Keeping Smugglers at Bay with Texas Hold 'Em

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

Thursday, June 19, 2008

Thank you all for being here today. I would like to welcome the five US Border Patrol Chiefs from each of the Border Patrol Sectors in Texas who serve on the front line, securing our border from all threats. I also would like to welcome the Chief of the Texas Department of Public Safety’s Drivers License Service who is instrumental to the initiative we are here to announce today.

As you may well know, Texas has a long, fruitful relationship with Mexico. They are our number one trade partner and millions of our citizens claim a family heritage there. Our border with Mexico is a gateway to trade and a meshing point for our shared culture. Unfortunately, our southern border has also long been a conduit of illegal activity that harms our state and challenges the sovereignty of our nation. Every day, Mexican drug cartels probe our border for weak spots through which they can pass their illicit cargo of drugs, stolen merchandise and illegal aliens, including those from nations with known terrorist ties. Over the last two years, forces on the border have arrested more than 500 illegal aliens from countries like Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Syria and Yemen.

To stem this two-way flow of contraband and secure our border, I worked with the legislature last year to appropriate $110 million for border security efforts. A primary focus of those efforts is Operation Border Star, a coordinated deployment of local, state & federal law enforcement to the high-crime areas of the border. The effort is succeeding as crime in those high-intensity areas has been decreased by 65% and illegal crossings have dropped by nearly half. That means the Mexican crime syndicates are losing money,
which means they're changing tactics, looking for new loopholes to exploit. Their latest target? Truckers.

They have been coercing truckers into smuggling their illicit contraband with threats of violence and blackmail. Now the vast majority of Texas truckers are law-abiding citizens who work incredibly long hours to feed their families and keep our economy moving. But there are those who are breaking the law to make a quick buck. In the first eight months of fiscal year 2008, Border Patrol agents in Texas intercepted 423 tractor trailers, resulting in the detainment of more than 1,800 undocumented immigrants, and more than 112,000 pounds of illegal drugs. In the Laredo area alone, 330 truck drivers have been caught smuggling drugs or humans into Texas in the last 18 months.

Up until today, when these lawbreaking truckers have been apprehended and convicted in federal court, they have typically paid a small fine or served a brief sentence, then gone back to business as usual. Starting today, that all changes. I have directed DPS to work with the Border Patrol to suspend the commercial driver's license of any trucker convicted of knowingly smuggling contraband over the border. We're calling this cooperative effort between state and federal law enforcement agencies "Texas Hold 'Em."

It's the next logical step in our efforts to secure our border. We're sending a message to commercial drivers who are breaking the law, "If you knowingly smuggle illicit cargo across the Texas border, you will lose your license and your livelihood." Border security is a serious issue and we must enforce appropriate consequences for those who knowingly violate our laws and hinder our efforts to protect our citizens.

And now, to share a little more information about this program, I'd like you to meet one of our five border sector chiefs, Laredo Sector Chief Patrol Agent Carlos X. Carrillo. Carlos?