

24th Annual Governor's Luncheon for Scouting
Governor Eric J. Holcomb
November 26, 2019

Remarks as prepared for delivery

Thanks, Debra, and thanks to all of you who put together this record-breaking luncheon.

I also want to thank the Marion County Public Health Department for sponsoring this year's event.

Well, good afternoon, to all the first-timers and long-time supporters of this annual show of force for good.

As was mentioned, this is my third Scouts Luncheon as governor, and it's quickly become one of my favorite events of the year.

This is the largest single fundraiser for Scouts in the country, which says all you need to know about the importance of this organization, about our community and about all of you.

Prepared for health: that's our theme this year, and, as usual, it is well-chosen.

It reinforces the part of the Scout Oath that says, "*I will keep myself physically strong, mentally awake and morally straight.*"

These three things are each important on their own, but they are not separate aspects of being healthy. All three really depend upon each other.

I want to explore that a little bit and show why if you ignore any one of those, you jeopardize your ultimate goals – whether you are a Boy Scout, a business executive, a politician, or any leader in our community.

And I'll do so with the help of two stories. The first is about a talk show host. The second is about one of our country's greatest accomplishments ever.

Before there was Letterman, Leno, or Jimmy Fallon, there was the original: "here's Johnny Carson."

In the era before cable – for all of our young people, that was sometime after the Pony Express – there weren't a dozen late-night shows, there was basically one, appropriately named, "The Tonight Show."

Every now and then a competitor would pop up, but Johnny Carson was the king of late night, hosting "The Tonight Show" for 30 years spanning the 60s, 70s and 80s.

He was so popular that for his last show – which had highlights of his 30 years – 50 million Americans tuned in. 50 million!

The show before that was his last one with guests, and he had only two – singer Bette Midler and comedian Robin Williams.

At one point, Bette Midler said that, rather than be interviewed by Johnny, she wanted to turn the tables on him and interview him.

One question went something like this: *"Johnny, you've lived the American dream. You have money, fame and success. Millions of people love you. Now that you're retiring, if you could sum up what you want in the future, what would it be?"*

Without hesitation, Johnny answered with one word: *"Health!"*

To the man who had everything, the most important thing was his health.

Ironically, Carson was a smoker, and in the last years of his life he suffered with emphysema.

His other guest that night, Robin Williams, was considered one of the funniest comedians of all time.

I'd put him in the genius category of talent, but what people didn't know at the time was that he suffered with mental illness.

Even though he made millions of dollars, and made millions of people around the world laugh on every continent, he was crying inside, and ultimately, he took his own life.

I tell this story as a reminder of one of the great axioms in life – and it has the advantage of being true: all the money and fame in the world means little in comparison if you don't have your health – if you're not physically strong and mentally awake.

Even one of the biggest stars in television history knew that his fame and riches meant little without it.

Now, our theme is “Prepared for Health” – and that preparation part is critical.

Bobby Knight once said: *“The will to win is not nearly as important as the will to prepare to win. Everyone wants to win but not everyone wants to prepare to win.”*

So it is with our health. We know what we need to do to be healthy, but too often don’t make it a priority.

Oh, I’m not holier than thou. Take it from me.

Like most of us here, my job keeps me pretty busy.

Before I knew it, I wasn’t eating right, I wasn’t sleeping right and I wasn’t working out.

I started putting on weight, and rather than do anything about it, I kept making excuses to myself.

It finally took my family doctor to tell me I just wasn’t cutting it. At my last check up, he laid down the law.

He told me he wouldn’t give me the results unless I brought my wife Janet with me. He said, *“If I just tell you, you’ll ignore it. If I tell you both, I’ll have a witness.”*

He’s a pretty smart guy – because it worked, for a while!

I went out and bought an elliptical machine. I started watching what I eat, and not just watching it go in my mouth. I’m still not where I should be, but, thanks to a great doc, I’m doing a better job preparing to be healthy.

