

**Hubbard: Mike Coffman's political un-exceptionalism**

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When it comes to political campaigning, candidates would do well to remember that, while Big Brother may not be watching, someone is probably recording.

Rep. Mike Coffman, the Aurora Republican, is the latest in a long line of seasoned and not-so-seasoned candidates to learn that lesson, with his remarks questioning whether President Obama was born in this country and insisting "he is not an American." (From photos of the event posted online, it does not appear that Coffman was wearing a tinfoil hat when he spoke.)

It used to be that only journalists and political nerds ventured out with recording devices.

And Coloradans have been privy to multiple missteps — from Ken "I do not wear high heels" Buck to John "I'm not a 'backwards' rural thinker" Hickenlooper — as a result.

Buck's 2010 loss to Michael Bennet is credited to some to degree to the numerous statements and misstatements on the primary trail that were recorded by eager Democratic "trackers."

In the height of his 2008 presidential primary against Hillary Clinton, then-candidate Barack Obama was recorded during a high-dollar fundraiser in San Francisco explaining his views as to why "bitter" Pennsylvanians "cling to their guns or religion."

It was a hint of things to come.

Now anyone with a cellphone — and a recent survey reports that a majority of American adults now have smartphones, which are even better — has the potential to capture information that isn't intended for a wide audience.

Coffman's tale is one that proves candidates must be careful even in friendly company.

For four years he has represented one of the most conservative congressional districts in the state.

But his deep-red Republican turf was reset as part of congressional redistricting earlier this year and he's now in a "purple" district where moderation is key.

While Democrats succeeded in putting him in a highly competitive seat, there was near universal agreement amongst political observers — that's me and my Twitter pals — that they hadn't come up with a candidate to capitalize on their good fortune.

And then Coffman, who has served in the Army and the Marines, marched into Elbert County (which isn't even in his new district), opened his mouth to discuss defense spending, and stuck a combat boot in it.

"I don't know whether Barack Obama was born in the United States of America. I don't know that," Coffman said of the nation's commander in chief. "But I do know this, that in his heart, he's not an American. He's just not an American." (As an aside, I wonder if any members of the audience were the Tea Party "dumb a--es" whom Buck lamented in another surreptitious recording?)

Regardless, you can bet that Coffman's comments will be coming soon to a campaign ad near you.

Coffman's remarks may have been shopped to the media by Democrats, but they were posted online by a supporter.

"I'm glad the congressman said it. Not enough have. More should," Brooks Imperial told 9News of his decision to upload the audio.

Coffman, understandably, began his backtrack almost immediately after 9News and The Denver Post reported on his remarks.

"I have confidence in President Obama's citizenship and legitimacy as President of the United States," he said in a statement. "I don't believe the president shares my belief in American Exceptionalism."

I don't know how much Coffman raised at the event, but you can call it a "record fundraising day."

Did he misspeak, or was he speaking freely?

We may never know. What we do know is that we live in an era where we will be increasingly asking ourselves that question.

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