

University of New Mexico
Commencement Address
May 13, 2006

To Acting President Harris, Provost Dasenbrock, Executive Vice President Roth. Distinguished Guests, Faculty, Staff, Family, and Graduates, welcome, and thank you.

I was a freshman in Congress when I was invited to give my first commencement address. I asked then-House Speaker Tip O’Neill what I should say, and he told me, “Think of yourself as a corpse at an Irish wake: you have to show up, but nobody expects you to say much.”

For those of you who know me, that could be a bit of a problem. But I will do my best to honor former Speaker O’Neill today.

Whenever I get the opportunity to address a group of graduates, it’s a reminder to me of how much things have changed since I earned my degree.

When I was in college, Al Gore had not yet invented the Internet.

It was before cell phones, blackberries and I-pods.

It was before laptops, before My Space and before Face Book.

Before blogging and text messaging.

How did we ever get anything done?

To the graduates, I want to congratulate all of you for your achievements. You have worked hard to earn your degree and it will serve you well in all that you do from today onward. I want to recognize the valedictorian and the many others who are graduating with honors. You obviously worked hard for the extra recognition, and I hope it serves you well in the future.

Many times these commencement addresses are directed toward the best and the brightest of the graduating class. And that’s unfortunate.

I’m not going to do that today. I believe everybody, no matter your class ranking or your major, will leave the University today with the potential to do great things.

I have another motive for delivering a broad message that resonates with all graduates, including those who struggled to make it here today. You see, I am one of you. I was not the best student. I played baseball and I spent a lot of time on other extra-curricular activities during my time in college. Unfortunately for me, sometimes my studies were

not a priority. But in the end I earned my degree and went on to graduate school, where my appreciation for foreign affairs started to take shape.

Despite my lack of scholastic achievement, here I am today, as the Governor of the great state of New Mexico, the best job I have ever had.

What has propelled me from my college graduation, many, many, years ago, to today, are the values that I learned from my friends, my idols, my church and my family and my confidence in greater possibilities. What keeps me going is the mystery behind the next corner, the next bend in the road, tomorrow's unexpected events.

There are a few rules that I live by which I believe have shaped my success.

First, you should always try to resolve conflict through direct dialogue. I have used this tactic with everyone from Saddam Husain to Fidel Castro to Republican legislators. There is a way through every block. This applies to conflicts within families, within communities, and within nations. I believe in being inclusive, bringing people together -- not exclusivity. I believe in cooperation and getting results -- not isolation.

Second, you need to make personal connections and nurture them so they will last a lifetime. Friendships are important relationships that can serve you personally, professionally and socially. When you meet someone, look for the common ground. Pay attention to details, and try to remember names and facts important to that person.

Third, Aim big. Always try to achieve more than you have to. In the next few years you will make many important decisions which will have a dramatic impact on your life, Should you go to graduate school, what career should you pursue, should you get married, start a family? When considering all of these choices, you need to have your goals in mind and evaluate what is best for you.

Fourth, Take a position and move forward. When I was elected Governor nearly four years ago, there was an attitude that the status quo was okay. New Mexico was last on so many bad lists, and we had been there for so long, there was an acceptance that we couldn't change directions. Guess what, that pessimistic attitude is history. We turned things around by taking bold positions and aggressive action to move the state forward. We shook up the school system. We cut taxes to make New Mexico economically competitive with other states. We're requiring ignition interlocks for all drunk drivers. And we didn't back down from big states like Florida, Texas and California in the race to build a commercial Spaceport.

As Governor, I'm proud to say we're moving forward. And people are noticing.

Remember those poor rankings. Just last week, Forbes Magazine profiled New Mexico and bragged about our business-friendly climate. The magazine ranked Albuquerque the best place in the nation for building a business and career. And another top business publication named Albuquerque one of the nation's fifty hottest cities for business.

And why not? We've built an economy with the lowest business costs in the country.

We have the thirteenth largest concentration of engineers in the nation.

