Gov. Perry: Continued Investment in Education is Essential to Texas’ Competitiveness

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

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Thank you, Betty [McCrohan, President, WCJC] and thank you for the innovative approaches you take to educating people at every stage of life at Wharton County JC.

It is a great day to be here in Palacios, in the last days of the shrimp season, as the boats are out on their last few runs before Saturday.

Palacios is a truly unique town, with an economy that not only relies on a traditional trade like shrimping but also high tech employment in the energy industry.

With Texas on track to build more nuclear power plants like the one across the bay it’s fitting that Wharton County should play a role in training the next generation of workers for that essential industry.

I am here today to present a workforce development grant in the amount of $175,985 to fund programs that will move young people into the nuclear power field and keep the Texas energy industry moving forward. The PowerSet Workforce Industry Training, or WIT is designed to connect motivated, capable students with educational opportunities in the STEM fields that is Science, Technology, Engineering and Math.

The goal is to accelerate their learning in these key subjects and give them firsthand experience with nuclear power technology opening their eyes to career opportunities in that growing field.

Texas has more nuclear power plants under development than any other state…as we continue to pursue our all-of-the-above strategy to meet our state’s power needs well into the future.

Under this program, motivated students will have the chance to take part in site visits, mentorship relationships and job-shadowing that will help them refine the focus of their studies sample a potential career and envision a brighter future for themselves.

This program is a key outcome of our Nuclear Power Institute. It’s great to see the NPI delivering on its charge to attract and prepare the workforce for the next wave of nuclear power plants planned for Texas.

The NPI draws upon the expertise of its membership a group that includes industry leaders…state agencies and educators ranging from junior highs to universities and community colleges like Wharton County Junior College.

Their approach, of capturing high-potential students while they’re still in high school, is a great way to strengthen our workforce and set the stage for future success for the students, their schools, their future employers and our state.
This program is another step in our efforts to improve the quality of education in our state and further groom our future workforce.

I’m also proud of our T-STEM initiative, which is improving the way we teach the science, technology, engineering, and math skills that our young people need to move forward. Since I announced the T-STEM initiative about four-and-a-half years ago, we have funded 46 of these remarkable schools in Texas and watched them change the lives of at-risk high school students.

The program is making a difference, so we need to increase its reach by doubling the number of STEM academies across Texas.

I have also challenged the Legislature to create a $100 million STEM Challenge Scholarship fund for students seeking degrees or certificates in STEM fields.

Not only will such scholarships give students an incentive to continue their high-tech studies they’ll encourage them to stay in Texas so our state can benefit from their brainpower and work ethic.

That continually improving workforce is playing a key role in our state’s relative economic strength.

It has helped Texas create more jobs over the past six months than any other state and maintain the lowest unemployment rate of the nation’s ten largest states. In the months to come, our challenge is to continue those trends by sticking to the basics that got us here.

They include keeping our regulatory climate predictable and our legal system fair so that job creators can create jobs not get bogged down with endless paperwork and frivolous lawsuits.

They include efforts like this WIT program that is motivating our young people to excel and preparing them to take their place in the world.

I’m talking about students like Elizabeth Castanon, a student from right here at Palacios High School who is planning to study Mechanical Engineering and Physics at Texas A&M Kingsville before heading to College Station to pursue a masters in Nuclear Engineering.

Now, Elizabeth, why don’t you share a little about your experience here at Palacios High and where you think you’re headed.

Thank you, Elizabeth. Now, if you’d stay here for a minute, I’d like to invite Ken Peddicord, the director of NPI to join us at the podium.

Ken and Elizabeth, it’s my honor to present you with this workforce development grant to fund the PowerSet Workforce Industry Training program.

I’m certain you’ll use these funds to invite more young people into the nuclear energy field and accelerate their learning.

Thank you, Elizabeth, and congratulations on the effort you have put forth to reach this point.

You are one of countless young people across Texas who are preparing to take your place as leaders in our schools, in the marketplace, and in our communities. This investment in education is an essential part of our state’s commitment to that bright future as we continue to innovate, lead and dream.

Now, we’d be happy to take questions on this grant from our friends in the working press here with us today.