

Fight in light of radical center

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There's a fight going on. This is the West, so it's no surprise that it's about water - and in simplest terms, it's about whether to build Glade Reservoir or not; whether water projects like Glade are a good idea for our future. As with all fights, there are two grumpy sides, which I would generalize as 1) environmentalists versus 2) developments interests, although, of course, it's more complicated than that: There are also farmers, fly fishermen, rafters, families, kayakers and a big hunk of people who just want to show up at the Poudre and have it look healthy and who want a healthy economy, too.

It's always easier to dig in your heels rather than find a solution - but heel-digging is not a sign of mature, responsible decision-making. That's why I find it frustrating when the likes of Congressman Cory Gardner and KCOL host John Clarke raise their arms in a fighting gesture. Do we win with such single-minded and stubborn insistence that Glade is the only way to go? No, we lose.

One of the most useful concepts I have come across is that of the "radical center" - a term that which is now growing in popularity and use. The "radical center" means a place where diverse and opposing parties can come to discuss their interests - instead of arguing their positions.

Don't get me wrong: I think it's good to have opinions and to fight for them. But it's ultimately most beneficial to fight in light of the radical center, which is what I urge our representatives to do.

I'm no expert, but there is a portfolio of solutions that get beyond the "Yes Glade, No Glade." It seems to me they include 1) conservation; 2) water sharing between agriculture, cities and businesses; 3) ag-to-urban transfers; 4) water reuse and recycling; 5) bolstering Colorado's Instream Flow Program (which would allow ordinary people to donate water shares to the river); 6) to be accountable to the people - water use decisions should be democratic, and water conservancy districts should have boards that are appointed by election, not judges; and 7) not all storage is created equal - creative storage might be the way to go (alluvial groundwater), and NISP presents problems: evaporative loss, the need to pump water to the reservoir, certain harm to important ecological zones and the river.

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Most of us appreciate the river other than a commodity. The river has intrinsic value, and most of us strive to live in a way that is psychologically sustaining, socially responsible and environmentally sound. We need politicians who understand that, and who can make smart, mature decisions toward real solutions.

It is in the human nature, perhaps, to bifurcate. It takes a conscious decision to resist. That's why I hope - perhaps naively - that we can end polarized debates and find a success story for this river. I'd like to humbly suggest, then, that Gardner and the NCWCD drop their spears and start talking. We need to create an arena where we can talk, and we need sensible leaders to help us begin.

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