We've turned the corner and become a model to the rest of the nation.

New Mexico is a leader in renewable energy technology.

We're a growing movie and film industry destination.

We're the home of the Spaceport.

We're building an economy with good-paying, stable jobs that provide each of you the chance to stay here in New Mexico, contribute, raise a family, make a difference and enjoy life.

And my commitment to you is that we will keep doing that.

You're probably thinking: That's great for you, and great for New Mexico. But what does any of it have to do with me? I'm just trying to figure out what's next. Where am I going to find a job?

My point, besides making a pitch for you to stay right here and be a part of the high-wage economy we're building in New Mexico, is that your options are limitless.

Right now there are a million possibilities ahead of you, it actually makes me envious. Even, today, I wake up every morning excited about what might happen.

More important than what you've learned in these last four or five years is who you have become.

Persistence, self-worth, integrity, determination, flexibility.

These are the traits of success.

You will encounter challenges and roadblocks, but none more difficult than you can handle. Your persistence and determination will keep you going.

For those moments when you're unsure, your confidence and self-worth will sustain you.

When you are offered short-cuts that you know aren't right, your integrity will keep you on the right path.

And when your path offers you the unexpected, a new direction; your flexibility, your trust in yourself will encourage you to take that risk.

Like previous generations, you are facing uncertain times: Iraq. Iran. Darfur. Global warming.

Even here at home, families are nervous about \$3-a-gallon gasoline. The President is talking about sending National Guardsmen – our National Guardsmen – along the border to deal with a failed immigration policy.

But rather than fret about the future, I'm urging you to be leaders.

Our nation is building walls, not bridges. Change it.

We're using politics to divide, not unite. Change it.

Our nation is now more feared and tolerated than admired and respected. Do something about it.

We need you to show up. We need you to participate and to lead.

This is your country. This is your world. It will be what you make of it.

Closing

I know that many of you simply know me as the Governor that drives too fast...but I'm in a hurry. I believe there are 25 hours in every day and must use each minute to the fullest. In fact, I might sign an executive order adding another hour to the day.

I am here today because somewhere along the lines I realized I could have a real impact - I could help people in my community and I could actually make a difference in the world. And you don't have to be a Governor – or even a leader – to make that difference. I am confident that this great University has prepared many of you to go on to do great things.

But it is up to you to take advantage of the possibilities. I urge you to find your passion. Find the thing that drives you and make it your mission in life. Don't be discouraged if things don't always go your way. I can promise you, you will experience disappointment, probably more than once.

My greatest disappointment turned out to be one of the best opportunities in my career. When I first ran for Congress, I was young and probably a little naïve. I thought I could beat a legend in New Mexico, despite the fact that I had no experience as an elected leader. But what I lacked in experience, I made up in desire and hard work. I lost that race, but my strong showing as a political newcomer set the stage for another attempt at office. Two years later, I won the newly created congressional seat in Northern New Mexico.

You never know what is around the next bend if you are not moving forward.

The challenge to your generation is to continue to strive for greatness while also rebuilding a sense of community.

This nation was built on welcoming your poor, your tired, your hungry. Let's not lose that. Let's continue to take pride and see strength in our diversity.

And let me assure you, there has never been a better time to be a New Mexican.

Not too long ago, when new graduates wanted not just a job, but a good-paying career, they had to look elsewhere. Somewhere beyond New Mexico.

Not today.

I want all of you to stay – and of course, I want all of you to register to vote.

In 1966, at the University of California at Berkeley, Robert F. Kennedy said:

"The future does not belong to those who are content with today, apathetic toward common problems and their fellow man alike, timid and fearful in the face of bold projects and new ideas. Rather, it will belong to those who can blend passion, reason and courage in a personal commitment to the great enterprises and ideals of...society."

Be involved and engaged.

Be bold.

Take risks.

Live with passion.

Dream big.

And show up.

I wish each of you the best.

And be safe tonight.

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