



Perry's Priorities

An Interview with
The Honorable Rick Perry, Governor of Texas



EDITORS' NOTE As Texas' 47th governor and the first Texas A&M graduate to occupy the Governor's Mansion, Rick Perry has led a life of public service, starting in the United States Air Force and continuing over two decades in elected office. Perry's political career started in 1985 as a representative for a rural West Texas district in the state House of Representatives. He was first elected to statewide office in 1990 and served as Texas Commissioner of Agriculture for two terms. Between 1972 and 1977, Governor Perry served in the United States Air Force. He is a graduate of Texas A&M University where he was a member of the Corps of Cadets and an animal science major. Governor Perry is an Eagle Scout and lifetime member of American Legion Post #75.



The Hon. Rick Perry and at the groundbreaking for Caterpillar's new hydraulic-excavator plant in Victoria, Texas (top right)

Would you provide an overview of your major initiatives for the state, including your focus on fiscal responsibility?

Texas continues to be a national example of how conservative fiscal principles can drive economic development efforts and boost tremendous job creation. Over the past year alone, Texas has created more than 278,000 jobs and our unemployment rate has remained below the national average for more than five-and-a-half years, even as our population has boomed – this is no accident. In Texas, we have focused on keeping taxes low, our regulations predictable, our courts fair, and on developing a skilled and competitive workforce. These principles have helped us become the best state in which to live, work, raise a family, and start a business.

This fiscal responsibility will only strengthen our state in the future. It's why I have called on Texas lawmakers to commit to the following five key principles of the Texas Budget Compact during this legislative session: practice truth in budgeting, support a constitutional limit on spending tied to the growth of population and inflation, oppose new taxes or tax increases and make the small business tax exemption permanent, preserve a strong Rainy Day Fund, and cut unnecessary and duplicative government programs and agencies.

How have you worked to create jobs in Texas? Which industries offer opportunities for job growth within the state?

In addition to creating an economic environment that allows employers to grow and create jobs, we have also made strategic investments through our state's economic development incentive funds – the Texas Enterprise Fund and Texas Emerging Technology Fund – that have helped us compete with other states and countries around the world. Economic development in Texas starts at the local level and we have strong partnerships throughout the state that focus on our shared goal of job creation. My office also focuses on six key industry sectors: advanced technology and manufacturing; aerospace, aviation, and defense; biotechnology and life science; information and technology; petroleum refining and chemical products; and energy. We want Texas to be at the forefront of transformational medical and engineering breakthroughs and the nation's centerpiece for biosecurity response efforts, and we have taken steps over the past decade to make that happen. We received strong rankings in the latest Battelle study and were chosen as the destination for a new Center for Innovation in Advanced Development and Manufacturing.

You are heavily focused on strengthening the education system in Texas. What do you need to create true education reform within the state?

A skilled workforce is essential for personal prosperity and the future of our state. I have focused on improving accessibility, accountability, and affordability in higher education to ensure that all Texans who want to pursue a degree can. This session, I have called for a four-year tuition freeze at the rate a student pays his freshman year at our public universities; for tying 10 percent of an institution's funding to the number of students it graduates; for increased financial transparency; and for the creation of more \$10,000-degree programs. These initiatives serve as incentives for students to pursue and complete their degrees, and will keep institutions accountable to the students and families they serve. We have also strengthened our public education system over the past 10 years and we have seen great results. We have implemented a college- and career-ready curriculum to ensure our students are prepared for the next step after high school and 92 percent of our students graduate in four years. We've also seen an increase in the number of high school students taking the SAT, particularly among our minority students.

What are your initiatives for energy independence? Is the country making progress in this regard?

Texas has a long history with the energy industry and we continue to provide a substantial portion of the oil and gas resources that fuel our nation. We have also focused on creating a diverse energy portfolio that uses a variety of sources, including wind (we have the most installed wind generation capacity of any state), clean coal technologies, solar power, and the expansion of nuclear power plants. As a nation, we have great potential for energy independence, but we must free our resources from over regulation and free our innovators so they can explore the next great sources of energy and create jobs.

How critical is an effective public/private partnership in terms of achieving your plans and goals for the state?

In Texas, we have focused on economic development at every level of government and that has helped us remain leaders in job creation. Economic development starts at the local level, and we work with all stakeholders to make sure we're implementing policies that will help us continue to create jobs and reduce the tax burden on hard-working Texans. The private sector is great at innovating and I am always interested in hearing good ideas from all corners of our state and nation.

At a time when there is gridlock in Washington and many perceive government as dysfunctional, how have you successfully worked across party lines to get results?

I want to make government as inconsequential in people's lives as possible. People need the freedom to innovate and create opportunity and prosperity, and I believe government should focus on providing essential services rather than trying to mandate and control all aspects of its citizens' lives. Sticking to your core principles and remembering that government works for the people – not the other way around – are the most important parts of governing.

You have many people within your Administration that have worked with you for a long time. How would they describe your management style?

I surround myself with the best and brightest people in their fields who share my vision and passion for working toward a better Texas. I trust them to do what is in the best interest of the state and our taxpayers. ●