Thank you, Leo (Linbeck, Chairman). It is an honor to be here today with a group that has done so much for Texas and its citizens, Texans for Lawsuit Reform. I’m especially happy to speak here today, since I have recently become a dedicated student of the Law. For instance, I watched with great interest last Saturday as A&M guard Acie Law put up 21 points for the Aggies against Oklahoma. That’s the kind of studying that I enjoy- when someone else does all the work!

In the past few years, we have succeeded in passing lawsuit reforms that shield business owners from higher costs, doctors from frivolous complaints, and consumers from a hidden lawsuit abuse tax contained in the price of virtually every good and service sold. Today we are finally seeing real results that Texans can look to as proof that this reform has done what we promised. Courthouses have been returned to their original purpose, to serve as a place for people to peacefully solve their disagreements. Texans are no longer paying such a large “tort tax” on everything that they buy because frivolous lawsuits have been reined in. And doctors are coming to Texas to practice medicine and conduct research because their liability costs are dropping. In that respect, we have been too successful, because the licensing board is backlogged with physicians to approve, many who are waiting close to a year to practice medicine in Texas. That is why my budget contains additional resources, so we can get doctors in examining rooms across Texas as quickly as possible.

These healthcare liability reforms have dropped the cost of liability insurance for almost half of the state’s doctors. This is good, first and foremost, for the patients of Texans who deserve access to the best medicine possible. This is possible, in part, because Texas now licenses 400 more doctors a year than we did before 2003. This has improved the ability for every Texan to find a physician that can best serve their needs. Additionally, areas of the state that were traditionally underserved by specialty doctors have now gained valuable services to the benefit of all citizens. I ran into a neurosurgeon in the Rio Grande Valley who told me that the diversion of head trauma cases to San Antonio via life-flight is a lot less common these days. I have been to Driscoll Children’s Hospital in Corpus Christi where they had hired about a dozen new pediatric specialists within a year of the passage of lawsuit reforms. Lawsuit reform is not just about insurance costs and trial lawyer fees, it is about saving lives. Together we have made a difference when it comes to that important measure.
Looking forward, there is more we can do. Two of the items that TLR has made a priority have gotten my attention. First, I am pleased that this group will be pushing for a reorganization of Texas' court system. Today there are several different court jurisdictions within the state that have oversight of the same matter and of the same lower court judges. This is the result of a judicial system that has been built piecemeal over the last 131 years. Sometimes, it is difficult to make sense of it. Split jurisdictions, redundant courts, and an unclear power structure do not allow for efficiency that best serves the needs of the people of Texas. Streamlining the court system will make the courts more accountable and will ensure that judges will hear cases where their experience and knowledge are best put to use. We must work together to end the needless transfer of cases and the lack of accountability that this system allows. Also, it is time that we reform the lines of the Regional Administrative Judges to eliminate confusion in supervision.

Second, I am glad to see what this group will offer as possibilities for reforming the State’s jury selection process. I am in agreement with TLR’s statement that steps “must be taken by the courts and the Legislature to improve Texas’ jury system to encourage citizen participation and to better ensure the right to a fair and impartial trial by jury.” As one of the freedoms guaranteed by both the Texas and US Constitution, it is imperative that we allow citizens with business before the court system a chance before the court system a chance to have the most fair and impartial jury to hear their case. Additionally, this is not only a right afforded to those involved with the court system, it is a responsibility of every Texan to serve when called upon by the State. Look, I have a pretty busy schedule. But if a governor can show up for jury duty, then most everyone else ought to as well. Texans are now avoiding jury duty because the process simply takes too long. By streamlining the selection process and improving the experience for every juror that is called, we will have a process where everyone is involved and is able to perform an important civic duty for the health of our justice system.

I have always believed that when Texas is run as a free enterprise state, its citizens prosper. That has been the case with the great strides that we have made with respect to lawsuit reform. Competition in the Healthcare Liability Market has increased. When healthy competition increases, people have more of a choice in services and cost. The savings that hospitals and physician groups are experiencing from this and their reduced liability costs means an increase in their investment in our local economies. They are expanding services and upgrading their technology. New programs aim to work for the safety of patients and more choices in primary care. Additionally, more groups are focusing on prevention of disease and research.

As I made clear in my State of the State address earlier this month, it is my dream to accelerate the day when no Texan has to fear the words, "you have cancer." The multi-billion dollar cancer research initiative I have proposed can save lives and provide millions with renewed hope. The proposal I offered is large enough in scale that it will attract world-renowned researchers to Texas to find the cure for cancer. It is also large enough that it will bring our university scientists together in a tremendous collaborative effort to find a cure. I have proposed the sale of the Texas lottery to advance the goal of curing cancer, expanding health insurance for working Texans and creating a permanent endowment for public education. With a conservative estimate of $14 billion from such a sale, we could create a trust fund for the uninsured that would generate close to a quarter billion dollars every year in perpetuity. Every year 95,000 will hear those terrible words from a doctor, "you have cancer." 34,000 will die too young. We have made great progress in some areas, but all too often we still don't know what causes it to spread. I believe we must offer hope to those who face this terrible fight by investing $300 million a year in collaborative research projects that can develop the therapies needed to fight this disease, and the cures needed to one day prevent its development.
We can only achieve that which we envision. Let’s set our sights on the stars and work together to do big things for Texas. I look forward to working with you for the good of Texas and her civil justice system. Thank you for the good, hard work that you perform on behalf of our State. May God continue to bless Texas.