Gov. Rick Perry's Remarks At Asian American Business Symposium

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

Friday, May 14, 2004

Thank you very much Amir (Rupani.) I also want to thank Representative Martha Wong who worked so hard to bring together this distinguished group of Asian-American leaders in the public and private sector. It is good to see the Aggie Mayor of Austin, Will Wynn, as well as local officials from Austin, Dallas and Houston, and State Representative Jack Stick. It is always good to be with men and women who create jobs, invest in the Texas workforce and the Texas economy, and pay the taxes that support our schools. You are the engine of progress, and represent what is best about America, and best about our free enterprise system.

As a state, we have a vested interest in making sure your businesses can invest more in workers, wages and productivity rather than in taxes, red tape and attorneys’ fees. I want business owners of all walks of life to be able to invest in Texas and the American Dream. And I want Texans of differing backgrounds and experiences to leave a lasting imprint on this state that enriches our culture, and serves as a model of collaboration for future generations. In that spirit, I have been proud to appoint some of the best and brightest to serve, Texans like Munir Lalani, Wendy Gramm, Ravi Shah, Sue Chiang, Sheng Ting Chen, Katie Phuong Pham, Mowrice Adam Mahmood, and Dr. Amanullah Khan. These Texans are giving back, and blazing new trails for future generations.

The American Dream recognizes no class, status or heritage, it is the hope of all, and must be available to all. One of the ways Texas employers can expand their business horizons is by doing business with the state. From printing contracts, to construction contracts, to software sales and technical support, to a host of professional and labor-intensive services, the State of Texas offers entrepreneurs ways to make a living and make a difference. Being able to do business with the state is a significant way to reduce barriers to entrepreneurial success, but the single-most important thing we can do to help ALL employers prosper is to tear down public barriers to private sector growth. President Reagan once said: “We in government should learn to look at our country with the eyes of the entrepreneur, seeing possibilities where others see only problems.” The possibilities for prosperity are endless if employers are not over-regulated and over-taxed.

Those of you following Texas politics will note that we are in the midst of a tremendously important debate about the taxes that finance our schools, and the results we seek in our classrooms. There are no easy answers. School finance is the most complex issue we address in state government, and it should come as no surprise that the task won't be finished in the first special session because it has always taken more than one special session. This first called session served a very important purpose: it clarified the debate. It forced a discussion on details in addition to
the broader goals. And I remain optimistic that we will find agreement, and legislators will ultimately pass a bill that warrants my signature, regardless of how long it takes. I believe where there is a will there's a way. I have the will to keep at this no matter how long it takes, or how difficult the challenge becomes. And I believe both Republicans and Democrats will rise to the challenge, and cast the tough votes on behalf of our schoolchildren, taxpayers and their jobs.

I believe the only permanent solution to school finance is job creation. When we tax entrepreneurs, both small employers and big ones, we risk the only stable source of tax revenue we have: which is a steady and strong job climate. I have yet to hear a Texan say to me, “tax my job away in the name of educating my children.” Churchill said, “for a nation to try to tax itself into prosperity is like a man standing in a bucket trying to lift himself up by the handle.” What pays for schools, hospitals, roads, libraries, emergency services, jails and a host of other services are not taxes, but jobs.

Tax dollars cannot be generated without a source of income. In order to collect a sales tax, you first need Texans with money in their pockets who choose to make purchases. In order to collect the property tax, you need Texans who can afford to own property. In order to collect the franchise tax, you need employers to generate profits based on worker productivity (and not incorporate in places like Delaware.) Jobs are at the center of all tax policy.

In Texas, we have made great progress in tearing down barriers to job creation. Last year we passed the most sweeping lawsuit reforms in the nation, lawsuit reforms that will allow employers to invest more dollars in productivity, and fewer dollars in the courtroom. We balanced our state budget despite a $10 billion budget gap without raising taxes while STILL increasing spending on education by more than $1 billion. We created one of the most aggressive job recruitment tools in the nation, the new $295 million Texas Enterprise Fund. Using that job creation tool, we attracted a 3,000 job expansion by Vought Aircraft, a corporate relocation by energy leader CITGO, and a new $3 billion investment by Texas Instruments: an expansion that was a recent cover story for Site Selection Magazine. Yesterday I joined the president of the world’s foremost outfitter of hunting and fishing gear, Cabelas, in announcing the building of their very first stores in the southern half of the United States, one in Fort Worth, and one in Buda. With $600,000 from the Texas Enterprise Fund, and $12 million in highway improvements, they knew they could grow and prosper here because this state is committed to the same mission.

Legislators also consolidated the state’s economic development efforts in my office, meaning corporate CEO’s will deal directly with the State of Texas’ CEO. All signs point to a prosperous future for the Lone Star State. In the last six months, Texas has added 68,000 net jobs. Most economic factors signal a new era of growth. Our sales tax revenues far outpaced our comptroller’s projections for the month of March. High-tech manufacturing posted its first gain this quarter in three years, largely because of semiconductor growth. Last year we landed “the biggest deal of the year” according to Business Facilities Magazine when Toyota decided to build an $800 million truck plant in San Antonio. That expansion will not only bring 2,000 direct jobs, but is on tap to already bring another 1,000 jobs to Texas among Toyota suppliers. Since the start of 2003 we have added 8,700 new jobs at call centers. They may not be the highest paying jobs in the market, but they provide a decent wage and in many cases private health insurance, which is better than collecting unemployment and Medicaid.

According to a survey done of 50 top employers in California, among those looking to move jobs to another state, Texas was the top destination of choice. In Texas, our door is wide open for business and opportunity. Our taxes remain low, our regulatory climate is reasonable, and our workforce is skilled. We have good schools, our own power grid, and we are now the nation’s largest exporter of goods. We are the Gateway to trade with Latin America.

I will never measure the success of this state based on how much we tax and spend, but how much Texans take home. Opportunity and prosperity must remain our mission. And while there is a role for government in creating
opportunity, it primarily has to do with creating an environment that is friendly to jobs. We should never tax more than we have to, or spend more than what is needed. We ought to empower the people, not government, to spend their own hard-earned money on their priorities. We ought to trust the people, not government, to create the jobs that fund core priorities. We ought to trust the people to decide upon rising property tax bills, just like we do bond elections. You can't go wrong when you trust the people.

Let us build a more prosperous Texas on the shoulders of the bright, talented and dedicated PEOPLE of this state.

Thank you, and God bless Texas.