



GOVERNOR GREG ABBOTT

Thank you to the House and Senate, the judiciary, statewide officials, fellow Texans.

I'm honored to join you today as we build an even broader path to prosperity for all Texans.

I'm especially proud to have by my side the fabulous First Lady of Texas, Cecilia Abbott.

From her deep faith and steady grace I've drawn strength during our 35 years of marriage.

Also by my side are two strong leaders working for the future of Texas: Lt. Gov. Patrick and Speaker Straus.

Today, I'm proud to report the State of Texas is exceptional.

Since my first State of the State two years ago, more kids are graduating from high school, we doubled the number of Tier One universities and more Texans have jobs today than ever before.

Sure, we had a downturn in the oil patch like we have almost every decade.

And like every other time, Texas has come roaring back.

Last year when oil hit bottom, Texas still added more than 200,000 new jobs.

Our national and international rankings continue to rise. We are now second in the number of Fortune 500 companies. And with your help, we'll soon be No. 1.



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And as Comptroller Hegar noted, if Texas were its own country we would now be the 10th largest economy in the world. Our economy is larger than Australia, Canada and even Russia.

But Texas is about more than just numbers.

We are about our people. People like Tiffany Tremont.

Tiffany served our country in the U.S. Air Force.

She is now president and CEO of Silo-tech Group, a San Antonio company that provides advanced cyber security and IT solutions.

Tiffany, thank you for your service.

Thank you also for being among the growing number of women-owned businesses in Texas.

Texas is No. 2 in the nation for women-owned businesses.

Our goal is to make Texas No. 1.

We all know that Texas leads the nation in areas like oil and gas.

Importantly though, Texas is in the middle of an innovation renaissance that weans our economy off of energy.



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Biotech. Defense tech. Wearable tech. Clean tech. Technologies developed in Texas are changing the world in which we live.

The Dallas, Houston and Austin areas are now known as three of the world's premiere "knowledge capitals."

And get this: Midland beats the San Francisco area in the percentage of jobs created by startups.

And, we continue to cultivate the next generation of entrepreneurs and innovators.

For example, Texas now has more public high schools ranked in the top 100 than any other state. We have the fourth highest high school graduation rate in America. We are second among Hispanic and African-American students, and first among economically disadvantaged students. And the No. 1 public high school in America is in Dallas Independent School District.

Some of these successes build on the work we did last session.

By every measure, last session was a tremendous success.

In addition to improving early education and higher education, we provided a record amount of badly needed funding to unclog our congested roads. We delivered the most robust border security effort of any state ever. We did all of that and more—in 140 days—all without breaking the budget.



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In fact, we very wisely ended the session with the largest savings account of any state in America.

In short, we made Texas freer, stronger, safer and smarter.

This session, we have new challenges to solve and old challenges that need new solutions.

The primary goal of government is to keep its citizens safe and secure.

That goal is even more important when it comes to our children.

You will cast thousands of votes this session. Few will involve life or death decisions. Your vote on CPS is one of them.

Last year, more than 100 children died in our Child Protective System.

You can vote to end that.

We can reform the system so that no more children die in it.

We were right to inject emergency funding. But that's not a lasting solution.

We need more workers, with better training, smarter strategies and real accountability to safeguard our children.

While improving child safety in CPS, we must also remain vigilant in protecting parental rights. We must remember that the best place for a child, if at all possible, is with their parents.



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We also need to develop a Network of Nurture.

The First Lady and others have reached out to faith leaders across Texas to encourage their members to become foster and adoptive parents.

We need a legion of families in every county who can open their homes and open their hearts to fostering our vulnerable children.

When done right, foster care yields tremendous results.

For example, despite growing up in state protective care, Ke’Nesha and A’Lisa Buckner never let their struggles hinder them. Instead, the sisters thrived, overcoming many obstacles and becoming successful adults dedicated to raising awareness for children in the foster care system.

They are with us today, and I’m proud to say they are both college graduates.

Ke’Nesha and A’Lisa, thank you for the example you have set.

Also with us today are Kris and Eric Calder.

They have fostered several children and adopted two.

Kris says, “This isn’t a sit back and let other people do the work. We all have to be accountable here.”

Kris and Eric, Texas is better because of parents like you.

Now, it’s time for us to do our part.



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To do this right, I've budgeted more than the House or Senate.

Do not underfund this rickety system only to have it come back and haunt you.

Do it right.

If ever we've had an emergency item, this is it.

And I'm declaring CPS reform my first emergency item.

If you do nothing else this session, cast a vote to save the life of a child.

Our schools are places for children to learn, explore and advance.

Texas schools are filled with some of the best teachers in America who are called to their profession.

Unfortunately, a small number of teachers have given Texas an unwanted ranking.

Texas reportedly leads the nation in teacher-student sexual assaults. Some of those teachers are not prosecuted. And worse, some are shuffled off to other schools.

We are the ones with the duty to do something about it.

Teachers who assault students should lose their license and go to jail.

I want legislation that imposes real consequences for those teachers.



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We must also penalize administrators who turn a blind eye to such abuse.

As elected officials, it's our responsibility to protect all Texans.

It is our burden to deal with the consequences of the federal government not securing the border.

Let's be clear: We all support legal immigration; it's what built America.

What must be stopped is illegal immigration—and worse, the criminals who conspire with cartels to enter the U.S. illegally.

Texas can't change federal immigration laws.

What Texas can do is to enforce existing law.

There are consequences—deadly consequences—to not enforcing the law.

Juan Rios is a criminal alien who had been arrested in Texas multiple times and deported three times. Last September, he went on a crime spree across Texas, killing two people and kidnapping another.

