

Bird receives 'Integrity' award; criticizes press

By Angela Muniz
Emerald Editorial Editor

More than 250 people came to remember Wayne Morse and honor the woman reflecting his ideals when Rose Bird accepted the first annual Wayne Morse Integrity in Politics award on Saturday.

Bird, former chief justice of

the California Supreme Court, received two standing ovations as she spoke to an audience filled with politicians, friends and admirers of Morse. She told them how she believes America has become an "instant society" because of quick, superficial news briefs.

"The media, I believe, are a remarkable mirror of American society — they show us reflec-

tive images of who and what we are," she said.

The press has a large impact on people's lives, she stated, and while it can be foolish or destructive, it can also be wise and constructive. Bird stressed that the press must have the freedom to cover issues as it wishes.

"The press will never feel free if it is chilled by codifica-

tion," Bird said.

As a mirror of society, the media have quickened to meet people's fast-paced demands, she continued. This, in turn, affects our ability to think about deeper moral and philosophical questions.

"The need for time to think has never been greater, but the opportunities to do so are few and far between," she said.

The substitution of "reflex for reflection" will have a negative impact on America's future and the rule of law, Bird explained.

America has moved into a "life-in-the-fast-lane urgency," without a sense of purpose. Because of this lack of stability, America clings to ideas hoping they will support us then discards them, she said.

"Things are happening so fast we have no sense of what they mean. Our days become like changing channels on a television set," Bird continued.

A society that seems to revolve around television "demands instant action to the most complex of problems," she said.

According to Bird, America has become an "instant society" from disposable food to disposable news. While people can instantly know news from around the globe, they forget events from only 10 years ago and fail to correlate them with events happening now.

Bird, who lost her re-election campaign for the California Supreme Court last year when her opponents ran ads claiming she let murderers go free, criticized the press for condoning superficiality.

"Subtleties are necessary casualties in the television network's battle for ratings," she explained. "And long consequences that cannot be explained in less than one minute are often not explained at all."

Without this detail or explanation, she continued, America loses its "sense of history and with it a measure of our own humanity as well."

Reality has been replaced with an image so that the "appearance of what is being packaged becomes... far more important than the package's content," she said.

Even though the images may be inconsistent, she added, "consistency is hardly a prerequisite to success in a society so conditioned to focus on the moment."

Bird concluded the burden put upon the media is great. They must take the responsibility to report in-depth news and refrain from the instant package.

"We must have commentators who have the ability and freedom to bring insight and understanding to the blur and glare of current events," she explained.

But it also is the public's responsibility to encourage this coverage from the press, she added.

"We should not cease to applaud and support the press in its endeavors to shine light into the dark recesses of governmental decision-making," she said.

"But when the press simplifies and trivializes things in the name of entertainment, when the press contrives polls and other barometers of public opinion as if they were always entitled to the final word of democratic government, when the press is willing to disregard the individuals freedom of speech and right to privacy in favor of the untraveled exercise of its own authority, then we must balk," she added.

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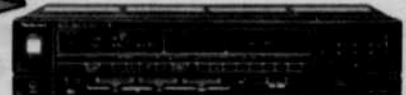
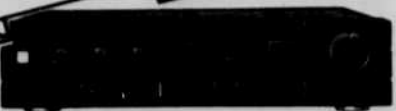
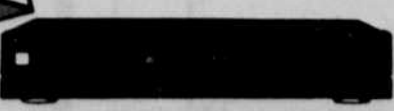
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