

Chasing Presidents: Bullock, Gabbard

By Joe Wilkinson

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So, I wasn't really kicked out; just told I would have to leave... and escorted to the door. No chance to talk to with Democratic presidential candidate Steve Bullock in Des Moines that day.

Oh, it wasn't his fault. Perhaps I over-assumed. Following presidential candidates this summer for the Iowa Wildlife Federation and a couple other environmental organizations, I make some connections and I miss some. I am asking candidates if they will support the Endangered Species Act, if elected. Today's "guests" are Governor Steve Bullock of Montana and Hawaii Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard.

Bullock is a native of Montana. With a Columbia law degree, he was a professor before heading to the state legislature. He then served as attorney general (2009-13). He was elected governor in 2012, serving there since. His wins have been considered impressive—a Democrat among a Republican majority—in voters and the legislature. He won again in 2016, despite Donald Trump outpolling Hillary Clinton by 20 points there. Bullock is considered a pragmatic centrist, working across party lines to get major legislation passed.

Like so often in this project, getting to the candidate was more of an adventure than just asking a couple questions. First, though... the question?

According to the 2019 United Nations report on biodiversity, we now face the sixth mass extinction in Earth's history. A million species may go extinct 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?

I caught up with Gov. Bullock at the finish line July 4, in downtown Cedar Rapids. While the premier race was the famous 8K, the 5K still attracted 635 runners. Bullock finished in 26:45, 117th overall there, and fourth in his men's 50-54 age division.

Back to the question. Bullock's reply? "Yeah, Joe... an example? We looked at this, out West, with the sage grouse. Sage grouse don't know ownership boundaries or state boundaries. I worked with state conservation agencies, industry, cattle folk, stock growers. We came to a plan, in which everybody gave just a little bit to save this iconic bird."

"What concerns me is we are not adequately supporting the Endangered Species Act," warned Bullock. There was talk and there has been in other areas, too, where Congress just delists or even Republicans today, some of them are saying, 'we need to engage; we have to repeal the Endangered Species Act.'"

Okay, now the story behind the story. Sometimes, getting the interview isn't just standing there, holding up a hand. You have to be in the right place. Oh, and having permission helps.

A week before, I had been late to the opening of Bullock's Des



Somewhere in the crowd, presidential candidate Steve Bullock (Governor, Montana) will finish up the 4th of July 5k race in downtown Cedar Rapids. (photos by Joe Wilkinson)



Presidential candidate Tulsi Gabbard outlines her background, and a look ahead if elected President, to a crowd of 100 or so, at Veterans Park in Cedar Rapids in July. Gabbard, a military veteran with duty overseas, is a Congresswoman from Hawaii.

Moines campaign headquarters. So, as Iowa Attorney General Tom Miller walked up to me, I asked if I was close. (I'm name-dropping, of course. With nearly 40 years in office, he is pretty easy to recognize. But I'm sure he didn't place me from my radio days covering his campaigns.)

"That's him crossing the street," pointed out Miller, who had already endorsed Bullock. I watched as Bullock, two camera operators and two reporter types crossed and recrossed downtown streets. I trailed just behind, assuming it was an interview. It was soon apparent. They were campaign staffers, shooting 'B-roll' of the candidate...and they were lost. Asking if I could have a minute, I was told by an aide, Galia, "No interview. He is late for a town hall telecast."

I almost beat them to WHO studios. I walked in, laughing, with a woman I met in the parking lot. Abura was tabbed as an audience 'question asker.' Yes, I was sure I could get through the door alongside her. Holding the door, news director Rod Peterson kind of recognized me. "Go right on through."

In the reception area, Galia approached again. Was I cleared to attend?

"No. How can I get clearance?" I replied honestly.

Her response was to escort me to the door.

As I went down the steps, I heard; "Thanks for coming, Joe," from Peterson, waving as I departed.

Gabbard was born in American Samoa, and raised in Hawaii; elected to Congress from the Aloha

state's 2nd district. A major in the National Guard, she has served two tours of duty in the Middle East. She is now in the midst of a two-week leave for Guard training.

In July, Gabbard spoke to about 100 potential voters in Veterans Park in Cedar Rapids. Her take on supporting the Endangered Species Act?

"I will, absolutely. It's something that I've done during my time in Congress, something that, coming from my home state, we have a number of endangered species around my home state that we take very good care of, preserving and protecting. I think it's important for us as a country to make sure that we continue to make that a priority."

Gabbard stressed the importance of moving from fossil fuels to clean, renewable energy, another campaign climate policy plank. "It is actually cheaper for us to be invested in clean, renewable energy, from solar or from wind," she emphasized. "Of course, the (fossil fuel) companies don't want us to know that."

Gabbard also warns the U.S. needs to steer clear of "regime change" wars. "Look at how many wars have been waged for the purposes of oil, that's an obvious one. If we're less dependent on foreign countries, that creates the independence that we need."

More candidates ahead. Meanwhile, candidates' audio responses are being posted at www.endangered.org.

Joe Wilkinson is president of the Iowa Wildlife Federation.