

# Michael and Me

**In which our man in Washington celebrates diverse foods, enjoys Philip Morris' largess, and debates Social Security reform with a leftist documentary maker**

**Date:** Wed, December 2, 1998 3:24:59 PM  
**From:** mlynch@reasondc.org  
**Subj:** Season's Greetings

The Christmas, excuse me, holiday season commenced yesterday, marked by the arrival of the Philip Morris gift box, a Philadelphia Cream Cheese box the size of a small suitcase, stuffed with such Kraft Food favorites as "Cheezin 'n Squeezin pasteurized process cheese sauce," "Shake 'n Bake Perfect Potatoes Crispy Cheddar," and "Toblerone Mini."

I'm not ungrateful for the gift. I will no doubt use many of the products, and the family my wife Diana and I adopt for Christmas will probably make some use of the Cheeze Wiz. Still, one must fight off disappointment upon opening such a large box "From the Philip Morris Family of Companies"—a family that includes Miller Brewing and Philip Morris USA, the maker of Marlboros and distributor of Macanudos—and finding only Kraft's processed products, all of which have a shelf life that make them eligible for the Y2K stockpile. Why treat the good stuff, the very stuff of holiday cheer, like a redheaded stepchild?

December 1 also kicked off the holiday party parade. D.C. over the holidays is like a small town in which everyone wants to throw a party. The problem isn't getting people to show up—Where else would one eat dinner in December?—but finding enough days for all the parties. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce was first out of the chute.

The reception, sponsored by the Chamber's "Office of Congressional Affairs," was held in the Chamber's flag room, an ample ballroom with a bunch of Latin written on the dark wood of the Italian Renaissance ceiling. Julie DeFalco, a former Competitive Enterprise Institute analyst who defected to the Chamber to write speeches for its president, Thomas Donohue, informed me that the theme was "exploration."

"I'm the one who put you on the list," she told me, after I commented that I quite liked the organization of food choices by continent. I had already sampled two fajitas and a couple slivers of quesadilla at the Latin American table. I had traveled to Asia, where I piled a plate high with dumplings, pad thai, and the evening's most popular dish: duck, plum sauce, and a reed of green onion wrapped in a small Chinese tortilla. I always maintain that the best thing about multiculturalism is the food. (Celebrate Diverse Foods—the slogan of D.C. conservative inclusion.) "Maybe you can do one of your letters about it?" she suggested.

There were a lot of dark suits in the room, and I managed to get some work done. I ran into a staffer for the Senate leadership, who will remain anonymous so I can share his insights. "What's the thinking on Social Security?" I inquired as we waited for our turn at the bar, knowing he was helping to formulate the political game plan. We're not going to do anything until Clinton comes up with a plan, he replied.



Otherwise, he'll "punch the piss out of us." There you have it. The 106th Congress is preparing for battle with Clinton like a battered wife prepares for her husband's return from the bar.

I also ran into a professional staffer on the House Education Committee. He talked about being part of the machine that he used to rail against in his former life as a nongovernment employee. He deals a lot with bureaucrats in his new position. His report, which I absorbed while working on a large glass filled with Absolut Vodka and a splash of tonic, is that life-long bureaucrats are stupid, in addition to being petty and lazy, although there are certainly exceptions.

He's learning a lot. The nice thing about being a professional staffer, according to this fellow, is how easy you can carve out a bit of turf that you can dominate legislatively. Even the congressmen and congresswomen can only abuse you so much, since they depend on your expertise. It's an easy way to make a career, he said, although he's not planning on it.

Diana and I made one more pass through Asia—each picking up another duck roll—and headed out the door. We were home, buzzed and full, by 8:15. Nothing like December.

**Date:** Fri, December 4, 1998 3:43:40 PM  
**From:** mlynch@reasondc.org  
**Subj:** More Holiday News

The American Legislative Exchange Council cordially invited me to attend its holiday reception last night. Actually, upon hearing of it from my Institute for Justice suite mates, I called and invited myself, telling Eric Caron, ALEC's press guy, that I was doing a series on holiday parties in Washington. ALEC is hosting an annual meeting this week, and since it caters to Washington outsiders and wannabe insiders, a.k.a. state legislators, I thought it would be an interesting contrast to the usual Washington party. This just meant that I didn't know many people there.

