MEMORIAL RESOLUTION
LYNTON KEITH CALDWELL
(November 21, 1913 –August 15, 2006)

Service to the environment was the hallmark of Lynton Keith Caldwell’s professional and private life. He will be remembered best as the leading contributor to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), a law that opened the floodgates of important environmental legislation and that continues to share responsibility for protecting America’s environmental legacy with the results: the Clear Water Act, the Clean Air Act, the Endangered Species Act. But NEPA was only the best known of Professor Caldwell’s undertakings.

Lynton Keith Caldwell was born in Iowa on November 21, 1913. He received a BA from the University of Chicago and an AM from Harvard University. Upon completion of the AM, he joined the faculty at Indiana University for the first time in 1938. Five years later, he completed his doctorate in political science at the University of Chicago. He returned to Indiana University in 1956, retiring in 1984, but remaining active well into the 1990s.

At Indiana University, Keith was instrumental in founding the School of Public and Environmental Affairs. Appointed by IU President John Ryan in 1971 to serve on a committee (with first SPEA dean Charles Bonser) to consider the formation of a school of public affairs he advocated strongly for the inclusion of an environmental focus in the curriculum and in the name of the new school. When SPEA opened in 1972, Professor Caldwell was a member of the new faculty.

In his early scholarship, Professor Caldwell concentrated primarily on public administration. Not until the 1960s, after two decades of national and international scholarship in that area, did he turn his considerable skills to the question of bringing an environmental awareness to the legal and political arenas. He was to speak, later, of having had a “revelation” concerning the importance of understanding the relationships between humans and the environment. Probing those relationships and the question of human responsibility for environmental impacts would occupy the remainder of his long professional life. But his largest impact, NEPA, would come about the end of the decade.

As a political scientist bent on fomenting environmental policy, Keith Caldwell was one of only a few thinkers in what was then a vast emptiness. The nation was only just beginning to turn its attention to matters of the environment, and no thought had yet been given to how that attention might be translated into the working machinery of government. His 1963 article Environment: A New Focus for Public Policy was groundbreaking. He saw, early on, that the environment was a large, integrated complexity that could not be addressed through reductionism, but rather required a holistic definition, however difficult that might be to encompass.
As Congress was struggling to craft a law that would begin to provide accountability for environmental impacts, Professor Caldwell was asked to serve as an advisor and later a consultant to the proceedings. He would eventually author much of the Act. In sweeping language, the law laid out a national policy of responsible environmental use, provided a means to ensure transparency in government actions that affect the environment, and formed a Council on Environmental Quality to assist the President in formulating environmental policy and to review governmental programs that affect the environment.

In the years following NEPA, Professor Caldwell was both a champion of the Act’s potential and an enumerator of its shortfalls. He recognized the immense importance of environmental impact statements – the instrument by which the government reports to the public the potential environmental effects of its proposed actions. But he mourned the unfulfilled possibilities of the Act’s broad description of national responsibility toward the environment and blamed the courts, particularly the Supreme Court, for failing to support the Congressional intent embodied in those parts of the Act. He also saw the unrealized power of the Council of Environmental Quality, stymied repeatedly by many administrations. His last book, The National Environmental Policy Act: An Agenda for the Future, published in 1998, makes these points and emphasizes the untapped strength of the Act, not only for domestic but also for international environmental policy.

The excellence and importance of Professor Caldwell’s work was recognized repeatedly. He held the Arthur F. Bentley Chair in Political Science at IU. He was named to the United Nations Global 500 Laureate Roll of Honor for service to the environment. Additional awards were conferred by the American Society for Public Administration and the Natural Resources Council. In recognition of his achievements, the American Political Science Association annually gives the Lynton Keith Caldwell Award to the best book of the previous three years in the area of environmental politics and policy.

Despite the volume of his publications and the depth and breadth of his service to environmental policy, or perhaps to balance it, Keith Caldwell also brought his passion for the environment to local affairs. He supported the foundation of the Indiana chapter of the Nature Conservancy. In 1990, he helped to start the Sycamore Land Trust, a land conservation organization active in the south-central Indiana landscape he loved. The house he shared with his wife Helen became a small monument to that love, seated at the edge of a restored prairie, against a backdrop of hardwood forest.

Lynton Keith Caldwell leaves behind a legacy of scholarship; a law that has served as the foundation for countless similar laws of environmental protection at the local, national, and international level; strong local environmental institutions; as well as his wife Helen, his son Edwin, and his daughter, Emma. His passion will be missed.
This memorial resolution will become part of the minutes of the Bloomington Faculty Council.

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