

Calculating the Environmental Costs of Sarah's Book Tour

How Palin, During Her 25-State Barnstorm, Managed to Run Up A Nine-Fold Increase in Fuel Compared to a Genuine Highway Tour

Richard A. Fineberg

February 8, 2010

As governor of Alaska, Sarah Palin made a show of getting rid of the jet plane her predecessor had used. She claimed to be a model of fiscal restraint in her campaign to convince the public she was a different kind of politician.¹ But is she so different from other disingenuous politicians when she carefully nurtures the false image that she is rambling around on a highway bus but she is actually flying around in a chartered jet?

As a private citizen, Palin is, of course, free to use a luxurious and notoriously expensive mode of transportation. But some folks might find the Palin's choice of travel arrangements for her book tour more than hypocritical. Since Palin has billed herself as an energy maven and placed advocacy of aggressive petroleum development in Alaska at the center of her autobiography, my efforts have been focused Palin's public pronouncements and her conduct in office. This sidebar looks briefly at the fuel consumption of the environmentally unfriendly travel plans Palin made to conduct her national speaking tour.

By way of background: Bloggers have reported that the Grumman Gulfstream II executive jet that Palin chartered reportedly costs \$4,000 per hour. That seems like a lot of money to spend, particularly when, having left her elected responsibilities behind, Palin presumably had time on her hands. In fact, in her final days before leaving office Palin found time to serve hot dogs to supporters at outdoor summer farewell gatherings in different parts of the state. And to get to the final party in Fairbanks, where her successor was sworn in, she and her husband packed their family into a van for an overnight trip of approximately 350 miles from Anchorage north.²

¹ Here is how Palin described the jet story in her recent autobiography:

My own fiscal restraint was considered by some Alaska lawmakers too sharp a contrast to the last Republican administration's lack thereof, and I was warned by lawmakers not to shake things up so much. Governor Murkowski . . . unveiled his last capital budget while donning a Santa Claus hat. I don't mean figuratively. He put the hat on and signed a budget full of "gifts" for lawmakers.

Not that he didn't trim here and there. He did cancel a senior care program for needy elders who had come to rely on it for their monthly income. Then he turned around and bought the jet.

That darn jet. Both the public and the legislature had told Murkowski not to buy it. It was very expensive to operate, and pilots couldn't land it on gravel strips, making it practically useless for travel around a lot of Alaska. After I was elected, I listed the thing on eBay and an agent finally sold it. (Sarah Palin, *Going Rogue: An American Life* [HarperCollins, 2009], p. 147.

² Palin described the final trip to Fairbanks as governor in her farewell speech July 26, 2009. In her autobiography, with characteristic focus on personal matters rather than affairs of state, she notes that "[o]ur drive back to Wasilla was full of cranked-up Southern rock music, and we stopped along the highway to roast hot dogs and make s'mores over a campfire" (*Going Rogue*, pp. 383-384).

Calculating the Environmental Costs of Sarah's Book Tour
Richard A. Fineberg / Feb. 8, 2010 (Page 2)

Having retired early from public office, Palin is free to park a jet on a runway for \$4,000.00 per hour, if that's what she wants to do. Nevertheless, readers might be interested in considering the quantity of fuel this peripatetic politician consumed on her late-2009 book signing travel to 31 communities in 25 states.

From quick map inspection, it appears that between Nov. 18 and Dec. 11, 2009, Palin logged at least 15,000 miles traveling from community to community. Here are some rough fuel consumption estimates for cars, buses and planes:

- If Palin rented a car and a van for the trip, the two vehicles might have averaged 15 miles per gallon. That would come to a combined total of 2,000 gallons of gasoline. One car at 20 mpg would have consumed 750 gallons of gasoline.
- Bus fuel consumption is more difficult to estimate, particularly without knowing the size and age of the engine in the big blue bus with her picture on the side. Transit buses use about 6.5 times more fuel per mile than light cars and trucks. That figure would put the bus consumption at 6,500 gallons. Highway buses are generally reported to get about 6 mpg. That would put the bus consumption for her tour at 2,500 gallons.
- The Grumman Gulfstream II executive jet is supposed to guzzle about 500 gallons of fuel per hour cruising in excess of 500 mph. If these figures reflect the reduced speeds and additional fuel used climbing and reducing to landing speeds, the Gulfstream would have consumed 15,000 gallons of fuel.

From these rough estimates, it is safe to say that Palin's 2,000 gallon base for a car and a van grew to somewhere between 17,500 gallons and 21,500 gallons for the bus and plane, depending on the bus fuel consumption. Taking the lower estimate and adding a chase car for running errands at each stop, Palin's plane and bus charade would have consumed a total of 18,250 gallons of fuel. In other words, Palin's transportation choices for her barnstorming tour resulted in at least nine times more carbon pollution than a car and a van covering a similar distance would have consumed.³

³ For a number of reasons, these estimates are probably conservative. The aircraft burn rate taking off and landing would probably be higher than its cruising average, the bus probably consumed additional fuel at the start and end of each trip and a car and van with higher average performance might have been obtained.