



Mike Reid – Chairman – Scout eh!



October 17<sup>th</sup>, 2006

Glenn Armstrong  
Chief Commissioner and Chair of the Board  
Scouts Canada

Dear Scouter Glenn,

I am encouraged by your open letter to the Commissioners entitled "Working Towards Meaningful Change". Working for positive change is what we are all about. We all must be committed to focusing our energies on reforming the Movement. SCOUT *eh!* is comprised largely of front-line section leaders who are committed to giving their best and, despite our differences, to working from within Scouts Canada to move forward toward the goal of improving Scouting.

I am particularly encouraged that you have pointed out three areas where you see clear room for improvement: administration/structure, program, and governance. We certainly concur, and I would like to offer the following in response to your letter:

With respect to administration/structure, I wholeheartedly agree that, "Scouting in Canada must operate in a business-like manner". Scouts Canada's finances have been an area of ongoing concern for us. Additionally, I think it would be very positive to work towards a structure that could be more responsive to and representative of the needs of the ordinary member, while still maintaining our national identity as the premier Scouting association in Canada.

Concerning program, the same issues of membership loss, adult training and worthwhile program content are near and dear to our hearts. It would be wise to work towards a structure that would be more responsive and representative of the needs of the ordinary members whose daily works and exceptional devotion are the engine of Scouting for Canadian youth. As a group of trained and spirited Scouters, we are particularly well suited to make contributions in this area, and I urge you to challenge us in this way.

The issue of governance is clearly contentious. We are, however, heartened to hear you say that the work to date isn't perfect and isn't finished. We certainly don't expect perfection but that said, fully redressing what your predecessor had recognized as the "democratic deficit" will certainly improve Scouts Canada. Our position is that meaningful democracy within Scouts Canada is not just an ideological or theoretical goal. It is rather, a broadly inclusive construct that would be an avenue for progress on all the other issues we face together. We have 23,000 adult volunteers in the movement who sustain Scouts Canada and constitute a tremendous pool of talent and energy.

A structure that truly represents these members would certainly benefit from a better utilization of the vast and varied resources Scouters are all too eager to bring to the challenge of serving Scouting's youth. It would also heighten their spirit and morale, and



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deepen their commitment to our noble mission. It would enhance positive two-way communication. A Scouter of your experience can hardly underestimate the incredible usefulness that comes from effectively energizing an entire movement of capable people and empowering them toward a common goal.

You are absolutely right: change is stressful. By definition, you simply can't have progress without change. The secret is to try to make change in a positive way so that the stress will be worth it. To implement positive, well-received change requires that you involve those directly affected by the process through open discussion of the issues arising out of change, as well as the issues driving the change. This freedom of expression is one of the traditional core values of our culture and of the movement we want to sustain together. We strongly encourage you to enhance the legitimate mechanisms for Scouters that enable them to participate in the process and to make them accessible to all Scouters, at all levels. We understand that not everyone will be pleased with the results, but excluding everyone in the name of expediency will dramatically sour the process for many Scouters. Scouters are, after all, simply people.

Regarding the annual review of appointments, we agree that in the best interests of Scouting, we need the best possible people to run the movement at all levels. On the other hand, we take exception to the model in which "all positions are annual appointments". We feel that a system in which the members-at-large are excluded or have limited say in any appointments or office-holders is not likely to generate the best list of candidates. It is not a system, which encourages the cream to rise to the top. We all accept and expect democracy in our country, our Troops, our Courts of Honour and our sections. Why not in Scouts Canada?

Even within the current system it is important to make a sharp distinction between the annual review of appointments, which are discretionary, and the mistaken notion that there is a provision, let alone a responsibility, to review applications for membership each year. Membership in Scouts Canada is something, which is explicitly dictated and protected in the by-laws of the corporation. It should not be at the discretion of any particular Commissioner. More to the point, allowing continued membership to be the subject of Commissioner discretion would open the door to favouritism, discrimination and personal animosity. Further, it is unnecessary, as there is already provision for removing members for legitimate cause. Scouting in a democratic society cannot sustain itself long if its membership believes it is under the thumb of a hand-selected elite.

In your letter, we have one other area of concern. We would not want your discussion of "members who are not contributing in a positive manner" to be misinterpreted.

As I am sure you are aware, the precise *raison d'être* of SCOUT eh! is the implementation of several aspects of Scouts Canada's own Strategic Directions, the development of which we very strongly supported and in which we encouraged all Scouts Canada members to participate.



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The constitution of SCOUT eh! addresses the following in particular:

**Strategic *Direction No. 7:***

Structures, systems and management organizationally accountable to members

***Strategic Direction No. 7.1:***

Democratic reform designed to enhance the capabilities of Councils and Areas to have input and influence on the decisions of the Board of Governors.

***Strategic Direction No. 5.1:***

A feeling of connectedness to, pride in and ownership of the organization based on an inclusive decision-making process.

***Strategic Direction No. 1.2:***

A halt in the precipitous decline in membership.

**Strategic *Direction No. 7.2:***

Achievement of financial stability at all levels of the organization.

When these are achieved, SCOUT eh! will have fulfilled its mandate.

Working towards the changes envisioned in the Strategic Directions, which we have all adopted, can make some people uncomfortable. Here again you are right to identify that change may cause stress and dissent. Stress and discomfort may well arise when members identify and verbalize difficult issues. That does not mean and should not imply that those members are not making a positive contribution. We must remember that we are all Scouters and that we are working towards a revitalized movement in which we will have a more positive future. Our goals are congruent with those of Scouts Canada. We ARE members of Scouts Canada. We trust that you, as our Chief Commissioner, will ensure that your message is not used by some as a pretext to impede our members in their efforts to achieve the progress envisioned in the Strategic Directions.

Unfortunately, there are some who fail to understand or who misrepresent our purpose. They dismiss our efforts to attain democracy and accountability in the movement as trivial. They think it detracts from program delivery. On the contrary, democracy is one of the cornerstones of the WOSM Gifts for Peace program which was initiated to celebrate Scouting's Centenary. Seeking democracy and accountability does not detract from our role in program delivery; it enhances that role. More to the point, our Scouts look to our example, and that example must be consistent with the democratic tradition of public advocacy. Scouts are more worldly today. They are very aware of what is happening in the world around them and they bring sophistication to their perceptions that you or I would have found alien as youths.



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Finally, just in case there was ever any doubt, let us clarify our position. We are and always have been members and friends of Scouting. We want to move towards a more positive future. We want to concentrate our efforts on what is best in achieving our common Mission. We want to revitalize our movement. We are deeply committed to being wise in the use of Scouting resources, and would like nothing better than to ensure that they are available to achieve the Mission for present and future generations. We are proud to accept our obligations and responsibilities to Scouting.

In closing, let me join with you to work co-operatively and positively towards a better future for the Movement we love so much. As I have often said before, we are ready, willing and able to help.

Yours in future Scouting,

Michael Reid  
Scouter