

**Palin stokes 2012 speculation with Iowa appearance**  
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IOWA (Aug 13, 2011) - Republican Sarah Palin rolled into Iowa's state fair on Friday, stealing the spotlight from the party's presidential contenders and sparking a new round of speculation about her plans for 2012.

Palin's visit to the cattle barn at the fair attracted a crush of photographers, reporters, fans and onlookers who swarmed the former Alaska governor, alarming the cows and bringing activity in the barn to a temporary halt.

The timing of the visit, a day before a straw poll that is a big early test of campaign strength for the 2012 Republican presidential contenders, renewed questions about whether she will jump in the race.

Palin, who stopped to talk to reporters and fans outside the barn, said she was still uncertain of her decision but there was time and room for more candidates to join the race.

"I think there is plenty of time to jump in the race," she said.

"Watching the whole process over the last year certainly shows me that, yes, there is plenty of room for more people."

She said that "practically speaking" September would probably be a deadline for her decision. "I don't want to be perceived as stringing people along," she said.

Palin joined a half-dozen declared Republican presidential candidates who visited the fair on Friday to speak at a local newspaper's stage, make a traditional visit to a life-size sculpted butter cow and eat fried Oreos or meats on a stick.

The fair visit is a traditional rite of passage for presidential contenders, and Palin's timing on Friday stole the spotlight from potential rivals, including former Minnesota Governor Tim Pawlenty and US Representative Michele Bachmann.

Palin, the 2008 vice presidential nominee, denied that was her intention.

"I don't think I'm stealing any spotlights," she said. "We're very thankful to have been invited by friends and I'm glad we could make it."

Talk about Palin's entry in the race had slowed after she ended a bus tour of several states in early June. As the 2012 race heated up, speculation focused on other new entries, like Texas Governor Rick Perry who plans to declare his candidacy on Saturday.

Dressed in black jeans and a white t-shirt with a cartoon stick figure woman and hearts on the front, Palin posed for photos with fans, signed autographs and petted a calf that was led to her through the media mob.

She dismissed suggestions that if she gets into the race she is on a collision course with Bachmann, another conservative woman who is popular with members of the Tea Party movement and attracts heavy media attention.

"That's so passe to say that just because there may happen to be two women in the race

that they would, you know, get in the mud and engage in some catfighting," said Palin, who was accompanied by her husband Todd.

"That's ridiculous, it's even a sexist notion that two women would duke it out. If I'm going to duke it out I'm going to duke it out with guys," she said.

Bachmann leads polls in Iowa and is an early favorite in Saturday's straw poll, a nonbinding mock election that tests the strength of campaigns and traditionally winnows out some losers from the field.

Republican front-runner Mitt Romney is not participating in the poll but will be on the ballot. Bachmann is being challenged by Pawlenty, who has campaigned hard in Iowa and needs a good showing to prove his viability.

Palin said Thursday night's debate involving eight of the declared Republican candidates in Iowa was "great." She welcomed the entry of Perry into the race but said it would have no bearing on her final decision.

"It adds to the debate, it adds another voice for Americans to consider," she said.

During her visit Palin ignored a shouted question from Alaska resident Tamara Roselius of Fairbanks, who asked why she gave up on the state. Palin resigned as Alaska governor with 18 months left in her first term, in part to escape ethics probes that had drained the family finances.

Palin's husband Todd approached Roselius and asked "when you have all that hanging over your head ... what would you do? Bankrupt your family?"

Roselius replied: "It's not there anymore is it? Sellout." -- REUTERS

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