



---

Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich – Scouts Australia Gala Benefit Dinner

---

## **Remarks of Ambassador Bleich to Gala Benefit Dinner, Scouts Australia, Canberra**

*(As prepared for delivery – August 25, 2012)*

Mr. Neville Tomkins OAM, JP, International Commissioner, Scouts Australia

Mr. Bede (BEED) Tongs MM, World War II Veteran from Kokoda Track

Mr. Garry Tongs, son of Mr. Bede Tongs

Thank you, Aaron, for that very kind introduction. And thank you, Commissioner Neville Tompkins and Scouts Australia, for inviting me to speak here tonight. It is a real privilege to celebrate a great tradition that binds our nations.

Before I begin my remarks, I would like to especially recognize Mr. Bede Tongs AM and his son Garry. As you know, Mr. Tongs is a decorated WWII veteran who served with great distinction in the Kokoda Track Campaign. It is a genuine privilege to share the podium with you this evening, Sir.

When Commissioner Tomkins invited me to join you tonight, he asked me to share some personal reflections on why international scouting is important for building a better world. And those personal reflections start with the Scouts in my life. My father in law is an Eagle Scout. My son Jake is also an Eagle Scout. And our son Matthew is already a life scout and working his way to Eagle.

The only weak link in this chain is me. I started out as a Cub Scout. But I left the Cub Scouts, since my father thought it would be fun for us to do Indian Guides together instead as a father-son thing. I came to regret that, especially when I discovered that it required us to march down Main Street each year in the Memorial Day parade wearing loin cloths. My father also cursed us with the Native American names of “Bald Eagle” and “Little Eagle” – which I blame for my current hairline.



---

Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich – Scouts Australia Gala Benefit Dinner

---

So it's probably natural that I came back to scouting later in life. After my sons started scouting, I became an assistant scout master. For those of you haven't done this, it is a great education in survival skills, particularly if you have the ability to survive teenagers who have access to fire. Let me share a couple of those survival lessons.

First, you really shouldn't go to bed until after the fire is extinguished. If you go to bed before the fire is out, it tends to make the boys curious. They ask questions like, "I wonder what would happen if I threw this into the fire?"

And by "this" they mean a C-5 Estes rocket engine.

This experience will teach you a couple of key survival skills. First, do not post your tent too close to the fire. And second, "be prepared" means be prepared to sleep the second night with a hole burned in your tent.

Another good survival skill is having the right equipment. One way I learned this occurred when one of the boys discovered that a C-5 rocket engine fits perfectly in the end of a 64 oz. soda bottle. It turns out that soda bottles are not designed to work as rockets – something that became evident as one whizzed within inches of my head.

Another learning moment had to do with cooking equipment. If you bring marshmallows, make sure that the scouts have had a chance to roast and eat their marshmallows before they put out the fire...or else they might try to cook their marshmallows by roasting them over fuel cans. Let's just say that this strategy is not ideal for the adolescent digestive system.

So use the right equipment.

What do these lessons have to do with making the world a better place? Don't throw things into fires. Be prepared...and bring the right equipment.

As the American Ambassador to Australia, I practice these key lessons every day and in different ways. So tonight I'd like to talk a little bit about the scout oath from the perspective of a recovering lawyer and a diplomat. And my point tonight is a simple one. As important as law and diplomacy are to our world, the values in the Scout oath are ultimately the bedrock on which our futures rest.

Law is good but it is also compelled by the state. Diplomacy is good but it is done under the shadow of armies. What sets the oath apart is that it is voluntary. No one is born a scout...or forced to be a scout. In joining scouting, each of us chooses whether to take the oath. And we don't follow the oath because we fear going to jail or being fined. We take the oath because we believe in it.



---

Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich – Scouts Australia Gala Benefit Dinner

---

I practiced law for many years and I believe that the law is a great force for good. But it also reflects something missing in our character. Every time we have to pass a law, it means that the social codes that hold us together were not strong enough. We shouldn't need a law against littering; if everyone just picks up after themselves we leave the earth clean. When we have so much litter that we need a law to stop it, it diminishes us a little.

In my current job, I fly a lot. I've seen people do lots of strange things on airplanes, but there are certain social codes that I've never seen broken. For example, I've never seen someone clip their toenails on the plane. I hope none of you have either. That's because everyone knows that it is disgusting. We shouldn't need a special federal regulation or treaty to forbid toenail clipping on planes. We do this voluntarily. We do it as a courtesy to others as an act of personal responsibility. So if we come to a point where so many passengers start clipping toenails that we have to pass laws to stop it, it diminishes all of us.

