

For Whom the Roll Calls

David Orr has framed for us the matter of framing. He has provided conservationists with lucid advice: be clear on our principles; speak them plainly and boldly; use familiar references; fear not the language of values, ethics, and religious conviction; respect the power of language and reason.

This morning, as I read Orr's piece and compose this response, the newspaper headlines provide the prompt—as they so often do these days. I am multi-tasking. I am typing these words as I listen to the debate on the floor of the U.S. Senate over C-SPAN. The fate of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) rests in the balance. Leaders in the majority party, through an act of legislative legerdemain, have injected into the must-pass Department of Defense appropriations bill a provision allowing oil drilling in the refuge (Hulse 2005). The sponsors of the provision have all the potent force of powerful economic and political interests behind them. Defenders of the refuge are striving to push back.

On the Senate floor, the supporters of drilling are linking exploitation of the refuge's potential oil reserves to the hurricane relief along the Gulf Coast, to the well-being of the nation's farmers, and to the security of the nation's troops overseas.

Meanwhile, over at the *Washington Post*, the pundits have been busy at work in the frame shop. Under the banner "Our Fake Drilling Debate," I read that drilling the refuge "would be good for energy policy and excellent for the nation's gov-

ernance" (Will 2005). In 760 deft words, the author offers a litany of fallacies, studded with condescension, selective statistics, and simplistic extrapolations. I learn a lot from this piece! I learn, for example, that the refuge is not "pristine," that it has no trees, and that the caribou "have increased from 5,000 to 31,000." (The author does not cite his source for the caribou data. He does not explain precisely where and when and why this reported increase occurred. He does not speculate on possibly related changes in the caribou population, in range conditions, or in human activity.) I learn that "ice roads and helicopter pads, which will melt each spring, will minimize man's footprint." (The author misses the opportunity to note that they may melt even more helpfully as climate change warms the Arctic). I learn that, "flowing at 1 million barrels a day—equal to 20 percent of today's domestic oil production—ANWR oil would almost equal America's daily imports from Saudi Arabia." (The author again fails to cite his source for these figures, or to inform us how long this assumed bounty would be sustained). I learn a great deal through such sober presentation of carefully culled, decontextualized, and reassembled "facts."

Now the Senate debate has ended. A vote to cut off further debate is being taken. If sixty senators vote to end debate, the refuge will lose its protection. The clerk begins the roll call of the senators.

Meanwhile, back at the *Post*, our author has moved on to the yet wei-

ghtier concern that is at issue in the ANWR debate. I learn that for "many" defenders of the refuge—the author, unfortunately, provides no names—the argument over drilling is in fact a proxy, a "disguised debate." I arrive at the core of the matter and learn that, for "some," "environmentalism is collectivism in drag"—a tool that socialists and liberals use "to enlarge governmental supervision of individuals' lives." (The author declines to discuss the impact that this proposed action of the upper house of the U.S. Congress would have on the individuals of the region's native Gwich'in people). In sum, environmentalism aims to force free citizens into "one large cohort" and turn us all into "wards of a self-aggrandizing government." Moreover—here comes the *coup de grace*—to limit drilling in the refuge is to deprive us of "the energy requisite for social dynamism and individual autonomy." Lions and tigers and polar bears, oh my!

But the art of framing is as much about what one omits as much as what one offers. And so, for example, no words here about that raving collectivist Dwight D. Eisenhower, who as president in 1960 signed the order creating the refuge; nor about the best projections of peak oil, fossil fuel demand and consumption, greenhouse gas concentrations, and climate change; nor about stewardship (or "creation care" as many evangelical conservationists have been calling it lately). The word *conservation* is not to be found among the 760 in the column. Perhaps the author feared that some in his large readership could misread it as *conservative*. Among the other words that do not

appear here are *responsibility, obligation, respect, justice, wilderness, wildness, community, future generations, and self-restraint*. Even the word *conservative* itself is absent.

David Orr states that “we are now engaged in a worldwide conversation about the issues of human longevity on Earth but no national leader has yet framed a satisfactory vision of sustainability.” He is no doubt right, but only half-right. For our pundit and his ilk this is not part of any worldwide conversation about sustainability. This is a fight for and about *power*, and words are weapons used to gain it, control it, and expand it. We would prefer to have an informed and respectful conversation, but we are dealing with those who wield words as bludgeons.

What to do in response? First, keep Orr’s precepts close at hand. Make a point of putting them to use somewhere, somehow, to someone, at least once a day. (For the forgetful among us, our editor may need to make Orr’s advice available in a handy, attractive cut-out card within the pages of *Conservation Biology*!)

Second, do not mistake reframing for hard thinking and homework. The human drama of conservation is long and tumultuous and dramatic and exhilarating. The story stretches back beyond Earth Day and the environmental movement, beyond the progressive conservation movement of a century ago, beyond Darwin and Wallace and Malthus and Linnaeus and Adam Smith, and be-

yond North American shores and western cultures. That epic narrative is now being reinterpreted, with our science a core—though hardly isolated—component. Lincoln recast and rejuvenated the story of American democracy. We live in a time when conservation’s story is changing. We must be active participants and leaders in that effort, not merely passive respondents to clever op-eds.

It follows that we must devote more time to marshalling the sources of our own conservation convictions, past and present. Those sources are all around us, embedded in our philosophical, literary, scientific, political, native, and faith traditions. Lately, for example, I have been citing George Perkins Marsh’s challenge to his contemporaries in his treatise *Man and Nature* to “renovate a nature drained, by [human] improvidence, of [the] fountains which a wise economy would have made plenteous and perennial sources of beauty, health, and wealth” (Marsh 1864). *A wise economy*. There is muscle in that phrase. Find these sources, collect them, organize them, and *use* them.

Finally, let us encourage colleagues outside the United States to draw upon their own deep and familiar cultural sources in support of conservation, biodiversity, wildness, health, community, and responsibility; to enrich the sustainability conversation with their own terms and traditions; to keep the culture and ethic of conservation growing until the United States is again prepared to provide

leadership within the global community; to continue to provide that “larger context of history, obligation, human dignity, and right” that David Orr describes. Sooner or later, the United States will again find its traditional conservation values in ascendance.

The motion fails to pass. The refuge is momentarily secure. However, within seconds, the sponsoring senator requests that the previous vote be reconsidered. Much on-the-floor maneuvering is taking place within the Senate’s tiny, closed political ecosystem. Is someone cutting a last-second deal?

Today’s actions on the Senate floor will resonate through history, just as the Fugitive Slave Act and the Kansas-Nebraska Act have since Lincoln’s time. Ask not for whom the roll is called. It is called for us all.

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Literature Cited

- Will, G. 2005. Our fake drilling debate. *Washington Post*, 15 December:A33.
- Marsh, G. P. 1864. *Man and nature, or, physical geography as modified by human action*, in D. Lowenthal, editor. Reprint 1965. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
- Hulse, C. 2005. G.O.P. may harness arctic drilling to Pentagon budget. *The New York Times*, 15 December.

Q1

Q2

Queries

Q1 Author: Please provide book title in reference 'Marsh, 1864'.

Q2 Author: Please provide page number in reference 'Hulse, 2005', if necessary.