

Jennifer Stock: Hello everybody, and welcome! You're listening to Ocean Currents, I'm Jennifer Stock, and on Ocean Currents we delve into the blue watery part of our planet and highlight ocean related topics. We talk with scientists, educators, explorers, policy makers, ocean enthusiasts, ocean adventurers, ocean archaeologists, and more, all trying to learn more about that mysterious and vital part of our planet. I bring this show to you from NOAA's Cordell Bank National Marine Sanctuary. Cordell Bank is located just off of the KWMR listening radius, off the Marin/Sonoma Coast. I love hearing from listeners so feel free to send me an email at Jennifer.stock@noaa.gov. I love to hear people are listening, and what you like and what you want to hear more of. This is going to be an interesting show today; my guests are going to be calling in a little bit. So for today my topic is ocean leadership, and here is my question; what will it take to raise ocean conservation issues among legislators and voters in the US?

With the multitude of global and social issues impacting our planet, the ocean, the largest habitat on the planet, which for too long was thought to be unchangeable, is changing, and there is a real lack of action among our legislative leaders except perhaps a small minority. There is also a wide divide among voters and leaders over the urgency of protecting our ocean so what will it take to change the tide on this awareness? Today we'll talk with two leaders in this arena, the director of the office of NMS, part of NOAA, Dan Basta, and on the second half of the show the executive director of Ocean Champions, a non-governmental organization advocating for ocean conservation on Capitol Hill and at home, so stay with us we'll be right back to dive into this topic!

Today we are talking about ocean leadership. With me on the phone is my guest Dan Basta, Dan you are live on the air!

Dan Basta:

Hey there I'm here, how are you?

Jennifer Stock:

Thanks so much for tuning in!

Dan Basta:

Happy to be here!

Jennifer Stock:

Dan is the director for the NMS program based in Silver Spring, MD, and I'm so glad to finally have you on the air Dan, I've had a lot of other staff and international programs on the air and it's wonderful to have the director, the brains behind it all, on air with us.

I want to start with how you got to the ocean, you have a background in engineering, in fact some aerospace engineering, and I want to know how you started with the ocean.

Dan Basta:

Well you know the big thing about any of us is serendipity as a way of finding people, I mean I had no idea that I would ever be doing what I do, and as you've said accurately I was in the aerospace engineering business

and one thing led to another in changing my career etc, many years ago a colleague of mine went to this organization called NOAA, which I thought was NOAH, and I had no idea of this fledgling organization, and he gave me a call from DC and said, you know, we might be able to do some good stuff. And I had been around water, you know, coming from New York, Long Island, but I'm not a marine scientist, well not at the time, so it was kind of serendipity actually.

Jennifer Stock:

Wonderful, and you're an avid diver too, diving all over the world?

Dan Basta:

Yeah I've been diving 30 years maybe, just dove last week with Don Hallus, he just retired, one of the champions of underwater technology, for mooring buoys around the world...

Jennifer Stock:

We just talked about mooring buoys last time on our show with a tsunami expert, they are so important having to do with science and the ocean and keeping warning systems in place. So briefly in your words, we don't always talk about NMS's on the show, but in your words as the director, what are National Marine Sanctuaries?

Dan Basta:

Interesting that you asked that, I was talking to a young man just a few minutes ago. Well we know exactly what the legislation says they are, you know, they are these important ecological biological cultural places that are of great value to our country. That's what the legislation says. There are 13 NMS's and one national Monument in the system at this time. The real estate that we are responsible for is over 150,000 sq. nautical miles, which is more than all national parks combined. With that said, what is really what they are about? Sanctuaries are our places where community, economy, and ecology come together, where you find this sweet spot of how you can sustain the system, sustain the culture, and sustain the economic well being of people that are invested in that place. That's about place. Sanctuaries are about places, about communities, they are in fact about the future. But in the scheme of all things, they are really tools that express and explain the way of the future for all Americans. They're a scale that people can understand, how actions occur, you cannot say "save the ocean" and then anyone gets their mind around it. But if you say, "save Monterey bay or Florida Keys" the place that you can identify with, a community, the scale makes work for you, there are places to project to the entire nation from, that are important as we are moving forward in this changing world, we have to share them and use them for this purpose. The sanctuaries are an imagination if you will, and they are a vehicle in how we adapt to this changing world.