That is true of all laws. When we have to pass laws against discrimination, pollution, cruelty to animals, it means that too many of us, too many times, have failed to live up to our better selves.

The same is true in global affairs today. We live in a complicated world with limited resources and different nations with different cultures and traditions and languages drawn ever closer together by technology. Conflicts and disagreements are inevitable. And yet, we have created large zones of peace and prosperity in this world through nothing more than good behavior and mutual agreements...not laws or force. Every day we work with other nations to reach agreements, make rules of engagement, and work with multilateral organizations to peacefully resolve any disputes.

One of the most compelling things about the U.S.-Australia relationship is not all of the agreements we have signed into law, but how relatively few. Over 70 years, we have built the Australian-American partnership on common values that we share and by building trust and respect. Our deepest bonds aren't legislated. They are things we do naturally, agreements we reach voluntarily. Like an oath, they reflect a mutual pledge to try to make the world better, to work together, and to do our best mentally, physically, and morally.

The ability to have this perspective, to see the world as a place where we all benefit by taking personal responsibility to do our best, is not something that law can ever really create. It is something you need to learn, to experience, to allow to become part of your life. In a world of billions of people, there will never be enough laws, guns, fences, or bombs to keep us secure. It is the social bonds – the idea that others will value our lives as much as they value theirs – on which our future rests.



---

Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich – Scouts Australia Gala Benefit Dinner

---

Our future also rests on the choices we make every day in ways big and small: we make choices about the products we buy, how we heat our homes, the causes we support, the assumptions we challenge, and the leaders we elect. No one can legislate good answers to all of those choices. It has to come from within.

The experiences we have as scouts, and that we teach as scout masters, are essential to diplomacy. (1) Be prepared. Our job is to anticipate whatever could happen and then help to shape good outcomes and prevent bad ones. (2) Use the right equipment. We need the right tools to stop conflicts. Sometimes it is diplomacy. Sometimes it is aid. Sometimes it is force. But selecting the right tool for the right occasion is one of the most critical skills. And (3) Don't throw things into fires. Even a fire that looks extinguished may have dangerous sparks or embers, looking for a chance to re-ignite. This is true of conflicts too. The measure of success in any battle is the peace that follows. A lasting peace requires that we tend as carefully to ensuring that a fire is truly out, as we did to building it in the first place.

I look at the many famous Scouts who have lived by these principles and by the Scout Oath who have advanced our two nations.

Neil Armstrong, the first man to set foot on the moon, his image captured and relayed to the world by Australian tracking stations.

President Gerald Ford, who signed multiple treaties with Australia. I walk by the tree he planted here in Canberra every day on my way to the Chancery.

Steve Fossett, the great adventurer, who circumnavigated the globe in a balloon – landing here in Australia on July 4, 2002.

And I think especially today of Senator Lamar Alexander, a great Secretary of Education, and a person who has loved his experiences in Australia so much that he wrote a book about it. As a Governor, Secretary of Education, and now as a Senator, he has led efforts to get parents to read to their children and with their children. This is now part of the scouting tradition as well. 2012 has been declared the National Year of Reading and today has been marked as the day for community leaders to promote reading among families.

Their achievements reflect a lifetime of preparation, of devotion to Country, of commitment to others, of being mentally awake and morally straight. No law can propel a man to the moon, or compel them to circumnavigate the globe, or to read with their children. These things must come from within – from the volunteer spirit of scouting.



---

Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich – Scouts Australia Gala Benefit Dinner

---

Today, as I look across the world's landscape as a diplomat, I see the world's challenges. I see Assad killing his own citizens in Syria, al-Qaeda terrorists plotting in Yemen, hunger in North Korea, threats and belligerence in Iran. And yet, I also see hope for all nations. Not too long ago, my son Jake attended the 100 year anniversary of scouting at Brownsea four years ago, where he camped for two weeks with scouts from all over the world. Boys and girls of all nationalities and religions from 190 countries volunteered to live together by the scout code. I saw them planting and building parks, helping the Red Cross, reaching out to those who felt alone or ill. Seeing this gives me hope. That together we can continue to help stir in young people from every corner of the globe, the desire to make this a better world.

That is why I look around this room tonight and it gives me hope as Ambassador. It reminds me that our future is in good hands. Thank you again for all you do; our world depends on it.