Speech - February 1, 2003

Note: Governor Perry frequently deviates from prepared text.

Text of Gov. Rick Perry's Remarks Regarding Space Shuttle Columbia Tragedy

You are all now aware that tragedy touched the space program today over the skies of Texas.

According to eyewitness and video accounts, the disintegration of the Space Shuttle Columbia could be seen, heard and felt by Texans all across North-Central and East Texas and western Louisiana.

As we await more information concerning the events of this great tragedy, I want to re-emphasize a note of caution to all living in North and East Texas: if you spot shuttle debris, do not touch it nor go near it. Shuttle materials could pose a grave risk to human health because of toxic propellants used aboard the space shuttle.

If you find debris, please call local authorities immediately to tell them of the location. This information also can be reported through a toll-free number: 1-800-525-5555.

Soon after receiving news of this tragedy, my office began coordinating with federal and local officials. I have spoken to Secretary Ridge twice, and my office remains in constant contact with proper authorities to assist in any way possible.

The Texas Emergency Operations Center is fully operational, and The Texas National Guard is on stand-by. We have deployed one unit of the 6th Civil Support Team to Lufkin to assist with hazardous material recovery.

In addition 22 National Guard soldiers are assisting local authorities in Nacogdoches and 36 soldiers are in Lufkin to help secure sites there. The National Guard has provided a C-130 out of Carswell Reserve Center to provide support to NASA and 2 Blackhawk helicopters have been dispatched from Austin to Lufkin to provide support.

We also activated the Amber Alert Network to warn citizens of the grave risk that could be posed by shuttle debris.

In this hour of tragedy, the people of Texas offer their prayers and condolences to the families of the loved and the lost. We remember today the life of an Amarillo native, Commander Rick Husband...a pilot who graduated from Lubbock Coronado High, Willie McCool...a native of India who studied at a Texas University, Kalpana Chawla.

We remember each of them, and the entire crew of seven who were propelled into space to test the utmost potential of freedom.

Two hundred years after Lewis and Clark began their journey, and one hundred years after the Wright Brothers first took flight, these seven brave pioneers have helped mankind explore the frontiers of space and shed light on the heavens. We are forever indebted to them, and the thousands who work at Johnson Space Center. Their mission must carry on.
May God grant eternal peace to the victims of this tragedy, and comfort to the loved ones they leave behind. Thank you.