

From the President



Moderation in Defense of Democracy is No Vice¹

It was the summer of our discontent. Over the past several months, our country has showcased to the world what can happen when ideology overshadows reason in the making of public policy. Most Americans watched helplessly as the process of governance spiraled downward toward epic dysfunction, dragging down with it their personal savings and retirement nest eggs. The People's Republic of China admonished the US in the global press that our brand of democracy no longer seemed to be working, and was certainly no model for others to follow—perhaps we should learn something about governance from the world's fastest growing economy, they suggested, before we caused any more collateral damage to global markets. It's as if along with Alice, we seem to have fallen Through the Looking Glass.

Drawing an ideological hard line in the sand and taking hostages is never a good way to make public policy, particularly in a democracy whose very lifeblood is the interplay of competing perspectives as diverse as the nation itself. No single political philosophy has a monopoly on wisdom or truth, and no one interest within society is infallible. It is essential to our democracy that there be a healthy competition of ideas through processes that even the Founding Fathers themselves knew would be messy, sometimes agonizingly slow and, when necessary, self-correcting. Because there is always a place for new ideas in our democratic marketplace, there is always hope and a reason for individual engagement. This has given us the world's most vital and dynamic system of governance, one that is adept at tackling all manner of problems and challenges as they arise—and one that, if not a precise model for other societies, is certainly a beacon of inspiration to others as they find their own way in the world.

The Pinchot Institute is firmly grounded in these principles of democratic governance. Through an openness to good ideas from wherever they might arise, and a genuine respect for the legitimacy of a wide range of views within our diverse society, the Pinchot Institute has become what someone once described to me as a “conservation problem-solving organization.” Coming at a problem through the narrow gateway of rigid ideology and exclusion blinds decision makers to creative possibilities that could well result in positive conservation outcomes. Through bringing together the most thoughtful and creative people with a wide range of perspectives, and through honest listening and independent analysis, the Pinchot Institute has become known for facilitating a rational, civil dialogue on some of

today's most challenging and controversial conservation issues—and finding ways to move forward toward a positive outcome that will serve the broad public interest.

This is what is meant when we say the Pinchot Institute is continuing the legacy of Gifford Pinchot's conservation philosophy of managing natural resources for “the greatest good, for the greatest number, in the long run.” Pinchot wrote of conservation as “the application of common sense to common problems for the common good.” It is a principled stance, as much moral and ethical as it is scientific or technical. It is an approach that is open to creative new ideas for confronting conservation challenges that were not, and could not have been, anticipated in the time of Theodore Roosevelt when these words were first written, instructing Gifford Pinchot in the management of the newly established National Forests.

The Pinchot Institute will soon commemorate 50 years since its founding in 1963, and its dedication at Grey Towers National Historic Site by a different president, John F. Kennedy. In his remarks, Kennedy asserted, “the fact of the matter is, this Institute is needed more today than at any time in our history.” The same can be said in the present day, not only because of the concerns that Kennedy highlighted over cleaning up the environment and conserving open space, but because now more than ever we need a place for rational, civil dialogue on pressing issues in environmental sustainability. The Pinchot Institute is an organization that is fundamentally committed to overcoming the boundaries of ideology to discover solutions, and solve pressing problems—through a respect for the principles of democratic governance that have made our nation the beacon of inspiration that it must continue to be in the world.

The work of the Pinchot Institute is made possible through the support of many individual contributors, especially the Pinchot Associates, and a host of public and private partner organizations that help underwrite our programs in natural resource conservation and environmental sustainability. As we close in on our first half-century in 2013, we are enormously grateful for the support that has allowed the Institute to fulfill its ongoing mission to seek “the greatest good” and continue to serve the public interest as a conservation problem solver. So, thank you. We look forward to continuing to earn your support in the months and years ahead.

— Al Sample

¹ With apologies to former Senator Barry Goldwater.