**Bernier Speech [EZ Speech No. 16263]**

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Commencement address by Ms. Janet Bernier at the 2017 graduation of the Political Science Department at Stony Brook University.

[I recommend that you begin by walking to the podium after your introduction, scan the audience puprpose-fully, and then, after several moments of scanning:]

so what’s next?

where do you go from here?

How you gonna translate that shiny new sheepskin into a making living? you’re a bona fide political scientist now, so what exactly does that mean? well, i’ll tell you what it means:

it means that you’ll probably be the only greeter at walmart that asks for election day off. [if you’re up for it, pantomime a “rim shot”]

it means that you have the ability to translate policy data into something simple enough that even a congressman can understand. [rim shot]

you whisper into your significant other’s ear at night that your love for him or her is independent of irrelvant alternatives. [rim shot]

but seriously, my friends . . . what are you going to do now as a newly-minted poly-sci major? there are tons of alternatives, of course, and not all of them are involved directly with politics. as you heard, for example, i migrated from political science to litigation and, now, to tax law in the course ofa [no.]-year professional career. now, of course, there’s not a whole lot of tax law that *doesn’t*, in the end, have profound political implications or impacts. and i think one of the reasons i’ve been able to be so successful in this field is the wonderful education i got here in stony brook’s poly-sci department, particularly the global, international perspective i got on the work political scientists are engaged in today.

in this regard, i’d like to acknowledge in particular the generous mentorship and guidance provided to me by [doctor(?)] jeff segal, who [at the time] was my constitutional law professor. i don’t know if you caught it, but jeff appeared on the cbs morning news back in january commenting, in his uniquely trenchant manner, on president trump’s nomination of neil gorsuch to the supreme court. i must say, he did stony brook proud!

now, i have no doubt that most you graduating poli-sci-ers have already thought deeply about where you’d like to go from here. some of you might already have an actual job offer that pays an actual salary. some of you might have decided to persue an advanced degree, thus staving off for another two or three or four years the need to confront the future. but whatever your situtation is at this moment, i’d like to give you just two pieces of advice — this *is*, after all, what they’re paying me the big bucks for!.

my first piece of advice is that, if you want to be truly happy in life, you’ve got to follow your bliss. Someone once said, “Find something you love to do, and you’ll never work a day in your life.” i think this absolutely true. but What if you don’t know what your “bliss” *is*?

now that’s a problem — and to tell you the truth, it’s an all-too-common one, at that. I can’t tell you how many young people i’ve met over the years who — after four or six or eight years of college — still don’t have the foggiest idea of what they want to do with their lives. i find this awfully sad. I think it’s tragic that these young people haven’t been “turned on” by *anything* in their lives except maybe video games — not by any subject, not by any teacher, not by any minister or guidance counselor or mentor or friend — not even by their parents. what a shame! and if there are any “can’t-deciders” in the audience here today, I can only hope and pray that someday soon you’ll have an experience, or read a book, or see a film, or meet a friend, or discover a hobby that really turns you on, that gets your juices flowing and makes you want to get up every morning with vim in your vigor and pep in your step. I don’t know what else I can tell you, except for my second and last piece of advice, which I address to every one of you graduates here today, and that is: *there are always alternatives!*

with only rare exceptions, You’re never locked into *anything* — any career, any lifestyle, any geography. sometimes, what you thought was your “bliss” turns out to be not so blissful. or pursuing it turns out to be a [helluva/heckofa] lot more difficult than you thought it would be. or you get introduced to an experience or field of endeavor you’ve never considered before. but the universal and constant truth of this world is that things change. everything changes, and you’re not immune. and there’s nothing wrong with changing your mind. yes . . . making a dramatic mid-course correction in your career might indeed cause you some embarrass-ment in certain quarters, depending on how vocifer-ously you might have championed your initial career choice.

but you can always change direction, just as i did, and find a new bliss, a new passion. i can tell you from my own experience: it’s not the destination that’s most important; it’s the journey. enjoy the ride. put every-thing you’ve got into every job you take. You might change destinations . . . you might switch vehicles; but as long as you know you’ve given 100% each time, you’ll have no regrets if circumstances change and impel you to make a new career choice. franklin roosevelt once said this in ushering in his new deal: *“it is common sense to take [an approach] and try it. If it fails, admit it frankly and try another. But above all, trying something!”*

you learned a lot more than political science here at stony brook, and that comprehensive education will stand you in good stead as you explore your career options. think deeply and choose wisely. Follow your bliss as long and as hard and as diligently as you can, but remember that there are *always* alternatives.

thank you.

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