End of Session Remarks in Houston

*Note - Gov. Perry frequently departs from prepared remarks.

**Wednesday, May 30, 2001**

Thank you Chancellor Smith. Good morning, and welcome to our press conference today.

One hundred and forty days ago, few people had high hopes for the 77th Legislature.

The delayed presidential election results meant very quick transitions for Lt. Governor Ratliff and me.

Pundits were predicting budget doom and gloom, deficits and tax hikes, because of the record tax cuts we passed in 1999. And just about everyone predicted that redistricting would be a black hole, sucking the oxygen out of the session and derailing any meaningful accomplishments.

As is often the case, the conventional wisdom was wrong.

By virtually any measure, the 77th Legislative Session was a success. It may not have been the most graceful session, but ultimately the people of Texas will judge us on results, and on that basis, this session was a significant success.

We achieved reforms, and provided funding, for priorities like higher education, public education, health and human services, and the border, results I would suggest to you are deserving of an "A" on any report card. And we did it without repealing the 1999 tax cuts, without dipping into the rainy day fund, and without passing new sales, income, gasoline or nursing home taxes.

These were bipartisan accomplishments of which all Texans can be proud.

The citizens of Houston can be proud of a number of accomplishments that will benefit this area. The University of Houston, Dr. Smith, received a healthy $23.3 million increase. That included new special items funding of $3.7 million to support a Learning and Computation Center, a partnership initiative with public schools, and a Small Business Development Center. The University also received $51 million in tuition revenue bonds to construct a science and engineering building and new classroom facilities.

The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center received a $31.3 million increase. This includes new special item funding of $18 million to support a biotechnology initiative that will help the city of Houston be at the center of the biotech revolution.
We also provided $13 million in funding for the Harris County Boot Camp, and funding for Hepatitis A immunizations in counties, like Harris County, that report high incidences of this ailment.

When you consider state general revenue and dedicated general revenue - without the tobacco settlement - the budget grew at an annual rate of about 4 percent - lower than 1997 or 1999 - and in-line with projected growth in the economy.

We made the dream of a college education a reality for 65,000 more Texas students, by tripling funding for the TEXAS Grant Program to nearly $300 million. This scholarship program says to Texans, “we don’t want your future to be limited because your finances are limited.”

Once again, we worked together to continue progress in our public schools by passing a $30 million Math Initiative that will prepare young Texans for the jobs of the future. I believe this measure will also help at-risk students by helping to identify and correct their learning challenges before it’s too late.

By passing a landmark teacher health insurance program, we will help keep qualified individuals in the classroom, and by strengthening charter schools we keep this important option open to parents and students and protect against the few bad actors in the charter movement.

On the important issue of traffic congestion, we saw a significant cultural change. If voters approve, we will start to move away from the pay-as-you-go model to a system of bonding. We also expanded toll road options, and adopted a more regional approach to address transportation challenges. And through state and federal appropriations, we have an additional $1 billion to spend on our state's transportation needs.

A number of the objectives I outlined in my State of the State address regarding progress on the border were accomplished through a strong bipartisan coalition. That progress includes a telemedicine bill that focuses on underserved areas, new bonding tools to make up to $175 million available for roads in the colonias, and a Medicaid simplification plan which will have an important impact on the border region.

When you add up these important programs and border higher education funding, the border region could see as much as a $360 million dollar increase over the next two years. That's a success by virtually any measure.

Medicaid simplification will result in more care given in the doctor’s office instead of the emergency room, while maintaining strong incentives for personal responsibility. We also addressed critical needs of our most vulnerable population – seniors in nursing homes – by increasing state and federal funding by $478 million without increasing their tax burden.

We took a hard look at our criminal justice system, focusing attention both on tough new laws, and important reforms aimed at insuring fairness. With our new DNA law, prosecutors will have greater tools to convict criminals, and the wrongly convicted will have access to the evidence they need to reverse their conviction.

And this was also the most environmentally friendly session in recent memory, to the benefit of Texas air, water and families.

Some will cite occasional flare-ups and honest disputes as symptomatic of this session. But those instances were not unique to this session. In fact, when you consider the combustive elements present when we entered this session – a slowing economy, redistricting, and new leadership – we did very well in producing solid results for the people of Texas.
This legislature made great strides on behalf of future generations. Republicans and Democrats are to be complimented for rising above differences to seek common ground for the common good in important areas such as health care, infrastructure, and education.

With that, I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.