Gov. Rick Perry: Our Children's Futures are Worth Defending

*Note - Gov. Perry frequently departs from prepared remarks.

Wednesday, April 30, 2008

Thank you, Frank [Tsuru, CEO of Momentum Energy] for that kind introduction and thank you, Larry [Kellner, CEO Continental Airlines] for hosting us here. A lot of people would have just put up a picture of an airliner for a backdrop, but you know as well as I do that Eagle Scouts won't settle for an imitation of the real thing.

I am humbled to be in the presence of so many fellow Eagle Scouts. Being around a group of honest, trustworthy, hard-working people like you allows a person to relax and focus on the matters at hand. The Boy Scouts of America have been helping me focus on what's important since I was a very young boy. I credit this organization for any success I may have achieved in life. Based on my personal experience and from a vast body of evidence, I believe the Boy Scouts are one of the most important organizations in our entire country. No other organization has salvaged more lives, built more confidence or created more leaders. Scouting changed my life and should continue, free of interference, to change lives well into the future.

I believe this strongly because I am the father of an Eagle Scout, and a product of scouting myself. The town I grew up in was just a little bit smaller than Houston. Called Paint Creek, it was a small, farming community too small to be called a town. We lived 16 miles from the nearest post office. We did have two churches back then, the Baptist Church and the Methodist Church, your choice. We also had a small school for grades one through twelve, and an attractive compensation package for teachers. They didn't have to worry about the cost of housing because they lived on campus. As you might imagine in a place like Paint Creek, there was a tight sense of community that centered on school during the week, and scouting on Saturdays.

On Saturday mornings, one of the parents, or as, we got older, one of our fellow scouts with a hardship license, would pick everybody up and take us to our 9:00 meeting. It lasted all day. Once every three months we would go off to Camp Tonkawa for the weekend. It may have been “rustic,” but, for me, it was heaven. We camped out, explored nature, spotted wildlife, learned the skills of the outdoors, and listened to old war stories from our scoutmaster, a World War II veteran and a 1932 graduate of Texas A&M, Gene Overton. It was the time of our lives, and it beat doing chores or hanging out with my older sister.

As I look back on those years, I think less about the actual activities and more about the lessons we learned. Scouting teaches both self-reliance and selfless sacrifice. It teaches young men the value of perseverance, that good things come to those who work hard and finish what they've started. It teaches our youth to respect the outdoors and to be stewards of the land God has graced us with. It teaches them a code of honor, and that you can never trade your integrity for something better. And it teaches young scouts to respect one another and respect those in positions of
authority, a quality that is greatly lacking in our society today. Of all the values I learned in scouting, I value reverence
the most. Every day, I acknowledge God’s power in my life and this world. It is my relationship with Him that
strengthens me for all I do. And now, more than ever, Scouts and their supporters need all the strength we can get.

For more than forty years we have watched our culture decline while attacks on venerable institutions like scouting
have mounted. As the culture has increasingly told young people to “look out for number one” that “moral values are
relative” “if it feels good, do it!” attacks have come in waves against the values and institutions we hold dear.
Lawsuit-happy do-gooders have sought to drive people of faith from the public square and to sanitize the Pledge of
Allegiance, our currency, our government buildings and even the scouting oath from any mention of God. Judges have
tried to expunge the word “Christmas” from the public dialogue, and activists have tried to force the Scouts to conform
to a social agenda that fits their narrow view. All of this is done in the name of tolerance. But I believe some of the
most intolerant acts are often performed in the name of tolerance.

I am proud to say that, just last year, I signed legislation that protects the right of schoolchildren to express their faith
in school, without fear of ending up in the principal’s office. When the Supreme Court decision in the Dale case
affirmed the Scouts’ right to set membership standards as it relates to scoutmasters, the same organizations started
threatening public schools and other publicly-financed organizations for letting scouts use their resources. For
instance, San Diego park facilities that hosted Scout activities as long as anyone can remember are now off-limits.
The Department of Defense gets attacked for hosting scouting events on DoD property despite nearly 60 years of
providing such support.

