Gov. Rick Perry's Remarks to the Government Technology Conference

Wednesday, January 30, 2008

Thank you, Brian (Rawson, Chief Information Officer, State of Texas) for that kind introduction. Nice tie—I guess I figured all tech guys at conferences wore black turtlenecks and jeans like Steve Jobs. Thanks for keeping up the standards here in Texas.

I want to welcome all of you here to the Government Technology Conference. If there are any livebloggers here, please be sure to tell your audiences that I’m a lot more statesmanlike than you expected. I’d say Austin is a pretty fitting location for a technology conference. With companies setting trends in everything from semiconductors to video games, this town is definitely tech-friendly. If you're here from out of state, I certainly hope you enjoy your stay, but, more than anything else, I hope you end up wishing you could move to Texas. I want our state to be the best place to live, work and raise a family.

If you were to Google the speeches I’ve made in the past few months, you’d find that the resounding theme centers on one word: competitiveness. My goal has always been to make our state the destination of choice for the movers and shakers of our world. If you’re a top software designer, I want you here. If you’re the best cancer researcher in the world, I want you on the staff at one of our hospitals. If you invented a process or device that will corner the market, I want you to manufacture it here. And those movers and shakers are here, in the private sector and the government side as well, some born here and others who got here as quick as they could.

I believe the critical mass that comes from motivated, educated innovators is the sort of thing that drives economies upward and makes life better for everyone. I recently created what’s called a Competitiveness Council, a group of leaders from business, education, and government who are united in their desire to improve Texas by improving our infrastructure, improving the alignment between what’s being taught in schools and what’s needed in the workplace, and streamlining government. That’s where you come in.
As technology experts, I consider you the leaders in the “work smarter, not harder” field of innovation. You are the thought leaders who will enable states like Texas to improve government by making it better, not bigger. I am convinced that the efficiencies that come from technology multiply the effectiveness of our agencies. In Texas, our Business Portal initiative is a collaborative effort between roughly thirty agencies that has made it easier for businesses to interact with the government. Technology also allows us to identify problems more quickly by analyzing trends and data. For example, local, state and federal law enforcement agencies along the border are utilizing analytical tools to direct crime-fighting resources where they’re most needed. Technology allows us to personalize the interface between government and the people we serve. There are roughly 24 million Texans now and we need those tools to meet their needs. Tools like TexasOnline.com put mountains of necessary information at our citizens’ fingertips, all in a well-organized fashion. And technology allows us to automate certain processes, allowing us to see and affect the bigger picture.

I know that a lot of you are swimming upstream when it comes to getting your ideas across. Admit it: government doesn’t exactly come to mind when people are asked to give examples of agile, fast-moving organizations. Don’t give up. I would encourage you to persist, because your grasp of technology makes you a change agent. Realize that you might feel alone when you’re trying to convince your organization to try something new, but it is worth the effort. I would call you the prophets in your organization, but a closer look at the Bible tells us the guys with that title usually lived alone, in a dark cave, eating spoiled food and shouting at crowds who never really understood them. On second thought, maybe SOME of you would qualify for that title. Tell you what: I think all of you should embrace the title of prophet and the responsibility that goes with it. You’re the ones on the cutting edge, you understand the amazing capabilities of the tools that are evolving across the industry, and you may be the only ones who can convince people in power to choose those tools wisely.

I encourage you to educate yourself on the needs of your organization and its customers. Ask questions. I urge you to stay current on best practices, new technologies and fresh information. Keep learning. And I hope you will never accept the status quo. The citizens of your state have put their trust in you. Remember that their tax dollars buy them your best effort. Keep serving. Finally, realize that what you do matters. When a battered woman can find safety through your Web site; When firefighters reach a home more quickly because your system gave them the right information; When a company decides to relocate and employ more people because you made it easier to find resources; When a person’s identity remains secure because you protected their information; You have made people’s lives better. You have made your state and your world a better place. You have answered the higher calling of public service. And for that, I am grateful, your coworkers are grateful and your citizens appreciate you.

Have a great conference, may God bless you and may he continue to bless the Great State of Texas.