



**Introduction at the Audubon Morris Doyle Event Honoring Robert Stephens:
Saturday, May 13, 2006**

The Morris Doyle Award is given every year to the individual who carries on the spirit of the founder of California Audubon, and best typifies Doyle's personal dedication to wetlands protection, bird habitat restoration, and engaging people in conservation and the out-of-doors.

I'm honored to be with you today as the new chairman of Audubon California, and to be in front of Roberts friends, families and supporters as we celebrate Robert Stephens as this years honoree.

Almost four years ago I asked Michael Mantell how I could get more directly involved in conservation; he suggested that I meet Robert Stephens. When we met, Robert and I went for a hike. Going into the woods I was free and uncommitted. Coming out, I realized I had just joined the Audubon California board. Part of Roberts magic was that I still don't remember saying yes. Four years later, I still don't remember saying yes when he suggested I try to fill his shoes as chairman. But here I am in front of you.

I want to tell you a brief story, about how *all* of us came to be here today.

The story is about "*The Big Tent.*"

Looking around at all of you today I see the wide variety of people who care about conservation in California; biologists, directors, board members, conservation directors, and yes, even lawyers. Your diverse backgrounds reflects our shift on the Audubon California board under Roberts tenure.

One of the most interesting phenomena of conservation and environmental group has been their implicit litmus tests for membership. When I first joined the California Audubon board, mentioning the word Republican could stop all conversation in a crowded room. Saying "guns" or "hunting" could require a defibrillator for some of the board. And the notion that English wasn't the first language spoken in California by 1/3 of the people who cared about conservation got quizzical looks.

Over time, Robert calmly and patiently brought a new sensibility to the board-one that quietly said that, supporting the mission of California Audubon; our work in **Conservation, Policy and Education**, didn't require an entrance exam or means test.



It simply required the ability to understand that birds and their habitats are harbingers of all our fate, and that if we are here on this earth as stewards for what is around us, then our role is clear. We need to do direct conservation of critical bird habitat, we need to affect state and local policy that degrades or endangers birds and their homes, and we need to educate young and old on why preserving birds and their habitats is important.

And anyone who supports that mission was welcome.

One of Roberts other prescient observations, was that same diversity that he brought to the board is what we need for California Audubon to remain relevant;

We need to build a more diverse Audubon membership that embraces the 1/3 of California's population that is Hispanic, expands our existing partnerships in the rural areas of the state and reminds people of faith that conservation is consistent with their beliefs.

So that's "*The Big Tent.*" I hope we can all make this Roberts legacy at Audubon.

In closing, Robert has typified the story my grandfather once told me. He said that there were two kinds of leaders: those who do the work and those who take the credit. He told me to follow those in the first group. There is much less competition.

Robert, it's going to be a hard act to follow.