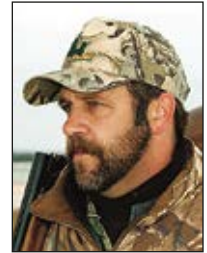


IT'S TIME FOR ANSWERS

CAPITOL COMMENTS



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The current presidential primary season has certainly been an emotional roller coaster for the candidates—and for each of us. As former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice once stated, “Democracy is noisy.” Apparently it is also disrespectful, deceitful, and disruptive. I have always been keenly interested in presidential campaign politics, not an expert by any means, but an observant spectator. From my view, we have never experienced anything like what we have seen this year. As a result, I have never been more disappointed in our leaders and pessimistic about our nation’s path forward.

For the first seven decades of the last century, conservation issues played a major role in national politics and congressional debates. Conservation appears to have lost much of its luster in our nation’s dialogue. The wide-ranging issues debated during presidential campaigns generally revolve around substantive and important responsibilities of the federal government. Unfortunately, during this primary season, we have seen little debate in the true sense of the word. “Debate” comprises “a formal discussion of subjects before a public assembly.” Rather, what we have seen is name-calling, obfuscation, and outright misinformation (at best, lies wrapped in half-truths).

Immigration, terrorism, and the economy are the issues that have dominated much of the discussion. Jobs, foreign policy, health care,

taxes, and the deficit have shared the stage with the candidates and the media. These issues are clearly critical to our nation and our standing in the world. The social issues of same-sex marriage, abortion, and the role of religion in government do not directly influence the sustainability of our nation’s domestic tranquility, defense, general welfare, or liberty. They are emotional hot buttons that drive voters to one political camp or the other but do little to support the major dedications of our Constitution. Politicians latch on to these issues because they resonate with base voters. They provide fodder for distinction and division but they are not top-of-mind issues for the majority of our citizens.

We have seen parades and protests from proponents and opponents of each issue. What we have not seen is parades or protests for the conservation issues that directly affect our domestic tranquility and general welfare. More disturbing, I have not heard any candidate discuss the conservation issues that are critical to our nation’s future—issues that should be fundamental to Boone and Crockett Club members.

Most of these issues focus on the lands where we recreate, the lands that sustain our lives and livelihoods, and the lands that provide homes to thousands of fish and wildlife species. These are significant issues that deserve straight talk: talk about the proposed transfer of federal lands, conservation funding, enhancing federal land

management activities, mitigating energy development impacts, private land conservation incentives, reauthorization of existing conservation laws, water management plans, and Endangered Species Act improvements. Each of these issues has a direct impact on our economy. Why don’t political candidates talk about these issues? We don’t require them to. We get caught up in political issues identified by candidates or the media that promote division between ideologies. It would be in the public interest to stop wasting time talking about social issues, and rather, debate conservation issues. Our natural resources are the foundation on which our country has been built and are the reasons for our position as a world power.

Food, fiber, energy, air, soil, and water are the commodities that sustain life. We have them in ample quantities, and they drive our economy. However, we do not account for the damage or alteration of these resources in our gross domestic product. Many of these resources have been diminished in principal and interest; however, that cost does not show up on our nation’s economic balance sheet. Does anyone believe that our natural resource landscape has improved in the last 250 years? It takes one window seat plane flight across the country to see humans’ impact on the land. The loss of wetlands and grasslands, development of infrastructure, mining of groundwater, and the impacts of energy and water development projects

demand action. All of these activities come at the expense of the nation’s natural assets. We need an accounting of debits and a conservation plan for credits to become transparent and sustainable.

In all fairness, many of the candidates have no experience or knowledge of how to fix terrorism, immigration, foreign policy, healthcare, or the deficit. They, like all of us, have opinions and unproven proposals. What they need to understand is the equal importance of natural resource conservation to our nation and the world. We have proven solutions to conserve natural resources. We can demonstrate the return on investment. The lack of political discourse about natural resources demonstrates a lack of understanding of the role they play in our economy and in our well-being. As the campaigns play out this summer and fall, we need answers—and we deserve answers—from the candidates on how they view the importance of natural resource conservation to the nation and to ourselves. The conservation leaders of the past demanded this discussion. What’s wrong with us? ■