Thank you, Doctor. Where are you sitting? It turns out, my family doctor is also a big supporter of the Scouts. I told you he was a smart guy.

If health is our foundation, being morally straight keeps the building standing.

To me, being morally straight goes beyond being honest and trustworthy, but includes holding oneself to the highest standards, being willing to take a stand, and speaking up when you see something wrong.

As the British writer and theologian, C.S. Lewis, once said, *“Integrity is doing the right thing even when no one is watching.”*

Or as the ancient Greek Heraclitus put it: *“Character is fate.”*

He wrote that 2,500 years ago, and it has never been more relevant. Character is fate!

We've seen too many moral and ethical lapses across virtually every segment of society, from government, to business, to academia, to sports, to the non-profit sector.

As a result, we're seeing a crisis of trust in the very institutions we count on to provide leadership and guidance.

The communications marketing firm Edelman has been surveying Americans about their levels of trust in various institutions for the past 18 years. Over the past year, they recorded the steepest drops they've ever seen.

Trust in government "to do what is right" dropped 14 percentage points!

Only one-third of Americans say they believe that today. Trust in business dropped 10 percentage points; trust in non-governmental organizations dropped 9; trust in the media dropped 5.

Six in 10 Americans now say they don't trust the news they read or see.

It's no mystery why more and more of our citizens feel this way.

Too many institutions – especially those we look to for leadership and truth – have let us down.

When they've made mistakes or done something wrong, rather than own up to it, they've hid it, or swept it under the rug.

Look, nobody's perfect. Our institutions are made up of people, and people make mistakes.

Being morally straight means owning up to mistakes, correcting them, and getting back on track.

Which brings me to my second and final story.

This year we celebrated the 50th anniversary of not just one of the greatest accomplishments in American history, but in all of human history: when our species first left the planet Earth and walked on the moon.

The landing of Apollo 11 was such a towering achievement that it has become the measuring stick for what humans can accomplish – if we could land on the moon, surely

we can cure cancer, or find peace among nations, or even find peace among Republicans and Democrats.

But Apollo 11 might never have happened.

More than two years before that historic flight, they were rehearsing the launch of the first Apollo spacecraft – “just” rehearsing.

Inside the command module were Ed White (a second class Scout), Roger Chaffee (an Eagle Scout and Purdue grad), and Gus Grissom (from Mitchell, Indiana, a star Scout, and also a Purdue graduate, and who many thought would be the first man to walk on the moon).

But a fire broke out in the capsule, the astronauts couldn't get out, and all three were tragically killed.

NASA had filled the command module with pure oxygen, which acted like an accelerant when a spark ignited from a faulty wire.

And there was no escape hatch, so the men couldn't get out.

And what did NASA do? NASA owned up to the tragedy. Apollo flight director Gene Kranz said: *“There was no question that we were responsible for the first space flight disaster.”*

But Kranz is also famous for saying one of the most repeated lines ever, *“Failure is not an option.”*

And NASA was determined to figure out what went wrong and to fix it.

They launched a detailed investigation and discovered that their quality-control processes were flawed.

They fixed their mistakes, and, two years later, Neil Armstrong (Eagle Scout and Purdue grad) made his “giant leap for mankind.”

Looking back at the fire, Gene Cernan, another Purdue grad (they call it the cradle of astronauts for a reason) and the last man on the moon, said this: *“It was the catalyst that allowed us to pick up the pieces and not just get the job done, but get it done right.”*

That's the lesson I hope I leave you with today.

Failure may not be an option, but with us human beings, it is inevitable.

The key is what you do with failure, what you do when you make a mistake.

To be fully prepared for health – to keep oneself physically strong, mentally awake and morally straight – requires not only having goals, but doing them the right way, listening to that inner voice, doing the right thing, “even when no one is watching.”

That, quite frankly, is what Scouts are about.

It’s why we need Scouts more than ever, and why I’m so proud to stand with you all, every day, every year.

I plan to continue to give that elliptical a workout, and I encourage all of you to continue to be prepared for health.

Thank you so much.

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