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Granted, and maybe this leads into my next question in that corporations utilize a vast majority of the natural resources of the country. If we think of corporations as families, as entities bound together by like-minded people, certainly your family doesn’t mine for as much gold and silver as say, Freeport-McMoran does. Do you believe a family’s tax rate should be equal to a corporation that consumes more raw material? What can we agree on is the tax system we run on currently is broken and we need to convene people who understand and can look at it collaboratively and look at it with a new set of ideals and eyes and come up with a proposal for the American people. But we all have to be a part of the game.

Not to pinpoint you here, but do you believe a family should pay the same kind of rate that a corporation would? I think we have to establish rates that will number one, keep people here, keep business here; that we have an understanding of an environment that wants to keep businesses here. When you broadcast corporations, you broadcast a generally negative characterization, when a majority of them are real small corporations that don’t use any different than anybody else, and maybe even less, in the amount of resources as a regular family. You have to be careful when generally putting people together and that’s why we need to convene people with common sense ideas that understand the marketplace, that understand the loopholes, and pull those people together to come up with a better tax system.

In the wake of the Japanese nuclear meltdown, you were quoted as promoting an “all of the above” energy policy. realizing there is still no proper way to dispose or contain nuclear waste nor are nuclear reactors immune from causing immense worldwide catastrophes, do you believe the Obama Administration’s pursuit of nuclear energy is the most efficient use of the country’s resources?

We are in a world of hurt right now with our energy policy because we lack one. And it has to be one in which “all of the above” has to be looked at. The issue that came about in Japan always makes us take a look and retrospectively involve ourselves, looking at how things are done, who is responsible. We have had an industry that has done very well in this country. And we’re going to need nuclear energy if we’re going to be self-reliant and if we’re going to have an America that moves forward.

Do you believe that solar or wind could ever take the place of nuclear energy? You know, right now they can’t. And they can’t take care of our energy needs in the next 10-15 years. It’s an emerging industry. There’s no way they can take care of that load right now, and not in the near future either. We need better science, we need to see more efficiencies, and we need continuation. Because when the sun’s down, we’re not producing solar, and when the wind’s not blowing, we’re not producing. Those are problems for us, especially with our vast needs and drain on the energy system.

Going back to your visit back home in Flagstaff the last part of March, you said “the federal government bears a responsibility, not if a moral obligation, to assist our community.” On a philosophy level, do you balance the Tea Party’s mantra of “get the feds out of my backyard” with your current visit to the Schultz Pass Flood area, in which the federal government will likely play an important financial role?

It’s a perfect mantra in the fact that we must have common sense regulations involving our renewable resources like our forests. I love my forests. But if you don’t take care of your forests, you’re going to have a catastrophe like you had on Schultz Pass. And it’s not a matter of if, it’s a matter of when that’s going to occur again. There are failed policies that we have to start looking at, common sense interactions about the way we look at our environment. We have a lot that we can do and be empowered to be a part of the solution process, but also help out in regards to make sure this catastrophe doesn’t happen again.

I think it’s a perfect mantra because the federal government is supposed to make sure the playing field is somewhat helped out when we have different opinions from jurisdictions, local states, and other municipalities. But yes, there is a role for the federal government.

Some in the Tea Party would argue one of the first mandates of federal authority in our recent history was a strong arm technique that “suggested” the establishment of highway speed limits and seatbelt laws or face the withholding of federal highway money. Many also claim this was done to insulate corporations in that every state was made to require drivers to carry liability insurance, or face stiff penalties from the feds. Would you equate the mandate from the 1980s — for the “overall benefit of US citizens,” as some in the Democratic caucus would call it — with the current health care mandate and the resulting safety net that estimates financially benefits insurance companies even more?

Well, first of all, in trying to equate the health care bill that was passed last year — we have a fundamental flaw with that program, in that it puts a bureaucrat or a government employee between you and your health care provider. We have never seen a program that is actually based with the federal government involved that’s actually worked. In fact it’s actually created this problem.

We haven’t paid people, we’ve forced under-funded mandates onto the states who didn’t have the money who then forced it onto communities who didn’t have the funding. We continuously get at it not only from our perspective, but also from their perspective, understanding what the pros and cons were.