Entering the reception at the Renaissance Hotel, I was confronted with two things. Well three things: a banner wel-

HENRY PAYNE

coming me from the family of Philip Morris companies, a bar sponsored by that generous family, and Caron. "Philip Morris is picking up the tab?" I asked, after brief pleasantries. The entire thing, he said. Noticing my firm grasp on a bottle of Miller Genuine Draft, he bragged: "This isn't even a Miller hotel."

I begged off, telling him it was time for me to gather news. I immediately ran into a gang of I.J.ers. "Where else can you find crab quesadillas at one of these things?" enthused I.J. attorney and Randian music critic Scott Bullock. The band was playing the Gap theme song—"Jump, Jive, and Wail." I decided to peruse the food tables.

There were indeed crab quesadillas. But they were distinguished from the rest of the fare, which consisted of trays of cheese, crackers, and raw vegetable platters. As a result, they were oversubscribed, and a line of eager legislators had formed. As the cook removed a burnt quesadilla from her pan, I decided not to wait for a sample.

The lights were low, making it hard for people to schmooze. It took more than the usual brief glance at someone's name tag to pick up the vitals. "Is your surname Reason?" a man asked in a Crocodile Dundee accent. I explained that I worked for REASON, a magazine, and was doing a story on holiday parties. "ALEC is brilliant," at "bringing politics and business together," he offered. It turns out that this fellow, Kym Bonnefin, is planning to do such a thing in Australia, which, he informed me, is composed of the same original stock as America. "Criminals," I replied. Kym soon moved on, but not before telling me that he had to meet 90 percent of the people in the room.

I was itching to leave, when I spotted the Reason Public Policy Institute's Ken Green. I headed over for a chat. "What are you doing here?" he asked, as if it were an exclusive gig, rather than an annual stuff-your-face fest. When I told him I was "covering the spreads," to borrow a line from Steve Postrel, for my column, I could tell he hadn't a clue of what I was talking about. You know, my Capital Letters column, I coaxed. No recognition. "Now Jacob's stuff I read," he jabbed, as I was giving him grief about not reading the magazine. "Did you read my last policy study?" he shot back. He had me pinned. It was time to leave.

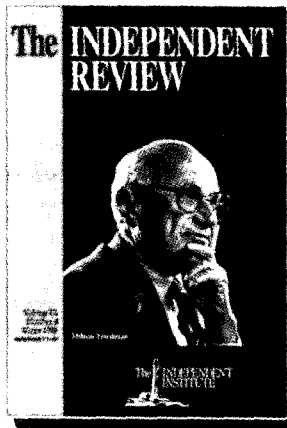
**Date: Wed, December 9, 1998 7:36:27 PM**  
**From: mlynch@reasondc.org**  
**Subj: White House Social Security Conference**

Headed to the White House conference on Social Security yesterday, which was held up at the Woodley Park Marriott near Chuck Freund's place. Popping out of a cab at 8:25 a.m., I managed to get my credential, make it through the metal detector, and slither to a seat right before a disembodied voice announced President Clinton's entrance. The only seat I could find, coming in a bit late, was to the stage's left, which happened to be just behind the section reserved for the day's presenters. So while I awaited the president's arrival, I found myself staring at the back of Norm Ornstein's head and listening to talk of "caps" and "rates of return." A fellow in front of me, who I later discovered was former Congressional Budget Office Director Robert Reischauer, was reading a critique of Martin Feldstein's partial privatization plan by the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities. He would later read

a document titled "AFSCME Opposes All Forms of Social Security Privatization," or something to that effect. This about sums up the approach the labor and left wings of the Democratic Party.

