

Dr. Robert M. Gates
National Annual Business Meeting Remarks
May 21, 2015

GOOD MORNING. IT IS A PLEASURE TO BE WITH YOU
HERE TODAY.

THE INDISPENSABLE HEART OF THE BOY SCOUTS IS ITS
VOLUNTEERS. IT'S PEOPLE LIKE YOU. SO THANK YOU FOR
COMING.

FIRST THINGS FIRST. THIS WILL BE OUR CHIEF SCOUT
EXECUTIVE'S LAST ANNUAL MEETING. WAYNE BROCK WILL
RETIRE ON OCTOBER 1 AFTER 43 YEARS OF PROFESSIONAL
SERVICE AND 3 YEARS AS CHIEF SCOUT EXECUTIVE.

WAYNE, EVERYONE ASSOCIATED WITH SCOUTING –
FROM THE NEWEST TIGER CUB TO THE OLDEST LIVING
EAGLE SCOUT AND EVERYONE IN BETWEEN -- IS IN YOUR
DEBT. YOU HAVE LED OUR MOVEMENT IN A CHALLENGING
TIME AND YOU HAVE DONE SO EVERYDAY WITH COURAGE,
GRACE, INTEGRITY AND GOOD HUMOR. YOU HAVE BEEN

UNFAILINGLY DEDICATED TO OUR MISSION. YOU WILL ALWAYS BE REMEMBERED FOR YOUR LOVE FOR SCOUTING, YOUR LEADERSHIP, AND VISION FOR SCOUTING'S FUTURE.

AND OF COURSE, I ALSO WANT TO CONGRATULATE MIKE SURBAUGH, WHO WILL SUCCEED WAYNE ON OCTOBER 1 AS CHIEF SCOUT EXECUTIVE. MIKE EMERGED AS OUR LEADER THROUGH AN EXTREMELY THOROUGH SELECTION PROCESS, IN WHICH – FOR THE FIRST TIME – WE REACHED OUT TO SCOUT EXECUTIVES IN ALL OUR NEARLY 280 COUNCILS AND THE STAFF OF THE NATIONAL SERVICE CENTER FOR RECOMMENDATIONS AND TO IDENTIFY THE CHALLENGES FACING OUR MOVEMENT. I PERSONALLY AM DELIGHTED WITH MIKE'S SELECTION, AND I HAVE EVERY CONFIDENCE THAT ALL OF YOU WILL BE TOO AFTER YOU GET TO KNOW HIM.

IN THE SPIRIT OF TRANSPARENCY I PROMISED LAST YEAR, I ALSO WANT TO INFORM YOU THAT WE HAVE TAKEN A NEW APPROACH TO OUR COMPENSATION AND TENURE

ARRANGEMENTS WITH THE NEW CHIEF. WE HAVE CUT THE CHIEF'S BASE PAY BY 20% WITH A POTENTIAL BONUS OF ABOUT 10% FOR PERFORMANCE. MIKE WILL ALSO HAVE A FIVE YEAR TERM, WITH THE POTENTIAL TO EXTEND IT AT TWO YEAR INTERVALS.

OVER THE PAST YEAR I'VE BEEN VISITING COUNCILS ACROSS THE COUNTRY. MY GOAL HAS BEEN TO LEARN FIRST-HAND HOW WE'RE DOING.

I'M HAPPY TO TELL YOU THAT THIS HAS LEFT ME GENUINELY ENCOURAGED AND ENTHUSIASTIC. FROM WHAT I'VE SEEN, THERE IS NO QUESTION THAT WE HAVE THE TALENT TO DELIVER THE FUN, VALUES-BASED, CHARACTER-BUILDING, LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCES THAT SCOUTING OFFERS.

WE DO, HOWEVER, FACE CONTINUING CHALLENGES, ESPECIALLY WITH THE FINANCIAL HEALTH OF SOME OF OUR COUNCILS AND WITH MEMBERSHIP GROWTH. I KNOW THAT'S NOT A SURPRISE. WHEN I SPOKE AT THIS MEETING A

YEAR AGO, I OUTLINED FOUR PRIORITIES TO ADDRESS THESE CHALLENGES. THOSE PRIORITIES WERE TRANSPARENCY, MARKETING, RETENTION AND RECRUITMENT, AND INNOVATION.

