Gov. Perry Announces Investment in Educational Robotics Programs

*Expects expanded program to spur student interest in STEM fields*

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

Monday, November 16, 2009

Thank you Mary [Fitzgibbon, Principal, Emmett J. Conrad High School] and thank you to the entire Conrad High community for hosting us today.

Last week the Texas Workforce Commission made a very wise decision, when they voted to invest in the future of technology education in our state, by dedicating $1 million to expanding our students’ participation in a pair of youth robotics competitions.

In FIRST Tech Challenge and FIRST Robotics, teams of students engineer and build robots to accomplish specific tasks, like shooting balls through a ring, or rearranging game pieces on a board.

When these robots compete, things are intense, fast-moving and fun. Just ask the members of Conrad High’s own team, the Robochargers, or the 2008 FIRST Robotics World Champion, the Robo-Wranglers of Greenville High.

They’ll tell you that they learn from their successes, but they learn even more from the inevitable glitches, when plans go awry, a vital piece of equipment jams, or a design flaw emerges.

Sure, they’re frustrating, but these incidents force team members to think on their feet, and function as part of a team, as they quickly collaborate on a solution. Any employer in the world can tell you how valuable those problem-solving skills can be in the workforce.

I’m glad to know that teams from 133 Texas schools have already registered to participate in upcoming tournaments, to learn the vital lessons they convey. Thanks to the investment...
of the TWC, we can support up to 250 new teams next year, that's 2,500 more students who will be exposed to the challenges and thrill of these competitions.

This initiative fits perfectly into our ongoing efforts across the state, to engage more students in the STEM subjects, Science, Technology, Engineering and Math. By emphasizing these core subjects, we can accelerate the pace of our high-tech education, expand opportunity for the young people of our state, and strengthen our state's workforce of the future.

Just last month, I announced a $160 million effort that will double the number of STEM academies in Texas from 46 to 92, provide scholarship incentives for STEM subjects, and expand the pool of STEM-qualified teachers.

More academies and more teachers are essential building blocks, but we will truly succeed by cultivating motivation in our students. We need to inspire.

We need to show these students that pursuing these subjects isn't just a path to a good life and a great career; it can be a lot of fun, too. By exposing more young Texans to the excitement of FIRST competitions, I believe we'll inspire a significant percentage, to get serious about a STEM-intensive education.

This will increase the odds that the world's next generation of great innovators will be Texas-born and bred. That's good for everybody in the Lone Star State.

So I would again like to commend the Texas Workforce Commission for making this visionary investment, and for believing in the potential of young Texans. I also commend the many Texas companies, such as National Instruments, Texas Instruments, L-3 and Innovation First, that have been supporting FIRST Robotics for years.

These companies understand the importance of STEM proficiency, and I'm proud Texas is working with them as partners.