really disappoints me is the very tactics used against him, they're trying to use against Barack Obama now," he said. "It's literally saddening. I didn't expect it, I didn't expect it. But I guess I should learn to expect everything."

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