



Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich – Scouts Benefit Dinner

**Remarks of Ambassador Bleich
at the Scouts Australia (ACT Branch) Benefit Dinner,
Canberra**

(As prepared for delivery – June 5, 2010)

Good evening. Thank you for that very kind introduction. I'm particularly glad that my in-laws were here from California to see that. My father-in-law seemed to enjoy it, and my mother-in-law may have actually believed it.

Thank you Commissioner Neville Tompkins and Scouts Australia for inviting me to speak to you tonight. It is a real privilege to be here to celebrate a great tradition that binds our nations.

Scouting is a great international tradition; but it is also a family tradition for me. My Father-in-Law David Pratt who is with us tonight is an Eagle Scout. Our son Jake, sitting there is also an Eagle Scout. And our son Matthew, who is only 15, is already a life scout and is working his way to Eagle.

The only weak link in this chain is me. I started out as a Cub Scout. But 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 meant each year in the Memorial Day parade we had to march down Main Street wearing loin cloths. My father also named us "Bald Eagle" and "Little Eagle" – which I blame for my growing up to be bald.

So it's probably natural that I came back to scouting later in life. After our boys 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 surviving teen-agers who have access to fire. Let me share a couple of those 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 this is a small rocket engine.



Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich – Scouts Benefit Dinner

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

A second survival skill is having the right equipment. If you bring marshmallows, make sure that the scouts have had a chance to roast and eat their marshmallows before you put out the fire. Or else they might try might still try to cook their marshmallows by roasting them over fuel cans. Which, let’s just say, is not ideal for the adolescent digestive system. So use the right tool.

Bottom line. Put out the fire at the right time. A major life lesson.

But I’d say the greatest lesson I’ve learned is reverence. I learned this especially when we arranged a trip to launch rockets with a group of scouts in some remote dunes in Northern California.

We were out there in nature, sending these beautiful vessels we built soaring into the clear blue heavens. Around us was sea and sand, and there was this feeling of one-ness. One of the people who came along with us was another scout master who was actually a rocket scientist at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, and he and I sat calmly off in the middle of no where, experiencing the miracle of space flight. And after sending off every rocket we had for about two hours, we had nothing left to shoot off and there was this serenity.

But apparently the boys weren’t spiritually satisfied yet. Instead, by divine inspiration, they noticed that the hole in the end of a soda bottle is exactly the same size as a C-5 Estes rocket engine. And while Bob and I are leaning over to pick up some supplies, we suddenly hear this sizzling sound of an engine about to reach ignition from the back end of a giant Fanta Bottle. And as it lifts off the ground and begins a crazy spiral, the rocket scientist says: “that doesn’t look very stable.” At which point hundreds of pounds of thrust packed inside an Orange Fanta bottle come flying at our heads.

It was at that moment when the Scout code to be reverent and bow your head came in especially handy. The bottle whizzed just above our heads and ended up in infinity and beyond. As Winston Churchill said, “there is nothing more exhilarating than to be fired upon. Without consequence.” I think Sir Winston would have loved being a scout master.

So if I learned nothing else from scouting, it is that scouting builds character.

What is amazing though is that the lessons of scouting – have worked across every generation, every age, and in every country for over a century. Scouting currently is



Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich – Scouts Benefit Dinner

shaping and strengthening the character of thousands of young people, boys and girls, of all nationalities and religions in over 190 countries. It is universal. Our son Jake attended the 100 year anniversary of scouting at Brownsea three years ago. Where he camped for two weeks with Scouts from all over the world. Including the Finnish scouts who were in the camp next to him. He was glad that Finnish Scouting is co-ed.

Australia's and America's scouting programs are among the oldest in the world. Australia adopted its own Scouting program the year after it was founded. We in the United States were a little bit behind, starting two years later, so we are just celebrating our 100th anniversary this year. But we've tried to make up for lost time. The U.S. is now the largest scouting program in the world with 9 and a half million registered members.

The value of scouting though is not measured by how long it has lasted, or how many people it has included, or how many countries it has touched. The truest measure is the people it has produced. Some of the best people I have known in my life – whether they were presidents and prime ministers, or teachers or coaches or volunteers or business leaders – have been Scouts.

What makes Scouting so universal, so long-lived, and so good at shaping leaders is that it taps into certain eternal principles about how we all live together. At its core, Scouting teaches that each and every one of us can improve the lives of others. While the language of Scouting Codes around the world may vary a little, the essentials are the same:

To do my best physically, mentally and morally. . . to do my duty. . . to respect others . . . to help others at all times, to stand up for what's right – these are the watch words of a good Scout. Those are the qualities we admire in others: trust, loyalty, courtesy, kindness, bravery and humility.

So tonight I'd like to talk a little bit about the scout oath from the perspective of a 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.

I practiced law for many years, and I believe 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



Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich – Scouts Benefit Dinner

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 the 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 peoples, there will never be enough laws, or guns, or 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.

I look at some of the challenges we face today, like the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. The problem there was a lack of personal responsibility by people making key decisions. Scouts are taught to understand that the world exists for everyone, especially those



Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich – Scouts Benefit Dinner

generations that haven't even been born yet. It is how they think about the world. If your responsibility is not simply to your family and your company, but to the land and to all of the people and animals who live in the Gulf of Mexico today and in the future, then you wouldn't extract oil without making sure you also invested in also protecting the Gulf from an accident.

We face these choices 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.

That is why I look at the Scouts in this room tonight and it gives me hope. When I talk to young people who volunteer in their communities to rebuild a community center that burned down, or to run a Red Cross canteen during an emergency. . . . When I see young people giving up a weekend to clean up a park or visit the elderly. . . . When they turn up by the thousands at rallies to show their support for efforts to reduce climate change or world poverty. . . . Or when I meet people like Alysia Major and the other young people who are here tonight, I'm filled with optimism because I know that our future is in good hands. I know we can make progress.

I saw it demonstrated before my eyes in our last presidential election. When Barack Obama first announced that he was running for President, many people -- including many Americans -- thought that America was too racist to elect a black man President. They thought America was too isolated and xenophobic to elect a man with a foreign sounding name like Barack Hussein Obama. They thought red states and blue states were so incapable of listening to each other that their votes could not change. And yet, we were better than we thought we were. We could look past the color of a man's skin and judge him on the content of his character. We could look out to the rest of the world and see greatness of other nations and other people. We could listen and learn that we are all much more purple than we are red or blue. It did not take laws or force. It only took individuals saying three little words: "Yes We Can."

Each of us has that same capacity for good -- whether as an Ambassador or as student, to do more for others. That is the greatest hope for our future. Young people around the globe doing their best to do their duty, to build better communities, develop safer cleaner energy and drinking water, teach others, and give everyone a fair-go.

In the end, Margaret Mead summed up better than anyone else the power of the Scouting tradition to do good.

"Never doubt the ability of a small group of committed people to change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has."



Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich – Scouts Benefit Dinner

Congratulations Scouts. Yes we can.