Jennifer Stock:

That's great, thanks for that; I wasn't sure when you would stop because I know you could talk about that for an hour.

Dan Basta:

Two hours!

Jennifer Stock:

I'm glad you spoke about scale and people connecting to one place, that's something people need is one place that they have in their mind instead of humongous, large, hard to quantify place, you mentioned in terms of really serving a role for the bigger picture, and what role does the office of National Marine Sanctuaries play with supporting ocean conservation legislation in terms of larger issues that do impact the entire ocean?

Dan Basta:

Well we're actively involved in a little of that, when you see the large ocean we have joint programs with about 22 countries, we have sister sites around the world, we have convened UNESCO's first ever meeting of marine world heritage sites, we pursue a lot of these items both internally in our country and around the world. We have limits to what we're allowed to do of course, we do live in a government with an administration with directives, but I think that our partners and we have about 400 partners, these are universities, museums, aquariums, in the US alone, we have the NMS foundation, which is an independent entity whose sole purpose is to support our system, we have a caucus in the House of Representatives, we have a significant coalition if you will, because sanctuaries exist they form around it that ____ to those things. I think depending upon the administration; we have more or less influence.

Jennifer Stock:

Yeah the partners are so key, I hear that clearly and when you talk about the numbers it's pretty powerful

Dan Basta:

Staggering, really.

Jennifer Stock:

What do you see as the biggest challenge of engaging on this legislative level to promote ocean and environmental laws that promote conservation?

Dan Basta:

I think its public will. You know I certainly, Jen you know it better than I do, look at the polls for what Americans care about, they don't care about oceans, even environment is low on their list, and in environment, oceans are low on their list, so its about being relevant, we have to create a momentum of attention that caring for oceans are caring for yourselves. Oceans actually have been driving our economy and were not even cognizant of it. So your National Marine Sanctuary Foundation and program created Capitol Hill Ocean Week, which is where a lot of legislative discussions take place, once a year in June for a week, and this year I'm happy to report on the air that President Clinton will be accepting an award.

Jennifer Stock:

Thanks, fantastic. So Capitol Hill oceans week brings together different legislators, senators, congress people to talk about oceans issues?

Dan Basta:

Yep, it brings together the leadership of oceans in the United States and culminates in an award dinner with 500 of your closest leading personalities across that continuum here in DC.

Jennifer Stock:

So you talk about highlighting President Clinton, tell me a little bit about some of the successes he had in his presidency.

Dan Basta:

Well, actually Bill Clinton started a lot of what most people today think of as Ocean Awareness, 1998 the year of the ocean, that was the Clinton administration, it created a worldwide focal point on oceans, and quite a number of proclamations and executive orders that he issued began a number of things, one of which led in the Bush Administration to the Papahānaumokuākea Marine Monument. At the time, the largest ever area on the planet set aside for conservation purposes and our country did that, and it had a major major influence internationally. So Bill Clinton started a great deal of stuff in 1998 in the last couple of years of his last administration. That momentum that he began, we've lost. We have lost that momentum, and awareness and attention and investment and at Capitol Hill Ocean Week in June where he will accept this award, I'm sure he's going to have a lot to say about that.

Jennifer Stock:

Well that's great hopefully we will hear what he has to say to hopefully revitalize that movement

Dan Basta:

We need leadership that can inspire.

Jennifer Stock:

Leadership that can inspire, is this in our legislators and how do we get them to have the ocean in their consciousness? We know there are some legislators that are incredible proponents of the ocean and we really value them but how do we get there? It seems like that's one of the big issues that we're facing, these are the people that are making the laws in our country.

