Gov. Perry's Remarks at the Texas Veterans of Foreign Wars Mid-Winter Conference

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

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As always, it's an honor to be with you all, and a pleasure to be joined by my fellow elected officials.

Regardless of what office we hold, or what political party we represent, we stand united in our support of our veterans today.

Again, I'm honored to be here, among so many who have sacrificed so much for their country.

As I'm sure I don't have to tell anyone here Texas has always enjoyed a special relationship with the members of our military.

In fact, today more than 1.7 million veterans call Texas home.

For many of you, it's where you were born. For others, it's where you were trained or stationed. And, for a large number, it's where you chose to retire.

I'm proud Texas has produced so many American heroes, and I'm just as proud that we're a welcoming destination for those who might've been born elsewhere.

It's a natural fit for veterans, because Texans are known for our strong sense of loyalty and our unwavering love of our state and our country.

The Texas VFW, of course, plays a major role in keeping our state veteran-friendly...providing much-needed assistance to the latest generations of veterans, returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.

You've each been instrumental in helping our nation's warriors heal and ease back into civilian life, and I commend and thank all of you for your ongoing gifts of service.

The freedom, the prosperity and the quality of life we enjoy in Texas, and in America as a whole, are possible only because of the sacrifices so many have made on battlefields around the world.

So it's only right that we, collectively, give back to those who have given so much to us.

While we can never fully repay that debt, Texas will continue to do what we can to improve the lives of our veterans, particularly by freeing them to make the most of the opportunities they have.
We all know the story of the soldier trained to run multi-million-dollar pieces of equipment in combat, only to be told they lack the certification to operate similar equipment back in the States.

Stories like those are why, over the last few years, we've worked to expedite the certification process for veterans, cutting the amount of time and red tape it takes for them to put the skills they already have to work.

There are employers out there, particularly in the oil and gas industry, who are clamoring for quality workers to fill jobs.

It only makes sense that veterans fill those jobs.

That's also why we've promoted programs like "College Credit 4 Heroes," which awards college credit for skills and experiences gained in service to our country.

Because no veteran should be held back from pursuing their life's goals because they selflessly took time to serve their country.

Of course, once they have a degree or technical certification, we need to connect our veterans to the employers who need them.

For that reason, we remain committed to the "Hiring Red, White and You" program; a series of job fairs for veterans held in communities across Texas.

In 2012 alone, these fairs led to nearly 3,000 new jobs for veterans and their spouses, each representing a life-changing opportunity for individuals and families who sacrificed for their country.

Sometimes, all you need to do is help a veteran navigate the sometimes-treacherous waters of the VA.

VA centers across the country have been overwhelmed by veterans submitting claims, leading to massive backlogs and needless delays.

So, several years ago, we formed a Claims Processing Assistance Team through my office, staffed by Texas Veterans Commission counselors who could help veterans expedite their claims.

Since August of 2012, we've been able to help cut the backlog from nearly 70,000 cases to just over 31,000.

Obviously, we have a long way to go. But we'll continue to work hard until this backlog is history.

During the last legislative session, we took another opportunity to say "thank you" to those who gave body and soul to their country.

We extended the property tax exemption for 100 percent disabled veterans to include their surviving spouses.

We also increased funding to treat veterans with mental health issues by $5 million over the biennium, because we all know there are some combat injuries we can't see.

http://governor.state.tx.us/news/speech/19368/
With every passing year, we will continue to assure our veterans and their families that Texas is a welcome refuge for them - that the sacrifices they've made will not be forgotten.

We will assure them of the freedom to make the most of their lives and support their hopes and dreams, whether that's building their own business or climbing the corporate ladder.

We will assure them they've given enough to us. Now it's our turn to give back to them.

Once again, I commend the VFW for all you do for Texas veterans.

And please know, however you served your nation, Texas is grateful for your service.

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