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Governor Corzine's Stevens Commencement 2008

May 22, 2008

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Good morning—

Thank you for inviting me to be a part of this exciting event.

It's great to earn a doctorate without the agony of orals and a thesis.

Just think, I only had to walk a couple of blocks down Washington Street from 14th.

Thank you President Raveche, Chairman Babbio, Trustees, distinguished faculty, parents, friends and most especially the graduates of the Class of 2008.

Let me begin by expressing my sincerest congratulations to each of the graduates for their outstanding achievement.

As one observer put it: "The fireworks of your life begin today. Each diploma is a lighted match, and each of you a fuse."

More modestly...all of us join together in wishing you much happiness and great success in your life ahead.

We are all excited by the prospect that you will make a difference in the world in which you live.

As Adlai Stevenson invoked at a commencement ages ago—like when I graduated from the University of Illinois in 1969 —"When you leave here, don't forget why you came."

Your time at Stevens has surely given you a terrific exposure to 21st-century knowledge and skills while offering you serious practice in disciplined reasoning and critical thought.

You came for a good reason.

Your preparation beckons you to a higher calling.

The preeminence of the American experience has been built on the nation's historic ability to create entrepreneurs who understood the leverage of science, math, and technology—

Entrepreneurs who translated equations and microchips into communication satellites, pharmaceutical formulas, Facebook, and i-Pods.

I suspect President Raveche would call that "Technogenesis."

The continued preeminence of America and our economic well-being will be borne of your generation's ability to advance our understanding and application of science and technology.

Your experience at Stevens puts you on the front line of that challenge.

From Colonel Stevens' steam engine to its successor the internal combustion engine, from Kitty Hawk to the Apollo program, and from the telegraph to the Internet, America has led the advance of innovation and invention.

I'm proud to recognize New Jersey has been inextricably linked to those advances—From Edison's Menlo Park, to the genius of Bell Labs, to the super-think tank at the Institute for Advanced Studies.

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America and New Jersey carried the mantle of the Industrial Revolution into the 20th century and again today, we carry the age of technology into the 21st.

The question is: Can we sustain our preeminence in a world that is a' changing?

We live in a world moving at warp speed.

Moore's Law captures the concept that computing power is increasing exponentially, doubling every two years.

Capturing the opportunities and the advantage of processing speed, memory, and resolution will take the minds of our most prepared and capable.

Today, by most accounts, China produces more than two times the number of engineers we graduate in the U.S.

Outsourcing and global competition are appropriately the subject of Presidential debates.

America's universities comb the globe for scientists to discover the protocols to employ stem cells in the attack on life's most devastating diseases.

I look with envy on the development of electric-powered cars and the power stations to charge them—products engineered and built in Israel.

I could go on about long-lived solar panels, energy-efficient desalinization, or nuclear fusion.

Still, America is preeminent, but the race is on.

I can only observe— There is a high calling for each of you—the graduates.

And our nation's challenge is not only in the laboratory, the design rooms, or hidden in computer code.

It is in the classrooms of elementary and secondary schools across America.

Classrooms where there are far too few teachers to inspire the curiosity and teach the skills and lessons of math and science you have taken in.

Again, I can only observe— Teaching is a high calling as well.

And so, Stevens graduates, you have chosen your path well.

The opportunities are substantial.

Don't forget why you came.

American demographers project that demand for science and engineering professionals will grow 3-times as fast as the overall economy in the next 10 years.

Of the fastest-growing professions, ¾'s of them require substantial preparation in math and science.

As a washed-up businessman, it is clear: Supply and demand is on your side.

For a time, society may have ascribed excess value and economic reward to finance, entertainment, or real estate, but in the future, I suspect scientific and technological innovation will rule.

From Franklin, to Ford, to Edison and Einstein, and on to Gates...America's strength has returned time and again to the discovery, the ingenuity, and onto the marketing of ideas and inventions.

The return to an embrace of the historic role for science in our society will almost assuredly gain momentum as the guard changes in Washington.

In this regard, I would argue in the past few years far too many constraints have been imposed on scientific progress—be the roadblocks financial, philosophical, or political.

Now, change is at hand.

In my thinking, science is basic to the human experience and its necessity must be collectively embraced.

It is a high calling, not only for Stevens graduates, but for New Jersey and the nation.

Our future truly depends on it.

Science speaks to the curiosity of man, marks our evolution, and defines the grandeur of the human experience.

The disciplined pursuit of mankind's most important challenges—climate change, complex diseases, food shortages, cyber-security and advancing productivity in all walks of life—are the field of opportunity—the opportunity of a lifetime.

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Stevens graduates—follow in the footsteps of New Jersey's brightest innovators, Einstein and Edison...

...and as Stevenson implored—Never forget why you came!

God Bless you all—

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