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PHOTOS SPECIAL TO THE SENTINEL

Josie DeHart, right, is shown competing in Germany in wheelchair basketball. She graduated in 2018 from Fruita Monument High School and recently made the final cut on the 2022 Toyota Team USA Women's Wheelchair Basketball Team.

Some sheriff's candidates don't intend to enforce 'overreach' laws

By SHANNON NAJMABADI
The Colorado Sun

DENVER — More than a dozen candidates campaigning to be top law enforcement officials in counties across Colorado are running on a unique platform: Not enforcing the law.

These candidates fit the profile of a loose movement sometimes referred to as "constitutional sheriffs" whose members promise to act as a bulwark against government overreach and laws passed by state legislatures that they deem illegal.

At the top of their list in Colorado is the "red flag" law that gives judges the ability to order the temporary seizure of guns from people considered a threat to themselves or others.

Some also reject the legitimacy of the 2020 presidential election and coronavirus precautions, issues that have become polarizing litmus tests dividing the far-right and more mainstream conservatives.

"No boss, no governor, no socialist agenda will take away my focus to fight for and protect our constitution," John Anderson, a sheriff candidate in Douglas County, says on his campaign website.

Experts say the rhetoric has emerged among local officials as political divisions have cleaved the country in the past decade, with fights over mask and vaccine requirements and gun-safety proposals pulling once-fringe views more into the mainstream. Some of the ideas have roots in far-right extremist movements while others may reflect a loose dissatisfaction with political leadership or campaign-season pandering, experts said.

A growing rural-urban divide may also feed into the feeling that sheriffs in sparsely populated counties must protect their residents from policies passed in big cities. But the ideology is too widespread to be based solely on that, said Mirya Holman, a Tulane University political science professor who has researched sheriffs. "We see these attitudes amongst suburban sheriffs, even amongst some urban sheriffs."

In Douglas County, for example, Anderson's campaign website says "freedom of speech and religion, medical freedoms, protection against unlawful search and seizure, guarantee of due process, state's rights" have all been "attacked in some way over the past several years."

"Who do you trust will stand up against tyranny?" the website asks.

Holly Kluth, a former Douglas County undersheriff who is campaigning against Anderson, has a lengthy description

of her philosophy on being a "constitutional sheriff" posted on her campaign website. It takes aim at the state's red flag gun law.

"We cannot allow violations such as this to be acceptable," it says.

Douglas County Commissioner Lora Thomas is a third Republican candidate for sheriff. She said in an interview that some COVID-19 precautions amounted to government overreach during the pandemic. She made the motion last summer to withdraw the county from the regional Tri-County Health Department over complaints about the health orders.

But to "say that the sheriff has ultimate power over everything" is a bridge too far, she said.

"It's just not correct," she said. "There is separation of powers for a reason."

Candidates running to be sheriff of El Paso County, which includes Colorado Springs, have been similarly divided on when and whether they will enforce all laws.

Sheriff candidate Todd Watkins, who served in the U.S. Border Patrol for 24 years, opposes "arbitrary magazine capacity restrictions, so-called 'assault weapons' bans" and other gun restrictions passed by state lawmakers, according to an endorsement from Rocky Mountain Gun Owners' political action committee.

Greg Maxwell, director of security for the Broadmoor Hotel, says if he is elected sheriff he "will make sure everyone's Constitutional rights are never violated" but "will not enforce mandates, which are not laws, such as masks and vaccine mandates."

El Paso County Undersheriff Joe Roybal, the third Republican candidate for sheriff, says his views don't differ much from his opponents. He will prioritize defending the Second Amendment and combating "assaults on our constitutional rights," according to his campaign materials and social media accounts.

But he characterized the constitutional sheriff branding as a "catchphrase."

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Shooting star

By FRANK WITOWSKI Jr.
Special to the Sentinel

Josie DeHart, a 2018 Fruita Monument High School graduate, was one of 12 individuals to make the final cut on the 2022 Toyota Team USA Women's Wheelchair Basketball Team.

The final selections were made at the conclusion of the 2022 Toyota Team USA Women's Selection Camp hosted June 9 to 11 at the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Training Center in Colorado Springs.

"It's been one of my dreams since I first started playing wheelchair basketball," DeHart said. "I'm very grateful to have been chosen. I've been working very hard, and my hard work has finally paid off."

