Three years ago an extraordinary idea was born: to provide the diverse and talented women of Texas a setting for an important dialogue where they could learn from... network with... and be inspired by... peers and mentors.

And looking at this crowd of 4,000 Texas women, would you agree with me that idea, known as the Texas Women's Conference, has been a smashing success?

This conference is a testament to the vision of a number of individuals... so many I can't mention them all... but I feel compelled to mention one. She has been a real inspiration to this effort... a woman who is gifted, graceful and, when it comes to putting up with me, abundantly patient. Please join me in recognizing your host, and your First Lady, Anita Perry.

The other day, I heard an interesting story. A young man decided to become a monk in a religious order that allowed monks to speak only two words every two years.

After his first two years of training, the young monk was invited by his superior to make his two-word presentation. "Food terrible," he said.

Two years later, at the invitation of his superior, he said, "bed lumpy." And then two years later he went to his superior's office and issued his final two words, "I quit." The superior looked at the young monk and said, "you know, this doesn't surprise me one bit. All you have done since you arrived is complain, complain, complain."

We are in many ways a product of our own outlook on life.

What would you say about your life if only given two words? Would you focus on what troubles you or inspires you? Would you focus on the past or the future? Would you express your worries or your hopes?

I think my dad might say, "farming tough." And I hope mom would say, "proud parent"... though I suspect she might say, "spankings work."

As you gather today in this convention hall, you come from a wide array of places and experiences.

You may be the chief executive of your company, or the chief executive of your household. You may be a student, or a retiree. You may come from plenty of money, or very little.

Texas women are a diverse tapestry of endless talents, stories and ideas, but with a few common threads.

You share the hope of success and fulfillment in your lives. You share a love for this state, and a certain pride of ownership that comes with being a Texan. And no matter what your age, there is not one yesterday you can reconstruct... but tomorrow... tomorrow is
something each one of you can have a say in.

This conference is about empowering the women of today to shape the destiny of tomorrow.

In the board rooms of corporate America...in the classrooms of our public schools...in health care clinics and soup kitchens, in thousands of places of business, charity and education, women are making a profound difference, and leaving their unique imprint.

In the Texas of the 21st Century, the achievement of a dream is not dependent on the permission of others, but your own sheer grit.

So the question here today is this: what do you dream? Is it one day becoming a doctor or surgeon? Is it owning your own business, or one day selling it?

Is it being able to take a break away, and spend more time with a child, a parent, or a spouse?

Minster Robert Schuller once posed the question, “what would you attempt to do if you knew you could not fail?”

The famed words of Teddy Roosevelt remind us, “it is not the critic who counts” but the one “who is actually in the arena ...whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood ...who strives valiantly...who errs and comes short again and again ...who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, and spends himself in a worthy cause;

“who, at the best, knows in the end the triumph of high achievement ... and who, at worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.”

Maybe if he wasn’t using the masculine tense in that famous quote, Teddy would have focused less on the possibility of failure.

We all experience failure, the greatness of America is that it is okay to fail, because only by risking failure can we ever succeed. And if we don’t succeed the first time, we can always get up and try again. We can only limit ourselves.

To the young women in this audience, with your whole lives in front of you, I want to share two thoughts...don’t be afraid to dream, and never be afraid to try.

If you study hard, and work hard, if you remain committed, and you ignore the forces of negativity...you will succeed.

Our entire education system is designed to make sure you can succeed. We have poured new resources into the basic subjects like reading and math to better prepare you for studies in fields like science and social science. We have raised standards because the road to achievement should be a challenge that tests you.

We have expanded college scholarship programs like the $300 million TEXAS Grant Program because limited financial means should not limit your dreams.

Education is the means to freedom, and education and freedom are twin pillars on which much of the success of America has been built.

We are all mindful that tomorrow marks the one-year anniversary of that tragic day when the American Dream, the people who live that dream, and freedom itself came
under attack.

We all remember that day like it was yesterday. We remember what we were doing when we first heard, and we remember the images of horror as our television sets showed structures of steel crashing down and innocent human lives lost. It was a day that changed America forever.

But in a uniquely American way, the worst of tragedies became our finest hour as a nation. Everyday Americans – in fire uniforms and police uniforms, in surgeons coats and business attire – reminded us that heroes are not rare nor distant, but among us all the time.

The freedom we enjoy, our attackers mistook for weakness. But freedom is not a sign of weakness, but a sign of faith. It emanates from the belief that men and women, given the opportunity to live according to their own designs, can live meaningful lives and leave this world a better place.

While our attackers preach intolerance, we preach acceptance. While they function from ignorance, we foster enlightenment. While their vision is a world controlled by the whims of a few, ours is dependent on the courage of the many, and the ingenuity of the individual.

It is not a coincidence that our enemies ban women from the classroom while the female leaders of our future are learning in them today.

And it is not a coincidence that the great Lady in the Harbor still welcomes people from around the world who dare to dream, and who risk their lives to live that dream.

The outlook for America has never been better. Our character remains strong. Our faith, hope and belief in tomorrow remains fervent. Our hopes remain high.

Americans have always looked for the rainbow in the midst of a shower. It is our unique optimistic view of the world, and what we can accomplish.

Today, as you leave this conference, you may feel as though your part in shaping the future is small or insignificant. It is not. Edward Everett Hale once said, “I am only one, but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something; and because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do something I can do.”

To the women in this room, I offer this final thought: the Texas of tomorrow is in your hands. You can shape it based on your ideas and your values. You can mold it with your hard work and sacrifices. And you can leave it a place worthy of future generations. May you succeed beyond your wildest dreams.

Thank you, God bless you, and God bless America.