Gov. Rick Perry's Remarks on Building a Balanced Energy Portfolio for Texas

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

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Thank you, John [Hofmeister]. It is a real pleasure to be among some of the brightest and most creative minds in the bio world today. And I can say that it is an even greater honor to be governor of a state that, thanks to many of you, is leading the charge in developing new methods to produce energy and other resources in an efficient and environmentally safe way. It is no mistake that we are here in Houston today to lay out a bioenergy strategy a year in the making. This area – spanning Houston, Baytown and Sugar Land – is a national leader in agbiotechnology.

The real push toward bioenergy in Texas came in 2004, when I spearheaded efforts to build industry clusters comprised of leaders in six industries that economists speculated would be the engine for future economic growth in the United States. One of those sectors, if not the most important one because all others are so dependent upon it, is energy. Our first focus was developing tools that would not only bring Texas to the international forefront of creative energy development, but also lead our state toward becoming more self-sufficient when it came to our own energy and fuel needs. At that time, Texas was already known to be the Energy Capitol of the World. We are the number one producer of wind energy through our wind farms; and rank second only behind sunny California in solar energy production. And then there’s the abundant supply of oil found under our feet. But in a state that grows by 1,000 new residents each day, we need to be more innovative and stretch our arms around new methods and research in the field of energy.

Like other states in the U.S. and countries around the world, we began looking at advancements in bioenergy and biofuel. But unlike those other states that look to food as fuel, we took an approach that allows us to meet our energy needs without having to choose between feeding our cows or driving our cars. By intersecting three of our state’s largest industries – energy, agriculture and petrochemicals – researchers in Texas have made tremendous progress in developing bioenergy and fuel sources from such things as plant cells, compost and fertilizers. Today, these efforts are not only providing clean and environmentally friendly products, but are yielding a greatly diversified and growing bioeconomy in our state.

We are also finding that bioenergy and fuel products are successfully competing with traditional manufacturing processes. Companies are thrilled to be able to cut costs by using natural products, while running a greener and more eco-sensitive business. In a place like Texas that not only houses unique terrains and ecosystems unlike any other the world, but also has access to ports, international borders, and other venues for trade, we have a distinct opportunity to further develop and leverage more of our state’s resources to develop a variety of bioproducts. This thought led us to this past year’s efforts, when our bioenergy focus evolved toward taking on the broad realm of developing new
clean and efficient technologies – ranging from biochemicals, to biomaterials, and biopharmaceuticals. Though these concepts aren’t new – I like to think my dad was a connoisseur of sorts when it came to biopharmaceuticals, always telling us kids to just rub some dirt our on scrapes and bruises to make them better – bioproducts are the future of what we will turn toward to help us in our everyday lives.

No other place in the world has embraced biotech research like Texas. In fact, a bill was passed this session that provides incentives for farmers who bring agricultural and wood waste materials to facilities that generate electricity through conversion of biomass. With outstanding private sector partners like Chevron, those in academia like Texas A&M and Texas Tech, and even our federal partners such as the U.S. Department of Energy, we now find ourselves with a comprehensive toolkit on how to effectively balance the state’s energy and biotechnology portfolio. In fact, it is my pleasure to announce the new partnership between Chevron and Texas A&M, where they will work together to find a way to accelerate the harvesting of non-food crops for conversion into biofuels from cellulose. This four-year project shows tremendous promise for providing solutions to our nation’s call for energy and fuel self-sufficiency. And I would also like to announce an award of $5 million to A&M, awarded through the Texas Emerging Technology Fund, to help the university recruit qualified faculty to successfully market their biofuel technologies and renewable energy research. Last but certainly not least, I would like to recognize the members of the newly formed Texas Bioproducts Industry Council. These individuals will be leaders in creating the future strategy of Texas’ bioeconomy. If you are here, please stand up and let’s give them a round of applause.

I think Texas is not only ahead of the pack when it comes to biotechnology research and development, but positioning ourselves to be an international example of self-sufficiency thanks to bioresearch. Our focus on advanced energy technology will bring about global solutions to growing energy needs. And with that, I’d like to introduce Kathy Fredriksen from the U.S. Department of Energy to speak more to the national spark for biofuel and energy.