

Coffman running a curious governor's race

We waited for months to see if Cynthia Coffman, the state's attorney general, would run for governor. She broke the news at an inopportune time, the morning after Election Day when the core of the political press and politically engaged voters were still trying to figure out the previous night's significance.

Questioned about her candidacy then deepened quickly. When the conservative base and its radio commentators ask if you're pro-choice or anti-abortion, an odd answer is to say stay tuned to find out. And when the influential Republican Women of Weld throw a shindig with a chuckwagon dinner for gubernatorial candidates, the smart move is to dig in. And if I ask a candidate about how they would pay for transportation, it's a sign they're in trouble if the response is to offer me a job.

And that was Coffman's first week on the campaign trail.

Platform, money and momentum are not on her side, according to my very round circle of Republican sources, who talk politics like Michael Jordan shoots baskets.

In a way-too-short scheduled phone interview, Coffman assured me my Republican sources are in the minority of her party, but she would have to get back to me on explaining why when she had more time.

In a significant event, CBS4's Shaun Boyd reported that Coffman supports abortion rights. That was big disappointing news to a handful of conservative talk radio hosts, led by my friend Dan Caplis, who assumed her conservative credentials led her away from such a position. If she had said that in 2014, she never would have gotten elected attorney

INSIGHTS



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general, he contends.

Coffman's spokeswoman Caroline Wren said the attorney general has never voiced her position on abortion. Coffman will address it on the campaign trail when the time's right, she said.

Wren told me the reason Coffman missed the gubernatorial forum in Fort Lupton was because she was flying back from Palm Beach, Fla., where she attended a Republican Attorneys General conference. Coffman used the event to vouch for George Brauchler, who dropped out of the governor's race and helped clear a path for Coffman and himself. The Weld County gathering would have been Coffman's first campaign outing since her announcement. She would have been the only woman GOP candidate at a Republican women's event.

Coffman politics are curious. With abortion in the balance, she is pro-gay rights, but on other issues she fishes off the same pier as alt-right gubernatorial candidate Tom Tancredo. She sued to oppose President Obama's Clean Power Plan to fight climate change. Coffman refused to join a bipartisan coalition of attorneys general to sue the Trump administration over the Dream Act, which shields undocumented people from being deported, if they were brought to the U.S. as children. Colorado Gov. John



ANDY COLWELL, SPECIAL TO COLORADO POLITICS

For almost two decades, Colorado Attorney General Cynthia Coffman, right, has been a friend and volunteer caretaker for Denver resident Jesse Wright, who lives in south Denver.

Hickenlooper appointed a special counsel to represent the state in the matter, instead.

So who is her base from that record?

"I hope I pull from everybody who's in that primary right now, and I think I will, because I think my voice is unique enough that I'll get folks from all directions," she told me.

Coffman pointed to her 2014 win.

"I brought in, in particular, women from unaffiliated and the Democratic party to come over and vote for me," she said. "I will do that again. I have no doubt. I have more experience. I have a stronger voice now. I have more to talk about and more that I want to do. I feel very good about the path to victory."

It's not just her platform she's not yet ready to talk about. Op-

Tancredo said House blew the whole thing out of proportion. House maintained that he had never cheated on his wife.

On the issues, Coffman didn't have a plan to fund transportation, potentially a huge issue for the next governor, but she's working on it. She asked me, jokingly, if I wanted to join the campaign to help figure it out.

She hasn't used the extra time she took before getting in the race to raise money, either.

If she had stayed in the AG's race, her fundraising would still be pretty grim for an incumbent. She raised about \$47,000 for her campaign, while Democrat Phil Weiser pulled in \$724,371. Only one of the five Democrats in the AG's race reported less cash than Coffman, state Rep. Joe Salazar at \$33,414.

"I'm pretty good at running a lean and mean campaign," she said. "And part of the reason I can do that is because I have extraordinarily loyal supporters."

But here's the alternate reality. If the much-anticipated candidate had gotten in the governor's race even four months ago, she might have been a Thanksgiving contender instead of a holiday curiosity. That is, if she had been raising money, having her allies organize a super PAC, elevating her media profile and articulating a clear message to remind Republican voters who she is.

And she could have solidified a base — any base — before the autumn leaves began to fall.

She told my pal Jesse Paul at the Denver Post in July that she had a timetable in her head, and that she saw a path to victory.

"The path has actually gotten better," she told me in November. "It's gotten more clear." Stay tuned.