Governor Perry Discusses the Fundamental Strengths of Texas

Shares views with the Texas Public Policy Foundation

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

Friday, January 15, 2010

Thank you, Bill [Bennett] and thank you to the good people of the Texas Public Policy Foundation for having us all here today.

Bill, listening to your introduction, I’d say you have a pretty firm grasp of the way things are here in Texas. I suspect Austin has changed a bit since your days as a student here, but the enthusiastic approach to living hasn’t changed much at all.

It’s remarkable to think of just how much our country has changed since you headed out of town with your PhD in hand. I think, in particular, of the influence that Ronald Reagan had, and recall a speech he gave in 1977 as our country was sliding into a four-year span of navel-gazing and hand-wringing, also known as the Carter presidency.

Reagan’s ideas were not new at all. They were fundamental ideas that are just as effective at the family dinner table, as they are in the governance of a nation or a state. He illustrated that with his still-classic line, "when a conservative says it is bad for the government to spend more than it takes in, he is simply showing the same common sense that tells him to come in out of the rain."

That sentiment still applies today and, if I might say so, is a key to the success that Texas is enjoying today. That’s why, today, I joined with Lt. Governor Dewhurst and Speaker Straus, in requesting more belt tightening by our state agencies.

In light of Comptroller Combs’ November report describing substantially weakened revenues, we must cut spending now, and stay ahead of the budget challenge. Together, we’ve asked each state agency to submit a plan detailing savings up to 5% that will minimize the impact on direct services.

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We run a lean operation in Texas, so those cuts won’t be easy, but we’ve taken this tack before like in 2003, and it works. Texans depend on us to make the tough choices…so we will.

You know, the state of things in our country back in ‘77 and the circumstances we deal with today are not all that different. People still want what people have always wanted: freedom. They want to live their lives free of oppression, to make a dollar and keep as much of it as possible, and to have a safe place to live.

If the Obama administration keeps up their first year pace, I’m going to run out of fingers on which I can count their major misguided efforts, like the healthcare debacle, the job-killing energy policies, and education “reform” that attempts to entice states into surrendering their autonomy…for as little as $75 per student.

Just this week, we declined to participate in the “Race to the Top” program because our children deserve better. Just this morning, the State Board of Education unanimously voted to adopt a resolution expressing support for my stand against national standards and national tests.

Texas is sending a message that we will not blindly follow directives simply because they emanate from Washington, DC. As you heard from Senator John Cornyn yesterday, Congress can learn a lot from Texas conservative leadership and fiscal conservatism.

Here in Texas, we have principled leaders, who have worked to hold spending and taxes down. Working together, we have reformed our legal system, and continually pursued a more predictable regulatory climate. Combined with a whole lot of effort by hardworking Texans, those priorities set Texas on the right track to our current leadership position.

The fruit of those labors are very tangible and measurable. For example, in October and November, Texas recorded the largest over-the-month increases in employment of any state in the country. As of the latest report, we still have the lowest unemployment rate of the nation’s ten largest states.

In fact, Texas is the only top 10 state that has more jobs today than before things started heading south about three years ago. For the bean counters in the audience, that means we’re up nearly 192,000 jobs since 2006.

That could be why CEO Magazine considers Texas the best place to do business, and Moody’s Economy lists seven Texas metropolitan areas among their “first cities to emerge from recession.” Our job-friendly approach is likely why the Small Business and Entrepreneurial Council ranked Texas in the top three states for small business and entrepreneurship.

Employers understand that Texas “gets it” when it comes to jobs. They understand that we want them here and that we’re doing what we can to lure them, including efforts to groom the future workforce, by improving our public education system.

That’s why I want to expand our STEM Academies across the state, with a larger investment in these programs that train students in science, technology, engineering and math, disciplines that are essential in the new economy.

That’s common sense. People understand that education always has been and always will be a way for people to improve their lot in life. People understand you need good infrastructure like roads, power and water to have a decent quality of life.

As I travel the state…and trust me, I’ve been all over it over the past twenty or thirty years…people aren’t looking for pie-in-the-sky concepts. They want government to exhibit the same common sense principles that guide their family finances, or their business decisions.

That’s why I have called on our legislature to give Texans the chance to vote on a constitutional amendment that will
require a two-thirds vote of the entire Texas Legislature to raise any taxes. This sets a nice high hurdle for lawmakers inclined to raise taxes, requiring broader support for what I consider a huge decision.

I have also called for a cap on spending growth does not exceed the combined growth rates of inflation and our population here in Texas. This would allow the state to keep pace with a growing population, and account for the upward pressure exerted by inflation, while protecting the hardworking Texas families, from those who want to raise their taxes. It will also limit the size, reach and power of government in their lives.

I’ve also called for similar limits on the folks in Washington, by making a balanced budget a constitutional requirement. Without such limits, the folks in Washington pour out tax dollars on every challenge, blissfully ignoring the consequences, while they bury our children under a growing mountain of debt.

Besides the U.S. Congress, what other system allows the folks doing the spending to just raise the debt limit whenever they feel like it? The day before Christmas, Congress voted to raise the debt limit yet again…to $12.4 trillion…with a ‘t’. If you divided the federal debt among every person in our country, from newborns to the elderly…each would owe about $39,000.

Americans are growing ever more aware of this spending explosion, and increasingly interested in grabbing the throttle, so they can slow down Washington’s runaway train. I’m convinced that the hardworking citizens of our state and country simply want government to handle the basics, then get out of the way, as we have done here in Texas.

As we do so, Texans must continue to raise our objections to the increasing federal intrusions into our healthcare, our classrooms, and our wallets. We can use our phones, computers, email and Twitter, to urge those representing us in Washington, to fight this battle on behalf of those who elected them.

While that happens, we’ll tend to our knitting here in Texas, and fight to preserve the fundamentals that have gotten us to this point of leadership in the country. With the insight and advice of groups like the Texas Public Policy Foundation, and the passionate engagement of principled citizens like those assembled here today, we can make a difference.

Together, we can perpetuate the legacy of fiscal discipline, limited government and individual liberty, that has made our state so great, and is our sterling hope for the future.

My final reference to Ronald Reagan is a simple one, but one that bears remembering. He said “The common sense and common decency of ordinary men and women, working out their own lives in their own way -- this is the heart of American conservatism today.”

That remains the heart of conservatism, in America…and in Texas. Thank you for your time. Here’s to a great, conservative 2010.

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