Dan Basta:

Well as I said, the simple answer is, it's a public will question. But the more specific answer is relevancy. You must make it relevant to what is of concern on peoples minds today. What people are talking about around the dinner table, or around what congress is wrestling with. And oceans are relevant to that. But unless you're relevant, it's very hard to get the imagination and then the commitment of the legislators in this process. I daresay I don't know any congressman or senator who was elected because of their stand on oceans. It's not the issue. Its about well-being, prosperity, economy, it's about other things. Its about the war on terror, it's about things that are absolutely critical in peoples minds. Touch those,

touch public will, other things happen. The ocean community has to recognize and use not-conventional methods in order to get the attention of citizens, legislators, and media. Not just pretty pictures.

Jennifer Stock:

For those just tuning in, this is ocean currents and my guest today is Dan Basta the director of the office of NMS, and were talking about Ocean Leadership and hoping to change the will in the country and raise the importance of ocean awareness, and talking about non-conventional methods, what are you thinking in terms of helping translate ocean conservation into economy and the federal budget deficit?

Dan Basta:

Well the Obama administration has given us a clue. Two things that the president has done most recently. First, is his proclamation on the great outdoors. Many people may be familiar with. One thing is woops! Forgot the ocean in that proclamation. Duh, it's all terrestrial, mistake. However, that is sort of being worked on, that the proclamation of the great outdoors of course includes oceans. So that's one angle already in our administration we currently have. The other is the attention to tourism. That was in the state of the union address, when you look at the numbers, tourism is the next coming major industry in the US in terms of jobs, and income. I just heard a statistic today that I think EPCOT Center in Florida, Orlando area, 51 million visitors a year. That's a big number. If you look at in the coastal parts of our country, tremendous drivers in economy. These special places sort of generate tourism. Tourism is a way in which dollars and jobs and future of the income can get messages across that demonstrate that without a healthy and sustainable ecosystem or local ocean place, not likely that these kinds of tourist dollars continue. In the Florida Keyes, the population of year round visitors is about 79,000. We get around the order of 4 million visitors a year, over a billion dollars of income is generated by that. So tourism is a major issue, and you know Jen now in your area, as you know very well, maybe if you've been reading the papers, Americas Cup is coming to San Francisco! That's a wonderful draw. A lot of things can be spoken about in the context of the Americas cup. It will bring tens of thousands of people to the region as you know. So those two things give us an in to be relevant right now, to things that this administration has said are important and relevant. You have got to get on with what people are saying is relevant.

Jennifer Stock:

So one thing I've seen that is quite frightening and sounds horrible, but some of the advertising for some tourism is "See it before it's gone!" And I'm just curious, how do you reflect on that in terms of promoting tourism but at the same time we're at a really critical point here.

Dan Basta:

Well that's the wrong kind of advertising. We work with a lot of hotel chains and things, and what we discovered is that it's the repeat visitor who is where the tourist economy is looking. It's a person who will return

to a place a second and third time. Not the there once, never back. And what they want to come back for on the second and the third time is tourism is becoming something that has on a repeat visit, a purpose. I want to go back to some place where I can do something at. I don't just want to go back and sit around at the pool or lay on the beach, I want something to do that's good, and that's in fact helping the place sustain itself and be that attraction that I know it to be. So the negative spin on the tourism I think is a small thing actually. It may make a few people some money in the short term, but it's really not what the entire industry is going, it's going exactly the opposite way. Its being eco-friendly, it's providing eco-friendly experiences, and enrichment to a persons sense of self when they decide to spend a dollar for tourism in that way. It's a brave new world out there, how to sort of craft that.

Jennifer Stock:

Yeah that's interesting. So tourism is a big piece of this, and in terms of other Americans, when I read online about Polls of where regionally people are, I know that coming here from West Marin, it's a very strong ocean conservation, environmentally friendly community, and its wonderful to be apart of that. How do we reach out to other places that are not? And how do we connect with those types of audiences? I know tourism is one way, but that's something I've been struggling with a lot.