This conference was a big deal, which was reflected by the presence of high-rent policy wonks and more than a handful of congressmen. But while it was ostensibly designed for dialogue, no one was interested in listening to anyone else. And why should they be? The president talked eloquently about "putting progress ahead of partisanship," the need for everyone to "sacrifice their view of the perfect to work for the common good," and ended his talk by thumping the podium in an admonition to work together. But like most of what comes out of his mouth, this was just convenient blather. Social Security is like any other issue in Washington. It's about politics and spin: Doing what's right is but a tertiary consideration. And it was only after the president left the room that the real business—which C-SPAN's cameras, so diligently pointed at the stage, don't capture—commenced: the spin operation

**"The most exciting new journal in many years!" —WILLIAM NISKANEN, Cato Institute**



"Comprehensive, unique and powerful."  
 —HARRY BROWNE, bestselling author, *Why Government Always Fails*  
 "Very interesting and enjoyable!"  
 —DAVID FRUM, Contributing Editor, *The Weekly Standard*  
 "The Independent Review is a great read!" —CHARLTON HESTON, actor  
 "Excellent!" —GARY S. BECKER  
 Nobel Laureate in Economics



Transcending the all-too-common politicization and superficiality of public policy research and debate, *The INDEPENDENT REVIEW* is the acclaimed, quarterly journal devoted to individual liberty and the critical analysis of government policy. Edited by Robert Higgs, *The INDEPENDENT REVIEW* is superbly written, provocative, wide-ranging, and based on solid scholarship.

Ranging across economics, political science, law, history, philosophy, sociology, and related fields, *The INDEPENDENT REVIEW* boldly challenges the politicization and bureaucratization of our world, featuring in-depth examinations of current policy issues by many of the world's outstanding scholars and policy experts, and written in clear, vigorous English. Undaunted and uncompromising, this is *the* journal that is pioneering future debate!

**Figures • Tables • Annual Index • 160 Pages/Issue**  
**Individual Subscription: \$27.95/year • \$52.95/2-year**  
 International orders add \$28 per subscription for shipping

**800-927-8733**

**Fax: 510-568-6040**

**E-mail: [review@independent.org](mailto:review@independent.org)**  
**<http://www.independent.org>**

**The Independent Institute, Dept. 2R**  
**100 Swan Way, Oakland, CA 94621-1428**

in the back of the room.

I made the mistake of retaking my center-of-the-aisle seat for the second panel, which consisted of two people who must have distinguished themselves in Washington's wonk world but whom I had never heard of and hope to never hear from again: Marilyn Moon and Rudy Penner. (For the sake of diversity, they are both from the Urban Institute.) As they did their best to accurately portray a dull, dull, *dull topic, the din from the back of the room grew louder. I decided to shimmy out of my seat and join the noise.*

I located the source of the noise behind the bank of cameras. A gaggle of reporters

nothing until the president sends a complete plan to Congress?" He replied that he planned to introduce legislation in January, but that the president needs to lead.

The din must have grown unbearable for those trying to listen to the official program, because White House staff were pushing us upstairs. I finished my interview with Santorum just as we reached the top of the staircase. There was filmmaker Michael Moore, with his entourage of camera people, producers, and writers. He was soon interviewing Santorum, who should have had the good sense to stay away but who, like Reps. Mark Sanford (R-S.C.) and Clay Shaw (R-Fla.), was drawn

quite eligible for Social Security, later accosted me. "Have you talked to someone who lives entirely off Social Security?" she asked, pointing to two women. I showed her my cup in an attempt to end the conversation. But this wasn't enough, as she wanted to provide me with the human element. I pulled out my notepad, revealing Betty Miller's name under a page of scribble. "Betty, that's good," she said, and I was free.

Moore, by this time, was free too, and I sneaked passed his producers, writers, and cameramen and introduced myself. REASON—I know you guys, he said. You're 50 percent right, but forget that we are part of a human family. I had seen Moore at Ken Starr's congressional testimony and, given that the White House was testifying today on the Hill, I was interested in his news judgment in choosing to cover a conference on Social Security. "That's not an issue," he said. "That guy just lied about sex. Find me one guy who hasn't lied about sex. Some of us guys, the only way we get sex is to lie." Moore's producers soon separated us. "Got to work," he said, as he walked away to interview Congressman Shaw.

But I was soon back, with tape recorder in hand. I wanted his opinion on Social Security. "It should not be in the private sector at all," said Moore, who became *more animated and quicker with the quips* when his camera's light came on. "This is a public responsibility to take care of our people when they become old."

What about the argument that we need a better rate of return? I asked. "That's true," he said. "Why can't you do that investing in the market and having it controlled by the government. What's wrong with that?"

"Some would argue that's creeping socialism," I said, putting a little reportorial distance between myself and this opinion. "I want socialism to creep as fast as it can into the world because as an Irish Catholic all that word *socialism* means is that income should be fairly distributed and wealth should be fairly distributed among the people," Moore responded. "The camel will have an easier time getting through the eye of a needle than a rich man getting into heaven."

