

**Prof. Bassam Shakhashiri's Remarks
at the March for Science – Madison
Saturday, April 22
Library Mall
UW-Madison Campus**

Thank you very much Tia. It's always a pleasure to be introduced by a former student.

Today we march together in Madison and with others across the country and around the world [applause] to support, to defend, and to celebrate science.

[applause]

We march peacefully and affirm our commitment both to advocate for the advancement of science through research and exploration... AND to assure serving society through innovation, economic prosperity, and public engagement.

We march as scientists, as citizens—to express our unwavering beliefs in democracy and to act responsibly to defend the sovereignty of the planet.

[applause]

This march is an event to inspire and motivate. It is part of a process, a process in which each one of us commit to carry forward.

As we mark Earth Day, we remember the words of its founder Gaylord Nelson who said, and I quote:

“Our goal is not just an environment of clean air and water and scenic beauty. The objective is an environment of decency, quality, and mutual respect for all other human beings and all other living creatures.”

[applause]

Today the BIG question for science, for society, for you and I, the big question is: how to help sustain Earth and its people in the face of: population growth, finite resources, malnutrition, spreading disease, deadly violence, war, climate change, and the denial of basic human rights, especially the right to benefit from scientific and technological progress.

[applause]

We all ask questions. We seek to satisfy our curiosity.

We are dazzled by complexity.

We try to reduce ambiguity.

We use reason and we look for simplicity.

In science we do what we do because it interests us, it satisfies our curiosity, we enjoy it. However, we have a responsibility to humanity as a whole.

It is not enough for us to be just scientists; we have a responsibility to be citizens as well.

[applause]

As scientist-citizens we have an obligation to use our skills for the benefit of all. This requires us to have and adhere to high values and virtues as scientists and citizens to advance and to serve society.

We must strive to achieve science literacy among the general public. Science literacy does not imply a detailed knowledge of Chemistry, physics, or biology, but rather a broad understanding and appreciation of what science is capable of achieving and, equally important, what science cannot accomplish.

Science literacy enables us and enables the public to make informed choices, to reject unproven conjecture [applause] and

to avoid being bamboozled into making foolish decisions where matters of science and technology are concerned.

[applause]

As we enter into conversations among ourselves and with the general public let us recognize that the nature of the discourse is very different than what we say and do when we converse with science colleagues. We must develop and learn the importance of speaking *with* people and not speaking *at* them.

[applause]

We must listen. Yes, we must listen carefully.

We must be purposeful.

And exactly what is our purpose?

I say the first purpose of a conversation is to have another conversation.

What is our big purpose? I say our big purpose is to influence public sentiment.

President Lincoln said best. He said, and I quote:

“Public sentiment is everything. With public sentiment, nothing can fail; without it nothing can succeed.”

I ask each one of you to join in engaging in purposeful conversations, not only with each other, but with others, to sustain the momentum of this march. I ask that you be responsible, I ask that you be thoughtful, and I ask that you be effective.

Thank you very much.

[applause]