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Utahns like idea of Mitt in 2012, not Palin

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So far, Utahns have shown no interest in joining a recently organized national effort to get Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin to run for president in 2012.

But David Kelly, a co-founder of the Colorado-based 2012 Draft Sarah Committee, said he's hopeful the former GOP vice presidential nominee will attract support in Utah.

Even, Kelly insisted, if former Utah Olympic leader and LDS Church member Mitt Romney decides to make another run for the White House.

"I believe there are Palin supporters there," Kelly said in a telephone interview from Colorado Springs. "Sarah exudes a little more conservatism. I know Romney kind of waffled on issues — right to life and so forth."

Not so fast, said Todd Weiler, vice chairman of the Utah Republican Party. "The conservative base in Utah, I think they're still looking forward to a Romney run in 2012," Weiler said. "I'm not surprised people aren't lining up to jump on the Palin bandwagon just yet."

Weiler said the success of the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake guarantees Romney will "always be Utah's favorite son. If he wants to run, he's going to have a home base here. Just being Mormon is not enough."

Kelly said a Palin supporter in Idaho told him that members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints won't back her if Romney's in the race.

"I don't quite agree with her comments," Kelly said. "Sarah has plenty of time to build inroads to gain support from Romney supporters, LDS or not ... let's see how Sarah stands up to Romney" in 2012.

Romney isn't saying whether he's interested in running again, although he's stayed busy campaigning for Republican candidates — including presidential nominee John McCain — since dropping out of the race in February.

Romney spokesman Eric Fehrstrom said Wednesday it's too soon to be thinking about the next election, especially given the challenges facing the country. "All of us, Republicans and Democrats, need to put partisanship aside so we can work together to make America prosperous and strong," Fehrstrom said.

About 12,000 people around the country have registered their support for Palin at the committee's Web site, 2012draftsarahcommittee.com, and coordinators have been put in place in 14 states, Kelly said.

Palin, the surprise choice of Republican presidential nominee John McCain, hasn't announced her future political plans yet, either. But she's kept a high profile since the GOP ticket lost, doing national media interviews and campaigning for Republican candidates.

A nationwide poll in November by Zogby International showed Palin is the favorite choice among Republicans for 2012, especially born-again Christians and gun owners. Romney, though, does slightly better than Palin among all voters.

The only way Palin could win over Utah voters is if Romney's not in the race, Weiler said. "Then I think Palin's got as good a shot as anyone in Utah," he said "She embodies Utah values very well."

Both Weiler and Kirk Jowers, head of the University of Utah's Hinckley Institute of Politics, brought up another possible candidate for 2012 who'd appeal to Utahns — Gov. Jon Huntsman Jr. Recently elected to a second term, Huntsman has said that's not going to happen.

But if it does, Jowers said, "There's very little oxygen in Utah for any other candidate, including Gov. Palin."

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