SO THIS MORNING I WANT TO REPORT BRIEFLY ON OUR PROGRESS IN ADDRESSING THESE SUBJECTS.

FIRST, TRANSPARENCY AND FOCUS ON STRENGTHENING COUNCILS AND UNITS. VOLUNTEERS – AND COUNCIL PROFESSIONALS ALIKE – NATIONWIDE NEED TO HAVE MORE INFORMATION ABOUT ALL ASPECTS OF OUR OPERATIONS, AND NEED TO KNOW THAT THE NATIONAL SERVICE CENTER IS THERE TO HELP THEM.

THAT’S WHY DURING THE PAST YEAR WE RENAMED OUR NATIONAL OFFICE AS THE NATIONAL SERVICE CENTER. THIS WAS NOT JUST A SYMBOLIC GESTURE OR A PLAN TO ENRICH THE SIGN COMPANY; WE INTENDED TO SEND THE MESSAGE THAT THIS ORGANIZATION IS NOT DRIVEN BY DALLAS. IT IS LED BY LOCAL COUNCILS AND LOCAL

VOLUNTEERS AND PROFESSIONALS. OUR MISSION IS DELIVERED BY HUNDREDS OF COUNCILS, 93,000 LOCAL UNITS, PROFESSIONAL SCOUTERS IN OUR COUNCILS AND A MILLION VOLUNTEERS IN COMMUNITIES ACROSS THE NATION. THE TALENTED AND DEDICATED STAFF IN DALLAS PROVIDES NEEDED POLICY GUIDANCE, TRAINING PROGRAM TOOLS AND OTHER ESSENTIAL SERVICES AND ENABLERS FOR COUNCILS, UNITS, LOCAL VOLUNTEERS AND PROFESSIONALS. THUS, THE NEW NAME IS INTENDED TO REMIND US ALL OF THE NATIONAL OFFICE'S PRIMARY FUNCTION. WE MUST ALWAYS REMEMBER THAT THE MISSION OF SCOUTING IS ACCOMPLISHED ON THE FRONT LINES – BY DEN AND PACK LEADERS AND SCOUTMASTERS.

WE'VE ALSO BEGUN PROMOTING GREATER TRANSPARENCY THROUGH COMMUNICATIONS AND BY LAUNCHING NEW TOOLS LIKE SCOUTING WIRE. EMPLOYEES AND VOLUNTEERS TOLD US THEY NEED A ONE-STOP SHOP

FOR SCOUTING TOOLS AND INFORMATION. SCOUTING WIRE IS SUCH A TOOL.

FINALLY IN REGARD TO TRANSPARENCY, WE BEGAN MORE OPEN AND FORTHRIGHT DISCUSSIONS ABOUT BSA'S FINANCIAL DECISIONS. THOSE INCLUDE OUR DECISIONS TO FURTHER DEVELOP THE SUMMIT BECHTEL FAMILY NATIONAL SCOUT RESERVE AND TO PROVIDE MORE INVOLVEMENT IN THE BUDGET PROCESS.

THE SECOND PRIORITY I CITED LAST YEAR WAS MARKETING.

ONE OF THE POINTS I MADE WAS THAT WE WERE FAR MORE LIKELY TO SUCCEED IN THIS AREA BY EMPHASIZING LOCAL MEDIA AND STAKEHOLDERS THAN BY PROMOTING THE BOY SCOUT STORY AT A NATIONAL LEVEL.

SO I'M GLAD TO SAY THAT WE HAVE SUPPORTED OUR COUNCILS THIS PAST YEAR WITH ADVICE, TOOLS AND RESOURCES TO HELP THEM OPTIMIZE THEIR SCOUTING STORY WITH LOCAL MEDIA AND STAKEHOLDERS. IT'S A

GOOD START, BUT WE'LL BUILD ON THIS EFFORT IN THE YEAR AHEAD.

