Gov. Rick Perry’s Remarks to the Governor’s Business Council

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

Wednesday, December 05, 2007

Thank you, Charles (McMahan) for that introduction and for everything you do for the state of Texas as chairman of this council. Charles, the people on this council were picked for their leadership skills, their business experience and their force of will, so it’s no small task to build consensus the way you do.

It is a pleasure to be here today in Dallas, a place that represents so much that is good about our state’s dynamic economy. The mix of high tech design, aerospace innovation, and financial services provide a mutually beneficial balance of strength and flexibility for a strong economy. The capital that flows into this area from Texas and beyond is testament to the strength of the ideas, the business sense and the leadership of the business community here in the Metroplex. For us to be viable well into the future, we need to ensure that influx of financial capital is matched by the ongoing renewal and refinement of our human capital: our workforce. We have made great strides in spurring economic growth and creating jobs for Texans.

Because you have been in the game with us for a while now, you’re well aware of the Texas Enterprise Fund. For four years now, we have been investing state dollars specifically to create those jobs. The Enterprise Fund allows us to close the financial gap for companies that will create jobs. In just two years, we have used this fund to close deals on projects that have benefited Texas with 51,000 new jobs, $15.5 billion in capital investment, and unprecedented opportunity for our future business partners. Of all the business sectors that form our economy, technology continues to grow at a rapid pace. 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. With it, we are funding those brilliant ideas being hatched in our universities so they can ultimately yield ideas that might save lives or transform our world.

These are just two of the tools in our economic development tool box. When you combine them with our successes in reforming our legal system, you have a fertile climate for growth. Leaders in every field, especially medicine, are attracted to the fact that we have effectively cooled off a climate of “over-suing” that long plagued our state. This has increased business opportunity, but, more importantly, has made better medical care available to people in traditionally underserved areas across our state. When you throw in the changes we’ve made in taxation, slashing property taxes by nearly one third, we have created an economic climate that has no equal in our nation. That’s the good news.

But there is a cloud forming within that silver lining. Today, I am asking you to join me in meeting that challenge head-on. The challenge is this: our current approach to education will not carry us to our desired destination. We want
our state to remain economically robust, providing goods, services and employment to our citizens ‘til the sun burns out. But the rapid advance of technology continually raises the bar for the knowledge and skills required to succeed in the workplace. And the increasing competitiveness of our global economy constantly moves the measuring stick higher and higher. The economy that Texas students enter is no longer one bounded by the Rio Grande to the south and the Red River to the north. In the global economy of today and tomorrow, our competition is just as likely to be in Beijing as it is in Boston. We do our children a great disservice if we do not prepare them to provide for their own families, invest in their communities and experience the fulfillment of a job well-done, a competition won. And, it pains me to say, that we have not been clearing that bar.

In their recently released report, the Commission for a College Ready Texas shared some insights that should give us all pause. Our own Sandy Kress chaired the commission and Charles McMahen served on it as well, so what I’m saying will not surprise them. They discovered that Texas is not hitting the mark on preparing high schoolers for college, even though a college degree is one of the leading indicators of future professional success. We have evolved a culture of complacency, with grade-segmented schools following diverse objectives, lax standards of achievement and students who exit their schools unprepared for the next level. I believe that our educational system is in need of an elemental cultural change. I firmly believe in the nobility of the teaching arts, but there is no shame in the goal of preparing children for future economic success. Education that merely expands a child’s mind is great in the movies, but our kids need to be equipped for genuine success in the workplace.

Later this afternoon, I am announcing the commencement of a Competitiveness Council dedicated to establishing a common-sense connection between the subject matter in our schools and the knowledge needed to succeed in our growing economy. Drawing on the best minds in business, education and government, this Council will work hard to make sure that our hard-working teachers and the students they inspire have the best chance to succeed in their chosen fields. And I need the people in this room to keep up the pressure on your end. The College Ready Texas report made it clear that employers like you have a crying need for educated workers. The study showed that roughly 90% of jobs require some form of post-secondary education. So I hope you will also advocate for and invest in other innovative solutions.

Just yesterday, I was happy to watch UT Dallas accept a large grant from the National Math and Science Institute to kickstart a UTeach program on their campus. This innovative approach cultivates math & science teachers from the ranks of college students already passionate about those subjects. Using a combination of state funding and a significant commitment from the private sector, this program will create a supply of energetic, enthusiastic teachers for our schools. UTeach succeeds because it demands mastery of challenging subject matter, it pairs aspiring teachers with active, veteran teachers, and gets them into the classroom early so they can find out if they have what it takes to survive in front of a classroom full of teenagers. I believe this infusion of bright, young minds will fuel a revolution in our schools, create a new generation of tech-savvy students, and energize our economy. The UTeach program is just one example of what can happen when we apply the exact sort of problem-solving skills we want our children to develop.

This is the sort of effort we can be making here on this Business Council. You all know the impact your own education had on your life and you intuitively know the education our children are getting isn’t as good as it should be be. I’m calling on you to join me in pursuing innovative approaches to educating our children, not letting tradition, choking regulations or “business as usual” stand in the way. Instead, let’s keep our eyes trained on a future Texas where students emerge from our schools ready to contribute to society, succeed in the workplace and support themselves and their families. The outcome is within our grasp if we’ll simply stay committed to our end goal. With your help we can make this vision a reality.