Gov. Rick Perry's Remarks to the East Texas Economic Development Summit

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

Thursday, November 15, 2007

Thank you, Trey [Henderson, Owner, Angelina Hardwood Sales] for that kind introduction. It is a real treat to be here in Lufkin and to meet the people who make this area of the state really work.

If you have any doubt about the importance of East Texas to the overall economic health of our state, look no further than the number of elected officials in the room. They didn't just come for the free lunch. Lt. Governor David Dewhurst is no stranger to building a business. Our comptroller, Susan Combs, knows what it takes to accelerate the engines of economic growth. Senator Nichols is a champion for East Texas when he comes to Austin and stays closely connected to his people. Judge Suiter helps maintain law and order, so that people can work together and succeed together. Todd Staples, our Ag Commissioner, knows just how much we rely on East Texas foresters, farmers and ranchers to keep us housed, fed and fueled. And I am grateful to Mayor Gordon for hosting this whole event.

Of all the values we celebrate in Texas, I would say that this area of the state strongly exemplifies the virtue of self-reliance. I am a firm believer in self-determination, the freedom of the individual to work their hardest and reap the rewards of their toil. In the economic realm, I believe that government’s role is not to overly restrict or excessively reward. Instead, my goal is a reasonably level playing field on which people win or lose based on their own merits, learning much from either experience. If you ask me, there is no better place to do those things than Texas. I have lived in this state for more than fifty years and have enjoyed the freedom it offers to pursue my dreams. It is the kind of state where you can be born on a tenant farm in a remote, agricultural area and end up sitting in the Capitol as governor. Texas is about opportunity. And economic success is a noble pursuit. Certainly it creates wealth, but it also leads to more jobs for the unemployed, more charitable giving for the needy, and greater freedom for all.

When a business is freed to exist in the marketplace, to succeed or fail based on the strength of its ideas, the way it executes them, and the sweat of its collective brow, it can become truly prosperous. I don't know of a better motivator than the chance to compete, to take risk and reap reward. And, today, I am surrounded by people who have risked greatly and continue to reap great reward for their toil. As you well know, Texas competes well with its fellow states with a superior business climate. Our success has led to prosperity for local business, foreign investment and international trade. You may know that Texas has been the top exporting state in America for the past five years. But you might be surprised to know that the vast majority of our exports are not from our giant corporations, but from small and medium-sized companies. That is because Texas is home to people who are willing to invest their own money and work hard for the promise of a return. You may have been born here, in Lufkin or Nacogdoches, but that is
probably not the only reason you are in business here. As a business leader, you may have been drawn here by our favorable tax structure and our efforts to protect businesses from frivolous lawsuits. Or, you may have gotten a kick-start from some of our business development initiatives here in the Lone Star State. You may know something about them, but I'm very proud of two key programs.

The first is the Texas Enterprise Fund. For four years now, we have been investing state dollars to create jobs for Texans. If a company comes to us with a plan to bring jobs to Texas, we can use the Enterprise Fund to help them relocate facilities or expand their operations. In just two years, we have used this fund to close deals on projects that have benefited Texas with 49,000 new jobs, $15.5 billion in capital investment, and unprecedented opportunity for our future business partners. And these dollars have come to East Texas as well. For example, Newly Wed Foods of Mount Pleasant received a grant of $450,000 last year to expand their manufacturing capabilities. Or Alloy Polymers of Houston County received $200,000 they'll use to more than double their work force. Of all the business sectors that combine to form our respective economies, technology is one of the fastest-growing. And we want it to grow even faster.

To that end, we created the Emerging Technology Fund which allows us to invest in smart people, helping them turn their ideas into products. We use this fund to help people who are pursuing breakthroughs in science and medicine. And we use it to fund those brilliant ideas being hatched in our universities so they can ultimately yield ideas that might save lives or transform our world. Here in East Texas, we made what we call a Research Superiority grant of $3.75 million to help them attract top level researchers in the field of environmental air quality. These are just two of the tools in our economic development tool box.

Just before lunch, you heard from Mr. Aaron Demerson, the man whose team manages those two key programs. They are standing by to help you continue the growth of this area and the health of your business. Call them, email them, send them a carrier pigeon, do what it takes to stay in touch with them. They have expertise and resources that can help you achieve your dreams of economic success. They are not your only allies in the area of economic development. You also have friends in the Department of Transportation. As you know, you can generate all the products you want, but they aren't worth anything if you can't get them to your customers. Just this week, TXDOT released the results of an environmental impact statement that is the next step toward creating a transportation corridor that will improve the flow of goods and services to and from this area. This project will provide a better connection to our economic partners, accelerate our mobility and improve our overall quality of life. I hope you'll keep an eye on this project as it moves forward and embrace it as a necessary investment in our economic future.

If I leave you with one message today, it is that I am optimistic about the future of our state in general and East Texas in particular. We will do our best to clear the way as you continue to set the standard, doing business East-Texas style. Thank you for all you do and may God bless you. May He continue to bless the great state of Texas.