Gov. Perry: Technical Skills Expand Opportunities for Texas’ Workforce

Outlines budget, education and infrastructure priorities for the 83rd Legislature

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

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Thank you Anne [Mostenbocker, Chair-Elect of the Dallas Regional Chamber] for that introduction, and congratulations on your selection as the new chairwoman of this chamber.

I know you'll continue the good work the Dallas Regional Chamber is known for.

I'd also like to take a moment and congratulate the people of Coppell and Haslet, two cities along with Schertz down in South Texas that will be the sites of brand-new Amazon fulfillment centers.

That means more than 1,000 new jobs for Texans, and that's great news to start the day.

I appreciate you having me here to discuss the state of our state, and it is my pleasure to report that the state of Texas is stronger than ever.

Our bank balance is healthy, our economy is growing, and our future is limitless.

We led the nation out of recession and into recovery, and remain the nation's prime destination for employers and job-seekers alike.

Texas employers have added more than half a million private-sector jobs over the last two years alone, a total of nearly 1.4 million created in the private sector over the last 10 years.

Those numbers are testimony to the hard work done by business owners, community leaders, and organizations like this chamber.

But that kind of success starts with a job-friendly economic climate that steadily draws the attention of top decision-makers in the business world.

In Texas, we've created a climate where any employer has the opportunity to thrive, and be competitive on a global scale.

That's helped establish Texas as the top exporter in the country, for 10 years running.

And it didn't all happen by chance.

More than a decade ago, we set out to create a Texas where investors could confidently invest their capital, and expect to see a solid return on that investment.

And, thanks to our low taxes, get to keep more of that return.

We set out to create a Texas where job-creators could put down roots, and know they wouldn't be tied up in miles of government red tape and regulations.
We created a Texas where our court system won't allow for over-suing, essentially putting an end to extended, often frivolous lawsuits filed as nothing more than get-rich-quick schemes by predatory attorneys.

And we dedicated ourselves to cultivating a workforce that stands ready to fill any need an employer could have, from the assembly line, to the sales office, to the laboratory.

Our dedication to those principles helped us build an economy strong enough to withstand the strains of a national recession, and today has us positioned to continue our upward economic trajectory.

Last session, we faced some difficult choices, but in the end, we held the line on taxes, spent within our means, and made the tough decisions separating wants from needs.

The revenue estimate we got earlier this month confirms we made the right decisions at that time.

We're in a position today to put our financial house in order, and it's time to do so.

We have earned an opportunity this session to true up our budget, and move away from the budgetary techniques we've come to depend on all too often.

We need to pay now, what is due now.

We should put in place a stronger constitutional limit on spending growth, ensuring it never grows more than the combined rate of inflation and population.

We need to make the franchise tax exemption for small businesses permanent.

We should continue to scrub the budget for any waste and redundancies, streamlining wherever possible.

We also need to do away with the practice of using dedicated funds and specific fees for anything other than the purpose for which they were intended.

If we don't need taxpayer money for that purpose, let's not collect it at all.

In Texas, we've never bought into the notion that if you collect more, you need to spend more.

That's why I've called for a mechanism to be put in place so, when we do bring in more than we need, we'll have the option of returning tax money directly to the people who paid it.

Currently, that's not something our constitution allows, and we need to fix that.

Also, while Texas is a low-tax state, let's make the burden on Texans even lower.

In a legislative session where we can see billions still on the table after we've funded our services and met the needs of our ever-expanding population, I think providing tax relief of at least $1.8 billion over this biennium is a good place to start.

As to how we provide that relief, there are plenty of good ideas, and that promises to be a very valuable conversation for us to engage in.
We want to hear more from the taxpayers themselves about how we run things in Austin.

My office, in fact, has built a web site to get your feedback on tax cuts.

You can find it at my main site, gov-dot-Texas-dot-gov.

While Washington, D.C., can sometimes seem entirely non-responsive, and is increasing the tax burden on Americans, and other states are scrambling to grab every tax dollar they can, I'm proud that in Texas, we're talking about the best way to give money back.