We can’t take care of everybody, we can’t make sure everybody does the expected, nor do I want the federal government to do it for me. I want to have a choice. I want to have a choice in health.

I don’t know if that’s a proper view of your scenario, but we want to encompass everybody and look for the protection of everybody, but we also need to have everybody paying in and everybody being a part of the solution, and being personally responsible.

RED ROCK PASS: OPEN HOUSE, CLOSED MINDS
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The Red Rock Ranger District of the Coconino National Forest continued its examination of the Red Rock Pass revision issue in its second public meeting held March 24, 2011. Unfortunately for the public, this meeting was changed to an Open House format rather than a meeting where genuine questions might have been answered. The Open House consisted of several stations, each of which was monitored by a Forest Service employee, where carefully chosen information was posted for public consumption. In September 2010, Jim Smith, a Sedona resident whose car was ticketed for failing to display a Red Rock Pass in the Vultee Arch area of West Sedona, won his case against the United States Forest Service and the pass program was dismissed his ticket and, in his decision, US Magistrate Judge Mark E. Aspey of Flagstaff questioned the validity of the current Red Rock Pass program. According to the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act of 2004, a site must have six amenities in place in order for a fee to be charged at that location. The six required amenities are: designated developed parking, a permanent toilet facility, a permanent trash receptacle, an interpretive sign, exhibit, or kiosk, picnic tables, and security services.

In spite of the court decision, Heather Provencio, District Ranger for the Red Rock Ranger District in Sedona said “We are collecting revenue … people are buying Red Rock Passes if they are going to sites that have those amenities. So, if they see a fee machine … if they see a national forest pass … then, yes, they need to have a Red Rock Pass.” Most locations within the boundaries of the Red Rock Ranger District do not provide the required amenities.

It was apparent substantial investments were made to produce large graphical displays and colorful charts for the March 24 meeting. In addition, full color handouts were made available to the public. The open house was not as well attended as the March 1 meeting. Once again, publicity was minimal although the USFS apparently made direct connections with organizations such as Keep Sedona Beautiful whose support for their preferred option is all but guaranteed.

When questioned about the Smith decision and its affect on the Red Rock Pass program, USFS employees pointed out all the wonderful things they do with the revenue from the passes. When specifics about the judgment and bringing the RRP into compliance with federal law were raised, Ms. Provencio stated that Jdg. Aspey made some errors in his decision. When asked why the USFS did not appeal, Ms. Provencio responded the errors were only minor and technical. The questioning then returned to compliance with the law and once again participants were regaled with all the wonderful things that are done with revenue from the RRP. Another strategy employed by the USFS was to threaten to close sites or turn them over to private entities to run as it has already done with all of the Red Rock Ranger District’s developed campgrounds and with the Day Use sites Grasshopper Point, Call of the Canyon (West Fork), and Crescent Moon Ranch. These are a few of the only sites currently in compliance with federal law and whose fees go primarily to a private corporation with only a small percentage collected by the USFS. In addition, concessionaires are not required to accept federal passes for their admission fees. Sedona residents and visitors are now required to purchase an additional $40 annual pass for entrance into the concessionaire’s Day Use sites or pay the individual entry fees per use.

Other sites Ms. Provencio talked about closing, like the Palatki and Honanki ruin sites, are actually exempt from the amenity provisions of FLREA. The law allows for cultural sites to charge fees regardless of whether they have improvements.

The USFS also boasted during the meeting that the Red Rock Ranger District has one of the largest volunteer forces in the entire national system. In Sedona, organizations like Friends of the Forest do much of the trail maintenance on Forest Service lands. On March 1, the USFS presented six scenarios to the public as possible strategies for bringing the pass program into compliance with Federal Law. In fact, only two of the six, Scenarios 2 (no day use fees) and 3 (day use fees at specific sites with amenities) would actually accomplish this. However, the USFS appears to be favoring Scenario 5. This option would allow a blanket pass to remain in effect for an area somewhat smaller than the current 160,000-plus acres, still including sites that do not have amenities.

Comments on the proposed revisions to the Red Rock Pass program were closed on April 15. A final decision is set to be published in May or June.

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