

Tancredo hopes third time will be the charm

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November 8, 2017



Former U.S. Rep. Tom Tancredo stands in front of his campaign truck during the launch of his 2014 run for governor. He announced his third run for the state's top job last week. File photo

Controversial former congressman launching third run for governor

BY PETER JONES

NEWS EDITOR

After two back-to-back unsuccessful runs for governor, third-time hopeful Tom Tancredo is ready for that cliché of a question about the definition of insanity.

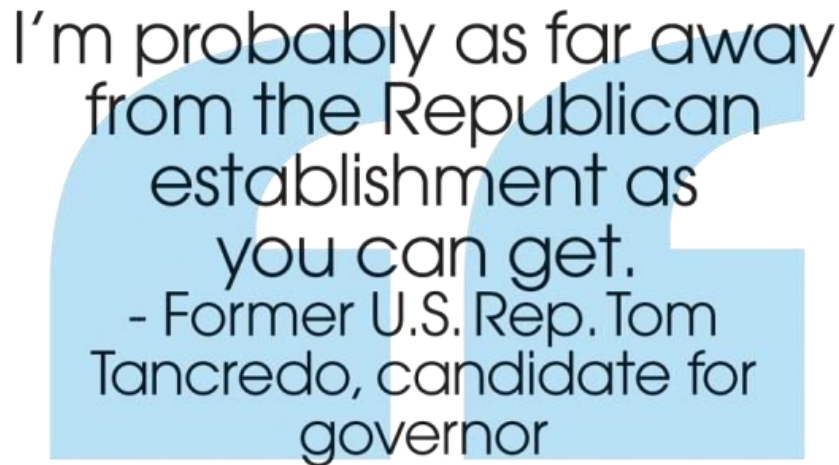
“Then again, getting into politics meets that same definition, even if you hadn’t done it before,” the former 6th District congressman said with a laugh.

The immigration hardliner is clearly expecting different results as he launches his third try for Colorado’s top elected position. That is largely because these are different circumstances, he says. He points to a recent poll that placed him ahead of District Attorney George Brauchler and State Treasurer Walker Stapleton in the already-crowded Republican primary race.

“The most important part of that poll was the one that showed us [statistically] tied with [Democratic frontrunner] Jared Polis, and I wasn’t even in the race,” Tancredo said.

If the third time is a charm for the often-controversial firebrand, it comes after two unusual strikes in his persistent batting for statewide office.

In 2010, Tancredo took 37 percent of the vote as the candidate for the American Constitution Party after a bizarre Republican primary that saw the GOP nominate a little-known Tea Partier, who garnered just 11 percent after being abandoned by major party leaders, effectively handing the governor’s office to Democrat John Hickenlooper.



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Four years later, Tancredo returned to the Republican fold, but lost the primary to former U.S. Rep. Bob Beauprez by only 3 percentage points.

Tancredo, who has been controversial even within his own party, credits that loss to a blistering series of negative advertisements paid for by the Republican Governors Association.

“They were some of the ugliest ads you’ve ever seen in your life,” the candidate said. “Hopefully, this time we can be prepared for that.”

A test for the GOP

Tancredo’s announcement will be a check on the pulse of Colorado Republicans. How well the lightning-rod candidate does in the primary may effectively serve as a poll on President Trump, traditional Republicanism and hardline immigration reform.

A change in rules that allows the state’s 1.2 million unaffiliated voters a role in party primaries is also a factor that may benefit anti-establishment candidates like Tancredo.

Although Colorado has been disinclined to elect a Republican governor in recent years, Tancredo believes his fiery independence is just what the party needs to change the trend.

“Who are the Republicans who have lost those races?” he asked. “Bob Beauprez was the last one, but other candidates have fit that same mold—the old Republican establishment, old white rich guys. So, if there is a Republican who can win, I would think it would be somebody

like me. I'm probably as far away from the Republican establishment as you can get."

During Tancredo's decade representing the 6th Congressional District, he became well known as an activist on illegal immigration, stridently holding firm to his principles, even as many other Republicans backed more modest reform.

During his 2010 gubernatorial run, Tancredo said President Obama was a bigger threat to the United States than al-Qaeda, and once said U.S. immigration policies had transformed Miami into a "Third World country." The candidate has even suggested that Mecca might be a legitimate military target in the wake of Islamic terrorism.

He has also not shied away from other controversies that have sometimes alienated him from even the right wing of his own party, particularly when he backed Amendment 64, the statewide ballot initiative that legalized recreational marijuana in Colorado.

"I will be interested to see if any of these guys [Republican primary opponents] say, 'I want to repeal it.' If you don't say that, then what can you say about [my support]," Tancredo said.

The racism card

More recently, the former congressman made the news when he complained that fellow Republicans had failed to protest the cancellation of what critics called a "white nationalist" conference in Colorado Springs, where Tancredo was scheduled to speak.

Tancredo once sat on the board for VDARE, the convention organizer that he describes as a nonracist organization favoring his brand of immigration reform.

In contrast, the Southern Poverty Law Center describes VDARE as "an anti-immigration hate website." The Anti-Defamation League says it promotes "the work of racists, anti-immigrant figures and anti-Semites."

Cheyenne Mountain Resort cancelled its planned 2018 VDARE conference earlier this year after the deadly white-nationalist rally in Charlottesville, Va. That rally's organizer, Jason Kessler, has been a contributing writer to VDARE's website.

Tancredo says his personal issue with the "forced cancellation" comes down to free speech.

"If Antifa [anti-fascist movement] wanted to have a conference or a march, I would completely support that effort. The whole reason is I believe in the First Amendment," he said.

The candidate, who adamantly rejects critics' claims of racism, says among his first actions as governor would be to form a taskforce to investigate white-supremacist organizations, though his critics may find as much to criticize in his reasoning as in his policy proposals.

"I want to know who they are. I want to know how many there are," he said of racist criminals. "I want to know where they're coming from and whether we have something to fear from them from a violence standpoint. I want a lot more attention paid to incarcerating these people who

commit hate-crime vandalism—or could they be agents provocateur?”

For the time being, Tancredo is offering a \$1,000 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of racist criminals, again as a kind of social experiment.

“I’m not going to tell you there aren’t people who feel that way, but I don’t think they’d fill the little restaurant we just walked into, that’s my guess. I want to find out,” he said.

Tancredo says he would also most certainly crack down on municipalities that do not cooperate with federal immigration authorities.

“I would look at the extent to which I could restrict state funds for Denver for becoming not just a sanctuary city, but actually threatening their employees with being fired for or fined for speaking to ICE. It’s incredible to me. The city has made a mockery of the law,” he said.

In addition to Tancredo, Brauchler and Stapleton, other Republican candidates include Cherry Hills Village businessman Doug Robinson and former state Rep. Victor Mitchell.

On the Democratic side, the candidates are U.S. Rep. Jared Polis, Lt. Gov. Donna Lynne, former State Treasurer Cary Kennedy, former state Sen. Mike Johnston, and businessmen Noel Ginsburg and Erik Underwood.

The Republican and Democratic primaries will be held in June.