

Advisory Council on the Digital Economy

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 28, 2000

Contact: Ray Sullivan or Eric Bearse

(512) 463-0715

Remarks of Lt. Governor Rick Perry to the Advisory Council on the Digital Economy, April 28, 2000

(Note: Perry Sometimes Deviates from Prepared Text.)

Good afternoon. Chairman Maples, members, thank you for taking time to be here again today. I'm very pleased with the work you have done so far. As leaders of the New Economy, your insight is invaluable in helping us make the most of this prosperity for all of our citizens.

I am looking forward to your work today, because the issues you will be discussing - technology, workforce development and education - are so intertwined. It's no exaggeration to say that education and workforce development are the operating systems of the digital economy in Texas.

Without a skilled and educated workforce, the technology infrastructure in this state will soon wither. That's why education is - and must continue to be - our state's top priority. I've often said that education is the best crime prevention tool we have. It's the best welfare reform tool we have.

And - most important to you - education is the best tool we have to make Texas the technology capital of the world. The trends are good. In recent years, we've toughened our accountability system, making it a model for the nation. Last year, we took the next step in education reform by ending social promotion in Texas.

The results speak for themselves. After just a few years of reform:

- Texas is one of two states achieving the greatest progress in education according to a national panel.
- The Texas Education Agency recently announced the highest test scores in history.
- The number of minorities passing the math portion of the TAAS test increased 25 percent.
- A national report card recently showed our African-American fourth graders ranking first in the nation in improvements in math, with Hispanic students close behind.

In the last five years, we've seen public school funding increase by \$8.3 billion - a 56 percent improvement - per student funding is up 37% in spite of our skyrocketing student population. During the last session, Governor Bush and the legislature used 75 cents of every new dollar available for education. We raised teacher pay, created a \$100 million college scholarship program, and still managed to balance our budget and cut taxes by nearly \$2 billion dollars.

In the coming years, K-12 education will continue to be a priority, but we need to build on the solid foundation now in place to improve our colleges, universities, technical schools and community colleges. Only one in five Texans - just 20% - have a college degree. That's not good enough.

Across the United States, some estimates show that there are 1.6 million information technology jobs waiting to be filled. While those jobs sit open, there are only a small fraction of that number of computer science and other technical graduates coming out of Texas colleges and universities this year. With such a gap, competition for top talent is fierce.

Advisory Council on the Digital Economy

To put it simply, the needs of the New Economy have changed faster than our educational system has. A recent survey asked top business people what they look for in their employees. The results are interesting. They want people whom:

- Have the ability to think critically and communicate effectively, verbally and in writing;
- Are comfortable working in teams, in their own field and across disciplines;
- Have technical skills and the ability to learn new ones quickly;
- And have knowledge of the global environment and the cultural sensitivity required operating in a global marketplace.

So to succeed in the new economy, young people need basic skills, they need to know technology, and they need to be able to adapt that technology. In other words, we must educate good thinkers. Accomplishing that is a tall order, but I'm an optimist.

We're working on plans to do more at the higher education level. Enhancing the use of technology in our public schools, colleges and workforce training programs can help. Through the Technology Infrastructure Fund, a majority of Texas schools are already wired to the information superhighway. But without staff training and support, the one sure outcome of wiring schools and hospitals and libraries is a higher electric bill.

We must also start to change the culture - prevalent in some of our schools - from teaching "computers" - to using technology as a portal to help students expand their horizons and learn the skills they need to succeed in the new economy.

When it comes to workforce development and lifetime learning, our community colleges are vitally important to Texas. Texas community colleges are doing some very exciting things when it comes to using technology and educating the workforce of the 21st Century. You will hear from some of them today.

I hope you can help generate ideas about how the private sector and community colleges can work closely together to help bridge the technology skill gap facing our state and our nation today. And finally, I encourage you to talk about technology transfer - how to reap the greatest economic benefits for Texas from our state's world-class higher education institutions.

Texas ranks sixth in the nation at federal higher education research dollars. For a state as large and dynamic as Texas, that's not good enough. I'd like your thoughts about how Texas can do a better job of attracting those research dollars here. And how we can transfer that basic university research and development into meaningful and marketable technologies.

At the first meeting of the Advisory Council on the Digital Economy, I encouraged you all to help create a long-term strategy for making Texas the world's leader in technology research, development, innovation and job creation. Since that strategy depends upon building on our education successes to create an educated, skilled and technology-friendly workforce, I hope you'll use your own educational backgrounds, your technology and business expertise, and the information you gather at meetings like this one - to make sure that Texas gets the job done right.

Thank you.