

## What we're not doing about Schizophrenia

"The left always looks at things through the prism of government, so they are saying: Where was the state, where were the schools? I would say: Where were the parents, the friends, the neighbors? Who are the people who know this man? And what were they doing about it?"

Thus, according to the Wall Street Journal, spake Rick Santorum, former Senator and potential Republican presidential candidate, about the family of the Arizona shooter, Jason Loughner. Proving, rather simply, that Rick Santorum is a flaming idiot.

I don't know what Jason Loughner's parents did or did not do, but I do know what hurdles the Rick Santorums have thrown at them. And I can very well imagine how they felt, watching the inevitable train wreck coming, knowing that they were powerless to stop it. You see, my son too suffers from schizophrenia.

We only learned of his diagnosis 9 months ago, but are already quite familiar with the barriers the Santorums have created. The one for example that says we can't push an erratic child into treatment unless he poses a clear danger to himself or other – and of course, in Arizona merely carrying around a loaded Glock is not a "clear danger" until you empty it into a crowd. Or the barrier that says, should you get your son into treatment, that the treatment providers are by law not permitted to keep you informed about that treatment, unless it's OKed by the patient whose judgment is already distorted by the disease.

Fortunately – Oh the irony, how bad fortune becomes good – fortunately, our son has been arrested several times for disorderly conduct. Fortunately, Rick, because the government **can** mandate the treatment that the parents **can't**. Assuming the government actually gives a damn. Our experience, of helpful but rule restricted Oshkosh police; of prosecutors who prefer convictions to solutions; of perverse jail staff who won't allow visits to their schizophrenic and therefore uncooperative inmates if – get this – in being thrust into the jail environment, their perceptions distorted by illness, they have not initiated a specific request for a visitor; our experience is that the system doesn't give a rip, and does its darnedest not to allow the people who know this man to have a chance to do anything about it.

With, thank God, one exception. Our son's probation officer, Terrence Slife, has been a Godsend, requiring our son to get the medical and counseling treatment he needs but would not voluntarily accept. I'm sorry, Mr. and Mrs. Loughner, that your son was never arrested for his disturbed behavior and then assigned to a single public employee both able, and most importantly willing, to do something about it. Maybe if he had, Rick Santorum would not have had this opportunity to prove what a contemptible swine he is.

Schizophrenia affects about 1% of all adults, with onset typically between the ages of 14 and 28. That's around 800 adults here in Winnebago County who struggle with this debilitating disease. That's about 35 children currently enrolled in Elementary school in the Oshkosh Public School System – about 3 at E.Cook, about 4 at Read, about 5 at Traeger – who will suddenly, with no forewarning, develop this disease over the next decade or two.

On behalf of those children, and their yet-to-become heartbroken parents, I say thank you Rick Santorum, you smug self satisfied sanctimonious SOB you. Thank you, Rick, for absolutely nothing.