Putting a Stop to Drunk Driving in Texas

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

Thursday, April 03, 2008

Thank you, Ben (Salinas, CARPOOL’s Director of Development) for having me here today and congratulations on the impact this organization is having.

It is always a pleasure for me to be in the presence of fellow Aggies, especially in a town some might best describe as an enemy stronghold. You know, like a good Aggie, I do my share of joking about the folks at UT, but, it is important to note that all college students face similar challenges in life, especially the choice to drink and drive. Regardless of whether they wear the Aggie maroon, the Texas orange or the Baylor Green and Gold, college students are typically blessed, or should I say afflicted, with a sense of invincibility. Too many people in the prime of life walk around with an “it could never happen to me” mentality.

A look at the statistics provides the sobering counter-argument that it most definitely can happen to you, me or anyone else who gets on the road. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration 1,677 people were killed in alcohol-related crashes in Texas in 2006, and more than 63,000 people were injured. 48% of those crashes were alcohol-related, a number that is far above the national average of 41%. Our state leads the nation in a lot of positive categories, but that is one lead we need to relinquish.

Experience tells us that it’s not just the drunk driver who is harmed by their foolish choice to get behind the wheel. Instead, we know that drunk driving is an indiscriminate killer, destroying families, devastating communities and decimating the rich potential of far too many lives. A single life lost to this killer is one too many, so those 1,677 fatalities mean we have that much more work to do. I applaud the members of CARPOOL for the common sense approach you have taken to fixing this problem. Cities often publicize the free taxi rides they offer to their citizens on New Years’, Fat Tuesday or St. Patrick’s Day, but those are just three days out of the year. By making your services available throughout the year, you have taken that solution to the next level. And by offering a non-judgmental ride to your peers, you have removed a barrier that too often causes people to choose a dangerous behavior over the most prudent approach. In doing so, you have given the gift of life to people who will never know how close they might have come to tragedy in a drunk driving incident. In doing so, you have exemplified the Aggie values that place the importance of your classmates above the other things you could do on a Friday or Saturday night.

A lot of people might just talk about the problem of drunk driving, but you’re Aggies, so you took action. I commend you for your efforts and I encourage everyone within earshot to get on board with this effort. Every dollar you give, every hour you might drive, every person you encourage to surrender the keys will make a difference in the eternal sense. In his address at the University’s inaugural in 1876, Texas Governor Richard Coke called on Aggies to “let
honor be your guiding star." CARPOOL and its supporters are proof that Aggies everywhere are still striving to fulfill that charge.

Thank you for all you do. May God bless you and multiply your efforts to protect those who won't otherwise protect themselves. And, through you, may God continue to bless the great state of Texas.