Thank you for that welcome, Todd (emcee Todd Whitthorne.) It’s good to see you and your wife Kathy. Mr. and Mrs. Aenchbacher, Dr. and Mrs. Gibbons, Dr. Sterling, Roger Staubach and of course Dr. and Mrs. Cooper, I am delighted to be here this evening.

My wife Anita sends her regards- she is getting her daily exercise keeping up with our two teenage children.

When I told my 14-year old daughter Sydney about tonight’s event, she wanted me to pass on some advice to Dr. Cooper about naming his next book. She recommends “Jogging and Yard Work: They’re not just strenuous, they keep dad out of the house”.

I told her that we may not be responsible for the new yard if we’re forced to move soon, and she said, “I know, but you better keep jogging.”

I took up running a little more than ten years ago. I found myself, during the stressful days of special sessions of the Legislature, having trouble sleeping.

A friend of mine told me that if I started running, it would solve that problem. I told him they forced me to run at A&M and in the Air Force, and I am not about to start again willingly.

But after another month of being dead-tired and over-worked, I took up his advice and started running. And outside of an occasional flare-up in the knees, I have been running ever since, 3 or 4 times a week.

I have found rigorous exercise to be therapeutic. It helps me deal with stress, gives me a clear head and, of course, makes me feel healthier even as this 50-year old frame starts to wear out.

Speaking of that, my only regret is that you will not hear tonight from a gentleman who wanted to be here, but who had to decline due to his hip replacement surgery, former President Bush.

But I hear he is doing well, and I am sure he will be sky-diving again in no time at all, that is, unless another President Bush issues an emergency order banning that kind of activity.

The last time I talked to the governor, he was in good spirits. Like all of us, he is optimistic this stand-off will end shortly.
I am reminded of those famous words of Winston Churchill, who said, “democracy is the worst form of government, except all the others that have been tried.”

Democracy, though at times it seems slow and a little messy, is the foundation of the freedom we all so richly enjoy.

Millions of heroic Americans have risked both life and limb on foreign shores and on high seas to further our freedom.

My father, Ray Perry, was part of that great generation of Americans who knew that our freedom is only as precious as our willingness to sacrifice for it.

As an 18-year old farm boy, he stuffed himself into the tail of a B-17 bomber and flew 35 missions over war-torn Europe.

He, my father-in-law Joe Thigpen, and millions like them, embody the sacrifice of freedom. And while our current election stand-off has been painstaking, when you think of the millions of brave men and women who have worn our nation’s uniform to protect our very right to vote, you can’t help but ask the question: what would be the better alternative?

As you all know, Dr. Cooper began some of his ground-breaking work in physical fitness while serving our country in the United States Air Force.

It was during that service that he developed the “12-minute test” and the Aerobics Point System that formed the basis for his first book.

And from that point forward, his impact on the health and well-being of millions of people – not just Americans, but people all over the globe – has been immense.

Dr. Cooper spurred the jogging boom that has gotten millions of people off the couch and onto the jogging trail. In Brazil, they refer to jogging as simply “coopering”.

In many ways, he has been a man ahead of his time. He has led the slow revolution in the medical community to change the focus from disease treatment to disease prevention through aerobic exercise and proper diet. His slogan epitomizes the new thinking: Indeed, “it is easier to maintain good health through proper exercise, diet and emotional balance than it is to regain it once it is lost.”

Dr. Cooper, while I will not extend my thanks to you this evening for the promotion of tofu pumpkin pie, I know I speak on behalf of everyone here tonight when I say we are profoundly grateful for the unsurpassed work you have done to contribute to the healthier lives so many of us now enjoy.

And I want to also pay tribute to a woman who has been Kenneth’s backbone. She stood by him when many in the medical community threatened his new approach to preventative activity decades ago, and in her own right has been an inspiration to everyone around her.

Millie, you and Kenneth have made life better for your fellow man, and in the process the two of you have built a lasting legacy that will outlive all of us here tonight. Please join me in saying thank you with a round of applause.

In state government, we too are in the business of prevention.
Just last session we created a landmark Children’s Health Insurance Program for the children of working families. This new program, which has now signed up close to 200,000 children in eight months, means those children will get health care in preventative settings instead of the emergency room.

It means ailments will not turn into chronic conditions, and children will be ready to learn and grow to their full potential because they are not sidetracked by nagging common ailments.

This kind of investment in preventive medicine at an early age pays great dividends over time, resulting in healthier citizens who lead more productive and fuller lives.

I am also a firm believer that the best crime prevention tool, the best economic development tool we have in this state is an educated child.

Through stronger accountability, higher standards and increased funding, we have not only raised test scores in our public schools, but we have raised the sights of our children. Today in Texas, millions of children can now dare to dream of a tomorrow that is better than what their parents and grandparents experienced.

And yet our work is not done. Learning doesn’t stop with a high school diploma. In this digital age, it is more critical than ever that more of our citizens pursue a college degree.

Only one in five Texans have an undergraduate or graduate degree. Simply put, that is not good enough. We must bridge the opportunity gap by eliminating the education gap. And as long as I am in office, that will be my passion.

That’s why I formed a special commission to address a number of higher education issues. The commission is examining how we can make a college degree more accessible and more affordable, how we can better integrate technology into the college experience, and how we can meet the rapidly changing workforce needs of the new economy.

As part of our effort to improve access to higher learning, I have proposed creating technology scholarships at our 2-year colleges. Our community, technical and junior colleges are essential in meeting the rapidly changing workforce needs of this state.

And a number of other innovative ideas will soon be proposed by the Special Commission on 21st Century Colleges and Universities. Their bold ideas will lead to a blueprint for excellence at our institutions of higher learning.

In Texas, we have a storied reputation when it comes to producing and recruiting legendary football coaches. I would like to see us develop the same reputation for producing and recruiting Nobel Laureates.

Let me close by saying it is a tremendous honor to serve as your Lieutenant Governor. And when the legal wrangling is cleared up and Governor Bush is declared the president-elect, it will be my great honor to serve as your governor.

Texas is a tremendous place because of our dynamic people, people like Kenneth and Millie Cooper, and so many other great Texans who contribute so much to their fellow man.

From the border, to the fifth ward of Houston, to the suburbs of Dallas, there are no second-rate dreams, no second class citizens.
The Texas of the 21st Century must be a place that invites all and includes all…a land that is enriched by the tremendous asset of diversity…a haven of opportunity for people with big hearts and unlimited promise.

May we all work together to do that which is worthy of generations to come. And may we keep close to our hearts one simple but important idea: Texas matters most.

Thank you, and God bless.