The 12-person team will attend the International Wheelchair Basketball Federation (IWBF) America's Cup from July 9 to 19 in Sao Paulo, Brazil.

This will serve as a qualifier for the IWBF World Championships scheduled Nov. 16-27 in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

Although many families have sibling rivalries, it appears this family has sibling admiration for their older sister Josie.

"She has been my biggest inspiration," 18-year-old Ellie said. "I know how much pressure she's

Fruita Monument grad earns spot on Paralympic USA Team



Josie DeHart, wearing jersey No. 15, takes a shot during practice.

been under, but she hasn't given up. She's finally made the big shot team. I love playing basketball with

her and love being part of her journey as much as I can."

Josie's 20-year-old brother Jack said, "I've been impressed with everything she's done. She's in the Olympics!"

Born with a disability known as arthrogryposis, Josie initially had a hard time finding her way.

"It was harder for me to find my confidence because I didn't know many people in wheelchairs," she said. "When I found wheelchair basketball, I realized I wasn't the only one with a disability."

Her proud dad Jimmy said he taught his daughter how to shoot a basketball, to which she says, "Dad made me competitive."

Josie said her mother, Nina, signed her up for an ALL-Adaptive Sports Camp in California when she was 12.

"That's when I fell in love with basketball," Josie DeHart said.

She then attended basketball camp at the University of Arlington where she met coach Christina Schwab, who encouraged her to join her first basketball team, the Denver Junior Rolling Nuggets.

"The coach (Christina Schwab) for that team was the coach for me in college and, now this is her first year being head coach for the Women's USA Basketball Team," DeHart said.

She is grateful to have had her coach along with her throughout her basketball journey.

"I got very lucky," she said.

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Cycle ride draws attention to vet suicide

By FRANK WITOWSKI JR.
Special to the Sentinel

After losing his close friend and veteran comrade Josh Rew to suicide last year, Navy veteran Nick Crandell did some soul-searching as he attended the grand opening of the Western Slope Veterans Coalition in Glenwood Springs.

"I was looking for answers to help stop the 22 veteran suicides a day," Crandell said. "After I learned about Smiling Goat Ranch (at the Coalition), I wanted to help them in some way, shape or form. Me, being a veteran, am a riding enthusi-

ast. It's a great way for us to get together."

And so, the Ride2Zero ride was born.

Smiling Goat Ranch Executive Director Sheryl Barto said she founded the nonprofit in 2015 as a therapy ranch to help people with neuro-sensory conditions. She has a special place in her heart for vets as her son and brother are in the Air Force.

A total of 62 individuals participated in the event on Saturday, which Crandell plans to make

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More than 60 riders took part in the Ride2Zero starting at the Vietnam War Memorial in Fruita and ending at Veterans Memorial Park in Rifle. Here they are heading east on Interstate 70.

CHRISTOPHER TOMLINSON/
The Daily Sentinel

SUICIDE: 'Lost too many'

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an annual ride each June in conjunction with PTSD Awareness Month.

"Tragedy always opens up the doors to opportunities," Crandell said. "I know there's a lot of division in our world, but this is something everyone can get behind. It's near and dear to me being a veteran and losing a veteran."

Vietnam veteran John Beckius, a Western Slope Veteran Coalition board member, said, "I think this is a great thing because I lost my son five weeks after he came back from Afghanistan."

Army Veteran Glenn White said, "I've lost too many friends to suicide — my brothers and sisters (in the Armed Forces)."

He said this event is good if it brings more awareness to younger veterans to get the help they need, as well as some older veterans who are still struggling.

Mal, Ryan and Laura Thomas rode together as a family during the event.

"My dad asked if I wanted to come, and he is a veteran," 17-year-old Ryan said. "I thought it was a pretty cool way to help raise awareness."

Laura added, "It's heartbreaking the amount of veterans we've lost daily. I want to support the veterans and be a part of the ride."

Army veteran Mitch "Discharge" Cox said 118,000 veterans have ended their lives since the mid-2000s.

"There's a long-standing history between bikers and veterans," he said. "That's why I jumped on it. I want to support it as much as I can. We lose too many veterans on a daily basis. Zero is the perfect number."

During the short emotional ceremony before the run, Barto addressed the riders in attendance.