Dan Basta:

What we do in a number of ways, first you have to take advantage of the technology that we have today. Social media is a driver for that. Your programming has to point to the ability to do that. When we did our Aquarius mission, a habitat in the Florida Keys, about 18 months ago, we had about 10 day mission, 1.3 million people who visited us for more than 15 minutes, and we had over 100 million touches everywhere in the world. You have to create the system that people are going to want to be touched with, then you have to understand that you have got to be willing to touch people when they want to be touched, where they want to be touched, how they want to be touched, in the moment. You got to create programming that can do that, that's one way, and we do a fair bit of that with our education programming, and I think most people would be surprised at the reach. Not enough though, not enough. So another way to think about this is communities. I mean _____ communities. Not communities on the coast, but special places, communities on the coast are equivalent and share the same problems of sustainability as special communities in places on land. For example, if you want to ensure that Estey's national park in Colorado will be there for the next generation, you can't build a high enough fence around it. If you want to ensure that Monterey Bay is going to be a vital and vibrant place for the next century, you can't build a big enough wall around it. There is common ground among communities that should be sharing a large agenda. It's not just about oceans, and it's not just about land. So community to community pairings are a way in which to reach those audiences. Why does someone in Idaho care about

supporting something in Stellwagen bank in Massachusetts? Because if I can support them in ensuring the habitat is staying, they can support me in ensuring that the habitat that empowers my place is staying as well. Larger coalitions are required. That's another way to do that. You got to take the positive and not the negative in most of this, and we are not, oh woe is us!

Jennifer Stock:

So is this part of the National Marine Sanctuary campaign? You were talking about leading a campaign this year, I know this is involved looking beyond our sanctuaries to the larger communities; you want to give us a bit more about how it will take place?

Dan Basta:

I don't know how much I should say on the air about this Jen, actually, because the kinds of things that you need to do are out of the box. Its film, as you know, you're working on film products, interstitials as we call them, a TV show we created that is embryonic at Monterey bay every two weeks, it's like a Wayne's World, one tries to create something about helping create the blue ocean film festival and inspiring filmmakers to interact with each other and with the marine world, we can create new ideas and films, you know? It's about working with the rock n roll folks, the Beach Boys, and programming with them. It's about creating a momentum in a lot of places that you can't figure it all out. You don't know what conversations a filmmaker will have at Blue with another filmmaker and create the next great film; you don't know what that is. It's about working with America's cup, and finding a way in which the yachting communities begin to understand the different view of themselves regarding what they may own in this conservation drama that we play. And you'll never know what all of those connections are between them, or what programs they may want to create, but they have to stimulate it, you get an urge for it, and that is one way in which a bill gains bigger momentum or what you could call a tipping point, and read the book, you know, and one morning you wake up and the kids are wearing white sneakers, and you don't know how that happened. It's a deliberate sort of process, you just didn't know it, but ultimately it found its way and it tipped things. We have to be willing to step out of our standard thinking to tip things. And you have to get a large enough critical mass so that you have the effects we're talking about earlier. It's an ethics and value thing in the end

Jennifer Stock:

Well it's definitely worth a shot and it's a role I've seen national marine sanctuaries do, serving as a bridge to bring people together to facilitate more connections, and I've seen that as a great stimulus in our program of helping ocean conservation as a whole.

Dan Basta:

Maybe I should have said that!

Jennifer Stock:

We just have a couple minutes left here, Dan, and I wanted to ask you, what is one thing you really wanted to see happen in your tenure as the director of the national marine sanctuaries?

Dan Basta:

Well I've been doing this now, running the system for about a decade, a little longer maybe, and there are a couple things that are actually dramatically needed. Our country is failing. We need new marine sanctuaries. We haven't had a national marine sanctuary designated in 12 years and that was in the great lakes. We need additional special ocean places designated as marine sanctuaries. There are communities that are asking for that around the country and in the great lakes. We need to allow that to happen in our country. That is one legacy that I would like to see. I would like to see another thing, when my tenure is over, about the way in which marine sanctuaries are relevant, not just to a marine conservation problem, but to the basic problem confronting the country, and recognized as such. Actually. Including recognized on the international arena as well. Oceans connect us all, every nation on earth, most nations, not the landlocked ones, have special ocean places, and that fabric that connects them to the ocean connects us to the ocean and to one another. It is a marvelous metaphor for how we begin to rethink things on our scales. I want to wake up 20 years from now and read the newspaper headlines that are talking about new coalitions of oceans, speaking about how a sanctuary in a non-sanctuary place at the moment is a bridge to as you have said, how local communities are taking responsibility for themselves, because if sanctuaries, because they're special, have that special role to play, and special responsibility. Were terribly underfunded, we always have been a second thought really, and at the worst our country spends less money on sanctuaries than on an F18. Does that make sense to you?

