
Prologue

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Consider this a most special issue of *American Experiment Quarterly*, as it celebrates the eightieth birthday of an inimitable Minnesotan and one of my all-time favorite people (and old bosses), former state senator, congressman, and governor, Al Quie. Or, as his remarkable life and career were described more fully and aptly in invitations to his big birthday party in Bloomington in September: “Man of faith, public servant, lover of life and adventure.”

How did this salute come about? A couple of years ago now, after first getting his permission to pursue the project, I started meeting with friends and colleagues from his time as governor in the late 1970s and early '80s (I was on staff back then) to tease out the main themes of his political and many other robust lives. Three headings emerged repeatedly from those conversations: revering and strengthening families, faith, and education.

From there, working closely with Governor Quie, as well as the center's Annette Meeks, we went about identifying and recruiting outstanding scholars—the very best anywhere—to lead American Experiment luncheon

forums on critical aspects of the three respective topics. The idea wasn't for speakers to rehash what the governor had said over the years or dwell on his corral of contributions. Rather, it was to take the three realms to the next levels: deepening public understanding and probing for remedies to some of our state's and nation's hardest problems. Those brilliant presentations—by Jean Bethke Elshtain on religion, William J. Doherty on families, and Chester E. Finn Jr. on education—keynote this volume. They are followed in each instance by brief comments by the governor himself, and then by audience questions.

This has been one of my favorite American Experiment enterprises ever, for reasons that, I trust, are clear to most anyone who has even sidled up to Minnesota during Al Quie's more than half-century of political and charitable service—more than twenty years of the former in Congress. My ceaselessly cowboy-booted friend (for proof, see *AEQ*'s first photo ever, on page 9) is one of the best people I know, and my colleagues and I have been honored to be part of the joyous and nearly yearlong celebration of his four-score birthday.

What, exactly, did Drs. Elshstain, Doherty, and Finn say in their papers?

We asked Jean, who is Laura Spellman Rockefeller Professor of Social and Political Ethics at the University of Chicago, to pick among questions like these: How has religious faith historically shaped politics in the United States? Has there been an acceleration of religious energy in the United States over the last generation? If yes, has this been a healthy course for Minnesota and the nation? Here are two of her January answers from "Faith of Our Fathers and Mothers: Religion and the American Democracy."

"God talk" as well as "rights talk" is the way Americans speak. If you do not appreciate the interplay of America's religions with America's politics, you will understand neither our religion nor our politics.

And in keeping . . .

In the academic circles in which I make my home, when you talk about the resurgence of religion as the direct source of political inspiration, it is always construed as a threat—almost some unique peril. This always strikes me as simply a misreading of the situation. We have always had in our history, people with strong religious convictions entering the political arena on the basis of those convictions and beliefs and being quite explicit about the fact that they're out doing what they're doing precisely because of their faith.

Recall here, most obviously, Martin Luther King Jr., as Elshstain does.

For Bill Doherty, professor of Family Social Science and director of the

Marriage and Family Therapy Program at the University of Minnesota, we posed questions like these:

Has commitment and duty in family life eroded over the last two generations? If yes, what have been the effects, especially on children? Why must a renewed commitment to family life and civic engagement go hand in hand? Here are parts of the conclusion from his "Family Life and Civic Bonds: Renewing the 'Very Air Our Loved Ones Breathe,'" delivered in March.

I am calling for a new citizen ethic for families, beyond the idea of the family as a personal haven in a heartless world or the family as the object of professional or governmental services. The citizen family, not just the private family. The producer family, not just the consumer family. The outward-looking family, not the walled-off family.

And,

A few years ago there was a drive-by shooting in St. Paul in which an innocent young boy was killed in the crossfire. A colleague of mine who knew the family attended the viewing. When she expressed her regrets to the boy's father, here is what he said: "I've been doing a lot of thinking over the past few days. You know, I think I was a good father to my boy. But I've decided that I was not a good enough father to those boys who killed him." This father was saying that he did not get involved enough in how we raise all our children, in how we build the village."

