

Independent-Minded Kathleen Curry Back in the Political Game

CO House District 58 Candidate

By Thomas Wills

On Tuesday September 19, Democratic candidate for Colorado House District 58, Kathleen Curry, spent some time in Hotchkiss including a lengthy interview/fact-finding with the Merchant Herald. I questioned Curry, and she in turn asked me a number of questions about issues in the North Fork. Over nearly an hour and a half we covered water issues (from several different perspectives), affordable housing, oil and gas development, solar energy, guns, and how politicians need to listen better to one another and *all* their constituents. Curry, despite running as a Democrat, has a centrist, *let's just work from the facts*, record and attitude on the issues she sees as non-partisan such as water, where her major expertise lies. She is definitely a water issue wonk and a half. She asked many questions as to the status of water in the Valley. She was a bit ahead of this reporter in knowing the latest about the Somerset water system, since Somerset is in Gunnison County and the issues there have come before Gunnison boards.

Pause: Who the heck is Curry? You

may remember the name from a decade and a half ago when the oil and gas issue was heating up and she was a somewhat controversial moderate and independent voice in state politics. If not, here is a refresher.

According to a quick Google search, Kathleen Curry is an American politician who served in the Colorado House of Representatives from the 61st district from 2005 to 2011, as a member of the Democratic and (as an) independent. She was appointed to serve as Speaker Pro-tempore by Speaker Terrance Carroll before leaving the Democratic Party (to become an Independent) in 2009.

In June 2023, after two unsuccessful tries as an Independent and many years as water-issue (mainly) lobbyist in Denver for a number of water user entities such as the Uncompaghere Water Users along with agricultural and wildlife interests, Curry returned to the Democratic Party and announced her campaign on August 16, 2023.

She had remained unaffiliated politically during her lobbyist years over the last decade.

Curry graduated from the University of Massachusetts Amherst with a Bachelor

of Science degree in agriculture and natural resource economics and a masters degree in water resources planning and management from the Colorado State University. She currently "serves as a member of the Colorado River Water Conservation District board of directors and as vice-chair of the Gunnison Basin Roundtable." She has also been working as a lobbyist for West Slope water interests, agriculture producers, and on wildlife issues. As to the last, she is reportedly "no fan" of voter-approved wolf reintroduction.

Curry has also been a Gunnison antique store owner and a cattle rancher and is married to Gunnison area rancher Greg Peterson.

Since her earlier service, district boundaries in the region have shifted around, Curry, of Gunnison, is now seeking the representative seat for the 58th District with includes the North Fork portion of Delta County. Current incumbent, Marc Catlin, is term limited. House 58 includes Gunnison, Hinsdale, Montrose, Ouray, San Miguel, Dolores and portions of Delta (North Fork) and Montezuma counties. It also tilts Republican, which makes even a centrist, independent-minded Democrat like Curry have at least a modest hill to climb.

Curry was the first candidate to officially announce for HD 58 and as of this interview was yet to see either a primary challenge or a Republican enter the race. She fully expects a challenger from the Republicans but had no idea who that might be as of September.

Issues: Water and Protecting Agriculture including gradually decreasing flows in the Colorado River, which the Gunnison Basin, including the Valley is tributary to. Curry says that her "priority will be fighting for equitable, statewide sharing of any future requirements for water deliveries to the Lower Basin for (Colorado River Compact) compliance," since HD 58 agriculture will be affected as this moves forward.

Energy: Curry advocates for balanced approach that acknowledges the important role that both traditional and non-traditional energy sources play. During the interview she expressed support of climate change adaptation and mitigation actions but seemed no hard liner on either side of the issue.

In the 2000's she was known for her strong advocacy for the private property rights of land owners with "split estates" where the BLM or others own mineral rights. She expresses support for property owners who choose to have gas drilling on their land where they own mineral rights and would like to see that they are protected from property damage and are paid fair royalties.

"It's their right," she says.

Affordable Housing and Land Use Planning:

Curry agrees that affordable housing is a major issue in HD 58 and well beyond. She thinks that local governments should take the lead in decision making on the issues and that mandates from the State are probably not the way to go in rural Colorado. She wants to make sure that whatever the State proposes actually helps the situation in areas like ours and doesn't end up having negative impacts.

She also refers to herself as "a supporter of property rights."