Jennifer Stock:

No!

Dan Basta:

So where is that national will or priority here? That's clear, and no ones saying we hate the ocean, but I think it's out of sight out of mind. It's always been okay, very big, take care of itself. I think that's the issue. Changing climate and environment is getting peoples attention. But Id like to see sanctuaries being more central than just these interesting curiosities that these 10 or 15 million Americans worship, I'd like to see them being on the agenda everywhere for what they mean, to people wanting to replicate what they mean in their own places and neighborhoods, it's a tall order right now but if you don't think in lower divisions, I think you don't think.

Jennifer Stock:

Well Dan thanks so much for your time, I hear the charge of creating relevance in our daily lives, creating a way for the ocean to be more relevant to everything in our lives, finding a way to help engage

Americans more in this fight for ocean awareness at the higher level.
Thank you so much for joining us today!

Dan Basta:

Thanks for having me on the line, Jenny

Jennifer Stock:

We're going to transition to our next guest in just a few minutes. This was Dan Basta from the office of National Marine Sanctuaries, he is the Director, and we are talking about ocean leadership. Dan thanks again for your support and we'll be in touch!

Dan Basta:

Jenny, I need to know, did I talk too much?

Jennifer Stock:

No, you're live on the air buddy!

Dan Basta:

I know, I just needed an answer to that

Jennifer Stock:

Ok, take care have a great afternoon.

Dan Basta:

Ok Jen bye.

Jennifer Stock:

I should disclose, Dan Basta is the Director of my Boss's boss's boss, so were somewhat interrelated here, he's the program director for my work at Cordell Bank National Marine Sanctuary, nice to have his perspective, I agree the relevance piece is one we struggle with quite a bit. We're going to take a short break and come back and when we come back we will talk with Mike Dunmyer, with Ocean Champions, a non-governmental organization that works on Capitol Hill that works with legislators themselves, we will hear a little more about his program and what they do. Thanks for staying with us, we're talking about ocean leadership today on ocean currents, and on the phone with me I believe we have Mike Dunmyer from Ocean Champions, Mike you're live on the air!

Mike Dunmyer:

Hi Jennifer!

Jennifer Stock:

Thanks for joining us today! Mike is the director of Ocean Champions, calling from Delaware, so mike, tell us a little bit about what ocean champions is all about?

Mike Dunmyer:

Sure Jennifer, were pretty unique, we're actually the only ocean organization that endorses and financially supports candidates for congress or members of congress who are strong on ocean issues. We work with folks that we help elect, try to ask for good ocean policy, try to beat the harmful stuff, it's a model that is pretty prevalent in most other areas in our society but we are the only ocean group that does this.

Jennifer Stock:

This is a fairly new group, I know there was a report by your two co-founders about how to raise ocean conservation and it came down to two parts, and it one of them is political engagement, right?

Mike Dunmyer:

Yes that's true, the gentlemen who is my partner, the one who founded ocean champions, and the guy who co-founded it with him, this is David Lamott and Jack Stern, David had been doing ocean conservation work, has a Marine Biology PHD at Scripps out there on the west coast, he went out and used that to try and change ocean policy for the better, and had some success, but he found that the oceans were losing way more often than he thought that they should, and being the scientist that he is, he decided to take steps back and look at it analytically, and he compared the ocean political community to other, more successful communities and what he saw was that the ocean community was very good at trying to affect change through lawsuits, they had a solid grassroots base in certain areas and they had really good brands overall but what they did not do was engage politically, they did not help elect people who would help them. So at the end of the day, what you find is that you can be the best advocate in the world with the people you're talking to, if they don't care about the issue you aren't going to get very far

Jennifer Stock:

Our previous guest Dan Basta was talking about relevance, that's one of the main issues we're really struggling with is that amongst voters and legislators as well, it's making the ocean relevant to everything else that is on the agenda for making political decisions, and how do you see that in terms of making science relevant, or ocean issues relevant to your clients?

