Greater Dallas Hispanic Chamber of Commerce

Monday, February 11, 2008

Thank you CiCi (Rojas, President of GDHCC). The business leaders and entrepreneurs sitting here today are a testament to your outstanding leadership throughout the Hispanic community in the Dallas/Forth Worth area. Board Chairman Frank Rosello and Senior Vice President Holly Reed: it’s a pleasure to be with you today as well.

I am honored to be in the presence of men and women who help keep the engine of our economy turning, the members of the Greater Dallas Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. You embody the do-it-yourself spirit, and you represent what makes Texas so great. And you make the Metroplex even better with your efforts to connect business leaders, enhancing our economic vitality.

With smart schools, multiple airports, and a business climate that encourages innovation, this area is one of the premier places in the world to do business. The people at Forbes Magazine agree as they recently named Dallas and Fort Worth as two of their “top 20 best cities for jobs in 2008.” Those same editors like our state too—they ranked Texas in the top five of their “best states to do business” just last year.

There are good reasons that our state has remained prosperous while the rest of our nation shows signs of slowing. We are blessed to live in a state that does not burden its citizens with an income tax or allow runaway lawsuits. We offer those who dare to dream a favorable regulatory environment, strong trade relationships, and an educated work force ready and eager to take on challenges.

Our state also has a number of programs that exist to encourage job creation. One, the Texas Enterprise Fund, is a deal-closing fund that has helped us secure growth in fields like information technology and biotechnology. This fund has aided Toyota’s arrival in San Antonio, Samsung’s growing presence in Austin and Rockwell Collins’ recently-announced expansion here in the Metroplex. As a state, we do more than encourage businesses to expand or relocate, we put our money where our mouth is and let the results do the talking. Since its creation, the fund has closed the deal on projects generating more than 51,500 new jobs and $15.5 billion in capital investment in the state. I’d call that a key part of a business-friendly environment.

And Texas is most certainly friendly to Hispanic-owned businesses. Our great state can lay claim to almost one-fourth of the top 100 fastest-growing Hispanic companies in the United States. No other state can match that. But I know I am preaching to the choir on this issue. As business leaders in North Texas, you already know that this state is very friendly to Hispanic business efforts. There are currently 240,000 Hispanic-owned businesses statewide that do more than $39.5 billion in sales annually. That’s billion with a “b.” And we enjoy a significant level of investment from
Mexican-owned companies as well. Mrs. Baird’s Bakeries, CEMEX, Azteca Milling Company, and Vitro Packaging are just a few who operate in Texas. Beyond the successes of Latino businesses, our state is enriched by a growing Hispanic population. More than one third of our citizens identify themselves as Hispanic. As you know, Hispanic Texans will compose the largest demographic group in our state by 2020. That’s a good thing.

When I was a student at Texas A&M, we learned a term “hybrid vigor” which describes how an organism is strengthened by a blended heritage. Our state is enriched by a diversity of thought and a blended heritage which forms one unique culture. And for all that is said about our diversity, we are one Texas and one people as surely as our state flag bears one star. And we all generally want the same thing. We all seek a good education for our children, safe and vibrant neighborhoods for our families, and the chance to succeed based on our best efforts and our own merit. Texas offers that in abundance and more people are coming here from every direction to get their shot at that opportunity, to the tune of 1,000 new people a day. Businesses from beyond our border, in every direction, across the U.S. and beyond, are coming here too.

Our southern border is a point of connection with our largest trading partner and an area of rich culture convergence. Since the North American Free Trade Agreement was signed, Texas trade with Mexico has grown more than 300%. In 2006, almost one-third of all Texas exports went to Mexico. So we enjoy a mutually beneficial relationship with a good neighbor. But our increasing prosperity also makes us more attractive to the criminal element, who see our citizens as customers for their drugs, victims for theft, and willing dupes for their schemes. And our values make us a target of those from countries with a known al Quaeda presence, possibly intent on doing us harm.

These two groups have long seen our southern border as a revolving door, an easy entryway to our prosperous state, and a curtain behind which to hide when they flee apprehension. We must not compromise on safety and security while ensuring a free-flow of commerce. And we must not demonize people of Latino heritage who are law-abiding members of our community.

Building a seamless fence between El Paso and Brownsville isn’t the answer. Instead, we are succeeding by coordinating the efforts of local, state and federal law enforcement agencies. I do believe that there are places that call for strategic fencing as a means of access control. These include some metropolitan areas and other highly-trafficked points of incursion. We want to make sure the good guys get through and the bad guys get caught. By securing our border, we will increase the peace and decrease the angry rhetoric that clouds the border issues.

Over the last decade Texas has made great strides in creating a strong climate for business. Over the past four years, our state has added one million net new jobs. And more jobs means Texas needs to keep turning out a strong workforce. As business owners and leaders, you know that education is one of the most important long-term investments we can make. During the last legislative session, we made some good strides in improving the future workforce by increasing the financial aid for college students more than $140 million. That means some 16,000 more students will get a boost on their climb to a higher education. And more high school graduates will get the clear message that their future is not limited by finances.

And I know that education is something your Chamber of Commerce cares about deeply because of your own generous donation of a quarter of a million dollars each year towards scholarships. Somebody once told me that, if you want to know what matters to a person, take a look at their checkbook register. Your ledger here at the chamber of commerce speaks loudly about your priorities. I personally want to thank you for helping more young Texans attend college.

I want to close by saying how honored I am to be your governor. As a former small business owner myself, I know the challenges one faces when you don’t sign the back of your own paycheck ‘til you’ve signed the front of everyone else’s. I know its often not easy to persevere when money gets tight or employees decide they’re owed more than a paycheck. So I congratulate you for working to build better companies which lead to a better Texas. I wish you the
best in your business endeavors, encourage you to keep supporting education and challenge you to dream Texas-sized dreams for your companies, your communities and your families.

Thank you, may God bless you and may He continue to bless the great state of Texas.