WE DID, HOWEVER, FOLLOW THROUGH ON THE *NATIONAL* LEVEL WITH THE LAUNCH OF OUR NEW RECRUITING CAMPAIGN, "BUILD AN ADVENTURE". THIS IS AN AGGRESSIVE MARKETING CAMPAIGN TO SUPPORT OUR THIRD PRIORITY: RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION.

"BUILD AN ADVENTURE" FOCUSES HEAVILY ON OUR CUB SCOUT PROGRAM. IT STRESSES HOW SCOUTING GIVES PARENTS MORE OPPORTUNITIES TO SPEND TIME WITH THEIR BOYS, INSTEAD OF JUST WATCHING THEM GROW FROM THE SIDELINES. AND IT GIVES THE BOYS THEMSELVES WHAT THEY WANT FOR THEIR FIRST SCOUTING ADVENTURES, SO THEY'LL REMAIN IN SCOUTING.

THROUGHOUT MY CAREER I HAVE PASSIONATELY SUPPORTED THE TROOPS IN THE FIELD. AND IN SCOUTING, THAT CONTINUES. TO THAT END, WE'RE REDOUBLING OUR

EFFORTS TO GIVE OUR UNIT LEADERS THE TOOLS, TRAINING AND SUPPORT THEY NEED TO DELIVER WHAT KIDS WANT.

IN A FEW MINUTES WAYNE WILL SHARE DETAILS WITH YOU ABOUT THE BSA'S ACQUISITION OF SCOUTBOOK. THIS WEB APPLICATION WILL GIVE YOU TOOLS THAT ARE HELPFUL TO BOTH SCOUTS AND UNIT LEADERS. AGAIN, WE ARE WORKING TO EASE THE BURDEN ON OUR UNIT LEVEL VOLUNTEERS.

WE'RE DOING LOTS OF OTHER THINGS IN THE AREA OF RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION THAT ALSO NEED TO BE MENTIONED. FOR EXAMPLE, WE'RE WORKING ON NEW WAYS TO BRING SCOUTING TO UNDERSERVED NEIGHBORHOODS THROUGH SUSTAINABLE SCOUTREACH INITIATIVES.

THIS IS A PERSONAL PRIORITY FOR ME. IT IS VITAL THAT BSA OFFER BOYS AND YOUNG MEN FROM DISADVANTAGED FAMILIES THE OPPORTUNITY TO EXPERIENCE THROUGH SCOUTING A WORLD THEY MIGHT OTHERWISE NEVER SEE.

TO OFFER THEM OPPORTUNITIES AND A FUTURE THEY MIGHT NEVER OTHERWISE HAVE.

QUALITY DELIVERY OF CORE SCOUTING PROGRAMS IS PARAMOUNT TO THE SUCCESS OF OUR SCOUTREACH EFFORTS. AND WHILE WE HAVE A BIG GAP TO FILL, SOME COUNCILS ARE DOING IT RIGHT. AMONG THEM ARE ATLANTA, DALLAS AND HOUSTON.

THE OFFICE OF THE CHIEF HAS CHARGED THE OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PERFORMANCE, LED BY SAM THOMPSON, TO WORK WITH THESE COUNCILS AND TO FURTHER DEVELOP PROGRAMS THAT ALLOW COUNCILS TO SUCCESSFULLY SERVE ALL YOUTH IN THEIR COMMUNITIES. SAM'S TEAM WILL BE RESPONSIBLE FOR PROVIDING RESOURCES AND MEASURING SUCCESS. AND I HAVE ASKED HIM TO PREPARE A REPORT TO BE SENT TO ALL COUNCILS HIGHLIGHTING PROGRAMS AND APPROACHES THAT HAVE PROVEN SUCCESSFUL IN CERTAIN COUNCILS AS WELL AS THOSE THAT HAVE NOT WORKED – ALL SO COUNCILS CAN ADOPT

AND ADAPT STRATEGIES THAT WE KNOW FROM EXPERIENCE WILL BE EFFECTIVE.