Mike Dunmyer:

Well you know, it's tricky because none of the critters who live in the ocean have yet earned the right to vote, and not to many people that really think about oceans all the time think about them in the political sense, we understand that hierarchy of priorities and if you kind of take that laws, you've got to go pretty long way out before people start really thinking about the ocean, and when you look at the kind of economic times we've been in for the last few years, people have a lot more personal, more immediate needs in front of them, so you've got to go in to this with a realistic and pragmatic view of things, even though we all know the ocean is there for half of the air we breathe and things we eat, people use it for medicine, and unbelievable emotional warmth and importance for people, but at the end of the day you're not going to score really high on the hierarchy so you have to do what we do, which is form really close relationships with the chairman of the subcommittee and committees' where ocean issues originate, and we try to understand what is on their agenda, what they would like to get done, and from a list of the possible, you look for the positive things you can move in that frame, and then try to stitch together a fabric of support to move those issues, understanding

that along the way you will be completing with a lot of other issues, really that in the eyes of the public seem to be more important.

Jennifer Stock:

What are the top issues that Ocean Champions are working on right now?

Mike Dunmyer:

Well, we do some work from the inside out, were working on the priorities, we have some folks who we have close relationships with, but we also have some longer term issues that we realize are going to take time to implement, take time to build support for and we will need to work on session to session, and with that as a backdrop, right now and the last couple years we've been really focused on fish conservation and coastal water quality. The fish conservation area, we've been working very hard to support a fishery management framework called "Catch-Shares" which have a long history of successful implementation, tends to do pretty well in bringing back threatened fishers and can also do pretty well compared to the economics of the fishermen who are participating in the fishery, it's a little controversial and it's a little different so it needs some political propping up, so we spent some time on that. We were really involved in the 2006 re-authorization of Magnusson- Stevens that governs US fishery law, the 2006 version is a very strong conservation version of that law, and right now it is being attacked by people, there are economic stresses on fishermen who are pushing to move people out of the limits on over-fishing in places to bring some more money in in the short term. We understand these needs but we think that these perfections that are now in place are really critical to help threaten fisheries rebound, and they are finally starting to work. We are about to jump into a federal law about shark finning, and I know it will pitch in wherever Magnusson is threatened. On the coastal water quality side, we've been working a lot to pas a good little ill that would stress harmful algal blooms in ocean dead zones that are in a growing problem. Also, marine debris and dealing with some of the garbage that goes into the ocean. So, it's a fairly full plate but there's a lot going on.

Jennifer Stock:

In addition to an election year

Mike Dunmyer:

Indeed. And in the end of the day, that's really what Ocean Champions is all about. There are currently 30 champions that we endorse who are serving in the house and the senate, in this congress and we are stretching to be able to support and help elect what we hope will be 40 champions in 2012 in November, in addition we are hoping to beat one Ocean bad guy who goes by the name of Steve Sutherland.

Jennifer Stock:

So how do you work at how to keep people out who are clearly not advocating for healthy ocean conservation, without revealing too many secrets?

Mike Dunmyer:

There aren't too many secrets to keep, its pretty straightforward, we have done this once before, we actually worked with a number of other environmental groups to campaign hard against former congressman Richard Pombeau, out in California, former chair of the Natural Resources Committee, if there was an animal that he couldn't shoot, he would be upset. We worked with these other groups to build these strong independent expenditure campaigns, this is small scale, but fortunately with us Mr. Pombeau had some ethical problems at the time, there was info coming out that he had done things that weren't technically legal, so we reinforced those points and less about oceans. With the combined efforts of ourselves. LCV, Sierra, Defenders of Wildlife, a few others, we were able to beat him. Similarly we look at congressman Sutherland who serves in the Panhandle of Florida, we need to understand first of all what the key points of the race are, according to polling what matters to voters, we will see where Sutherland stands on the issues and then use the soft spots, we will use advertising, voting, and lots of different tools to try and block him so that we can win.

