Gov. Rick Perry Speaks at Texas Association of Business

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

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The Texas Association of Business has a unique but vital role this legislative session to carry a simple but powerful message: the issue is not whether Texas families and Texas businesses pay enough in taxes, they do. The issue is how government spends your tax dollars. When the economy softens, it is precisely the wrong time to raise taxes. Economic slowdowns are usually temporary. Tax hikes are usually not. It is not possible to support job creation if you also support the higher taxes that kill job creation. Texas has always been a state of unlimited opportunity because we have always limited government. Not everyone agrees with that philosophy. That is why your voice must be clear and unwavering in delivering a simple message: Texas can live within its means.

Behind every government program there is the face of a taxpayer. It may be a small business owner looking to grow a business. It may be a working single parent worrying about making ends meet with higher insurance rates and a lower rate of return on a 401K. It may be a senior citizen in a nursing home, or living at the end of the block from you. They are here by the millions -- the Texans who pay their bills and pay their taxes, who take responsibility for themselves and who demand the same of their government. Our people delivered a message this last election. We would be wise to heed their voice. They want responsive government and responsible government. My three priorities are to balance the budget responsibly, to insure greater economic security for our citizens, and to invest in the greatest economic development tool in the history of Texas -- the education of our children -- all of our children. If we do those three things, then you will be able to look back at the great challenges this Legislature faced and know that we were successful.

Fortunately, in this time of great challenges, we have leadership in the Lieutenant Governor and Speaker of the House who will work to ensure that future prosperity is not jeopardized by bigger government. David Dewhurst and Tom Craddick are both good men who will join me in doing what is best for Texas. Let me discuss the priorities I will pursue, with your help. The very first issue before the 78th Legislature will be homeowners insurance reform. The reason is simple: Texans are fed up with rate shock, and we're going to give them some relief. We want insurance companies to be able to offer their important services and make a profit in this state. But, we also want rates that are fair, practices that are ethical, and dealings that are open. We will improve the regulatory scheme, continue to expand consumer choices, and lastly, we will serve notice to unscrupulous mold remediers, public adjusters and personal injury trial lawyers: if you perpetuate fraudulent practices in Texas, you will pay a price.

Tort reform is vital in another specific area, medical malpractice reform. The centerpiece of my proposal is a $250,000 cap on subjective, non-economic damages. My plan also improves the enforcement process so that bad
actors are removed from the medical profession. But the bottom line is this: our doctors need to spend more time examining patients, and less time being cross-examined in the courtroom. Tort reform is also vital to keeping your cost of doing business low. As President Reagan once stated, businesses never pay taxes – customers do. Every cost you must endure you must pass on to the customer. We must not allow frivolous litigation to have an effect on job creation. With fiscal responsibility, we can address the challenges of the present, and with new job creation efforts, we can address the challenges of the future. I welcome the ideas of business leaders across this state to keep Texas on a pathway to prosperity.

The greatest economic development tool we have in Texas is an educated child. In recent years we have made progress. We have raised the bar of achievement for both our schools and our students. We test our students because we must know what they know, and because they must be prepared for their final exam, the exam called life. Here is my pledge to you, the future employers of our future graduates – I will resist any effort to lower standards, weaken accountability and promote Texans who are not ready. I want to build upon recent reforms in education. We have improved the reading curriculum, and last session focused new resources on math. It is time to do the same for the teaching of science. Good science skills build the foundation for success in our technology-driven economy.

I want to make sure Texas has the best trained workforce in America for the jobs of a new century. That means not only ensuring our students stay on track to that high school diploma, but on course to a college campus. I am sure that are some individuals in this audience who went to college even though past generations of your family did not. I was so fortunate. My parents couldn't attend college, but they helped make sure my sister and I did. I was blessed to attend a fine institution in this state, the future home of many national football championships, Texas A&M. Because of that, I stand before you this state’s first Aggie governor.

As long as I am your governor, education will be my highest priority. That’s why I will work with members of the legislature to reform public school finance. I can't promise that all the answers will be found this session, but we will work until they are found. And under this Administration, Robin Hood will be addressed. We will hear every day about what this state must do for our people. But to borrow a page from President Kennedy, what is it that each one of us can do for our state? Certainly as business owners, I ask that you keep investing in Texas, our economy and our people. But there is something more that every citizen can do and that is to volunteer your time.

Last week I announced the formation of a new non-profit volunteer organization, the OneStar Foundation. In the coming weeks, the board will be formed and its apparatus put in place. Its mission will be to match citizens who have been blessed with citizens in need. When a Texan spends time assisting a victim of violence, mentoring a child, or helping a welfare recipient gain independence, a life is often changed. But something else happens, the life of a volunteer is made richer through the very act of giving. It is a powerful truth upon which the spirit of volunteerism thrives, our blessings are never made full until shared with others. This effort will not supercede existing charities, but lead citizens to them. It will not replace the role of government, but augment it. The lesson I’ve learned is that a government that attempts to do all things for all people does few things well. The larger government grows – the smaller the circle of our freedoms. But there are no limits that can be placed on the Texas Spirit: a spirit of compassion and charity that dwells richly in our hearts. And just remember, the best volunteers are busy people, because busy people are accustomed to getting things done. I ask that you join me in giving back to this great state.

Thank you for your love of Texas, the opportunities you create, and the energy and enthusiasm you bring to the arena of public policy. If you will continue to make your voice heard, I will continue to listen. Thank you, and God bless Texas.