Thank you Secretary Williams. Secretary Chertoff, my fellow governors, distinguished guests and delegates to the 24th annual Border Governor's Conference: as we welcome you here today to Texas, we do so with great pride in our people and our history, and tremendous hope in tomorrow. And that hope extends beyond our borders. Having visited this very morning with the president-elect of Mexico, Felipe Calderon, I know there is a renewed spirit of cooperation that signals our hope in the future is not misplaced.

As we gather here today, we are bound together not only by a common border, but by a common future. And we know, in an increasingly interdependent world, progress and prosperity are not the product of isolationism, but inclusion. Simply put, our prosperity must be shared or it will be short-lived. This is not just economic theory, it is economic fact, proven by more than a decade of free trade that has raised the tide of progress and prosperity for both of our respective peoples. As the state that exports more goods and services than any in the nation, we are grateful for the opportunity to show that open markets open new doors and create new wealth.

We must also recognize the new era that is upon us. As the Western values of freedom and global competition advance, age-old hatreds harbored by new age criminals pose an alarming threat to our collective security. We cannot return to a September 10th mindset in the face of a continuing threat from a determined enemy. Without a total commitment to our security, economic, educational and social progress rest on tenuous grounds at best. And securing our homeland starts with securing our border. It is the right, and I would argue the imperative, of every sovereign nation to establish an orderly process by which people and products can legally cross from country to country, while ensuring there are safeguards in place to prevent the smuggling of illegal narcotics, weapons and people. As a people committed equally to justice and compassion, we cannot tolerate the indignity of our fellow human beings left to die in the back of trailers. Nor can we stand idly by as drugs that poison our children and weapons that threaten innocent lives are illegally carried across border lines. And while we have great sympathy for the immigrant who comes here for economic purposes, and indeed welcome such a person in accordance with our immigration laws, it would be both naïve and dangerous to believe that among the waves of economic migrants that come to this country there are not also those who come here simply to
cause great harm. Terrorists and criminal operatives blend into their surroundings and announce their arrival by cold and calculated acts of violence, not by sending out prior press releases or diplomatic envoys. As border governors we bear the collective brunt of this burden. The violence of criminal organizations has senselessly taken innocent lives on both sides of the border. And our resolve, in the face of intelligence data that suggests terrorists want to infiltrate our international border, must go beyond conferences and joint resolutions. It requires a unified response that starts with a stronger law enforcement presence.

The State of Texas has already conducted three joint operations with local and federal officials along the border. In 15 Texas counties, and one neighboring New Mexico county, an increased law enforcement presence has reduced crime as much as 70 percent. We know what works: increased patrols, new tools and technology, and a greater law enforcement presence. Any guest worker program that seeks to match American employers with foreign workers cannot succeed unless our border is secured first. I support the creation of a guest worker program because it will raise personal income on both sides of the border legally, while verifying the identities of people who otherwise live in the shadows of society. I also support measures to expedite the free flow of commerce across our border ports of entry because trade creates jobs, jobs create wealth, and privately-generated wealth is the source of public investments in education, healthcare and other shared priorities.

We can continue to expand our trade ties without compromising our security needs. In fact, it is imperative that we achieve both goals. As the governors of the ten border states, I believe we are natural allies in the quest to make our nations more secure. A catastrophic terrorist attack on American soil has economic effects that ripple strongly across border lines. And we also know that a deadly outbreak of disease, or a biological or chemical attack does not respect international boundaries. My fellow governors, we have an opportunity to send a strong message of solidarity based on a unified commitment to prosperity through global competition and stability through security. We must place a premium on working together to protect all citizens from criminal threats. We must share the burden of protecting our air and water, while wisely developing the resources that can improve our quality of life. And we must join together in declaring that, “we, the border states, stand united in protecting the dignity and rights of every human being while recognizing the rule of law.”

Not since 1848, with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, have our respective federal governments paid this much attention to the area known as “la frontera,” the border. This is important on two levels: first, because the border is a diverse microcosm of the future, and second, though we come here today from two different nations, we live in an interdependent world and we have one common destiny- un destino comun! Thank you, and may God bless you all.

I am honored to introduce a high-ranking official in the Bush Administration who is the director of the Department of Homeland Security, Secretary Michael Chertoff. As such, Secretary Chertoff is President Bush’s top-ranked official on matters of domestic security, and oversees our nation’s preparation for, and response to, both manmade and natural disasters. He is a distinguished leader with a vital mission. Please join me in welcoming the Secretary of Homeland Security, Michael Chertoff.