

"If you don't want it printed, don't let it happen."

Aspen Daily News

Aspen Daily News endorsement: Bennet understands what's at stake

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When it comes to national office — especially that of U.S. senator — it's difficult to discuss the elevated role without weighing the fate of the ever-fragile status of the model that supports it. It's actually that consideration that leads to this endorsement for incumbent Michael Bennet.

That may sound hyperbolic, and we can appreciate that. After all, there's not an outright "bad" candidate in this race that we can tell. When speaking with challenger Joe O'Dea, we were taken by his easygoing, approachable demeanor — and perhaps more importantly, his personal investment in his Hispanic employees, which he said constituted about 80% of his entire staff. This is a man who's been critical of the often lengthy and cumbersome process that many immigrants undergo in the pursuit of citizenship, and he told this editorial board during his interview that he would support granting citizenship for residents through the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, program.

"I think that's important — they're here through no fault of their own," he said, a sentiment with which this board agrees.

O'Dea has strong opinions about an even stronger border between the United States and Mexico, having spent considerable time in Brooks County, Texas, speaking with border patrol officers. We commend doing first-person research into an issue before coming to a conclusion about it; we also wonder why a Senate candidate hoping to represent Colorado was spending so much time in Texas in the final weeks leading up to Election Day. And we were a bit dismayed to hear him use talking points — "We need to make sure we don't have felons coming across, or terrorists" — that are harmful and, worse, unsubstantiated by facts.

In fact, "only nine illegal immigrants became terrorists, a minuscule 0.000029% of the estimated 31.3 million who entered from 1975 through 2017," per a report from the conservative-leaning Cato Institute. "In other words, about 3.5 million illegal immigrants entered the United States for each one who ended up being a terrorist." In fairness to O'Dea, he did "totally agree" that most immigrants from across the border are people "who just want to work," a refreshing sentiment.

O'Dea has done good work through his private-sector pursuits, and we applaud him for it. Perhaps in another time — a more stable time — this newspaper would be issuing its endorsement for his candidacy. But when asked about his thoughts regarding the Jan. 6 insurrection, O'Dea described the unprecedented attack on the U.S. Capitol that left five people dead as "a black eye for the country," an assessment with which we agree. But his admonishment

was limited to chastising then-President Trump for not doing more in the “three, three-and-a-half hours” to call off the violence.

This feels like an understatement that not only insults the loss felt by five families from that day but also minimizes the damage done at a cultural level to our nation.

The Jan. 6 Congressional committee has unearthed a clear truth in its investigations: that the events that transpired that day were preplanned and far more organized than what many may have assumed when watching it in real time.

Bennet understands the seriousness of the situation in which we collectively find ourselves as it pertains to our relationship with democracy. He touted Colorado’s top-tier ranking in the country for voter participation and verbalized a hope that the rest of the country is able to adopt many of the practices that Colorado utilizes to ensure voting is easy and accessible, via mail-in ballots and a large number of physical drop boxes.

Additionally, his record speaks for itself in terms of bipartisan work and a commitment to see visions come to fruition. He can cite many bills that never became law over the course of his time in the U.S. Senate but can just as quickly point to the core ideas of those bills appearing in the policies that now shape our country’s next chapter.

“The work I’ve done on broadband — the work I’ve done on forestry, conservation and drought — all has been informed by lessons I’ve learned from the Western Slope,” he said. He went on to emphasize “the \$60 billion in the infrastructure bill that’s based on my broadband bill that I wrote literally with the Delta-Montrose Electrical Association,” a bill co-sponsored by Rob Portland, a Republican, and Angus King, an independent in Maine. More locally, he was also able to point to the funds he funneled toward the Roaring Fork Transportation Authority as well as the Coal Basin methane-capture project currently underway.

But perhaps no moment resonated more with the voters in this area than seeing Bennet’s efforts — he delivered dozens of letters to President Joe Biden urging him to designate Camp Hale a national monument — come to fruition. While it’s unknown if the long-fought Colorado Outdoor Recreation and Economy Act, better known as the CORE Act, will be fully realized, the national-monument designation felt, well, monumental.

We hope to see Bennet continue using bipartisan efforts to navigate the most effective pathways available to change — and simultaneously protect — the proverbial landscape, as well as the literal one, at a time when Americans need both.