Jennifer Stock:

Are there certain areas of the country that are more responsive to messages about the ocean than others?

Mike Dunmyer:

It's interesting, in some senses it's a little bit of a mixed bag, as you would expect, the coastal areas like CA, WA, or east coast like DE, MD, NC, these people are more fixed on these issues and relate to the ocean on an emotional level as well as a pragmatic need to keep the resources on a sustainable level. You will certainly find support along the coast, but the oceans are so important to our economic well-being, and so much a part of the daily lives of the people who are on the coast that sometimes, the important conservation initiatives that originate on the coast also in the short term have the ability to cause some pain for voters, so you also will typically find some opposition to help some ocean issues along the coast as well. Its kind of understandable, sometimes we've had champions who are located inland who have really been able to do some wonderful things because they don't bore anybody, they just believe that their best interests are in long term benefits for the oceans

Jennifer Stock:

Are ocean issues a bi-partisan issue in your world or do you have both supporters on both sides?

Mike Dunmyer:

We do. We absolutely believe that oceans have to be a non-partisan issue because they are so critical to all of us. From the pragmatic perspective, if you only have friends on one side of the house, then that will be about half the time that you won't be able to get anywhere. When Ocean Champions started in our first election in 2004, we were pretty close to 50/50 in endorsing republicans and democrats. We are still bi-partisan, although admittedly these days it's harder to find republicans who are strong on

ocean issues enough to merit an endorsement. It's not that there aren't republicans who care, it's more that the republican leadership does not have the ocean in their priorities. To be successful with that party you have to walk the line. That said, there are republicans who we have endorsed such as Senator Whitney Snow, who have done phenomenal things with the ocean and right now we are about 75% democratic in terms of our endorsements and 25% republican and it's probably not going to improve in 2012.

Jennifer Stock:

What should voters be paying attention to this year, this election year we have national, regional, local elections, and in terms of listening for the candidates that support ocean and environmental legislation, what are something's that people should be paying attention to?

Mike Dunmyer:

Well I think, first of all, my number one advice to anyone when I'm having this conversation is do the reading, do the research, go past the ads and the headlines and really understand the issues. Then think very strongly about what are the issues that matter most to you as a person, and really vote on those issues. We have some terms we've used around here a lot, code of the ocean, elections matter, it's easy to focus on what are the immediate needs, but as we hear about things like climate change and overfishing and resource depletion, more and more you really have to pay attention to the longer term and think about achieving a balance in what you look for. The other thing that I would say is that it's very natural right now for people to be very turned off by politics, there are many people watching politics in DC and saying "I just can't take it anymore", and we understand! But I would say to that, nothing is going to change by disengaging. The only way we will lead to a better outcome in a government that feels more responsive in a government that will double down and focus in more intensely than in the past

Jennifer Stock:

In terms of letter writing, a lot of organizations are making it easy to click here and click there and add your address and the letter goes off, I know there are ranks in weight that these letters or e-mails or phone calls carry. How effective is letter-writing these days? I heard a statistic that 1 letter represents 100 constituents in an area. Can you talk a bit about that in terms of local folks hoping to get involved?

Mike Dunmyer:

That's a great question, Jen, it's very timely. You're right, I think e-mail and all these electronic tools have made it that much easier for people to contact their representatives, and as you might expect it kind of cheapens it. We will on occasion, send out blasts, asking our constituents to respond on something like that, but only when we have been told by senior committee staff on the issue, and they say they just need to hear how people stand on the issue. If you really would like your voice specifically to be heard, is to either pick up the phone and call the office of the

congressperson and ask to speak to the legislative position that deals with the issue you want to talk about. Person to person phone calls carry a lot of weight, and they are tremendously effective. 3-4 years ago, they were talking about this highly contentious issue they were dealing with, and we asked what they had heard from their constituents, and they said they had received a lot of electronic responses, but only a dozen letters, and they read every real letter, so they carry more weight. They are important because they are rare. The phone calls as well, and the thing to do in each one of these cases is realize that the staff is incredibly busy, so you want to be very respectful of their time, tight concise messages, straight and to the point, don't flavor it, don't tell too many stories, just let them know where you stand and why its important, and that's what's going to count.

