

“Lifelong Leading”

28th GOVERNOR’S LUNCHEON FOR SCOUTING

Governor Eric J. Holcomb

December 12, 2023

Remarks as prepared for delivery

Thank you, Rafael.

You and Joe Wiltrout and your team have done it again this year, creating a high-energy event that’s a celebration as much as an appeal for support, and there’s a lot to celebrate.

The Governor’s Luncheon for Scouting carries the name of the office which I currently occupy – and I would not miss it for anything – but I’m not the one doing the hard work.

I want to thank the many people involved in this luncheon, who make sure that the plans get made, the materials get created, the set-up looks fine, and the results are so memorable. Thank you!

“Legends and Leadership” is our theme this year. That theme allows me to do something that I enjoy doing, which I believe can be constructive: myth-busting!

Here’s the myth that I want to bust today: Leaders are born that way. You can see them coming from girlhood or boyhood. We already know who the leaders and the legends are going to be.

I believe that’s wrong. It’s a myth.

I am here to assert – based on watching leaders and attempting to serve as one – that leaders are not born that way. They become that way through a lifetime of inspiration, growth, and practice.

Most of us have heard of “lifelong learning” and many of us follow that path.

Let me suggest that there is also something we should call “lifelong leading.” It’s the actual way that leaders – and sometimes legends – ultimately emerge.

In a moment, I will elaborate on my belief, but allow me to cut right to the chase where our purpose today is concerned. Thank goodness for Scouting, which is an especially excellent way to get on a path of lifelong leading, to make it a habit.

Is there evidence? You betcha.

Let me name some names from Indiana. If some of these folks are in the room getting surprised by the shout-out, then so be it!

Marion County Superior Court Judge Dave Certo, CEO of BWI Gary Hobbs, CEO of Penske Entertainment Mark Miles, CEO of Lilly Dave Ricks, and CEO of Ascension St. Vincent Kevin Speer.

That’s a partial list, with apologies to the many others I could have named.

It’s a list in alphabetical order, to which I’m going to add one more name out of order. That’s Jim Morris, Vice Chairman of the Pacers now – with a history of leadership roles in state, national, and global public service that would take the rest of the afternoon to acknowledge. Jim Morris has attained “legend” status. Period.

There’s a common denominator among these leaders and legends: all of them are Eagle Scouts.

Are they all born leaders? I doubt it. Sorry, guys! Are they all lifelong leaders? Yes, for sure! And in each one, it started with Scouting.

Let’s unpack the myth of “born leaders” a bit on the way to busting it.

We can describe the traits associated with so-called born leaders; the young people who seem destined to dominate. They tend to have one (or both) of two things: supreme abilities which may be intellectual or athletic or creative, and large endowments of charisma.

So the supposed born leaders tend to be the “smartest guys in the room” and/or “the guys who take over the room.”

That’s nice work if you can get it. But neither of those qualities makes a leader, let alone remotely close to a legend.

Supreme abilities and high charisma are natural endowments, to be sure. But natural endowments are not needed for leadership, and they are not enough for leadership.

Let me say that again. The great qualities we may be born with – our natural endowments – are not needed for leadership and they are not enough for leadership.

Extraordinary natural endowments may even short-circuit the much more important habits of lifelong leading through which we develop the characteristics of true leadership.

A few moments ago, we met Sam Thomas. He is missing a natural endowment called a hand. Think about that. But I am placing my bet here today that Sam will be a leader – hand or no hand – and that Scouting will have had something to do with it.

He already builds a better fire than most people with two hands and gives a better speech than some of us who've been doing it for decades.

I am betting that Sam and the other young people we've met here today will earn their reputations as leaders by following one of three "lifelong leading" styles.

Some will be synthesizers. These are the leaders who learn to shut up and listen, who don't care who gets the credit and who want to be challenged by others.

They are not the smartest people in the room. But as a result of their commitments to lifelong leading they develop ideas, innovations, and plans that synthesize the best of everyone else around them in the room.

Some will be coaches. These are the leaders who develop emotional intelligence over and above raw intelligence.

They don't sort people into friends or foes, useful or useless. They figure out what special contributions each person on the team can make and what things each person on the team still needs to develop. As a result of their commitments to lifelong leading, these coaches figure out how to rally those around them to victories of whatever sort they pursue.

And some will be role models. These are the leaders who put character first, who demonstrate that principles matter, values matter, and that the “how” is as important as the “what” and the “why.”

As a result of their commitments to lifelong leading, these are the teachers, bosses, friends, and colleagues we never forget, whether or not they become CEOs, governors, or anyone else with a fancy title.

No one is born a synthesizer, a coach, or a role model. In each case it is lifelong leading that helps us to understand, achieve, and continue to develop these essential styles.

Scouting is built to accelerate lifelong leading. And so, we must keep Scouting strong in Indiana.

Scouting emphasizes the formation of character, extending what young people see and learn in their families and communities and the ethical foundations of leadership.

Scouting shows young people how to get things done together. Dens and troops are places in which lone wolves learn that the pack is always stronger than even its most capable members.

Finally, Scouting gives young people leadership opportunities and ways to try and fail and try again, whether it’s setting up the campsite, starting the fire, planning the long hike, or organizing an Eagle Scout Service Project.

So, I say again: Scouting is built to accelerate lifelong leading. And so, we must keep Scouting strong in Indiana.

That is why we are here today. Together with the Crossroads of America Council, I thank you for your contributions of time and treasure. I thank you for your support of the Governor’s Luncheon for Scouting.

And I thank you for your interest in lifelong leading!

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