



[Home](#)

[Newsroom](#)

[Media](#)

[Administration](#)

[NJ's Priorities](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[Press Releases](#)

[Public Addresses](#)

[Executive Orders](#)

[Press Kit](#)

[Reports](#)

[Home](#) > [Newsroom](#) > [Press Releases](#) > [2010](#) > [Governor Christie's Remarks at Rutgers University 2010 Commencement Ceremony](#)

Governor Christie's Remarks at Rutgers University 2010 Commencement Ceremony

Wednesday, May 19, 2010 • Tags: [Education](#)

Governor Chris Christie spoke at and received an honorary degree at Rutgers University 2010 Commencement Ceremony in New Brunswick, N.J. on Sunday, May 16, 2010.

The two part video of the Governor's speech can be seen on the [GovChristie YouTube Channel](#) by clicking here for Part 1 and here for Part 2.

Full transcript of the Governor's speech is provided below.

FULL TRANSCRIPT

GOVERNOR CHRIS CHRISTIE:

Thank you.

Thank you, first and foremost to the graduates of 2010. I want to congratulate you on your achievement.

I come to you today felling a little old.

Last night I went to my 30th high school reunion, and so it's nice to see young people again.

It reminds me of the fact that it wasn't so many years ago that I sat where you are sitting and I honor you for your achievements.

To President McCormick, And the Members of the Board of Governors, The Members of the Board of Trustees, And the Family, Friends, and Honored Guests of the graduates that are here today: A lot of life goes along a well-defined path.

There's a clear beginning, a middle, and an end -- and then you get the reward you were after.

College is like that.

But there's another part at the end of the path that nobody talks about much.

When you get to the goal -- especially when it's a big, important goal, like this one today -- when you get to the finish, you have a sense of relief, a sense of freedom.

You're out from under a set of rules, and now you get to make your own.

Most of you probably feel that right now.

But feeling like you're free, and really being free, are very different things.

What I want to talk about is just that: about making sure you have taken the blinders off, and know what it means to really be free.

Education is key to the kind of freedom I'm talking about.

Because your education did more than inform you about a particular topic.

And it did more than teach you how to think.

Without it ever being stated explicitly, your education established a personal inventory of what's important to you.

There wasn't a great deal of planning. It was just the result of what you saw in front of you, day after day. It just happens.

That's your impression of the world. And it's already settling into your mental DNA.

So I say to you today be careful.

Because the possibilities that you can see right now are only a few degrees in the great arc of your future.

If you imagine that your outlook in this moment is the pinnacle -- that this is as big as the menu of your life can get -- then unfortunately the blinders are already on.

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Your education may in fact be the platform for everything you do.

But then again, it might not.

Graduating from college is a significant accomplishment, but it is one accomplishment in one direction, often in one discipline.

That can be the basis for everything else you do. Or it can be one step in one direction in a life filled with different achievements in all kinds of realms.

And if you're open to that possibility, then you know what it truly means to be free.

Because to be free is to know that at any time in life, you can choose any direction, any new goal. Or you can simply appreciate the beauty of the world, and the smooth lines of a life well lived.

This first step does not have to determine any of those that come after.

I hope that as your life unfolds, you will be open to whatever might come along for you.

But whatever you choose, I hope you become more and more aware that there is more than what's out your own window.

Maybe you studied to be an accountant. Or an economist. Or an engineer. None of those are easy. Congratulations. And you should celebrate today.

But don't let it define who you might want to be tomorrow.

One of the greatest guitar players in the world, a man in Nashville, Tennessee named John Knowles, walked through the line of a few commencements just like this one until he got all the way to a PhD.

But his PhD wasn't in music, it was in physics.

Dr. Knowles performed in physics for about ten years. It was the 1960s and he was designing the first calculators, but he had other things in his life that he enjoyed. So he quit his job as a senior engineer so he could pursue something else.

He had figured out that he loved something else more than physics: playing and teaching guitar.

And how he made that transition was simple: He didn't let choices he made at one point in his life lock in all the choices that would follow.

How was he able to do that?

He furnished his mind with more than an unshakeable commitment to a single discipline or a single perspective.

He made himself remember that there are other things in the world besides the interest and the field of study right in front of him.

And he kept himself open to the possibility that someday one of those things might become more important to him than the choice of education that he made as a very young man.

Dr. Knowles is almost 70 now. Most people who know him don't know he has a PhD in physics.

That was one life, and then he chose another.

