

25th Annual Governor's Luncheon for Scouting
Governor Eric J. Holcomb
December 10, 2020

Remarks as prepared for delivery

Thanks so much, Katie, and thank you for sharing your story.

It's an honor to be introduced by someone so accomplished, and also an honor to share a few thoughts with so many of our community leaders.

Your steadfast support of BSA – making this *the most* successful such fundraiser in the country, once again – says all you need to know.

I also want to thank the Indianapolis Colts for sponsoring this event, and for inspiring today's theme: "A Training Camp for Life."

After all, that's what Scouting is all about, isn't it?

Helping our youth not just experience the outdoors and learn skills and develop friendships, but, even more importantly, building character that will serve them throughout their entire lives.

Now, last year, I talked about one aspect of our collective character in need of repair when I talked about *trust*.

I described the steep decline in *trust* in institutions vital to our country's success: business, government, the media, academia, even faith-based institutions and more – and how our continued progress depended on rebuilding that *trust*.

Today, I want to talk briefly about something equally at risk, and equally urgent – something equally incumbent on each of us to recover: and that's the *truth*.

We are experiencing an assault on the *truth* – what one writer calls "truth decay," and another calls the "death of truth."

There are many different reasons for this, of course.

Some attribute it to our deep polarization, with access to constant and countless and separate information silos – many of which have a business model that seeks to excite and elevate every argument into partisan warfare.

They even monetize it.

Some single out the rise of talk radio and social media, which are much better at inflaming passions than fostering a “reasoned” debate.

Wired to entertain, not inform, with blatant disregard for objectivity or fact.

The old saying, “*A lie can travel halfway around the world while the truth is still putting on its shoes*” has never been more relevant – or dare I say – dangerous.

But for, whatever the reasons, a consensus around *facts* and *truth* is essential not only for BSA, but for our country.

If you think about it, there are two sides of being truthful.

One is being true to yourself.

The other is being true to others.

The two are slightly different – but closely linked.

One of the most famous lines in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* is when the King’s counselor Polonius advises his son.

He says, “*To thine own self be true, and it must follow, that thou canst not then be false to any man.*”

And so it follows, being true to oneself is the starting point for any Scout.

Hoosier legend, Coach John Wooden admonished us to – and I quote: “*Be more concerned with your character than your reputation, because your character is what you really are, while your reputation is merely what others think you are.*”

The handbook for scoutmasters is called *The Scoutmaster Minute*, and it gets right at it.

The first chapter is on character, and it begins with these words: “*A Scout is trustworthy. A Scout tells the truth. He keeps his promises. Honesty is part of his code of conduct. People can depend on him.*”

Another way to say “people can depend on him” is *people can trust him*.

Telling the truth, and being true to oneself, are essential steps in building trust – which in turn are essential to leadership.

By the way, truthful people understand themselves, and know their strengths and their weaknesses.

They describe themselves and others accurately and fairly.

When they commit to something, they do it.

And when they make a mistake, they learn from it. They own it.

There may be short-term pain in owning it, but I can testify by way of my own experience, it brings about long-term gain.

These are keys to growth – and ultimate success.

So, I encourage our Scouts to never stop learning.

Be curious. Be open to new people and ideas. When it comes to information, rely not only on a single source – but on many.

If something smells funny, look it up.

Most of all, develop your critical thinking skills. Think for yourself and come to your own conclusions without being told what they are in advance.

And if embracing the truth is important for individuals, it is foundational for our democracy.

The Declaration of Independence begins with the words: *“We hold these truths to be self-evident.”*

In court, we swear witnesses to tell *“the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.”*

The most famous myth about our first president is that he couldn’t tell a lie.

Ben Franklin cut right to the chase when he said, *“Honesty is the best policy.”*

Crafty old Ben probably meant two things: that being honest is the best way to live your life, but also leads to the most effective policy for government.

In fact, our Founders were enlightened thinkers who challenged the prevailing wisdom that monarchs had a monopoly on *truth* and could lie when necessary to protect the state.

Instead, our Founders put a premium on openness, transparency, freedom of expression and unfettered debate, passionate as it was.

This is America's *real* power.

We've seen more prosaic examples right here in Indiana.

I know of several restaurants and shops that have been hurt or even had to close because customers became irate when they were asked to wear masks.

Sometimes they've threatened employees and in at least one case posted false allegations on social media.

All because they've come to believe that wearing a mask is an infringement of their personal freedom rather than based on the best science, or even the odds, at this point, to keep all of our citizens healthy.

Whether Scouts – or as citizens – we have to continue to reach for Ben Franklin's admonition that "honesty is the best policy" and get back to an acceptance of facts, of science, of some common definition of truth.

Whether we're talking about masks, seatbelts, speed limits or secondhand smoke.

Without commonly agreed-on facts, there can be no rational debate over policy, and no way to hold elected officials, like myself, accountable to the people.

I'd like to close out the year 2020 with part of the West Point Cadet Prayer, which calls on future military leaders who study there to – quote: "*Strengthen and increase our admiration for honest dealing and clean thinking, make us to choose the harder right instead of the easier wrong, endow us with courage that knows no fear when truth and right are in jeopardy.*"

Sound familiar? Amazing how your Scout Law and their Cadet Prayer align themselves so perfectly when sharing such a similar oath and purpose.

Scouts – and Hoosier leaders – we're a better state because of each and every one of you – and that's the *truth!*

Thank you so much.

###