"Nick contacted me about eight weeks ago, and it's incredible to see



CHRISTOPHER TOMLINSON/
The Daily Sentinel

Mitch Cox, an Army veteran and a three-time suicide attempt survivor, speaks before the motorcycle ride Ride2Zero at the Vietnam War Memorial in Fruita.

how this community pulls together. Veterans have a 50% higher suicide rate. We have a military suicide crisis and getting help is not as easy as it should be."

Cox told the audience that when you get out of the service, you can feel you have no purpose or sense of direction. Cox said he was a suicide attempt survivor saying, "When I had my attempts, I was feeling lost and felt I had no one to talk to. I was feeling worthless and was the problem for everything going on. It's tough for veterans. Veterans need to help each other out."

Cox said he realizes he is not alone. Crandell and others said they are available 24/7 to talk to a hurting veterans or others in distress.

The Ride2Zero Motorcycle Run started at 10 a.m. at the Fruita Vietnam Veterans Memorial and concluded an 80-mile trek at Rifle War Memorial where a reception with food and music was held.

If you're struggling or know someone who needs help, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK or text CO to 741741.



Josie DeHart, left, hugs her coach, Christina Schwab, who is in her first year as head coach of the USA Women's Wheelchair Basketball Team.

STAR: Basketball coach with her since she was 12

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"She's (Coach Schwab) has been a huge part of my basketball career."

Although she was heartbroken when she didn't make the 2017 Olympic team, DeHart persevered with her optimistic outlook and

began playing for the ING Frankfort Sky Wheelers, a coed wheelchair basketball team in Germany.

"Playing for them made me ready for the USA team," she says.

Her mother Nina is excited by her daughter's accomplishments. "We're definitely all very proud

of her," she said. "She's been playing in Germany professionally. She's been going to the University of Wisconsin in Whitewater, and we've been able to watch her play there."

Jimmy DeHart boasts that Josie's boyfriend, Dylan Fischbach, is "the best men's wheelchair

basketball player," so perhaps the family may have more than one Olympian to cheer for in the future.

But for now, Josie DeHart, the only one on this year's USA Women's Wheelchair Basketball Team from Colorado says, "It's a huge honor to represent my country."



PHOTOS SPECIAL TO THE SENTINEL

Josie DeHart trains one week every month at the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Training Center in Colorado Springs.

LAWS: Coroner candidate runs as 'freedom doctor'

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"They're doing that simply to catch the attention of people and, in my opinion, confuse them," said Roybal, a 26-year veteran of the sheriff's office who is seen as the frontrunner in the race.

There needs to be some kind of cooperation between local, state and federal officials, he said.

The strong anti-government sentiments and opposition to gun restrictions and coronavirus precautions have alarmed some experts in law enforcement and radicalism.

Other local offices, from county clerks to municipal

boards that once flew under the radar, have also become hyperpartisan in recent years. A woman vying to be El Paso County coroner is running as a "freedom doctor." Once-sleepy school board races have become caustic battlegrounds.

Refusing to enforce gun-related laws is one area where the "constitutional sheriff" ideology can have a tangible impact on constituents' lives, said Robert Tsai, a Boston University law professor who has researched constitutional sheriffs.

"If they refuse to go and pick somebody up because of a violation of gun laws, they refuse to disarm somebody, refuse

to respond to someone who is armed. That's really where the rubber meets the road," Tsai said.

Several sheriff candidates this year have promoted partisan causes in their campaigns, such as galvanizing residents to vote out judges they consider soft on crime or questioning the legitimacy of the 2020 presidential election.

In Mesa County, for example, sheriff candidate Bob Dalley says he will "re-establish voter integrity" and "uphold the constitution as written" on his campaign website.

Asked about "major problems during the 2020 election," including voter fraud and ballot dumping,

Dalley said he was disappointed more wasn't done to "find out what went on last time."

"If anything is brought to me as sheriff then absolutely we're going to investigate it just like any other crime," said Dalley, who has worked for the Palisade police and is now chief marshal for the town of De Beque.

He did not respond to a request for comment.

Watkins, the El Paso County sheriff candidate, has expressed support for state Rep. Ron Hanks and Mesa County Clerk Tina Peters, two of the loudest voices in Colorado claiming the 2020 presidential election was stolen.

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