Gov. Perry Addresses the Greater San Antonio Hispanic Chamber of Commerce

Celebrates Latino Contributions to State’s Economic Strength

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

Friday, January 30, 2009

Thank you, GEN Robles and thank you for your continued service to this great city and to our state.

After 80 years of existence, this Chamber pretty much has this leadership stuff figured out.

Speaker Straus, it is nice to see you back on your home turf after your first few weeks running the show in Austin.

Folks like Victor Carrillo who makes things happen on the Railroad Commission. and, of course, your former chamber leader and new Secretary of State, the Honorable Hope Andrade.

There is no question that the business community is clearly doing something right here in San Antonio. This city is handling the current global economic crisis as well as any city I know.

As you all know, unemployment is climbing across the country, but Texas has been staying a full percentage point below the national average thanks to the strength of our economy.

That’s good, but San Antonio’s average is a full point lower than that, thanks in part to the 1,000 companies that now make up this Chamber.

There is nothing like a diverse economy, an employer-friendly climate and a workforce full of Texans to keep and attract jobs.

San Antonio gained more than 27,000 jobs over the last year, and picked up another 21,000 new residents, so you're pretty much tracking right on trend for Texas.

In general, as the U.S. economy gets shakier by the day, Texas is holding tough.
As Americans look for the best place to live, work and raise a family, more of them are heading to Texas all the time.

As business owners seek shelter from growing tax burdens and increasing government interference, they’re heading to the Lone Star State as well, like Caterpillar who is bringing 1,400 jobs to Seguin.

Those trends validate the fiscally sound approaches we’ve taken, and affirm our efforts to help employers create more jobs, but they also create a unique set of challenges that we need to tackle in this legislative session and the years to come.

Those challenges include making sure we have sufficient water, power and transportation capacity for our people in the years to come.

We need to keep on improving the quality of a Texas education at every grade level, to maximize the potential of our young people, and prepare them to compete in the global economy.

That improvement requires accountability measures and incentives to retain the best teachers, a continued emphasis on teaching our high school students math, science and English, and more financial aid for qualified college students.

We also need to get a handle on the obesity that plagues our society and threatens the long-term health of our children.

I’m confident the Legislature will approve my plan to tackle this problem in our schools with incentive-based healthcare plans like those gaining popularity in the workplace.

We’re pursuing these and other priorities under tighter budgetary constraints, but they are essential for maintaining our state’s magnetic attraction for innovation, jobs, and investment.

We’ll sustain that magnetism if we keep government spending down, make our regulations even more predictable, and maintain attractively low taxes.

Over the past few years, those factors have made it possible for business leaders like you to keep products going out the door, paychecks going to your employees, and Texans earning the resources they need to succeed.

Those factors have contributed to Texas leading the nation in job creation, Fortune 500 companies and exports.

The majority of those exports go to our largest trading partner, a nation conveniently located on the other side of our southern border.

Not only is Mexico our partner in trade, they’re also a long-time neighbor whose history and culture is interwoven with ours.

Not only do Texas and Mexico share a border, but we share the challenges of preserving order in increasingly dangerous times.

We are all disturbed by the stories of increasing violence just across the way, as warring drug cartels seek to destroy each other and undermine law and order on their turf.

I take issue with those who describe Mexico as a “failed state.” Failed states don’t maintain Mexico’s remarkable
trade output or keep up the pitched battle with organized crime like they do.

We need to be partnering with Mexico on security issues, not pointing fingers.

I am encouraged by President Calderon’s willingness to commit military resources to the fight, to counter the cartels’ firepower.

The greed, poverty and violence that make the border region so volatile are not just Mexico’s problem.

Many of the guns aimed at Mexican law enforcement passed through our state as did so many of the dollars funding those violent gangs.

That is why we work so hard to secure our southern border, working to not only to reduce illegal northbound crossings, but to shut off the southbound flow of contraband, seizing large amounts of vehicles, weapons and cash.

That is why I have called on the Legislature to continue funding our border security efforts, and devote additional resources to prosecuting the transnational gangs that are threatening communities across our state.

I already directed $557,000 to the San Antonio Police Department for overtime that keeps more officers on the street battling gangs.

Fortunately, our border security efforts over the past several years have reduced attempted crossings and significantly decreased crime in key areas. But we have more to do.

We cannot 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.

By securing our border, we will increase the peace and decrease the angry rhetoric that clouds the border issues and causes discrimination.

Roughly a third of our citizens identify themselves as Hispanic and are part of a vital, growing part of our state’s population. Hispanic Texans will compose the largest demographic group in our state by 2020. That’s a good thing.

Our state is enriched by a diversity of thought and a blended heritage which forms one unique culture.

As surely as our state flag bears one star, we are one Texas and one people. And we all generally want the same thing.

We all seek a good education for our children, safe neighborhoods for our families, and the chance to succeed based on our own merit.

That is what Texas is all about and that is what ALL Texans deserve, and I will fight for these things so my two nieces, whose last name is Solis, can accomplish any dream.

[PAUSE]

As our Hispanic population grows in size, it also grows in terms of influence.
Latino consumers are a key target of retailers who have figured out you can't just slap a Spanish name on a product and assume it will sell.

These companies are learning the importance of enriching the leadership of their companies with a new generation of sharp, well-educated, motivated Latinos, like so many of you here tonight.

I have been very intentional about placing Latinos in significant positions across state government, like Rolando [Pablos] who chairs the Racing Commission; Becky Klein who chairs LCRA; Jose Cuevas at TABC; Bert Mijares at Public Finance Authority; and, of course, your Secretary of State, Hope Andrade.

Our state is blessed that such talented people are willing to serve.

Let me assure you, when I'm talking to CEOs, I'll be encouraging them to tap into this often overlooked source of insight, ingenuity, and innovation as they shape their companies for the new global economy.

[PAUSE]

As our Hispanic population grows, I hope that we can work together to ensure respect for the culture and appreciation for traditional values of family, hard work and integrity.

These are Texas values, and we need to perpetuate them in our homes, in our schools, and in the voting booth.

I've seen the numbers and I know that my party is not the leading choice for Latinos, but that is our fault for not engaging more directly, and failing to accentuate our shared values.

There are those in faraway Washington DC who would shut our doors to trade, or marginalize those who have contributed so much to our economy and enriched our culture.

Washington might do that, but we see things differently here in Texas.

I see things differently, and want you to know those days of disconnection and misunderstanding are over.

[PAUSE]

As I look out across this room tonight, I can't tell you how encouraged I am that more than 1,000 people would come out on a Friday night to celebrate the vibrant Hispanic business community in San Antonio.

With all we hear about a global economy on its last legs, it is wonderful to spend time with people who are working harder than ever, motivated by the opportunities of an evolving marketplace, and optimistic about the future.

I share your optimism about San Antonio and I am proud of where Texas is headed.

I believe we have worked hard together to build a foundation that will not be shaken by the ongoing crisis.

Like you, like Texans have for centuries, I don't see threats in tough times, I see opportunity.

Let's go out from this place tonight, energized by this time together, enthused at the opportunities before us, and encouraged by the innovators around us.
May God bless you and, through you, may He continue to bless the great state of Texas.