Gov. Rick Perry’s Remarks At The Midland Hispanic Chamber Of Commerce

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

Wednesday, October 13, 2004

Thank you very much. It is always good to be in Midland, the home of my good friend and Speaker of the House Tom Craddick. It is an honor to be in the presence of so many good public servants, Congressman Neugebauer, your new State Senator Kel Seliger, and a great mayor by the name of Mike Canon. It is a tremendous honor for me to be with entrepreneurs who risk capital and work all hours of the day, small business leaders who pay the taxes and support our schools, the men and women who churn the engine of Texas progress by creating and sustaining opportunities for Texas workers, the membership of the Midland Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. You are the personification of the American Dream, and I am proud you call Texas home.

Speaking of the American Dream, I can think of no one who epitomizes that dream more than Jose Cuevas, Jr. Jose started small with JumBurrito, and he has grown it into a thriving business that employs West Texas workers and contributes to the West Texas economy. Jose, you are a powerful example to this community. In fact, you are such a good leader that tonight I want to publicly announce that earlier today I appointed you to serve on the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission.

It has been an honor to appoint great Texans from the Permian Basin, including a good man from Midland by the name of Patrick Cordero, the chair of the Residential Construction Commission, and your outstanding city manager who is serving on the Municipal Retirement System Board, Rick Menchaca.

Texas is proud to have 240,000 Hispanic-owned businesses that do more than $1.4 billion in sales annually. Our state Texas is the proud home of more than 7 million Hispanic Americans, and by the Year 2020 Hispanic Texans will compose the largest demographic group in our state. In Texas, we welcome the ideas and ingenuity of people of all walks of life. We believe in an American Dream that is a promise to all, an American Dream that recognizes no class or status, but the hopes and aspirations of every citizen, an American Dream that is still achieved through hard work and enduring values. Texas is enriched by a diversity of thought and a diversity of heritage that blends together to form one unique culture. And for all that is said about our diversity, we are one Texas and one people as surely as our state flag bears one star. We all seek a good education for our children, safe and vibrant neighborhoods for our families, and a lifetime of opportunity. And more people are making Texas their end destination on the journey to opportunity.
Texas is the central hub of commerce in the Western Hemisphere. We are the largest exporting state in the nation, recently surpassing California. We export $42 billion in goods and services to Mexico alone, with 12 separate industries in Texas exporting more than $1 billion in products and services to Mexico. 75 percent of U.S. commerce with Mexico crosses through a Texas point of entry. Sometimes, when you’re driving on I-35, it seems like all that NAFTA commerce is on the road at the same time. That’s why we’re pouring more concrete to build more roads than any state in the nation.

In the first quarter of this year, exports were up 22 percent to Mexico, and even higher to nations in Asia and Europe. Some thought NAFTA would fail because they view free trade as a zero sum game. But clearly, that argument has been proven wrong. Free trade has raised the tide for all the boats in the harbor. Between the United States and Mexico, cross-border commerce has grown from a $100 billion industry before NAFTA to a $248 billion industry since. For every dollar in goods shipped south through the busy Port of Laredo, a dollar fifty heads north.

We live in an integrated world and a borderless marketplace. The solution to differences is not to build walls but to build relationships. Because Texas is ideally situated as the gateway to Latin America, I not only support NAFTA, I support its expansion, from Cape Horn to the northern-most tip of Alaska. Texas is helping to lead the national recovery, with 122,000 jobs added in the last 11 months. Last year, we attracted nine of the 20 largest capital investments in the nation, including a new Toyota plant in San Antonio, and a $3 billion expansion by Texas Instruments. This year we announced the largest job expansion nationwide in the first quarter when Vought Aircraft announced it would consolidate operations and bring 3,000 additional jobs to North Texas.

We also have one of the most aggressive job creation funds in the nation, the $295 million Texas Enterprise Fund, which has helped us secure growth in fields like information technology and biotechnology. Our state is attractive for employers because our regulations are reasonable, our workforce is skilled, and our taxes are low. And I might add, we have no personal income tax. You couldn’t pick a better state to run a business.

You can grow here, succeed here, and prosper here. We have cultivated an economic climate that rewards hard work and welcomes new ideas. We have limited taxes and spending because we believe the best way to fund schools, hospitals, roads and other priorities is to generate revenue from new jobs, not new taxes. We don’t take a traditional government view of job creation in Texas: While job creation is fundamental to generating revenue for government, that is not its primary purpose.

Job creation is first, and foremost, about allowing more families to fulfill their dreams. Job creation can lift people out of poverty, expand the horizons of opportunity, and grow our economy better than any one government program. To create more jobs, last year we passed the most sweeping lawsuit reforms in the nation. Every dime spent defending your business against a frivolous lawsuit can be better spent on creating jobs in your community. These lawsuit reforms were the most sweeping in the nation. And by limiting government to wise investments in core priorities, our future has never looked more promising.

In public education, we have dedicated more than $7 billion in new funding to our schools since 1999, we have raised standards and strengthened the curriculum, and we have witnessed steady improvement among students of all backgrounds.

From 1994 to 2002, the passing rate on the state’s assessment exam increased by 32 points. Now we have a harder test, and once again test scores are on the rise. We’re not satisfied with these gains, we are continuing the push for progress. With more than 600,000 students in our schools who speak English as a second language, we have an important obligation to help them break down the language barrier and achieve their full potential. That is why earlier this year I proposed spending an additional $100 million for bilingual education. And I want to go one step further,
let's financially reward schools for each bilingual student that succeeds on the state assessment tests.

I happen to believe that rewarding success breeds more success. When it comes to bilingual education, my goal is to ensure students are proficient in English as quickly as possible so they will be proficient in math, science, history and every other subject they must master. I believe that we must tell our children, "you are our first priority regardless of what may be your first language."

In Texas, we have more than 1.1 million students learning at an institution of higher learning, including a record number of Hispanic Texans. In 1999, I worked with Democrats and Republicans to create the TEXAS Grant scholarship program, a $324 million grant fund to help students from families of limited means. Having grown up in a small community in rural West Texas, where my parents started out as tenant farmers, I was blessed to be part of the first generation in our family to attend college. Now we have a college grant program that provides scholarships for “First Generation” college students. I know the profound difference a college education can make in the life of a young man or woman, whether they come from the farms and fields of rural Texas, the inner city, or a colonia along the border.

In Texas, the door to opportunity will remain open to all who knock, regardless of their financial means. When your business invests in Texas, this state gives you a very good deal: low taxes, reasonable regulations, an abundant workforce, and a spirit of optimism. As the international magazine “The Economist” put it, “the future is Texas.” That is true in more than one way. The face of Texas is changing. Here millions of people of Latin American descent are finding opportunity. Said in any language, Texas is a state that values hard work. And we welcome all who want to live the immigrant dream.

Second, the future is Texas because we are the economic epicenter of the Western Hemisphere. Free trade is attracting employers and jobs to every region of this state. We must continue to build a job climate that is friendly to jobs, entrepreneurs and working families. This must continue to be a state where an entrepreneur with a dream can open a JumBurrito, and through hard work and sheer determination, grow that small business and succeed. Let us always keep the door of opportunity propped open for the people of this great state.