Text of Gov. Rick Perry's Appointment of John Sharp To Lead Tax Reform Panel

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

Tuesday, November 22, 2005

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Good afternoon. With Hurricane Rita bearing down on the Texas Coast, foremost on Texans’ minds is the safe evacuation of our friends, family and neighbors from Corpus Christi to Beaumont/Port Arthur.

And that is clearly where the efforts of my office are focused, as well as dozens of state agencies, as the evacuation effort goes on even as I speak.

In keeping with my schedule today and recognizing the importance of ongoing efforts to resolve the school finance issue, I do want to take a few moments to announce a new effort to provide tax reform and property tax relief in Texas.

I have always maintained that the legislature must act not because a court may order it but because providing property tax relief and education reform is the right thing to do.

Legislators and the leadership put in a lot of hard work and put forward a number of good ideas to resolve this issue in recent years.

Our best efforts to reach an agreement got us close but didn't lead to a bill landing on my desk.

I think it is time to take a different tact. So far, every school finance proposal has essentially emanated from inside the capitol building.

Now it is time to look outside the capitol corridors and seek a fresh and broader perspective to resolve this great challenge – a new approach that puts partisanship aside in order to do what’s best for Texas.

So today, I am asking someone who doesn’t have a vote in this Capitol but who has years of experience in navigating the maze of tax law and the halls of this Capitol to lead a new effort to make our tax system fairer, more modern and more productive.

That individual is my old Squadron 6 classmate and the state comptroller from 1991 to 1999, John Sharp. Thank you for accepting this challenge, John.
John has agreed to lead a panel whose singular goal will be to make recommendations for tax reform in Texas that the legislature should consider in the next session.

Simply put, this mission transcends politics because it is about providing a fairer tax code and tax collection system, permanently reducing property taxes and ensuring a long-term, stable source of revenue for our schools.

This panel, which we will work together to assemble in the coming weeks, will take this debate outside the halls of the capitol and directly to the people. And ultimately, they will make recommendations aimed at improving a tax system that has too many loopholes and is too reliant on property taxpayers.

John and I have known each other for 37 years since the day we met on the corps Quadrangle as two freshmen united in our fear of upperclassmen.

Today, we are united by something greater, and that is our common desire to do what is best for taxpayers, schoolchildren and Texas. And whatever political rivalries that existed in the past are exactly that: the past.

I’m not looking for a magic formula for school finance, but instead a fresh perspective that can help bring about bipartisan change.

John has extensive knowledge of our state’s finances, experience as our state’s tax collector and perspective that comes from spending some time in the private sector.

I appreciate John Sharp’s willingness to join me in this effort, and at this time would like to ask him to share a few comments before we take your questions.