

**J. SCOTT CHRISTIANSON**

## Conservationists must keep fighting the good fight



The amount of environmental legislation to be dealt with during the next Congress is staggering: reform of the 1872 Mining Act, reauthorization of the Clean Water Act, the Safe Drinking Water Act and the Endangered Species Act are just a few. With a new conservative-oriented Congress, many conservationists and environmentalists are worried and wondering what compromises can be made. But now is not the time to be conciliatory. The facts support the need for good conservation.

In a recent article in *Outdoor America*, Maitland Sharpe, executive director of the Izaak Walton League, wrote to conservationists about dealing with the Wise Use movement, the anti-conservation movement adopted by many new leaders in Congress.

"First, we cannot ignore the Wise Use Movement. No matter how bizarre its rhetoric appears, Wise Use is real and powerful — it will be with us for a long time. We simply cannot put our heads in the sand and hope Wise Use advocates will go away. They won't. We must meet them in the marketplace of ideas and be better salespeople. And we can — we have a better product.

"Conservation is a grass-roots movement. It serves the needs of real people in real places. Conservation serves our communities by helping us meet our shared needs. It recognizes that we all live in communities large and small and that what each of us does affects others. It is not some abstract ideal of an upper-class, urban elite, and it certainly is not a plot against rural Americans. We need to rebuild our strength at the grass-

roots level and re-establish our identity in our local communities and states. We need to speak out loudly and show who we are and what we're for," concluded Sharpe.

If we hesitate to speak out, a small and vocal minority will be able to step in, define the situations and issues and distort the facts. Moreover, conservationists need to be willing to speak out about other societal problems and basic issues of ethics and morality.

### MORALITY AND ETHICS

Morality is a hard issue to address in politics or the media because already, politicians on the religious right have co-opted morality as their exclusive domain. This is fundamentally wrong. While there are definitely moral aspects of religion, they do not equate. Religion is not the same as morality, and being religious is not the same as being moral. Mo-

rality and ethics are deeper currents that run throughout our society.

The mistake of confusing morality with religion is obvious from the way we get bogged down in religious discussions when trying to address moral issues. This is very unfortunate because we desperately need to talk about moral and ethical issues such as greed, selfishness, charity, value of life, kindness, crime, punishment and responsibility to our children, elderly and future generations.

But instead of taking on the root moral issues, many elected officials are content to distract the nation with high-profile, and superfluous, religious issues. For example, the recent call for a moment of prayer or silence in public schools.

Many of you saw the photo on the front page of last Friday's *Tribune* of 7-year-old Nermin Divovic, who had been killed in Sarajevo. More than 200 years ago, James Madison explained that the purpose of the separation of church and state was to "keep forever from these shores the ceaseless strife that has soaked the soil of Europe in blood for centuries." The children of Europe are still bleeding from religious strife.

There is no doubt as to the need for separating church and government. Any attempt to address the ethical and moral problems of our society by bringing religion into our public schools only serves to distract us from the real issues.

### FAREWELL

This is my last column for the *Tribune*. There has been a lot of support for a column to balance the views of Fossil Bill and add a local touch to environmental issues. Before me, Jim Windsor wrote the *Citizen Recycler* column for two years. Hopefully, this tradition will continue and you will see a new face in these pages soon.

The *Tribune's* managing editor, Jim Robertson, has been very supportive in allowing me to express my voice in these pages, as has the *Tribune's* publisher, Hank Waters. I am not a professional journalist by trade and have learned much about writing during the past two years, most of it from my friend and fiancée Ava Fajen. She has diligently proofed my columns, offering excellent suggestions, ideas and encouragement.

Thanks to all of you who have taken the time to write in with your questions, comments and concerns.