

He Has Acted to Save the World: Award to Marlin Schneider, Wisconsin State Representative

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The quality of a democracy depends on the behavior of those we elect to fill our public offices. We bestow power so that it will be used in our interests. The behavior of elected and appointed public officials in our national, state, and local communities has come under the most severe criticism by credible observers in the fifth estate. The nation's journalists and editorialists have correctly recognized and acknowledged a malady in the land. Sadly, they have focused on the terminal stage of the malady—not on origins and processes.

The malady of which I speak has been with us almost since the founding of our nation and was most clearly diagnosed in 1861 by John Stuart Mill (1806-1873). He wrote,

... How can institutions provide a good administration if there exists such indifference to the subject that those who would administer honestly and capably cannot be induced to serve and the duties are left to those who undertake them because they have some private interest to be promoted? Of what avail is the most broadly popular representative system if the electors do not care to choose the best member of parliament, but chose him who will spend the most money to be elected? (Mill, 1861/1952, p.375)

This passage survives as one of the world's most eloquent statements of the challenge facing representative government. Today's honoree knows this well.

Mill also published on the relations between behavior and government. He, too, was concerned that we may not act to improve our political institutions. In *Representative Government* he said,

We ought not to forget that there is an incessant and flowing current of human affairs towards the worse consisting of all the follies, all the vices, all the negligences indolence, and supinenesses of

mankind which is only controlled and sweeping all before it by the exertions which some persons constantly and others by fits, put forth in the direction of good and worthy objects. (p.336)

We acknowledge that Mill published first, but we must applaud the contemporary press for they have again heralded the warning and renewed the imperative that we as a society have a right to expect ethical, intelligent, and courageous behavior from those in public office. Ethical, intelligent, and courageous behavior sometimes seem unattainable for the contemporary body politic whose many misadventures usually suggest, instead, the operation of greed, banality, and fear. But today, in Wisconsin, there is new hope and we are assembled here to acknowledge one who brought us that hope.

Charles Montesquieu and Jean Jacques Rousseau published even earlier on these matters. A sampling of the writings of Montesquieu and Rousseau will serve as an historical anchor for the notion that the laws of a society should be consistent with the laws of human behavior.

Montesquieu (1689-1755) was a member of the Bordeaux Academy of Sciences. Although he died well before the publication date of the "Behavior of Organisms" in 1938, and was forced by the King of France to give up his tenure in Bordeaux, I am convinced that he would have been warmly welcome today in this scientific society. He shared our concerns about understanding the behavior of man. He wrote "The Spirit of Laws" in 1747 which is in part appropriate to present to this assemblage. Though his work forms the basis for many enlightened western democratic institutions, he could not publish it in his own country, France, where it was rejected by all sides. It received the highest praise in England however, while Voltaire was imprisoning its

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admirers in Paris. Publishing progressive political views has frequently been attended by high risk in France, much as it has in Florida.

Montesquieu was the first to insist that enlightened governments must consider the effect of laws *on* behavior. He stated that he was also curious about the behavior of making laws, writing,

I have first of all considered mankind; and the result of my thoughts has been that amidst such an infinite diversity of laws and manners they were not solely conducted by the caprice of fancy. (Montesquieu, 1748/1952, p. xxi)

We, here today in Wisconsin, certainly share Montesquieu's observation that political behavior is not random and is the proper subject of scientific scrutiny.

Before he began writing "*The Spirit of Laws*," he observed the customs, social, and legal institutions operating throughout Europe in the 18th Century. He expressed a respect for the anticipated methods of behavior analysis when he wrote: "I have not drawn my principles from my prejudices but from the nature of things." (p. xxi)

Based on his careful observations, Montesquieu suggested many behaviorally sound reforms to improve mankind's institutions. He regarded this pursuit as the highest and most noble cause. He urged us to act to improve our political institutions, writing . . .

"Could I but succeed so as to persuade those who command to increase their knowledge in what they ought to prescribe . . . I should think myself as the most happy of mortals." (Ibid, p. xxi)

The spirit of Jean Jacques Rousseau is also with us today. His intellectual courage in analyzing the effect of political institutions on human behavior earned him a condemnation by the Parliament of Paris and the threat of arrest if he did not go into exile. Rousseau published the *Social Contract* in 1762, marking the date of the first behavioral contract between a people and their government. Rousseau understood and identified clearly the problems of causing humanity to act in prosocial ways without suppressing free behavior. In his words,

The problem is to find a form of association which will defend and protect with the whole common force the person and goods of each associate, and in which each, while uniting himself with all, may still obey himself alone, and remain as free as before. (Rousseau, 1762/1952, p. 391)

B. F. Skinner is also with us today, fortunately in a less etherial form than Montesquieu, Rosseau, or Mill. Skinner has published extensively on these issues, having of late turned his considerable understanding of mankind and its institutions toward the improvement of both. In 1981, at the University of Florida, he unveiled a contemporary and urgent analysis of the association between our institutions and our behavior, extending considerably the observation of Rousseau and J. S. Mill that we must act to improve both if we are to survive (Skinner, 1981). Skinner, the scientist, provided a system for understanding why we are not acting to save the world. He has extended and refined this analysis considerably in, "What is Wrong With Daily Life in the Western World" (Skinner, 1986).