I'M ALSO PLEASED THAT RALPH DE LA VEGA WILL BE GIVING VOLUNTEER OVERSIGHT TO THIS EFFORT. RALPH IS A HUGE CHAMPION OF SCOUTING'S EFFORTS TO REACH OUT TO UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS. AND, IN AN EFFORT TO FURTHER ADVANCE OUR WORK IN THIS AREA, WE'LL SOON ANNOUNCE THE APPOINTMENT OF A CHIEF DIVERSITY OFFICER.

ON THE SUBJECT OF RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION, WE NEED TO LOOK TO OUR OWN LEADERSHIP RANKS – SPECIFICALLY, SCOUTING'S NATIONAL HONOR SOCIETY, THE ORDER OF THE ARROW – AS A WAY OF PROVIDING MENTORS TO YOUNG PEOPLE.

THE ORDER OF THE ARROW WILL SOON BE TAKING ITS SCOUTING STORY ON THE ROAD THROUGH THE “ARROW TOUR” – A YEAR-LONG CELEBRATION OF THE ORDER OF THE ARROW'S 100TH ANNIVERSARY. IN AUGUST, MORE THAN

15,000 ARROWMEN WILL GATHER TO CELEBRATE THE ANNIVERSARY AT NOAC.

AS A FELLOW ARROWMAN, I HOPE YOU WILL ALL JOIN ME IN SUPPORTING THEIR JOURNEY.

THE FOURTH PRIORITY I MENTIONED LAST YEAR IS INNOVATION. A WILLINGNESS – AN ENTHUSIASM – TO MAKE PROGRAM CHANGES THAT STRENGTHEN OUR MOVEMENT. AN EXAMPLE OF THIS IS THE FURTHER ENRICHMENT OF STEM ACTIVITIES IN OUR CORE PROGRAMS AND THE LAUNCH OF A MUCH LARGER PILOT PROGRAM FOR STEM SCOUTS, BUILDING ON THREE YEARS OF WORK. STEM SCOUTS OFFERS NEW SCOUTING ADVENTURES IN SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, ENGINEERING AND MATH.

WE GOT OFF TO A GREAT START WITH THIS PROGRAM IN KNOXVILLE. KIDS WHO HAD PASSED UP OUR NORMAL RECRUITING OUTREACH WERE EAGER TO SIGN UP FOR THE CHALLENGE OF STEM SCOUTS. SO NOW WE'RE EXPANDING THE PILOT PROGRAM TO 12 MORE COUNCILS.

FINALLY, LET ME ADDRESS MEMBERSHIP POLICY.

I TOLD YOU A YEAR AGO THAT I WOULD OPPOSE RE-OPENING THIS ISSUE DURING MY TWO-YEAR TERM AS PRESIDENT OF THE BSA. I HAD HOPED THEN FOR A RESPITE DURING WHICH WE COULD FOCUS ON HEALING OUR DIVISIONS FROM THE 2013 DECISION, IMPROVING OUR PROGRAM, STRENGTHENING OUR FINANCES AND ENDING OUR DECLINE IN MEMBERSHIP.

HOWEVER, EVENTS DURING THE PAST YEAR HAVE CONFRONTED US WITH URGENT CHALLENGES I DID NOT FORESEE AND WHICH WE CANNOT IGNORE. WE CANNOT IGNORE GROWING INTERNAL CHALLENGES TO OUR CURRENT MEMBERSHIP POLICY, FROM SOME COUNCILS – LIKE THE GREATER NEW YORK COUNCIL, THE DENVER AREA COUNCIL, AND OTHERS – IN OPEN DEFIANCE OF THE POLICY, TO MORE AND MORE COUNCILS TAKING A POSITION

IN THEIR MISSION STATEMENTS AND PUBLIC DOCUMENTS
CONTRARY TO NATIONAL POLICY.

NOR CAN WE IGNORE THE SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND
JURIDICAL CHANGES TAKING PLACE IN OUR COUNTRY –
CHANGES TAKING PLACE AT A PACE OVER THIS PAST YEAR
NO ONE ANTICIPATED. I REMIND YOU OF THE RECENT
DEBATES WE HAVE SEEN IN PLACES LIKE INDIANA AND
ARKANSAS OVER DISCRIMINATION BASED ON SEXUAL
ORIENTATION, NOT TO MENTION THE IMPENDING U.S.
SUPREME COURT DECISION THIS SUMMER ON GAY
MARRIAGE.