It was 11:40 a.m. I was hungry. I left for lunch.

**This, my friends, is how Washington insiders and reporters meet real people. Interest groups provide them to us. It's like a traveling zoo.**

surrounded an ample, bearded man, whom I didn't recognize but who was most likely from the White House. Many others were talking on cell phones. "I think it went fine," I overheard Sen. Rick Santorum (R-Pa.) tell someone on his phone. Santorum had earlier delivered a speech. And as harsh a critic as I am, I must say his assessment was correct. He had presence, and props. The president even took notes. Santorum articulated a clear case for individual accounts, taking head-on the argument that we must keep the current system intact because it privileges women and widows.

The wife of a man who worked his entire life but died at 61, just a year prior to eligibility for early benefits, would receive a whopping \$255 death benefit, explained Santorum, as he held up four bills totaling that amount. Now if that same man had invested his taxes in an individual account, Santorum continued, his bereaved wife would receive more than \$260,000, and he pulled out a foot-high stack of faux money. Clinton's eyes lit up: Perhaps he was thinking the cash would be of use for his legal bills. After Santorum finished his speech, he even let Clinton fondle the money.

I was able to get a short interview with Santorum. "In light of your bold advocacy for individual accounts today," I led, buttering him up, "do you think it's wise to do

to Moore's celebrity and camera like a bug to a zap lamp.

I stood surveying the scene. Gene Sperling, the White House point man on Social Security, was surrounded by reporters, speaking, no doubt, the truth in very serious tones. (I only know it was Sperling because a White House flack suggested I might want to join the crowd.) An older woman, a real live senior citizen, handed me a paper coffee cup. It was Betty Miller from the National Council of Senior Citizens (NCSC), a labor-backed seniors group adamantly opposed to any change. The cup entitled me to a free cup of coffee. But it was really an attempt to play on my fears. "The Social Security Debate in a Cup," the cup read. "Should the current system be scrapped so Americans can invest 2 percent of their income—the price of a cup of coffee a day—in a volatile stock market?"

Miller, a retired government worker, lives on Social Security and a bit of other income. She was there for first-person testimony on how important the program is. But I was not to take her word for it—she pointed out two other seniors who live exclusively on their Social Security checks. This, my friends, is how Washington insiders and reporters meet real people. Interest groups provide them to us. It's like a traveling zoo.

Another NCSC activist, a woman not

**Date:** Wed, December 9, 1998 8:02:44 PM  
**From:** mlynch@reasondc.org  
**Subj:** Moore's Tripped Up

Yesterday at quitting time I headed over to the Hay Adams Hotel, where a celebration was being held in honor of Mark Davis and Gary Aldrich, who had just co-authored a novel, *Speak No Evil*. I arrived about a half-hour late, circa 6 p.m. The room was packed and abuzz with talk of D.C. celebrities, Aldrich himself counting as one in some circles. (He is the FBI agent turned bestselling author whose book *Unlimited Access* alleged all sorts of White House "shenanigans.") Someone pointed out Donna Rice-Hughes, of Gary Hart fame, who is now an anti-porn activist. And several people told me that Linda Tripp was scheduled to appear.

About midway into Aldrich's speech, Tripp arrived, basking in the lights of an adoring TV camera. People who tell the truth about this town shouldn't be chained to the back of a pickup truck and dragged through the streets, said Aldrich, who soon would ask for a round of applause for

those bold enough to tell the truth.

After the speeches, I edged my way to the bar to pick up a beer. Tripp was nowhere in sight. I ran into former *America's Voice* anchor Genevieve Wood. The topic somehow turned to Gus Van Sant's remake of *Psycho*. "I don't need to see any lesbians," blurted Wood. I turned around and was facing Linda Tripp.

"My name is Michael Lynch. I am from REASON magazine," I offered, as I shook her hand. My eyes were oscillating between her eyes and a diamond-studded brooch covering her blouse's top button. I was paralyzed, not knowing what to say. "I, too, tape my phone conversations with a Radio Shack recorder," came to mind, but I thought better of it. "So what did you think of the impeachment hearings today?" was another possibility, although I was sure others would use it.

