Gov. Perry Announces $1.75 in Grants for Veterans' Mental Health Services
Addresses Wounded Warrior Riders

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

Thursday, March 25, 2010

Thank you, Sgt. [Mike] Owens, for that introduction, and for your service and sacrifice in defense of our country. Your story is an inspiration, as are the stories of your fellow veterans. You represent the millions of Americans, young and old, men and women, throughout history, who have stood their post, on that dividing line between their fellow citizens, and those that would do us harm.

Members of our military leave behind family and friends, and the cocoon of safety we enjoy here in America, to poke their finger in the chests of evildoers, and live out that simple, four-word philosophy, “Not on my watch.”

As long as there’s been an America, we’ve been blessed with this special breed of warrior, and I commend all of you here today who have continued that brave tradition of selfless service.

We can never truly repay your sacrifice, but we are fiercely committed to honoring and supporting you and your families, and sustaining the special relationship that has long existed between Texas and the military.

Throughout our history, Texas has played host to military installations and sent her sons and daughters to serve in the defense of our country. Many Texans know firsthand the rigors of military service, from those first frenetic days of boot camp, to the chaos of the battlefield, to the challenges of re-entering civilian life.

Whether a returning veteran carries a visible wound, or one that lies a little deeper, they deserve our best effort to support them, as
they return to the country they risked it all to defend. As benefactors of their sacrifice, we all have a role to play in ensuring our veterans move smoothly from the field of battle to a life of dignity.

During the last legislative session, we took some deliberate steps to meet our obligations, including measures to help our returning veterans, who are dealing with the very real pain of post-traumatic stress disorder…or recovering from traumatic brain injuries.

Last year, I had the privilege of signing a bill which required the creation of mental health programs for veterans, which included veterans helping each other through veteran-to-veteran, or vet-to-vet, groups.

I also worked with the Legislature and our health agencies to secure an additional $5 million, to supplement the $1.2 million from the state budget, to expand mental health treatment and support programs for veterans and their families.

Today, I am proud to announce that $1.75 million of those funds are being awarded to veterans programs across the state, including expanded trauma therapy, and peer-to-peer support groups throughout the state.

This follows on the heels of more than $2.6 million in non-competitive grants that the Department of State Health Services, already awarded to the state’s 38 local mental health authorities, to expand and improve the care we offer our veterans.

Experts and veterans alike prefer the vet-to-vet approach, as it helps overcome that warrior’s aversion to seeking help, and helps build peer relationships that speed healing.

I will continue to encourage VFW posts and American Legion halls across the state to sponsor their own vet-to-vet teams, displaying that esprit-de-corps that makes our armed forces so effective…and the veteran’s community so close-knit.

This veterans’ mental health initiative has been moving forward as we have invested in our veterans in other ways, including the creation of a VA claims processing team, that is helping clear the backlog of claims submitted by Texas veterans.

In the months and years to come, I’m certain the leaders who convene in the building behind me will continue to honor our veterans, but we also need groups like the Wounded Warrior Project, to be truly effective.

No one knows the challenges facing veterans better than someone who has shared the experience, so I commend the members of the Wounded Warrior Foundation, and thank you for not just telling our wounded veterans they matter, but showing them with your actions.

If you will be riding in this event, I pray for your safety, and thank you for risking a sweaty jersey and some sore muscles, to remind us all of the deal that was struck when our veterans raised their right hands, and pledged to defend our nation, against all enemies, foreign and domestic.

On behalf of 24 million Texans, I wish you Godspeed and good luck.

May God bless you and, through you, may He continue to bless the Great State of Texas.