Text of Gov. Rick Perry’s Remarks Concerning the Mexico Water Debt

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

Thursday, March 10, 2005

Today we are here to announce tremendous news for farmers, ranchers and residents of the Rio Grande Valley: the 12 year wait is over, our diplomacy has been successful, and the water owed by Mexico is on the way.

Under a new agreement just reached by the United States and Mexico, Mexico will fulfill its obligations specified by the 1944 Water Sharing Treaty and transfer every drop of water owed to Texas farmers by September of this year.

This is not only great news for the people of the Rio Grande Valley; it is a historic day for all of Texas, the United States and Mexico, because it marks the end of a contentious issue that has clouded our friendship for too long and the beginning of a new era of cooperation.

Over the next several months, Mexico will transfer water from the Amistad and Falcon reservoirs to Texas, completely eliminating Mexico’s water debt and raising U.S. reserves from 95 percent of storage to 103 percent.

And as required by the treaty, the U.S. will continue to receive one-third of the water arriving in the Rio Grande from six Mexican tributaries.

These transfers will ensure that Texas growers have the water they need in time for the planting season and give our farmers, their families and employees some much needed piece of mind.

And not only will Mexico’s existing water debt be totally paid off in short order, but South Texas farmers and ranchers can also expect consistency and certainty in future water deliveries.

Mexico and the United States will meet annually to review basin conditions, develop firm water delivery plans for the next cycle year, and work cooperatively on drought management strategies that can benefit both of our nations.

These efforts will increase transparency and accountability, and help ensure that both sides live up to their obligations consistently in the future, not just when Mother Nature is generous.

Today’s announcement is the culmination of many months of determined, quiet diplomacy by state and federal officials working with our Mexican counterparts to reach an agreement that will benefit citizens on both sides of the border.
Over the past several years I have had the opportunity to discuss the water treaty numerous times with President Fox and the governors of Mexican border states.

And I am proud to have helped communicate the urgency of the issue to them and helped these leaders along the path towards a long term resolution that gives Texas farmers the water critical to their livelihoods.

In fact, in November of 2003 I first asked President Fox to consider using water from Mexican tributaries not covered by the treaty to meet water demands so that we could conserve water in the Amistad and Falcon reservoirs and make more water available to transfer to Texas farmers.

This proposal helped Mexico rethink its dept repayment options, and today has helped them meet their obligations.

As we look to the future, we must continue to make strong efforts to conserve water.

Today I am asking legislators, including Senator Hinojosa (and Representatives Pena and Flores), to pass a concurrent resolution asking our congressional delegation to seek funding to help line canals in the Valley so we can prevent water loss from leakage and improve the antiquated water delivery system.

The canals were built almost 100 years ago, and have never been renovated and lined by the federal Bureau of Reclamation to prevent losses from evaporation and seepage.

Today the relationship between Texas and Mexico is stronger than ever because we have kept the lines of communication open and worked together as friends, even on this most contentious of issues.

Texas and Mexico share a special bond. Not only are we connected by a common border, but in many respects a common way of life and a common future.

The agreement we have announced today sends a strong message that we will continue to pursue a common path to that future, together, as friends and neighbors.