School Finance Victory

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

Tuesday, May 16, 2006

Thank you. I am honored to be here with Lieutenant Governor Dewhurst, Speaker Craddick, members of the legislature and the grassroots membership of a number of associations that helped us pass a historic school finance reform plan.

With several strokes of my pen, we will reward teachers and reform our schools, provide a record property tax cut that will make homeownership more affordable, reduce the net tax burden on Texans by nearly $7 billion, and improve our tax system so it is fairer because it is broader.

Because of this plan, our schools will improve, our economy will grow and our state will prosper.

I offer the highest possible praise to Lieutenant Governor Dewhurst, Speaker Craddick and members of the house and senate for passing property tax relief and education reform with overwhelming bipartisan support.

It is rare, if not unheard of, that the vote on those two issues which elicit such great passion would pass by a combined margin of 167 to 8.

Because of their efforts, Texans will see their net tax burden drop by nearly $7 billion over the next three years.

They will see schools that are better funded, and teachers that are better paid.

And millions of Texans will see that the dream of homeownership is more affordable and easier to realize.

Lawmakers can be proud of those accomplishments, just as I will be tremendously proud the day I have the honor of signing their work into law.

Under this legislation, current and prospective homeowners are not the only winners.

Every Texan will benefit from a stronger economy that generates thousands of new jobs.
A lower property tax burden will give employers an incentive to expand and hire additional workers.

And because of new provisions in the reformed business tax, employers will have a powerful incentive to invest more in employee healthcare and pensions.

This is tax relief that Texans can count on for more than just a year or two.

New taxpayer protections that dedicate revenue increases to sustained property tax relief, and that require voter approval for local school leaders to raise taxes more than four cents, ensure that this tax cut is an investment in Texas’ future.

I am extremely proud that we are also investing more in teachers.

In addition to authorizing a $2,000 pay raise for every Texas teacher, Texas is creating the largest performance pay program in the country, with more than $300 million to reward teaching excellence with bonuses as large as $10,000.

This is a landmark step in the fight to give our children the best education possible.

This legislation will also keep Texas on the forefront of the national education reform movement with stronger math and science requirements for high school students, and with renewed investments in dropout prevention and college readiness efforts.

And by 2008 it will allow close to $1 billion in locally raised school dollars to be kept in those local communities and spent on the education of local children.

This is a tremendous step toward reducing the impact of Robin Hood while we make a historic investment in funding equity.

Texas is sincerely indebted to the leaders with me today for their hard work, and for the leadership of former Comptroller John Sharp, as well as the members of the bipartisan tax reform commission, who created the plan no one thought possible: a tax reform bill that is fair, equitable and good for the economy.

I am tremendously grateful for the leaders in the business and education communities who took a bold stand for this plan long before it was a sure thing.

And I am grateful for the atmosphere of cooperation that prevailed in both houses of the legislature, an atmosphere that flowed directly from the example set by Lieutenant Governor Dewhurst and Speaker Craddick.

I was heartened to see members working across party lines and across the capitol building, finding common ground even as they stood firm on their principles, so that they might deliver a school finance plan that will forever change Texas for the better.
That is what I asked lawmakers to do on the first day of this special session, on these very grounds.

We started in a bipartisan spirit, and yesterday they finished their work in a bipartisan spirit, even giving taxpayers back a day of per diem by getting done early.

Today I say, “job well done. Texas is better off for what we have accomplished together.”

Let me yield the podium to my friend and the presiding officer of the senate, David Dewhurst.