

New York mayor Michael Bloomberg gave a commencement address to graduates at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine on May 25th, and he struck a theme which was decidedly refreshing coming from a Republican – he spoke in vigorous defense of science. His address may be found here:

<http://www.nyc.gov/cgi-bin/misc/pfprinter.cgi?action=print&sitename=OM>

Or you may view video of it here:

http://www.nyc.gov/html/om/html/2006a/media/pc052506-Johns_Hopkins.asx

or here (high speed connection):

http://www.nyc.gov/html/om/html/2006a/media/pc052506-Johns_Hopkins300k.asx

Here is an excerpt:

Today, we are seeing hundreds of years of scientific discovery being challenged by people who simply disregard facts that don't happen to agree with their agendas. Some call it "pseudo-science," others call it "faith-based science," but when you notice where this negligence tends to take place, you might as well call it "political science."

You can see "political science" at work when it comes to global warming. Despite near unanimity in the science community there's now a movement – driven by ideology and short-term economics – to ignore the evidence and discredit the reality of climate change.

You can see "political science" at work with respect to stem cell research. Despite its potential, the federal government has restricted funding for creating new cell lines – putting the burden of any future research squarely on the shoulders of the private sector.

Government's most basic responsibility, however, is the health and welfare of its people, so it has a duty to encourage appropriate scientific investigations that could possibly save the lives of millions.

"Political science" knows no limits. Was there anything more inappropriate than watching political science try to override medical science in the Terry Schiavo case?

And it boggles the mind that nearly two centuries after Darwin, and 80 years after John Scopes was put on trial, this country is still debating the validity of evolution. In Kansas, Mississippi, and elsewhere, school districts are now proposing to teach "intelligent design" – which is really just creationism by another name – in science classes alongside evolution. Think about it! This not only devalues science, it cheapens theology. As well as condemning these students to an inferior education, it ultimately hurts their professional opportunities. Hopkins' motto is Veritas vos liberabit – "the truth shall set you free" – not that "you shall be free to set the truth!" I've always wondered which science those legislators who create their own truths pick when their families need life-saving medical treatment.

There's no question: science – the very core of what you have been living and breathing these past several years – is being sorely tested. But the interesting thing is this is not the first time that graduates of the School of Medicine have faced such a challenge. When the institution was founded more than a century ago, medicine was dominated by quacks and poorly-trained physicians. In that world, Johns Hopkins and its graduates became a beacon of truth, and trust and helped to revolutionize the field.

Today, in just a few hours you will each evoke that same respect – and with it, you will each bear the same responsibility: To defend the integrity and power of science.

Many people have been buzzing about the odds of Bloomberg making a run for the Whitehouse – speculation that his office is quick to put down, but still seems to oddly encourage. It is worth noting that though he ran for mayor (twice) as a Republican, he was a registered Democrat up until that time, and many of his positions – pro-choice, gay friendly, anti-smoking, pro-healthcare, pro-gun control, pro-science – are more traditionally associated with liberals. As a billionaire, many people expect that were he to run he would do so as an independent, so as to avoid the whole primary process.

Only time will tell, of course, whether such a run is in the cards. But, one can always hope that such fresh rhetoric – unapologetic, well reasoned, straight faced – will enter the public

sphere more and more in the upcoming election cycles. I'm not endorsing a Bloomberg presidency, but I do hope he can stir up the pot, and force more politicians to face up to the zealots who are driving the fanatical religious agenda which thinks that its good policy to block access to life saving solutions such as Gardasil – the vaccine for cervical cancer (which has also been shown to be effective against other cancers)
<http://www.thepeoplesvoice.org/cgi-bin/blogs/voices.php/2006/06/03/p8582> – while claiming to be “pro-life.”