I AM NOT ASKING THE NATIONAL BOARD FOR ANY
ACTION TO CHANGE OUR CURRENT POLICY AT THIS
MEETING. BUT I MUST SPEAK AS PLAINLY AND BLUNTLY TO
YOU AS I SPOKE TO PRESIDENTS WHEN I WAS DIRECTOR OF
CIA AND SECRETARY OF DEFENSE. WE MUST DEAL WITH
THE WORLD AS IT IS, NOT AS WE MIGHT WISH IT TO BE. THE

STATUS QUO IN OUR MOVEMENT'S MEMBERSHIP

STANDARDS CANNOT BE SUSTAINED.

WE CAN EXPECT MORE COUNCILS TO OPENLY CHALLENGE THE CURRENT POLICY. WHILE TECHNICALLY WE HAVE THE AUTHORITY TO REVOKE THEIR CHARTERS, SUCH AN ACTION WOULD DENY THE LIFELONG BENEFITS OF SCOUTING TO HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF BOYS AND YOUNG MEN TODAY AND VASTLY MORE IN THE FUTURE. I WILL NOT TAKE THAT PATH.

MOREOVER, DOZENS OF STATES – FROM NEW YORK TO UTAH – ARE PASSING LAWS THAT PROTECT EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS ON THE BASIS OF SEXUAL ORIENTATION. THUS, BETWEEN INTERNAL CHALLENGES AND POTENTIAL LEGAL CONFLICTS, THE BSA FINDS ITSELF IN AN UNSUSTAINABLE POSITION. A POSITION THAT MAKES US VULNERABLE TO THE POSSIBILITY THE COURTS SIMPLY WILL ORDER US AT SOME POINT TO CHANGE OUR MEMBERSHIP POLICY. WE

MUST ALL UNDERSTAND THAT THIS PROBABLY WILL HAPPEN SOONER RATHER THAN LATER.

IN 2010, A FEDERAL DISTRICT JUDGE IN CALIFORNIA OVERTURNED THE MILITARY'S DON'T ASK, DON'T TELL LAW AND THE REVERSAL WAS APPLIED NATIONWIDE IMMEDIATELY. ONLY A STAY GRANTED BY THE APPEALS COURT – GRANTED, I BELIEVE, MAINLY BECAUSE WE WERE IN THE PROCESS OF CHANGING THE LAW – PREVENTED DRAMATIC DISRUPTION IN THE ARMED FORCES.

WE CANNOT PREDICT IF OR WHEN THIS MIGHT HAPPEN TO US, BUT I PERSONALLY BELIEVE OUR LEGAL DEFENSES HAVE WEAKENED SINCE THE DALE CASE. AND IF WE WAIT FOR THE COURTS TO ACT, WE COULD END UP WITH A BROAD RULING THAT COULD FORBID ANY KIND OF MEMBERSHIP STANDARD, INCLUDING OUR FOUNDATIONAL BELIEF IN OUR DUTY TO GOD AND OUR FOCUS ON SERVING

THE SPECIFIC NEEDS OF BOYS. WAITING FOR THE COURTS IS A GAMBLE WITH HUGE STAKES.

ALTERNATIVELY, WE CAN MOVE AT SOME FUTURE DATE – BUT SOONER RATHER THAN LATER – TO SEIZE CONTROL OF OUR OWN FUTURE, SET OUR OWN COURSE AND CHANGE OUR POLICY IN ORDER TO ALLOW CHARTER PARTNERS – UNIT SPONSORING ORGANIZATIONS – TO DETERMINE THE STANDARDS FOR THEIR SCOUT LEADERS. SUCH AN APPROACH WOULD ALLOW ALL CHURCHES, WHICH SPONSOR SOME 70% OF OUR SCOUT UNITS, TO ESTABLISH LEADERSHIP STANDARDS CONSISTENT WITH THEIR FAITH. WE MUST, AT ALL COSTS, PRESERVE THE RELIGIOUS FREEDOM OF OUR CHURCH PARTNERS TO DO THIS.

