Gov. Rick Perry's Remarks Regarding Meth Watch

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

Monday, October 25, 2004

Thank you Sheriff Smith. Jim Cousineau, thank you for welcoming us today and for Brookshire’s participation in this important program. I am honored to be joined by Representative Leo Berman, Mayor Joey Seeber, Walter Diggles and Glynn Knight, as well as Rice County, Kansas Sheriff Steve Bundy, who recognized that that more could be done to stem the growing and alarming trend of methamphetamine production in his state, and helped create the nation’s first Meth Watch program. And let me say a special thank you to Sandra Mallie with the Henderson County Coalition Against Crime, who has transformed her own family’s darkest moments into a noble cause, and who is making a profound difference in her community. Sandra, I want to thank you, Al Gusner, and Ethel Walker for taking the initiative to get the ball rolling on this important program.

We are here today because there is growing problem in East Texas and elsewhere in this state, one that is destroying lives, tearing apart families, and threatening the safety of our neighborhoods. Like the crack cocaine epidemic that swept our nation’s urban areas in the 1980’s, a new methamphetamine plague is spreading in rural areas, robbing too many Texans of their health and hope, and leaving severe devastation in its wake. And this time the drugs are not being imported into our communities from other countries, but are being manufactured in homes, motel rooms and vacant buildings right in our own neighborhoods, using chemicals found in everyday household products like cold medicine, or fertilizer used in agriculture. Oftentimes these homemade labs are set up in the presence of young children, exposing our most vulnerable citizens to toxic chemicals and highly explosive fumes, as well as dangerous drug addicts that threaten their safety.

That is why we are launching a new Meth Watch program that will curtail criminals’ access to the ingredients used in the illegal production of methamphetamine, empower East Texans with the knowledge they need to help law enforcement find homemade meth labs, and help get this dangerous drug off our streets. And I am also proud to announce that my office will provide $50,000 to the East Texas Council of Governments to hire a coordinator who will help retail businesses, schools, community organizations and others take part in the voluntary Meth Watch program. The coordinator will also serve the Deep East Texas Council of Governments, for a combined area of 26 counties.

The Meth Watch program trains retailers to recognize suspicious customers, like those who purchase huge quantities of meth ingredients, and encourages stores to place those products where they can easily be monitored by employees. Meth Watch signs are displayed throughout participating stores, letting meth manufacturers know that...
their business is not welcome. The regional coordinator will also help teachers recognize children who may have been exposed to methamphetamine production, help farmers keep their supplies of fertilizer secure, and help citizens learn to identify the telltale signs of a homemade meth lab in their neighborhood.

Meth Watch partners are unifying their communities against drug abuse. Like a good neighborhood watch program, the mere presence of the Meth Watch program can act as a strong deterrent to methamphetamine producers and dealers. But there is more that we can do to protect our citizens and stem the tide of this growing epidemic. That is why I will be asking the legislature to toughen penalties associated with the manufacturing of methamphetamine. Those who endanger the lives of Texans with this destructive drug must know that they will face severe consequences for their actions. And we must do more to ensure that children who are exposed to meth labs receive the protection and care they deserve. That is why I will support legislation that would clarify the roles of law enforcement, medical experts and child protective services when a child is found at a location where meth is produced. This important reform will allow state and local officials to better coordinate their efforts so that drug endangered children are placed in a safe and healthy environment as soon as possible.

I believe that government has no greater responsibility than ensuring the safety of its citizens. Today, we are sending a tough message to those who would poison their fellow Texans with this dangerous drug: the people of East Texas are watching you, law enforcement is going to find you, and your days as a dope peddler are numbered. And now to speak more about this innovative program is Rice County, Kansas Sheriff Steve Bundy, who helped his state implement the first Meth Watch program in the nation.

I am honored to introduce Sandra Mallie, Secretary of the Henderson County Coalition Against Crime, whose vision and initiative played a central role in today’s announcement.

At this time we would be happy to attempt to answer any questions you may have.