Now that's freedom: the freedom to look beyond the path you're on to recognize something better for your soul.

So I say to you, as you graduate today with this splendid, prestigious degree: As you go through life: Do whatever it is you like.

When I got to college, I ended up in a lot of classes that forced me to read a lot of non-fiction.

A lot of very strict things.

I decided I wanted to take a different path, a class on great American poets. Something that I absolutely had no interest in, but I didn't get into the class I wanted to get into, and that was the one that was open.

And so, I went into that class with very low expectations, hoping to just grid it out. Get my grade and move.

But I was exposed to a great professor. And she made poetry relevant to me.

Now, did this make me a better lawyer? Probably not.

But it did take off the blinders. And it opened my mind to other things.

I didn't do this to impress anybody. I did it like I said, quite by accident. And I don't think I've even ever shared that story before.

Because in the end there is no one to impress who matters. The lion's share of the emotions in your life are going to be how you feel about yourself.

You live inside your mind. So fill it with things that make you appreciate all there is besides that what you already know.

Consider what's familiar, then furnish your mind with the unfamiliar.

The scientist needs a place in their mind for art.

The number cruncher ought to make room for literature.

And the master of reason needs to understand the indefinable pull of emotion.

If you can equip your mind to accommodate the unfamiliar, then you have acquitted yourself to be open to the new and unfamiliar possibilities that your life may bring.

You should want that.

Because life is too short for the color and timbre and tone of your days to be determined by nothing more than the view from your own two eyes.

If you are incapable of seeing the diversity of perspective and opinion and opportunity beyond your own short experience, you will miss so very much. And the greater tragedy is that you won't even know you missed anything at all.

For most of you, the diploma they hand you today is going to open certain doors -- and as you know, there are doors that would never open if you didn't get it.

But there are other doors, and behind them will be things that can change your heart and soul, and your life. You will recognize them only if you have moved beyond petty habit to a true appreciation of all the world might have for you.

One more thing: When the time comes, I wish for you the courage to walk through those doors.

Because it will take courage. No one's going to pull you along, not really, not in your adult life.

When you make big changes, you're gonna be the one who makes the call. Just you. And when you've got a comfortable life and a routine, it's gonna take a lot of courage to listen to your heart and decide to climb another hill.

I see the twists and turns in my own life and I know that's true, the benefit of perspective.

I hope you choose whatever you choose because through the years you stay free enough to let something capture your heart, and not because your whole life was set by a choice you made sitting in a classroom when you were 18 or 19 or 20 years old.

Here in New Jersey, so many people have gone down some different road not to impress anybody but just because it let them be creative, it called on imagination, or it just looked like fun.

Einstein came to New Jersey in 1933. Buzz Aldrin went from Montclair to the moon. Sinatra went from Hoboken to Hollywood. Harriet Tubman brought slaves to Cape May. Les Paul, who invented the electric guitar and passed away just last year, did that from Mahwah, New Jersey for 60 years. Danny DeVito, Frankie Valli, Carl Lewis, Count Basie, Alice Paul, Toni Morrison, I can't help myself, Bruce Springsteen -- these aren't folks who followed the well-defined path. They made their own way, and they were free -- truly, intellectually free. And it all started for them here in New Jersey, where it starts for you.

Through action and through faith, they were aware enough to see possibilities beyond what was just in front of them... and they did good things and great things, and some of them changed the world.

I'm all for changing the world. But you don't have to do that. All you have to do is stand ready to change yourself.

If you are aware, and if you are lucky, you will always be pulled between two choices: sticking to the road you're on, or being distracted by something that seems a little more interesting.

I'm here to tell you at 47 years old, distractions have been very good to me.

So listen to them. Always listen.

Because a life well lived is a beautiful thing.

There is beauty in order and achievement. That's what brings us here today.

But there is also beauty in disorder and uncertainty and ambiguity... and faith... and chance... and wonder... and opportunity... and mystery.

There is even beauty in failing greatly -- if it's in pursuit of something that called you to try.

Those who recognize that other beauty -- those who open themselves to whatever is new and creative and unfamiliar -- those are the women and men who know what it is to be free, because they see beyond the well-defined path of their own days and nights.

They are the ones who have sought to find the true width and breadth of what is possible in life.

What I want most today is something good for each and every one of you in your life.

I wish for each of you awareness... open eyes... and a wide road, wide with freedom.

Congratulations to all of you, and thank you for having me.

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