Montesquieu, Rousseau, Mill, and Skinner are observers of the direct relationship between human behavior and the design of our institutions. They are each examples of the passionate search to perfect our systems of government to create an environment in which mankind would be elevated and would be able to contribute to the public good. That is why I have suggested that they are all with us today. They have provided an elegant analysis which ought to compel us to act to save the world even as it warns us that we must not fail to do so.

It is therefore the greatest of pleasures to recognize today one who has so acted. I am referring to Representative Marlin Schneider whose extraordinary observation of human behavior and concern for the future of mankind led to the creation and adoption of pioneering legislation on adolescent pregnancy prevention. This legislation serves as an elegant model for all the states of our nation.

The Legislature of the State of Wisconsin has been acknowledged as one of the most enlightened representative bod-

ies in our nation. As a Representative, Marlin Schneider, from Wisconsin Rapids, is deeply concerned about the tragic consequences of over one million unwanted adolescent pregnancies in the U.S. each year. Representative Schneider became the subject of considerable national attention when in 1985 he brought to a legislative meeting a statue of a pregnant adolescent boy. He compellingly demonstrated to his legislative colleagues that the antecedents and consequences of unwanted adolescent pregnancies among children inexorably involve both genders. By extending the obvious natural consequences of teenage pregnancy to males, he presented to his colleagues an irresistible case for making an improved discrimination on targets of legislative concern.

But this was only the beginning. In the Wisconsin Legislative Council, Schneider and his colleagues created the predicate for the most enlightened legislation on adolescent pregnancy prevention programs and services in our nation entitled, "Legislation on Pregnancy Options." The Wisconsin Legislature embraced the principles in a landmark act entitled, Wisconsin Act 56. An element and feature of this act states:

The legislature believes that adolescents should be encouraged to take responsibility for the consequences of their actions. It is clear that among adolescents the burden of unwanted pregnancies presently is borne by the adolescent mothers and that ways must be found for adolescent fathers, as well as the parents of adolescents to share in this responsibility.

Report Number 16 to the 1985 Legislature also states:

The Special Committee concluded that, in cases of adolescent pregnancies, the families of both the male and female involved should take some responsibility for the consequences of the sexual activity of their minor children. Adolescent mothers often establish separate households and rely on public assistance for support, or remain at home with their parents. Under these circumstances, the male and his family escape any responsibility for the care and support of the child. Parents may be encouraged to take a more active role in discussing with their children the consequences of adolescent sexual activity if the grandparents, where the parent is under the age of 18, are required to provide financial support

for their grandchild. In addition, the number of households requiring public assistance may be reduced if family responsibility for children and grandchildren is reinforced.

We may conclude from this and other sections of the adolescent pregnancy legislation that Representative Schneider identified forces operating which sustain the increase in unwanted adolescent pregnancy and that his reforms created the opportunity to respond appropriately to this complex and most urgent social problem.

This landmark legislation is carefully designed to reduce both the high number of unintended or unwanted pregnancies and the resultant high number of abortions. The entire package of legislation is extensive and comprehensive, dealing systematically with every aspect of adolescent pregnancy. It provides for pregnancy prevention education, creates an Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention and Pregnancy Services Board, makes available a number of useful activities for adolescents which naturally compete with sexual opportunity, and causes teenage fathers and grandparents of babies born to adolescents to share the state's cost for the support and maintenance of the child.

I am compelled to observe from my own experiences as an elected Commissioner and Mayor, that although creating admirable and useful legislation is extraordinarily difficult, getting it passed is frequently impossible. In this regard Representative Schneider succeeded brilliantly. He was able to accommodate the multiple divergent interests and concerns of his colleagues, resulting in overwhelming support for and passage of a legislative masterpiece which all states can adopt—and should. Our scientific society now has the opportunity to reward through action and public honor this legislator who has exhibited intelligent and courageous behavior on behalf of his constituents and all the citizens of America.

Marlin Schneider is a public servant who *has* acted to save the world and is most truly deserving of the inscription on his prize. Taken from Charles de Montesquieu, it reads:

Could I but succeed so as to persuade those who command, to increase their knowledge in what they ought to prescribe—I shall think myself the most happy of mortals.

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