You need to know that, at its core, this war is really not about the boy scouts. The scouts are merely a listening post
on the perimeter, sounding the early alarm on other impending attacks on our values. I do not believe the attacks will
let up, but I also have seen a groundswell of defensive support. In fact, I believe we are approaching a tipping point in
our society.

But if you believe there is such a thing as right and wrong, if you believe there are acceptable standards of behavior, if
you believe that ethics cannot be made up on the spot or fabricated to fit the situation, if you believe that judges
should make decisions based on the law rather than popular opinion or their own personal agenda, and if you believe
that this very nation came into existence because of what George Washington called “divine Providence” then you
have a stake in this war.

Earlier this year, I saddled up and charged into the middle of this fray when a book I wrote about Scouting was
my attempt to clearly state the importance of scouting values and more precisely draw the battle lines in this vital
conflict. With it, I hope to let the world know that this conflict isn’t just an intellectual exercise: it is a battle for the very
future of our country. And I am donating all proceeds from the book to the Boy Scouts legal defense efforts, to allow
them to continue the good fight.

When I was a 14-year old boy, I traveled to the place where George Washington experienced his greatest despair,
Valley Forge. I was one of thousands of young boys who gathered for the National Jamboree. President Lyndon
Johnson flew in by helicopter to speak to us, and Lady Baden Powell attended her last Jamboree. That week, I was a
proud member of a movement of young men learning the values essential to a civil society. A little less than 200 years
after George Washington and his men persevered in the snow, we experienced the greatness of America, a land of
freedom that they fought and died to defend. We were in some ways the fulfillment of their distant dreams.

And so, today, my fear is not that we will lose our freedom to a superior power, but that the decay of our society will
lead us to trade our freedom for shortsighted self-indulgence. For more than a generation, our culture has emphasized
a message of self-indulgence at the expense of social obligation. We have reaped the consequences in the form of	een pregnancies, divorced and broken families, and a cycle of incarceration that joins young men with their fathers
behind bars. The foundation of our society is not government or individual freedom, it is the family. And the demise of the family is the death knell of any great society.

Past generations did not fight to give our children the freedom to gun down other children. And they didn’t die to give parents the freedom to starve their babies because they’d spent their last dime on the next drug-induced high. And they didn’t sacrifice so that video games, television and the Internet could raise our children instead of two loving parents. We must never mistake liberty for license, one is a right, the other leads to oppression.

Scouting directs young men and women away from the pursuit of vanity and toward causes greater than self. It is by no means a perfect institution, but it is a worthy one. When I became an eagle, my sense of pride was genuine, not the artificial version the self-esteem crowd so readily doles out to the youth of today. That’s because I not only knew all the hard work that went into earning it, but also that something worth having is worth working for.

To all of you gathered here tonight, I applaud you for serving this great organization that teaches our children the virtue of hard work, the rigor of self-discipline, and the importance of respect for others. Yours is a noble cause. We earned our Eagles by serving our communities in some quantifiable fashion. But that call to serve didn’t end when we got our pin. Instead, as Eagle Scouts, we have a responsibility to continue serving our communities by rescuing young men from a life of lazy indifference by perpetuating the Scouting way.

This week’s Chicago Tribune carried a story about the remarkable efforts going on here in Houston and at Camp Strake. Efforts by people, like Houston’s own Amal Davis, who are working to bring scouting to a whole new generation of children, specifically those in the inner city. To succeed, those worthwhile efforts need resources like your time, your money, and your voice. To everyone here tonight, to every person associated with Scouting, I encourage you to press on, as the Scriptures say, “do not grow weary in doing good.” Our children deserve our best effort. They are worth the war we fight to defend scouting and the values it instills. Don’t ever give up. The great majority of Americans are with you, as are millions of Texans.

Thank you, God bless you and may God continue to bless the great state of Texas.