As important as tax relief is, it's not the only thing we're dealing with this session.

As our population expands and industries grow across our state, the demand is increasing upon the fundamental building blocks of our communities.

That's why we need to deal with our state's infrastructure needs.

We must particularly address our growing needs in water, and transportation.

Doing that without breaking the budget will require creativity and some "outside-the-box" thinking.

I believe one answer lies within our Rainy Day Fund.

The Rainy Day Fund was created to ensure we had a sufficient amount in reserve in case of disaster, and to ensure Texas maintains its strong credit rating.

Due to our economic success, the fund will soon hold nearly $12 billion, significantly more than the amount we need to meet those obligations.

While we cannot, and will not, raid the fund to meet ongoing expenses, we also shouldn't accumulate billions more than necessary.

That's why I support a move to utilize $3.7 billion from the Rainy Day Fund for a one-time investment in Infrastructure programs.

In addition to the Rainy Day Fund investment, we should also end the diversion of State Highway Fund appropriations, which will mean another $1.3 billion every biennium for road maintenance and construction.

What I am proposing will support critical water and transportation systems across our state, addresses our needs both short- and long-term, and ensures both water and traffic will continue to flow in Texas for generations to come.

The people here today know how important that is to our continued economic development.

Whenever we're recruiting a business seeking to relocate or expand, a chief concern of theirs is ensuring there are adequate water, power and transportation systems for their needs.

Our success also relies upon the continued excellence of the Texas workforce, and it falls to us to better prepare the next generation for the jobs available to them.

Yesterday in Austin, I outlined a series of initiatives meant to expand options for children in our public schools. expanding public charter schools and

http://governor.state.tx.us/news/speech/18099/
creating a scholarship program to give parents more of a choice about their child's education.

I also promoted a technical training program that would help students gain certification in much-needed occupations and help employers fill the jobs Texas they need filled now.

This program, a combined effort between state, industry and higher education, would cut the time necessary for students to earn certification in these much-needed vocations, without sacrificing an iota of the quality Texas workers are known for.

The skills they would acquire would be targeted to specific needs of industries, so students can be assured they'll have jobs waiting for them.

By design, this system can be replicated for the needs of any industry or sector, and can also be ramped down when industry's needs are met.

It will also target the needs of specific groups, such as veterans, displaced workers, and career-focused high school graduates to maximize their job preparedness training.

The essence of this program is removing the roadblocks between candidates who are already largely qualified and jobs that need to be filled.

Many of these candidates already have specialized training and valuable real-world experience in these fields, but lack certification.

Competency-based learning awards credit for those skills and experiences, dramatically cutting the time needed to earn certification, and minimizing the cost by not forcing candidates to sit through lessons on subjects they've already mastered.

This is a practice that's already paying dividends in programs like College Credit 4 Heroes, which we launched earlier this year that specifically rewards veterans for the training they've received, and through institutions like Western Governors University Texas, and some of our community colleges.

From our origins pioneering a rugged frontier, Texans have a long, proud tradition of working together, South Texas ranchers and DFW teachers, Bay-area shrimpers and west Texas farmers.

We are a diverse tapestry of cultures, faiths and blood lines but we are bound by a common spirit, and a common lineage that's remarkable for a state so big.

Not only will we all work together for the remaining days of this session, we will work together every day in companies and in agencies across our state.

From the Governor's Office, to local chambers of commerce, to officials in small towns across our state, we are all privileged to do our part to make a better Texas.

Texas is not merely strong, but exceptional.

We are a testament to the power of freedom, to the entrepreneurial spirit unleashed from government interference.

We believe these ideals are sturdy enough and strong enough to advance any
and all Texans, regardless of race, color or creed.

We all need to come together and work hard to keep Texas on the right track to continued economic prosperity.

Once again, I thank you all for your time and attention, and I urge you all to be at the very top of your game going forward.

We'll need you to be at your best and brightest in the months and years to come, as we continue to make Texas, and Dallas, even better places to live, work, grow a business and raise a family.

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