As for Checker Finn, president of the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation

and another of my old employers (at the U.S. Department of Education), we asked him to wonder aloud about conundrums like: Is it possible to find the right balance between the expanded interest of federal and state governments in academic rigor and accountability, and the perpetual and proper interest of parents and communities in having the largest possible say in their children's education? You have to read his essay for the answer, but here's a slice of how he framed things last May in "Twenty Years After *A Nation at Risk*: Reconciling Grand Designs and Down-Home Rights in Education."

[T]here's nothing more private, more intimate, more local, and less of anybody else's business than rearing one's own children, including of course, their education. That's the proper work of parents and family, perhaps also of neighborhood, village, and church. Arguably, it's the most important private act one ever engages in, imparting to your child your own beliefs, values, and special knowledge and striving to shape that child into the kind of person you dream she will become.

On the other hand, Checker continued,

we know that every society from the most primitive tribe to the most sophisticated nation-state has established means for inducting its young into its essential knowledge, skills, traditions, mores, ground-rules, values, and practices. . . . Hence all societies devise ways [i.e., often insist on ways] of educating their young.

Coming to grips and working out this tension "is much of what education policy and politics are about."

The reference to *A Nation at Risk* in Checker's title is particularly germane given that Al Quie served on President Ronald Reagan's National Commission on Excellence in Education, the group that wrote it. Despite what has proved its puny fruit, the report remains the best known of all the flashing-light manifestos about American elementary and secondary education over the last generation. (As for my reference to "puny," the governor wasn't the least bit offended when Checker himself said members of the commission had been a "tad naïve about some realities of the American education system." In fact, during the discussion afterward, Quie straight-shot back that he and his counterparts had been arrogant and inarticulate, too.)

This American Experiment tribute concludes with eight shorter, more personal "Reminiscences and Celebrations" by longtime friends and associates of the governor: Esther H. Allen, Robert C. Andringa, John Brandl, Carl "Buzz" Cummins, Cathryn Kennedy, Joe Nathan, Chuck Slocum, and me. These stories are only occasionally sugary, yet still the warmest of icings on the gubernatorial birthday cake.

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The fall issue *AEQ* moves on with an essay by Roger J. Magnuson on the not-easy connections between civil rights and the war on terror. His paper is part of a string of *AEQ* pieces and

packages on national security that pre-dates September 11, 2001, but which has accelerated since then, as witness, for example, a symposium, featuring 34 writers in the summer issue, on the “Bush Doctrine: A Preemptive Path to Peace or a Recipe for Perpetual War.” Roger, as you may know, is a top-of-the-line lawyer in Minneapolis—and one of the two or three most energetic and civically generous people I’ve ever known. Here are to-the-point snippets from “Giving the Devil His Due Process: Civil Rights Meet a Culture of Terror.”

While a political state has an obligation to do justice . . . it also has a fundamental obligation to secure the security of its citizens.

Likewise,

Our *Federalist Papers* remind us of the objective to create a government that would be a “palladium of free government” and a “citadel of ordered liberty.” These objectives are impossible to realize in a culture of terror.

Citadels of ordered liberty, as Kathy Kersten argues next, also require sharp attention to three demanding lessons. In remarks delivered at Providence

Academy, a very good Catholic school in Plymouth, on the second anniversary of 9/11, she talked about what young people must learn and embrace. Here is a portion of her second test from “September 11: Three Lessons Inspired by Providence.”

How can we prepare ourselves to defend America and our way of life effectively? The first thing we need to do might sound kind of odd. We need to hit the books, so we know what we’re defending. We need to know why America is so special, so exceptional – what makes it worth our sacrifice, our vigilance, and our love.

We close by returning to Dr. Finn, whose regular feature, “From Checker’s Desk,” has him positively ubiquitous in this edition. His always-important columns about education focus this time on affirmative action, social studies, the travesty of taxpayers “paying twice,” and on No Child Left Behind.

Enjoy the approaching holidays, my friends. And for those of you on the cusp of extra-big birthdays: Congratulations and blessings to you. You’re in terrific company. ■



Governor Al Quie

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