Gov. Rick Perry's Remarks to the Texas Association of Business

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

Friday, January 25, 2008

Thank you, Randy [Jones, TAB’s volunteer chair]. A lot of you know that Randy is in the cement business so he’s a good guy to know if you need to pour a foundation, build a deck, extend a highway, are dealing with the Sopranos -- whatever. I want to thank your president, Bill Hammond, for inviting me here today. You’re about the only guy I know who can outdo my enthusiasm for economic development in our state.

The goals and efforts of this organization are very important to me. I have long believed that a healthy economy is the best recipe for the ills of society. No government handout can equal the impact of gainfully employed people working good jobs to support their families. To me, a fair shake is about a level playing field on which people can compete, fair and square.

The whole notion of competition is one you’ve heard me talk about before and you’re going to keep hearing it in the years to come. Because competition is honestly what life is about. We live in a competitive state, whether it’s on the football field under the Friday night lights or in the high tech marketplace. More than any other activity, competition gives us a truer sense of who we are. When you’re going head-to-head with someone on the basketball court or on the shelf at Best Buy, you learn quickly where you stand. If you compete and fall short, you try harder. If you lose by two points on the scoreboard or miss your quarterly earnings, it tells you that you have work to do. Winning by two points also tells you what you have to do to maintain your edge. Unfortunately, the court you play on as business leaders isn’t always level. If you deal with regulations that made sense fifty years ago but now only hinder your progress, your court isn’t level. If trucks full of your product creep through urban areas because of crowding on the roads, you are not free to truly compete.

That is why I have created a Competitiveness Council. Last month, this group of leaders from business, local governments and agency heads met for the first time and got the ball rolling. When I meet with them next week, I will reiterate my challenge to help our state cast off the shroud of “business as usual.” I want them to help us transfer best practices from the fast-moving world of business to the government sector, placing a premium on agility, innovation and healthy competition. You and I both know that the government’s traditional approaches simply don’t work. They lead to stagnation, crippling debt and the exodus of talented people. That is unacceptable. In my mind, if we’re not moving forward, we are falling behind. And it’s no longer just a matter of falling behind another Texas company or losing an employer to a nearby state. We live in a truly global marketplace. But that fact is just one example of how we’re no longer just competing locally. Instead, we’re in the business Olympics and not just every four years.

Every hour of every day, there are companies on the other side of the globe who want your market share. And your customers are probably looking their direction more and more every day. Now I don’t say this to frighten or depress
you. That's not how competitors react to the facts about their opponents. Instead, they take that information, probe for weaknesses, make themselves stronger, and play their hearts out. In short, I want Texas to be more competitive because competition sharpens the senses and brings out the best in people. I will also admit it can also bring out the worst in people. But that's where groups like yours come in and where government should play a role. Because every level playing field has visible white lines, clearly-understood rules and referees to keep things fair. But when the field tilts in the wrong direction, government should get involved. So we will continue to provide consumer safety, appropriate environmental protections and strong ethics. But public servants must fulfill the public trust by giving people the best chance to compete.

Because you are out in the marketplace, competing for all you're worth, you probably have your own stories about the health of our state's economy. Everything we're seeing says it is going very well. Freeing business to compete has made Texas the number one exporting state in the nation for several years, created one million net new jobs in the past four years, and put us in the top five of Forbes Magazine ranking of best states to do business. Texas was named the 2007 State of the Year by Business Facilities magazine because we had the most economically significant relocation and expansion projects of the year. Expansion Management magazine assigned Texas the highest Legislative Quotient in 2007, meaning we have the most business-friendly legislative climate. That award is at tribute to the strong relationship we have with your other speakers this week, Speaker Craddick and Lt. Governor Dewhurst. And I believe we'll be in line for more improvement this year as we stay the course on our efforts to stoke the competitive fires.

Now, I know that one of your primary areas of focus during this conference is the issue of healthcare, how to pay for it, how much to provide, and how to succeed in business while doing so. This is one of the most pressing issues of our times because it lies at the intersection of genuine human need and market forces that have been greatly tampered with by government. When I took office in 2000, Texas was probably one of the most litigious states in the Union. Malicious lawsuits in the hands of unscrupulous lawyers were driving insurance rates up and forcing doctors to either turn away from their calling or leave the state.

Thanks to reforms we put into place, the climate has shifted significantly. Court dockets are no longer jammed with cases, malpractice insurance has fallen by an average of 20 percent and doctors are returning to areas that were previously underserved. And insurance is the next big hurdle. I have great confidence in Mike Geeslin and the headway he's making at the Texas Department of Insurance. And I'm looking forward to the findings of the State Coverage Institute project. Funded by a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson foundation, this group is setting out to answer to the challenge of caring for the uninsured. I strongly support the approach of bringing together the best of executive and legislative leadership to focus on the issue of the uninsured before the legislative session begins.

Bill, as I said when I started, I really appreciate the efforts y'all make here at the TAB. Because you're all in the game, you get it. You get what it takes to compete. You get what it takes to succeed. I hope your organization will continue to advocate for what’s good for business and what’s good for your employees, the people of Texas. I wish all of you success in the coming year and pray that God will bless your endeavors. And, as always, I pray that He will continue to bless Texas.