Swinford Secure Border Act
*Note - Gov. Perry frequently departs from prepared remarks.

Wednesday, February 22, 2006

Thank you. It is an honor to be here in Amarillo with Representative David Swinford, and the men and women of law enforcement serving in the Department of Public Safety.

The security of the Texas-Mexico border is important whether you live right on the border, or as far away as the Panhandle.

That is because criminal and terrorist organizations view America's porous southern border not as a final destination, but as a prime point of entry for importing terror, narcotics and weapons of mass destruction to locations across the U.S.

A strong Texas border is essential for a safe America.

And while enforcing our border is a federal responsibility, Texas has not, and will not, wait for Washington to take all of the necessary actions while our communities are threatened.

Last year, I authorized $10 million in state funding to help border sheriffs detect and deter criminal activity through additional manpower and new technology.

We have invested millions more to establish rapid deployment teams of state troopers, and increase the number of criminal investigators serving in the border region.

And we recently launched Operation Rio Grande, a comprehensive security initiative that uses intelligence, a new command and control structure, and additional state law enforcement resources to stop border crime before it spreads to other places.

All of these initiatives, which have been implemented by executive authority, will help make our border more secure and Texas safer.

But we shouldn't stop there.

The fact is, there may be additional changes that can be made by members of the legislature.

That is why I have asked an experienced leader in the legislature who chairs the important State Affairs Committee, Representative David Swinford, to take the lead in helping me pass border security legislation.
I chose Representative Swinford for this important task because he is a law and order lawmaker who wants to stop illegal activity in places like Laredo and Del Rio before it impacts towns like Amarillo.

Representative Swinford understands the urgency of the situation, he shares my vision for a stronger border, and with more than 15 years of service as a lawmaker, he has the experience to get the job done.

Representative Swinford, thank you for accepting this serious responsibility.

Representative Swinford will work with members of both parties to develop a comprehensive proposal called the Secure Border Act.

And while the specifics of the legislation will be worked out in the months to come, the Secure Border Act will address three essential issues.

First, I have asked Representative Swinford to update existing conspiracy statutes so that law enforcement can more aggressively pursue international criminal and terrorist organizations.

Whether these groups smuggle drugs and human beings, or raise funds to support their illegal activities through fraudulent charities and businesses, one thing is certain: they are highly organized, and their crimes are planned out long in advance.

We need to make sure our conspiracy laws apply to the new methods and strategies criminals are employing, and those who break them need to face tougher penalties.

Second, I have asked Representative Swinford to include in his bill a provision that gives state and local law enforcement officials greater wire tap authority.

Texas law officers should have the same intelligence gathering tools as their federal counterparts, which means we must expand wiretap authority to all 3g offenses such as kidnapping, extortion and aggravated sexual assault, and not just murder and drug trafficking.

And third, Representative Swinford will lead the effort to ensure that state law enforcement agencies have the resources they need, and are better positioned to deal with the evolving threats of a post-911 world.

He will also work to streamline bureaucratic procedures and generate administrative cost savings so that we can put more officers where they are needed most, keeping our communities along the border and across the state safe from criminal and terrorist organizations.

Border security is an issue that affects every Texan, from Brownsville to the Panhandle.

And while the job of ensuring the security of our international border is the responsibility of the federal government, Texas won’t wait for federal officials to act because the safety and security of our people is at stake.

I appreciate Representative Swinford for agreeing to serve as the point person for guiding the Secure Border Act through the legislature.

He has my full faith and confidence, and his leadership on this issue will make Texas safer and our border more
secure.

Thank you. And now it is my honor to introduce a man doing an outstanding job for the Panhandle, Representative David Swinford.