OUR OATH CALLS UPON US TO DO OUR DUTY TO GOD AND OUR COUNTRY. THE COUNTRY IS CHANGING AND WE ARE INCREASINGLY AT ODDS WITH THE LEGAL LANDSCAPE

AT BOTH THE STATE AND FEDERAL LEVELS. AND, AS A MOVEMENT, WE FIND OURSELVES WITH A POLICY MORE THAN A FEW OF OUR CHURCH SPONSORS REJECT – THUS PLACING SCOUTING BETWEEN A BOY AND HIS CHURCH.

THE CHALLENGES ARE BEFORE US NOW. THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE BOARD AND OUR LEGAL COUNSEL WILL WORK TO DETERMINE OUR RESPONSES AND OUR BEST STRATEGY. WE WANT AND VALUE YOUR THOUGHTS ON ALL THIS, RECOGNIZING THE IMPORTANCE OF PROTECTING OUR CORE VALUES.

THE ONE THING WE CANNOT DO IS PUT OUR HEADS IN THE SAND AND PRETEND THIS CHALLENGE WILL GO AWAY OR ABATE. QUITE THE OPPOSITE IS HAPPENING.

I KNOW MY REMARKS ON THIS SUBJECT UNSETTLE MANY OF YOU. SOME OF YOU MIGHT BE ANGRY THAT I RAISE THIS SUBJECT AND WITH WHAT I HAVE SAID. BUT

THIS MOVEMENT SHAPED MY LIFE AND MY ONLY PURPOSE
– MY ONLY REASON FOR ASSUMING THIS LEADERSHIP ROLE
– IS TO PRESERVE THE BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA IN
RECOGNITION OF ALL IT HAS DONE FOR THIS COUNTRY,
AND ALL IT CAN AND MUST DO IN THE FUTURE. SCOUTING
IS NEEDED IN THIS COUNTRY NOW MORE THAN EVER.

I ASSURE YOU THAT I HAVE NO HIDDEN AGENDA. I
WANT ONLY TO APPRISE YOU OF THE NEW REALITY I SEE:
THAT BOTH INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL EVENTS AND
PRESSURES OVER THE PAST YEAR AND LOOKING TO THE
FUTURE WILL REQUIRE ACTION AT SOME POINT.

FOR NOW, I ASK THAT, IN THE DAYS AND MONTHS
AHEAD, EVERYONE HERE REFLECT AND PRAY ON OUR PATH
FORWARD. WE CAN ACT ON OUR OWN OR WE CAN BE
FORCED TO ACT BUT, EITHER WAY, I SUSPECT WE DON'T
HAVE A LOT OF TIME.

FOR ME, I SUPPORT A POLICY THAT ACCEPTS AND RESPECTS OUR DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES AND BELIEFS, ALLOWS RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS – BASED ON FIRST AMENDMENT PROTECTION OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM – TO ESTABLISH THEIR OWN STANDARDS FOR ADULT LEADERS, AND PRESERVES THE BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA NOW AND FOREVER. I TRULY FEAR THAT ANY OTHER ALTERNATIVE WILL BE THE END OF US AS A NATIONAL MOVEMENT.

EVERY DAY, IN EVERY COMMUNITY IN AMERICA, SCOUTING IS CHANGING THE LIVES OF BOYS AND YOUNG MEN – TEACHING THEM SKILLS AND LEADERSHIP, HELPING THEM BUILD CHARACTER AND INTEGRITY. EVERY DAY, IN EVERY COMMUNITY, SCOUTING MAKES THOSE COMMUNITIES BETTER PLACES TO LIVE. WE HAVE BEEN DOING THIS FOR 105 YEARS. I AM CONFIDENT WE WILL DO SO FOR ANOTHER 105 YEARS AS LONG AS WE STAND

TOGETHER, UNITED IN OUR SINGULAR MISSION TO SERVE
AMERICAN YOUTH.

I AM HONORED TO WORK WITH ALL OF YOU TO GIVE
OUR YOUNG PEOPLE THE WISDOM, DIRECTION AND
CONFIDENCE TO BE THE BEST THEY CAN BE.

THANK YOU.

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