Gov. Perry Announces Emerging Technology Fund Grant for Desalination at UTEP

Technologies expected to help meet future statewide water needs.

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

Thursday, October 23, 2008

Thank you, Diana [Natalicio, UTEP President] and thank you for welcoming us all here to the University of Texas-El Paso. It is a real pleasure to be here today to celebrate a next step in this university’s emergence as a technology center-of-excellence.

UTEP has been recognized as the leading engineering school for Hispanic students, and is one of only six institutions in the country designated as a Model Institute for Excellence by the National Science Foundation. It is entirely fitting for a school with such a strong emphasis on science, technology and engineering to be an incubator for exciting new technologies like those we’re discussing today.

In a city that only gets a little more than eight inches of rain a year, it is also appropriate that the technologies in question are related to the production of water.

Texas is a state that has an abundance of energy-related natural resources like oil, wind, and coal, but water can be a challenge. I remember my share of days growing up on my father’s cotton farm, staring at a cloudless Texas sky, hoping for just a drop or two to help our crop.

You could say that is part of the farming experience, but we can’t leave our statewide water issues to chance, when you consider where Texas is headed. Some have estimated that our state’s population will double over the next 60 years. According to the Texas Water Development Board, that growth will cause a 27 percent increase in water demand.

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Unfortunately, unless we pursue options other than our existing sources, we will have a 40 percent shortfall in supply by the year 2060. That is one reason why, in 2002, I directed the Board to start our state moving on seawater desalination.

Since then, Texas has moved projects from the laboratory to the drawing board and into the testing phase. As a state, we are getting closer to coastal desalination and are especially pleased at this new phase, inland desalination.

When you look at the water challenges I mentioned earlier, I simply cannot imagine our state being given that much time to solve a problem and coming up short. Fortunately, we have places like UTEP that are focusing their resources on one of the approaches that will help meet our state’s water needs in the future.

Today, we are here to celebrate a collaborative effort between the university, the city and the state of Texas. The state is stepping up with a grant from the Texas Emerging Technology Fund that is being matched by our two partners here, all intended to make UTEP, El Paso and our state the world leaders in inland desalination technology.

The approach we take with the Fund is different from the typical approach you may have come to expect from government. Here in Texas, we don't just commission studies to learn fascinating information. Instead, we’re about finding marketable technologies, fueling their refinement and starting ventures that turn a profit.

This is the latest example of our efforts to find great ideas born in university laboratories, and invest in them to generate products that can ultimately create jobs, turn a profit and keep our state’s economy humming.

Despite the economic concerns that are striking fear into the hearts of investors, business owners and families, Texas is actually doing comparatively well. Because of measures we have implemented over time, we have an economic stability that is the envy of the rest of the country.

Because we spent the last few years tightening our belts by cutting spending and encouraging growth by cutting taxes, our state is better prepared than most to handle the current crisis.

We are still the leading exporting state in the nation, the leading job creator, and the home to more Fortune 500 company headquarters than any other state.

However, we’re not immune to the economic turmoil, so we should all continue to tighten our belts, especially those of us in government who have been charged with the stewardship of our citizens’ tax dollars.

As our economy works through this rough patch, I believe that companies will continue to seek their fortune in Texas, taking advantage of our favorable taxes, our sensible legal system and reasonable regulatory climate, to continue to pursue their dreams.

When they get here, they will need the water that is being purified in this town, the spin-off technologies created by this collaboration, and the collective brainpower of our state that is enhanced every time we do one of these deals.

Part of our criteria in choosing where to place dollars from the Emerging Technology Fund is investing in human capital, finding the subject matter experts that will propel us to the front of the pack, and giving them the resources they need to succeed.

We have certainly done this with Dr. Tom Davis, a man widely acknowledged as the subject matter expert in this field. With all apologies to the University of South Carolina, I am proud to welcome Dr. Davis to our state.
I am confident you will find El Paso and this fine university to be the ideal setting to mine for new ideas.

Thank you all for being here. I pray that God will bless our efforts and that, through this collaboration, He will continue to bless the great state of Texas.