

Chasing presidents: Bennet, Hickenlooper

By Joe Wilkinson

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A big Internet plus is that you can look up almost anybody; especially 2020 presidential candidates. All, obviously, have websites. Google a name, and 100 sites or articles appear in a millisecond. It takes some sifting to learn more about any of the couple dozen Democrats running.

Be aware, too, you will be hit up for online contributions along the way. Besides the boost to the candidate financially... getting enough donations of even a dollar can mean a bump in poll visibility. That is important, to comply with Democratic Party rules to remain viable and continue on the debate circuit. From there, the goal is a strong showing in Iowa's February caucuses.

Chasing candidates this week, I caught up with two Colorado lawmakers with eyes on the Oval Office. I ask each the same question about the federal Endangered Species Act. With each answer, it's easier to see how it would be dealt with under their watch. It also stirs other visions for environmental action, should they make the cut. The question?

According to the 2019 U.N. report on biodiversity, we now face the sixth mass extinction in Earth's history. A million species may go extinct, many over the next few decades, due to pollution, habitat loss and climate change. In the news, we have seen stories of starving orcas and polar bears; plastics pulled from the stomachs of marine species. Such losses harm our economies, our health and quality of life. As President, will you uphold our Endangered Species Act and better fund it, to protect imperiled plants and animals?

First Up This Week? Colorado Governor John Hickenlooper.

Hickenlooper walked in to a crowd of 50 or so, in a downtown Grinnell Coffee House. Most came to listen or talk to the first Democrat elected governor in Colorado in 120 years. He reviewed his resume; a master's degree in geology, getting laid off, but coming back by opening a brewery, having a hand in opening 20-plus businesses, creating thousands of jobs. He was mayor of Denver and worked across political lines with mayors from 30 suburbs. They established a regional light rail system and rebuilt Denver's downtown. He has been termed a 'pragmatic progressive.'

He called for questions. My hand was up, so I got the first one. Hickenlooper's response?

"Donald Trump has cut funding for every single



Democratic presidential candidate Michael Bennet (right) listens as state Senator Rob Hogg reviews flood levels and damage on the Iowa River in Iowa City and Iowa's fight to improve flood forecasts. Bennet toured flood-damaged areas in Cedar Rapids, too, in late July while campaigning in Eastern Iowa. (photos by Joe Wilkinson)

federal agency that works to guarantee the quality of our waters, and our air and we should not accept this," charged Hickenlooper. "Biodiversity is the 'canary in the mine.' If we do not have a regulatory framework that's addressing—and measuring—our water quality, our air quality, we will always slide backwards, because there are too many businesses, too many people NOT necessarily bad people—who are trying to make their business grow, and when it comes to a close call, they will always decide against the environment and for their business." He continued, "And I make a commitment to you, (with) the strongest words I can, as someone who has a master's in geology, we will reinvigorate our approach to using science and facts to reverse this last two years of going the wrong direction on every type of pollution and every contributor to climate change.

This week's side story? During his opening comments, Hickenlooper smiled widely and relayed how (the night before?) he had been picking his banjo, sitting in with old friend (Colorado-based '80s and '90s rockers) Big Head Todd.

Also this week? Colorado Senator Michael Bennet.

Bennet was raised in Washington, D.C., graduating from Yale with a law degree. He worked in the U.S. Justice Department during the 1990s, before moving to Colorado. There, he became friends with Denver mayor—later to be elected Colorado governor—John Hickenlooper. From being his chief of staff, Bennet moved on to head the Denver public schools. He established major reforms in the mid-2000s. In 2009, he was appointed U.S. Senator. Bennet won election in 2010, and was re-elected in 2016.

In Iowa, I caught up with him at the University



Colorado Governor and Democratic presidential candidate John Hickenlooper answers questions during a late July campaign stop in Grinnell.

of Iowa (UI) Hydrology Center. He and Iowa State Senator Rob Hogg had earlier toured areas of Cedar Rapids hammered by 2008 flooding. Here, UI hydrologists explained how sensors now in place across Iowa waterways provide advance warning of waterway levels... to help minimize future flood damage. I was learning a lot, too.

Eventually, the topic for a couple minutes was the Endangered Species Act. Would Bennet support it as president?

"I believe I will and I can tell you that, while my generation has ignored these issues, the next generation of Americans are deeply, deeply concerned about it. I hear from young people all the time about the biodiversity report that you're talking about and, of course, about the climate reports coming out of the UN," responded Bennet. "I also believe that the next president not only has to deal with these issues, starting on day one of their presidency. We have to construct politics around sustainability, climate and biodiversity that is actually sustainable. And that's not where we are today.

"We are in a world where, if you're lucky, somebody gets to put in a set of policies for two years and then it's ripped out two years later, or four years later. You have to make climate policy urgently. It also has to be durable. I think we owe the next generation of Americans a lot better than that," concluded Bennet.

More candidates in the weeks ahead. Oh, and for what it is worth—to me anyway—at campaign stops like the above two, and on the July 30 and 31 debate stages, I am hearing climate change, science and renewable energy as issues.

Iowa Wildlife Federation's website: www.iawildlife.org will have this blog up and running in a week or so. Meanwhile, the candidates' audio responses on the Endangered Species Act can be found at www.endangered.org.

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