

## The great mommy debate

### Local women weigh in on Palin mixing family, politics

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Motherhood is an asset, not a hindrance, especially when it comes to Republican vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin, according to Naperville area mothers.

"I'm very impressed with her, her willingness," said Patti Minta, a member of the DuPage Professional Women's Network, a group that gives working women and mothers a place to exchange ideas and make contacts.

The Sun last week asked local working and stay-at-home moms what they think about the questions and criticisms that have swirled around whether Palin could adequately meet her duties as a mother while serving as vice president.

The roughly two dozen DPWN women gathered Thursday for a lunch meeting were eager to defend Palin from criticisms centering on her role as a mother of five.

"She knew this was a calling for her. That's what moms do ... they do what needs to be done," Minta said.

Republican presidential candidate John McCain announced Palin as his running mate in August.

As a working mother, Palin knows what it's like to juggle the demands of a job and a household, said Traci Kuhn, director of DPWN's Plainfield/South Naperville chapter.

"I'm hoping she brings to the office that viewpoint," she said. "I don't think a lot of men know what it's like. That's something she can bring to the arena."

Palin and her husband, Todd, have five children: Track, 18, Bristol, 17, Willow, 14, Piper, 7, and 4-month-old Trig, who was born with Down syndrome in April.

Lockport resident Julie Schultz said that if Palin had enough time to serve as governor of Alaska, she doesn't see why she wouldn't have time to serve as vice president.

"Why are we assuming she'll be busier as vice president than as governor," Schultz said.

Other women said they were angered that Palin's role as mother was even considered an issue up for discussion. It's unfair and distracting to direct questions about parental duties to Palin and not to her male counterparts, Patti Schiavone said.

"It's not talking about the issues, it's all about her as a mother," Schiavone said. "It doesn't even matter whether you are a Republican or a Democrat, what they're doing to her is wrong."

"It's archaic," Naperville resident Nancy Kopperud said.

Debra Wierus-O'Neill of Bolingbrook said that while she's not supporting Palin politically, she thinks it's absurd that questions have so often focused on Palin's personal life.

"It angers me that those are the issues that have been brought up about her," Wierus-O'Neill said. "That's ridiculous, those are not the issues."

U.S. Rep. Judy Biggert said she experienced similar questions during her past races for the Illinois House and for Congress. She remembers being asked by former Illinois Senate President Pate Phillips whether she could run for public office and care for her four children, who were grown at the time.

"I was outraged," Biggert said. "I think it's a non-issue. I don't think a man would be asked that."

Questions that imply Palin may not be able to balance her personal and public jobs are "absolutely inappropriate," said Stephen Maynard Caliendo, associate professor of political science at North Central College.

"It is not fair and it plays heavily on sexist perceptions of gender roles in our culture," Caliendo said. "We've never asked these types of questions of male candidates."

As to the duties Palin would incur if elected, Caliendo said the vice president's only constitutional power is to break a tie in the Senate. In the style of more recent vice presidents, she may adopt some "pet projects," like Al Gore and his emphasis on mental health during the Clinton presidency.

Balancing the responsibilities of motherhood and holding a high public office would be too much for her, stay-at-home mom and Naperville resident Marie Benware said, but she supports Palin's decision to do so if elected. Like Palin, Benware has five children.

"Sometimes it does take extraordinary times and situations where people are put in places of leadership and they can really have unique influence, and maybe this is something she's called to do," Benware said. "I think family is most important, but I think she believes that too and I think she sees our country needs to start putting more emphasis on family and the family structure."

Even if winning the election means Palin's family sees less of her for the next four years, it seems as though her husband and children are prepared to support her, Benware said.

"I think she seems prepared to bring forth what needs to be put forth," she said. "And her family seems to be supportive of that."

For more information about the DPWN, visit [www.dpwomen.com](http://www.dpwomen.com).