

Wales campaign: Area judge learned to speak at age 12, hosts anti-bullying event

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MILWAUKEE, WI - Fox Point Municipal Judge Scott A. Wales, candidate for Milwaukee County Circuit Court - Branch 47, hosted an event Monday (3/6/17) attended by many grassroots activists, attorneys, judges and civic leaders. Judge Wales was born with Moebius Syndrome, which paralyzed half his face, and portions of his tongue and palate. It also impacted his hearing and eye movement, and subjected him to endless bullying. Medical science has recently proven that severely disadvantaged children often suffer from toxic stress, with significant mental and physical impacts:

<http://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/toxic-stress/>

Since embarking on his campaign for Branch 47, Wales started writing about his medical condition because of Facebook and Internet comments on his appearance, as well as questions voters would ask him about his lack of facial expression on one side of his face. On Monday, he spoke publicly on the matter for the first time, connecting all those from severely disadvantaged backgrounds. "It is not about charity, it is about equality. It's about making sure that everybody has a chance." As a defense attorney almost 30 years, Judge Wales has worked over 400 cases for free, and many additional cases at a deep discount for children, teenagers, and young adults of color from low-income families.

Beyond childhood, Judge Wales also wanted to highlight the bullying crisis in business interactions, in corporate settings, as well as in retirement homes and in senior care settings. The event also featured an expert who spoke about the connections between bullying and the troubling increases in bullying related

suicides. Judge Wales' sincere hope is that his project to earn the responsibility of the Circuit Court judgeship will highlight this crisis; Americans and people around the world who are different face immense hardships, especially with the advent of cyberbullying.

At age 12, Wales was anxious about his upcoming bar mitzvah, because he could only speak very short sentences, which came out very slowly and with great difficulty. His lack of confidence left him unable to articulate or vocalize his thoughts. The bar mitzvah is a celebration of reaching adulthood, where young men are asked to read Hebrew in front of their entire synagogue. Luckily the public school speech pathologist at Judge Wales' middle school had a maverick idea, and sought out ventriloquist Rosalie Gellman, a protégé of Edgar Bergen and famous puppet Charlie McCarthy. Working hard through many obstacles, Gellman helped him reach a eureka moment through ventriloquism, and eventually Wales was able to fulfill a lifelong dream, to attend UW-Madison and graduate as a Badger. Eventually his speech pattern strengthened and he was able to confidently pursue law school.

During law school in Miami, Judge Wales was awarded an internship with Dade County State Attorney Janet Reno's groundbreaking Drug Court. Then a novel concept, this court was focused on treatment of drug addicts instead of jailing, a hugely successful idea that was much imitated nationally because of rehabilitative success rates and huge savings to taxpayers. As a student Judge Wales learned key litigator skills, and accomplished tasks normally given to senior attorneys while interning under a key mentor, then public defender Attorney Hugh Rodham (brother of Hillary Clinton). Judge Wales learned firsthand the immense need for compassion, understanding, legal representation and additional services for low-income community members caught in drug addiction and associated lifestyles. Despite being offered a position after law school in the Miami public defender's office, Wales felt a need to return to the Midwest, to work with unserved communities in his hometown. Unable as a child to advocate for himself, he felt an immense sense of duty to use his voice to advocate for others as an adult, something he feels very fortunate to be able to do. Judge Wales has a passion for community service, and has also been a part-time adjunct at MATC Downtown Campus since 1992, teaching government and paralegal studies.

Video of speech by Judge Wales:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2h3fQ861cVg>

Speech Transcript:

“I would not be doing this without the love and support of my wife, my daughters, and my mother. I’m here because I made a decision with their support and guidance to take on this responsibility, and hopefully earn Branch 47. We’ve met a lot of wonderful people on this journey. It really is amazing how you get to know your community. Milwaukee County is a large place, and there are so many people that are very passionate about the quality of life improving. I truly believe that everyone in this room cares about that and that alone. In addition to the theme of experience, the other theme I share is on a very personal note, and is not something I have ever talked about publicly.

Somebody submitted a Facebook post saying: why isn’t Wales smiling or something to that effect... I was born with a condition called Moebius Syndrome and it is very hard to do things that we take for granted.

So when I saw that, I realized that people just need to know: it is not about charity, it is about equality. it is about making sure that everybody has a chance.

As judges, truthfully it really is about treating people fairly and not judging people based on whatever appearance they seem to represent to you, but trying to learn who they are and make the experience of being in court truly an honorable one.

Our society, without commenting on politics, isn’t the same society it seems that we grew up in when we were younger. it is a harsher society. it is a spontaneous society, certainly through electronic media etc. And yet the irony of it is that courts are still our last resort.

It is the area of our government that people know the least about, relatively, but expect the most from, at times.

I just hope honestly that I can earn this responsibility. I never say I’m campaigning, I never say I’m running for judge. That sounds political and it is just not what I believe in, I believe it is earning a responsibility. Which means at a minimum trying to get the interest of the public, and hopefully through that, perhaps their trust and willingness to come out and vote.”