Jennifer Stock:

Great, thank you for that overview, its important for people to hear, our emails are getting filled with "do this now!" and I think people feel really good about clicking the boxes and I think its great but I was curious as to how much weight these things carry and this is a great overview.

Mike Dunmyer:

It's worth noting that sometimes it just gets them angry, this is one of those situations where you have to consider the job that you have to do, you have to do it, you only have two hours before something is due, it has to be in your bosses hand, and if you're just getting steamrolled with these generic emails you have to deal with in some way, if its not the right time it may impact their ability to help you.

Jennifer Stock:

Since Ocean Champions is really monitoring the scene of where the voice is needed, how can listeners listening today get more involved to keep up on these opportune times to communicate their opinions about ocean issues?

Mike Dunmyer:

Well, I would absolutely say to watch our website, and watch social media, we're www.oceanchampions.org, you can find us under ocean champions on Facebook and twitter, we communicate a lot there. We will be putting out about 50 endorsements, we tend to win about 80% of our elections, so with those 50 endorsements that at least 40 will wind up winning, these are the folks who we research, take the time to sit down and have one on one conversation with them, we don't do questionnaires, or sport cards, we think politics are much more subtle than that, we get to know the individual and what their motives are, what they are interested in, which committees they want to serve on, really what their objectives are and we can say we've taken the time to get to know them and they are the most likely to get in there and do strong important thing for ocean health, get in front of bad things that others want to do, and if you live in these districts and care about the ocean then consider our guide and support these endorsed champions. Similarly I would also say that if you really care about oceans, support ocean champions. We are trying to help

the big guys win; we can't do that without the support of those who love the oceans as well.

Jennifer Stock:

Great, people can find out about that at your website as well. Last question, in terms of the bigger picture, what are your thoughts? You work so closely with legislators in terms of passing of laws and people getting elected, but the rest of us here, how do you think we should get the ocean a little bit higher up in people's minds?

Mike Dunmyer:

Well, the simplest things I can put out there that were mentioned earlier... the oceans provide 50% of the oxygen that we need to survive, so if you take two breaths, consider what your life would be like if you only got to take one of those breaths, you can realize how important the oceans are, not to mention they regulate climate, provide primary protein to a billion people in the world, and provide much nutrition to the rest of us, walk out on the beach some time and watch the sunset and see how you feel, and think about how it would be if there was tons of trash, no life, and the ocean wasn't there. In terms of the life support system for the people, the end of the day is that there is an emotional attachment for most of the people here, and consider it as you fill out those letters in the voting booth.

Jennifer Stock:

Thanks Mike, we appreciate your time today!

Mike Dunmyer:

Thanks Jennifer it was a pleasure.

Jennifer Stock:

Thanks for calling in. So education, what it gets down to is getting people more educated about the ocean in their lives, we've talked about that a lot in the past on ocean currents, and I encourage everybody to share that with people that may not know so much about the ocean to share what you do know, because it really makes a difference and helps people to get a better picture about the importance in their lives. Recently there was an incredible achievement. James Cameron, the filmmaker and producer of Avatar, dove solo to the deepest part of the ocean in the Marianas Trench, which is about 200 miles southwest of Guam, and the depth was about 35,576 feet which is about 6.8 miles deep. Originally it had been explored by Jacques Picard and Captain Don Walsh, this was the first time it was a solo mission, and thinking about awareness and how this got national news, I'm sure it captivated people's curiosity and majesty of the ocean, and I hope it brings to light the excitement of the ocean. Thanks for tuning in here to Ocean Currents! You can catch past episodes at www.Cordellbank.noaa.gov, subscribe to the Ocean Currents podcast there. If there is a topic that you would like to learn more about, e-mail me at Jennifer.stock@noaa.gov. I'd love to hear from you and what you think of the show, so feel free to contact me! We have a ways to go on the ocean leadership, so keep plugged in and this is a great opportunity when we vote and we consider who we vote for. Thanks for tuning in! Take care.