

Chasing Presidents for endangered species: Seth Moulton, Joe Sestak

By Joe Wilkinson

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For months, a couple dozen presidential candidates have been through Iowa's Main Streets, corn boils, summer festivals, parades, house parties and other events. They're asking for our votes. Maybe you have noticed.

Their prize, of course, is a good showing in February's Iowa presidential caucus. Right now, with a Republican incumbent, it is sort of a Democratic free for all. Still, there are a couple GOP names floated.

Environmental issues have become more important to me; especially looking ahead to my grandchildren's world and climate challenges. That is why a small grant from a national environmental group to us in the Iowa Wildlife Federation caught our eye. We are tracking candidates, to ask where he or she stand on the Endangered Species Act (ESA). In its simplest terms, The ESA prevents species listed from being killed or harmed. It protects habitat essential to their survival. And it creates plans to restore healthy populations.

In the weeks ahead, we will continue 'Chasing Presidents.' It is not going to cover all the issues. However – like me – you'll learn a lot more about renewable energy, climate change – as well as regime change wars, population bulges and even water as future world-changers.

So, this question is being put to each candidate: According to the 2019 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 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 print, the responses may be edited slightly, with no change in the context. The full responses will be heard on our Iowa Wildlife Federation website; www.iawildlife.org in a week or so.

Today's guest No. 1: Massachusetts Con-



Democratic Presidential candidate Seth Moulton fields a question during a campaign stop in Cedar Rapids this month. (photos by Joe Wilkinson)



Presidential candidate, Pennsylvania Congressman Joe Sestak, talking climate issues to a crowd in Cedar Rapids this month.

gressman Seth Moulton, speaking to crowd of 40 in Czech Village in Cedar Rapids. His take?

"The 'Save Right Whales Act'; I sponsored it. We wrote it in my office and we were able to get a bipartisan cosponsor... that's the way you can actually get a chance of it going to the Senate and passed into law. And...(to) get a bill like that passed, you have to find the money to fund it. Well, we got the money for it.

"And here is why that's important," continued Moulton. "There are about 418 North Atlantic right whales left, IN the world. We can either be the generation that watches them go extinct – like the generation that saw the dodo bird and passenger pigeons go away, or we can be the generation that steps up and saves them.

And every one of these fights – legislation or fights in the U.N. or wher-

ever else – it IS a fight. The Maine lobstermen did not like the bill. (They would) have to make some modifications...because a lot of right whales die by getting tangled up in lobster traps. We actually got the Massachusetts lobstermen on board. So this is something we can do. We can get industry partners."

"We can deal with the opposition," Moulton summarized. "But it is a lot of work. (The ESA) is important and it's absolutely important that I will continue it as President."

Guest No. 2, Retired Admiral, former Pennsylvania Congressman Joe Sestak; discussing environment with a crowd of about 40 in the Cedar Rapids Public Library.

"I don't like that (the losses predicted), but think of what we have insects, (amphibians?) Yes, everything. If for no other reason? My daugh-

ter (a two-time cancer survivor). Supporting the ESA is the right thing to do. This is necessary. Take the coral reefs. They are vital. Fifty percent of our oxygen comes from coral reefs. They are the lungs of the Earth. Not taking care of our ecology? It's like smoking two packs of cigarettes a day", Sestak stressed.

"This has to do with our way of life. You lose plankton, you lose any of that, you begin to go down. You lose shares? You begin to go down. So, I totally agree. We've been to the Galapagos (Islands region) and they're already having (migration related) problems there."

Next week? A couple fresh looks at the same question.

Joe Wilkinson is the President of the Iowa Wildlife Federation.