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Former Republican vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin gestures while addressing the National Quartet Convention in Louisville, Ky., Sept. 16. AP photo/Ed Reinke

By ROBERT PIERCE

On Wednesday, Sept. 15, an estimated crowd of 1,000 people made their way into the Tulsa Convention Center for the annual Liberty Gala, hosted by the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs.

The group that night heard from the featured speaker for the evening – former Alaska Governor and vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin. Among those at the convention center was Seward County Republican Party Chairman Reid Petty.

Petty was excited about seeing Palin, whom he said mentioned that America's national debt has now exceeded \$13 trillion. He said the former governor said this is the country's biggest national security threat. "I completely agree with that statement," Petty said. During her speech, Palin talked a lot about her political background before becoming the Alaskan governor.

"She talked about being on the city council and how local politics are just as important if not more important than state and federal politics," Petty said. "She stressed to those who are in local politics to keep taxes low."

Petty said Palin said when she was on the city council in Alaska that she was often the only council member who would vote against raising the mill levy.

“She encouraged local leaders to do the same,” Petty said. “I completely agree with her on this topic and feel there shouldn’t be any sort of tax increases occurring at the local, state, or national level at a time of economic crisis.”

Petty said he was excited to be able to attend the event, and he said prior to Palin’s speech, there was a reception, and Petty was able to speak with other leaders.

“I didn’t know a lot of people there,” he said. “Gus Blackwell, who’s a state representative in Oklahoma, was there. I talked to him for a while. After that, they had dinner.”

Palin spoke for about 45 minutes, and Petty said he felt her message hit home with the conservative movement.

“The House Republicans released a 22-page document that has their commitment to America, and a lot of what she had to say is on there,” he said. “I think her message is what a lot of people agree with right now.”

Palin received two standing ovations, and Petty said the crowd at the Tulsa Convention Center was excited to have her there. He said when Palin was running as vice president with Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), she was extremely popular. That popularity seemed to die down after the 2008 presidential election, but Petty said Palin seems to be coming back into the national spotlight.

“I think there was a time in there where she kind of lost a little bit, but within the conservative movement, I think she’s gained it all back and may be even more popular than ever,” Petty said.

Also among the crowd in Tulsa were attendees of the Restoring Honor rally in Washington, D.C. Petty said he spoke to several of them, and he was excited to hear about their experiences.

Petty was seated at a table with workers from Oklahoma gubernatorial candidate Mary Fallin’s campaign. Petty said Palin has endorsed Fallin, and the candidate herself was also in attendance.

“I got to kind of talk to them about Fallin and about some of her views,” Petty said. “That was kind of neat, too, to talk to some campaign people and find out what they’d been hearing in Oklahoma, which is similar to Kansas and the whole country. I enjoyed sitting next to some people who are helping Mary Fallin.”

Petty said he really enjoyed Palin’s comment, “I can see November from my house. I can also see it from this room.” Petty said when it comes to politics, Palin has become someone who cannot be ignored.

“I don’t know if she’ll run for president or not, but anytime she leaves some sort of comment on Facebook or Twitter, the White House just kind of throws their hands in the air and they instantly respond to it,” he said. “It’s kind of amazing because she doesn’t even hold a political office yet. They feel the need to respond to everything she says.”

Petty said Palin likewise has a very successful track record of endorsing candidates, including Christine O’Donnell, a candidate for the U.S. Senate from Delaware, who won that state’s primary.

“They say that three-quarters or so of the candidates that (Palin’s) endorsed in the primary season have won,” Petty said. “She’s definitely a political force to be reckoned with whether she runs for president or not.”

Petty said Palin is quite motivating with her speeches.

“She talks about the issues that matter to a lot of people, especially right now with the economy not going well and about government trying to take over the way we live our daily lives,” he said. “She speaks out against it, and she’s not afraid of anyone despite the personal attacks she receives on a daily basis.”

Petty said it is uplifting to hear someone like Palin speak whether people agree with her or not.

“I think she’s like a common everyday person,” he said. “She thinks like a lot of people think.”

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