Gov. Perry Announces Texas Veterans Leadership Program

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

Monday, November 10, 2008

Thank you, Tom [Pauken, TX Workforce Commissioner] and thank you for all you do to keep Texas working.

We are gathered here today, on the eve of another Veteran's Day, to announce a statewide effort to honor and support our veterans.

This holiday has special significance to me, as the son of a World War II veteran who flew 35 missions as tailgunner on a B-17, as someone who spent hundreds of hours in the cockpit of an Air Force C-130, and a governor who has looked into the eyes of countless Texans, as they returned from service in places like Afghanistan and Iraq.

We celebrate the holiday in a variety of ways...visiting cemeteries, cheering parades, maybe even visiting museums like the National Museum of the Marine Corps in Virginia. As we remember, we need to keep in mind that the battle stories, the casualty counts, the tales of valor, they all involve real people: sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, real people.

These men and women who hit the pause button on their lives to serve their country, who have risked their lives in the defense of our freedom, and asked their families to wait 'til they return, deserve more than a pat on the back.

They deserve the best support we can give them as they transition from the confines of military culture, the rigors of the training cycle, and the chaos of the battlefield, to the sometimes alien surroundings of the civilian workplace.
We must make sure every veteran returns from the field of battle to live a life of dignity, with access to the healthcare and benefits promised when they made their own promise to defend this nation, with the ability to earn a living and support their families.

I am encouraged when the private sector stands up for our veterans, like our hosts today do. AT&T has invested millions in our armed forces. Active duty troops have benefited from their phone centers in forward areas and the $8 million worth of prepaid phone cards they've donated. AT&T has also done nearly $50 million in business with companies owned by disabled veterans…another example of their commitment to our troops.

The public sector also has a role to play in supporting our veterans. That is why, I am pleased to announce today the official start of the Texans Veterans Leadership Program.

Under the experienced leadership of Tom Pauken, who created a similar federal program for Viet Nam veterans, hand-picked veterans will serve as Veterans Resource and Referral Specialists.

In 28 locations across our state, these Specialists will help Texas veterans adjust to civilian life with training, job search assistance and a program encouraging Texas businesses to hire them.

We do this out of a sense of duty to our defenders, but I'll admit to selfish motivations as well. The Texas economy is doing a lot better than most other states for a number of reasons, including our favorable tax structure, sensible legal system and a very strong workforce.

I would like to make our work force even stronger by adding individuals with the leadership experience and maturity that comes from military service. That is why I want veterans to move to Texas, to pursue their dreams and put their military experience to work. We want them on our team.

This program will provide an infusion of talent into our economy, a dose of encouragement to our veterans, and a win-win situation for our state.

In his 1954 proclamation formalizing this national holiday, President Dwight D. Eisenhower wrote:

“…let us solemnly remember the sacrifices of all those who fought so valiantly, on the seas, in the air, and on foreign shores, to preserve our heritage of freedom, and let us reconsecrate ourselves to the task of promoting an enduring peace, so that their efforts shall not have been in vain.”

I want our veterans to know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that their service to our nation has not been in vain. I want to express to each and every one of you, service members from every generation, the praise and gratitude of more than 23 million Texans. We are free because you were brave. The hour of danger was your hour of courage.

And as you pass the torch to future generations, we stand with you, to affirm that your heroic deeds will never be forgotten.

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