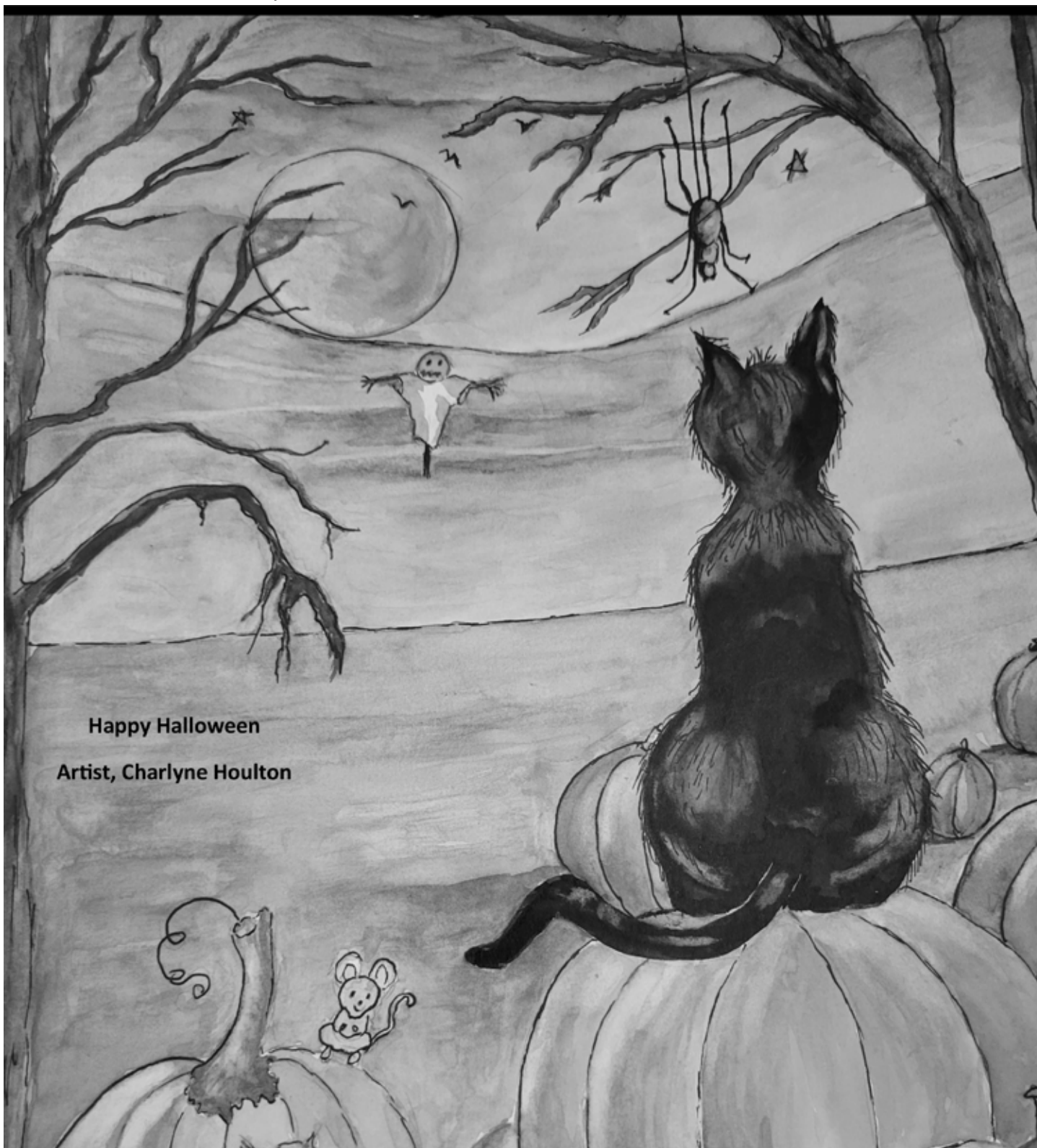
Pro-Choice and Pro-Gun: Curry is clear on her support of every woman's right to control her own body and reproductive choices but also strongly defends the right of all law-abiding adult citizens to own firearms for self-defense and other legitimate purposes such as hunting.

"I will vote to defend the second amendment but I will also consider measures that are designed to address the root causes of gun violence and protect victims," Curry, a gun owner like most ranchers and farmers, writes. Moderation in other words. She would like to see efforts taken on the mental health aspects of gun violence, like getting people with problems into effective treatment before they act out in deadly ways.

Bi-Partisanship: "The question should always be asked: "What is broken that needs to be fixed?" and "Have all the differing points of view been heard?" Curry, who seems more of a practical problem solver than a partisan politician, suggests. She says she thinks "the minority" (rural Republicans) in the State legislature are not listened to in the way they should be and says she will offer her ear and respect to good ideas no matter who they come from and will not hesitate to work "across the aisle."

Curry also worked on the Colorado measure that allows unaffiliated voters to choose to vote in one party's primary election. She strongly opposes current Republican efforts in the courts to try and stop this. She points out that the primary votes are being funded by the taxpayers.

"They are trying to disenfranchise fifty percent of the voters," Curry said. She feels if they pay for the cost of the primary vote then they could restrict Republican primary voters to registered Republicans, but not until then.



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