She had registered recognition when I mentioned REASON, perhaps believing in free minds and free markets. Finally, with nothing intelligent to say, I resorted to flattery. I told her that while I was bored with the whole thing, there was someone on our

staff to whom she was a personal hero. She appeared pleased.

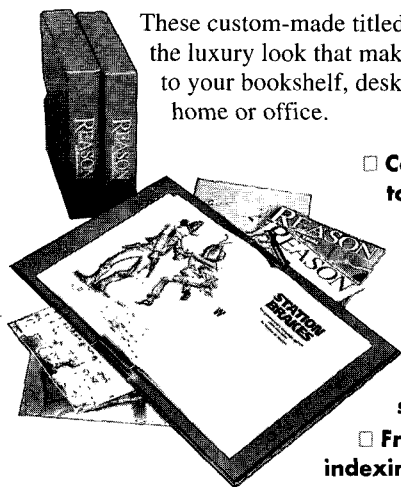
I was soon out the door. Stepping off the elevator in the lobby, I was again confronted with Michael Moore. I pulled out my notepad and approached him to ask how he squared such digs with his egalitarian outlook. But it turned out he wasn't staying at the hotel, just stalking Linda Tripp. He was being prevented from going to the party by hotel staff.

"I see you everywhere," I said. He asked if I was trying to see Tripp. I told him I had just returned from doing exactly that. I asked him how he felt about being on my Washington beat. He said he didn't like it at all. I may make a libertarian out of you, I twitted, noticing that his mind was someplace else—perhaps on the footage of Tripp he didn't get. "I am half with you," he said. "Pro-choice, legalize drugs, keep the government out of our bedrooms, even when they are attached to the Oval Office." As I walked to the Metro, I thought, That's the part of libertarianism I like best too. Although I don't think there's a bedroom attached to the Oval Office. ♦

#### ORGANIZE AND PROTECT YOUR COPIES OF

# REASON

Now there's an easy way to organize and keep copies of REASON readily available for future reference.



These custom-made titled cases and binders provide the luxury look that makes them attractive additions to your bookshelf, desk, or any location in your home or office.

☐ Cases and binders designed to hold a year's issues (issue sizes will vary).

☐ Constructed of heavy reinforced board, covered with durable leather-like material in red.

☐ Title hot-stamped in silver.

☐ Free personalization foil for indexing year.

☐ Cases V-notched for easy access.

☐ Binders have special spring mechanism which allows magazines to be fully opened for easy readability.

## REASON

Jesse Jones Industries  
Dept. 95RSN  
499 East Erie Avenue  
Philadelphia, PA 19134

Quantity	Cases	Binders
One	\$ 8.95	\$11.25
Three	24.95	31.85
Six	45.95	60.75

Add \$1.50 per case/binder postage and handling. Outside USA \$3.50 per case/binder (U.S. funds only). PA residents add 7% sales tax.

Please send \_\_\_\_\_ cases; \_\_\_\_\_ binders for REASON Magazine.

Enclosed is \$ \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Charge my: (minimum \$15)

☐ American Express ☐ Visa  
☐ MasterCard ☐ Diners Club

Card # \_\_\_\_\_

Exp. Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Charge Orders: Call Toll Free 7 days, 24 hours 1-800-825-6690

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Please Print

Address \_\_\_\_\_

No P.O. Box Numbers Please

City \_\_\_\_\_

State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Allow 4-6 weeks for delivery.

# Martian Chronicle

Mars may well be the next great frontier. But what kind of world should we make there?

A couple of years ago, after hearing an engineer named Robert Zubrin rhapsodize about his plan for a privately financed expedition to Mars, I tried out the idea on America's masters of marketing. I sent an outline of the scheme to Bill Gates, Ted Turner, Barry Diller, Peter Uberroth, television executives such as ABC's Roone Arledge and NBC's Don Ohlmeyer, the leaders of DreamWorks, and a long list of other people whose names tend to be accompanied by the word visionary. I wasn't asking for money, just for their thoughts on how humanity's interplanetary adventure could be packaged profitably, but most of them didn't even want to think about it. Except for a few enthusiasts, they couldn't imagine how you could make the trip interesting enough to pay the bills. How could you hold the audience for such a long trip to such a desolate place?

By John Tierney

