Gov. Rick Perry's Remarks at Post-Session News Conference

Wednesday, June 04, 2003

Texans of differing philosophies will argue about whether this session was a success. But for me, it comes down to a simple measure: We did what we set out to do. We kept the trust by keeping our promises. We promised we would lower homeowners insurance rates, reform medical malpractice laws, and - despite tough economic times - that we would not raise the price of government in order to balance the budget. And we delivered on each one of those promises. Lower homeowners insurance rates, lawsuit reforms to keep doctors practicing medicine and increased investments in job creation, public education, and vital transportation projects mean Texas has a stronger foundation for a prosperous future. And because we had the discipline to rebuild the budget from scratch, examining every cent we spend and restraining the growth of government, unlike many states we balanced our budget without new taxes. State leaders showed the kind of budgetary discipline families must show: we set priorities, separated wants from needs, and stretched every dollar. We protected the pocketbooks of Texas taxpayers while protecting vital programs, increasing funding for public education and health care. And because we reduced general revenue spending by $2.6 billion while at the same time drawing down more federal funds, we are better prepared for the future no matter what the national economy does. I am honored to have by my side two strong leaders who were instrumental in making this legislative session a success, Lt. Gov. Dewhurst and Speaker Craddick. Texans owe a great deal to these two individuals for their outstanding leadership. I also want to credit Representative Heflin, Senator Bivins, and members of both parties who put in the long hours, made the tough decisions, and put Texas first ahead of party, ahead of politics. Those who forecast doom and gloom may have gotten a lot of headlines, but the results speak the loudest. Texans can be proud we invested $1.1 billion in new funds - over and above the previous budget - into vital health care programs, keeping our commitment to those who cannot help themselves. We achieved efficiency savings by restructuring state programs.
while limiting the impact on services we provide. Our trauma centers will be able to handle more emergency cases because of an additional $172 million that they will receive to hire more doctors and expand their emergency room and intensive care capacity. Close to a quarter million more Texans - including many uninsured Texans - will be able to receive health care at newly funded Federally Qualified Health Centers. We made it easier for small businesses to afford health insurance for their workers. We increased funding for Medicaid acute care coverage, for HIV medications and children with special health care needs. And we are continuing to invest in health coverage for the children of working families enrolled in the Children’s Health Insurance Program. The children of a family of four will maintain coverage as long as the family income does not exceed roughly $3,000 a month. Our students will benefit from an additional $1.2 billion in public education funding, a new science initiative, and a greater emphasis on the completion of college-prep coursework. We invested $324 million - an increase of $56 million - into the TEXAS Grant Program so Texans of modest means can pursue their college dreams. And in providing universities tuition flexibility, we required that they set aside 20 percent of any tuition increases for student financial aid programs. We funded the Texas Emissions Reduction Plan, protecting the public health while proving that economic progress and clean air can go hand-in-hand. We laid the groundwork to ensure Texas has the safe, abundant water supply it needs by moving forward with plans to desalinate gulf water. And to ease traffic congestion, increase highway safety and spark economic growth, we provided seed money that will generate billions in bond funds for the Mobility Fund. This session we made an historic commitment to the building of needed road, rail and public infrastructure projects. And I am pleased that legislators created the $295 million Texas Enterprise Fund. With the passage of the enterprise fund and the most comprehensive lawsuit reforms in the nation, Texas will become the leader in attracting employers and new jobs. We took the right approach, focusing on jobs and economic development rather than job-killing tax hikes. But let there be no doubt that the three biggest accomplishments of this session were the passage of homeowners insurance reform, medical malpractice reform, and a balanced budget without a tax increase. The special interests speak with a loud voice, but it is the quiet voice of the common interests that we heard this session. We looked out for the millions of Texans who work hard, play by the rules and pay their fair share in taxes - Texans like retired trucker Ronnie Congleton and small business owner Wanda Rohm who joined me for my state of the state address, and who are with us today. Like millions of Texans, they want government to be both responsible and responsive. And that’s what we have given Texans: reforms that are fiscally responsible AND responsive to consumer concerns. Millions of Texas patients can know that qualified doctors will be available when they need them because we passed comprehensive lawsuit reforms that help patients by protecting doctors from frivolous lawsuits. With us today are Dr. Antonio Falcon and Dr. Christine Canterbury, who also joined me for the state of the state address. They are representative of thousands of doctors who love the practice of medicine and who want to continue to build a healthier Texas. Our landmark lawsuit reform bill will ensure pregnant women will have the pre-natal care they need. It will mean women with high-risk pregnancies will not have to travel hundreds of miles to find a doctor to deliver their newborn safely. And Texans hurt in life-threatening accidents can know a qualified specialist will be on call when their life is on the line. And for every Texan who has experienced skyrocketing homeowners insurance costs, help is on the way in the form of meaningful insurance reform that will regulate insurance companies, stop abusive and fraudulent practices and significantly lower excessive homeowner rates. On issue after issue, we have passed needed reforms. Of course, one issue still must be addressed: comprehensive education reform that ends the era of Robin Hood. Now that the other priorities have been addressed, now that we have examined every dime of state spending and increased government efficiency, Texans can know that in the near future we will pass comprehensive education reform that ensures better results in our schools and a stable, long-term source of funding so we can keep our commitment to adequately educating every Texas child. We will look at excellent schools districts, like Galena Park, to see how they break the stereotypes, achieving outstanding results with a large percentage of economically disadvantaged students. Dr. Shirley Neeley, the architect of success in Galena Park, is once again with us today. Dr. Neeley, we are going to look to innovators in education like you to improve our schools. Thank you for your outstanding work. In the wake of a national economic slowdown, this was not an easy session. But results matter most. And Texans can know that on issue after issue, we kept our word, and did what we said we would do. Our promises and priorities have been passed into law, and Texas will be better off for a balanced budget that invests in priorities without raising taxes on
Texas families and small businesses.