

Wrapping It Up; Chasing Presidents with John Delaney and Tom Steyer

By Joe Wilkinson

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As the marathon continues for visibility in the February Iowa caucus, a couple runners have dropped off the pace. Another has joined the race. This week, though, closes my look at the 2020 Presidential candidates.

I caught up with 14 Democrats over the last couple months, asking their support for the federal Endangered Species Act if elected. A dozen answered. Their thoughts—and a few other views on the environment and climate change—have been shown in the last five weeks.

One declined. Actually, New York City mayor Bill De Blasio's state campaign director nixed it. "He's had an extra long day," was the explanation, as he walked between his boss and me. Another, (former San Antonio mayor and former Housing and Urban Development Secretary Julian Castro), I missed in the jostling and shouts of the media scrum surrounding most candidates' appearances.

A 15th, former Massachusetts Governor Bill Weld—then the only Republican challenger to President Trump—walked within 50 yards of me at the state fair. I had my back to him, though, and was told later he had been there. Since then, former Illinois GOP Congressman Joe Walsh has joined the race.

Let's close out, though, with my final two. Billionaire businessman Tom Steyer—the last Democrat to enter the race—and former Maryland Congressman and business developer John Delaney, the first Dem to throw his hat in the ring.

The question, one more time? 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've seen starving orcas and polar bears; and plastics pulled from the stomachs of marine species. Such losses harm our economies, health and quality of life. As President, will you uphold our Endangered Species Act and better fund it, to protect imperiled plants and animals?

In the middle of a June



Democrat Tom Steyer talks from the straw bale stage at the Iowa State Fair this month. A billionaire, Steyer is self-financing much of his campaign. He told the State Fair soapbox crowd he will not run as a third-party candidate if he does not get the 2020 Democratic nomination. (photo by Joe Wilkinson)

day with thousands of people flooding downtown Cedar Rapids for a candidates forum, I caught up with Delaney. He was brief, with three or four other questioners right behind me.

"YES! And I'll also deal with climate change," he said. "And get us to net zero (carbon emissions) by 2050, because that's actually the most important thing we need to do." With crowd noise, everything further was muffled.

I fell in with Steyer and his delegation, on the grand concourse at the Iowa State Fair on the way to his turn at the candidates soapbox Aug. 11. "Ask that inside. I might not get many questions," he requested. He was deluged, of course. So, I caught up with him a half hour later. His answer differs from most other responses. He takes a more holistic, cautious, look at the Endangered Species Act.

"If you look at where we are, the shorthand for a sustainable world is the climate crisis. Then, you

talk about biodiversities, species extinction, yeah. I'm aware of the (U.N.) report—highly aware of what we have to do to make sure we are safe on this planet," replied Steyer.

"Would you support it?" I asked again.

"I know you want to get me (to answer the specific question now)... but I'm telling you, you need to think about this in a holistic way, and you can make sure that Americans are safe... not just this year, but going forward, and making sure that we're going to be healthy. So, I'm highly aware, so when you're thinking about that, climate is just a shorthand. (I'm) highly aware," he repeated.

So, another candidate underscores how important Climate Change is as we head into a period where scientists warn us of more floods, warmer temperatures and drastic losses of plant and animal species on Earth.

Thus far, in the presidential campaign, health care, immigration and

ability to work with all sides on the issues seem to be THE campaign planks most candidates embrace. But they all have a climate plan or campaign, by now. I've got to think that arose out of more people asking about it, when they weren't hearing it on the campaign trail. And there are still more than 14 months before the 2020 election.

The steady stream of candidates through Iowa has slowed. Jay Insee, John Hickenlooper and Seth Moulton have dropped out of the presidential chase. National Democratic Party rules about campaign fundraising and presence in the polls will squeeze a few more out in the coming weeks.

Still, if a couple candidates I missed make any late appearances, maybe we can include an "extra-innings" column, to catch up.

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