One of his innocent victims was Welton Betts. Welton loved God, his family and the Dallas Cowboys. After leaving a Cowboys game last year, he stopped at a Texaco station in Cedar Hill where he was gunned down by Juan Rios.

Mr. Betts' death is a tragedy.



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It's a tragedy repeated too often in Texas.

It is time for Texas to take a stand.

Some law enforcement officials in Texas are openly refusing to enforce existing law.

That is unacceptable.

Elected officials don't get to pick and choose which laws they obey.

To protect Texans from deadly danger, we must insist that laws be followed.

Sen. Perry, this is the session we will ban sanctuary cities.

I'm declaring this an emergency item.

At the same time, we must continue our efforts to help secure the border.

Chairman Bonnen, the new administration in Washington has shown the potential to finally secure the border.

But as Darrell Royal said: "Potential just means you ain't done it yet."

Tomorrow, I will meet with Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly to discuss the federal government's efforts to strengthen border security.

Chairman Hunter, while the federal government is ramping up, Texas will not retreat.



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My budget continues the investment made last session, including funding for DPS troopers and the National Guard.

Texas will not flinch in our resolve to keep Texans safe.

Protecting Texans is more than securing the border.

I want to thank our law enforcement officers across the state who are on the front lines of keeping our communities safe.

Unbelievably, last year ambush-style killings of police increased more than 150 percent.

We will never forget the sniper attack on Dallas law enforcement last July.

Or Harris County Sheriff Deputy Goforth killed in cold blood at a gas station.

Or San Antonio Detective Marconi murdered late last year.

These murders had one thing in common: The victims were killed because of the uniform they wear.

We have with us today some Texas heroes.

Officer Gretchen Rocha of the Dallas Police Department and Officer Lee Cannon of the DART Police Department, both of whom were shot in the Dallas attack last July.



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They are joined by three Dallas police officers who've been injured in the line of duty:

Senior Corporal Jeremy Borchardt, Senior Corporal Richard Whitt and Senior Corporal Eddie Coffey.

Texas will not tolerate attacks on law enforcement officers.

We will rise up as a state in support our law enforcement.

I want legislation that increases penalties and makes it a hate crime for criminals who target peace officers simply because of their uniform.

Protecting Texans also means protecting the most vulnerable—the unborn.

I welcome any legislation that protects unborn children and promotes a culture of life in Texas.

We are joined today by Cardinal Daniel DiNardo.

He is president of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Your Eminence, I commend your commitment to protecting the unborn. Thanks to you and the bishops of Texas for showing respect for the unborn by offering to bury fetal remains at no cost.

It demonstrates the dignity and reverence that every child's life deserves.



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Chairman Cook, that is why I support legislation to codify this dignity for every child in the future.

Every child—born and unborn—deserves dignity. The butchering of unborn babies for trade in the open market is barbaric.

Sen. Schwertner and Rep. Burkett, I want legislation on my desk that criminalizes the sale or donation of baby body parts.

We must also do more to help the children that mothers bring into this world.

That's why I'm committed to advancing adoption services and developing programs to support mothers who embrace the blessing of a child's life.

We must provide our children with the tools they need to succeed.

We do that through education.

James Madison emphasized the importance of education to our liberty. He said "a well-instructed people...can be a permanently free people."

That's precisely our goal in educating our children: Ensuring their perpetual freedom.

That education begins with early education including high-quality Pre-K.

Don't take my word for the importance of this.



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Eighty percent of all voters agree: Texas should fund optional high-quality Pre-K education.

They want our children on the path to reading and doing math at grade level by the time they finish third grade.

Rep. Huberty and Sen. Campbell, you were right to champion that proposal last session.

You brought high quality standards to a Pre-K system that desperately needed meaningful improvement.

So, I'm perplexed by the budgets submitted by the House and Senate. They nod in the direction of Pre-K, but they turn a blind eye to the goal of achieving high-quality Pre-K.

Do your constituents know that each session you vote to spend about \$1.5 billion on unaccountable Pre-K?

The purpose of high-quality Pre-K is to set high standards, evaluate them and eliminate what doesn't work.

It's to ensure that Pre-K works rather than wastes taxpayer money.

Let's do this right. Or don't do it at all.

You were also right last session to advance Texas universities to be among the best in America.



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While so many colleges are competing for 5-Star recruits to athletic programs, Texas is leading the way to attract 5-Star recruits to our academic programs.

Sen. Nelson, the Governor's University Research Initiative you funded last session brought internationally renowned researchers to Texas.

As one example, Dr. Richard Miles—a member of the prestigious National Academy of Engineering—is leaving Princeton to join the Aerospace Engineering Department at Texas A&M.

His work places Texas A&M and the State of Texas at the forefront of laser and optical technology that can enhance national security.

Research like this spurs economic development and helps create jobs.

We must continue our mission to do more than just prepare Texas for the next two years.

We also need to put our state on the path for national and international prominence for the next 20 years.

GURI does just that. And must be fully funded again.

We must do more to help our public schools educate our children.

I support our Education Commissioner—Mike Morath—and all he is doing to improve our schools.

Thank you, Commissioner.



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He's making our schools more connected than ever to the internet. He's developing math innovation zones to improve student performance. He's deploying reading and math academies that make our teachers even better.

We are also working to address the growing demand on our charter schools. They do a great job and deserve more funding.

Our goal is to give teachers the tools and resources they need to help our students succeed.

But we have to realize we're living in the 21st Century while insisting on an education architecture built for the 1800s.

Both the House and the Senate are right to tackle the vexing challenge of school finance now rather than putting it off.

I agree. It is time to construct an entirely new system.

With a sense of urgency, we must create better ways to fund education.

But school finance is not about financing our schools. Nor is it about lining the pockets of the lawyers and lobbyists who capitalize off the backs of our students.

It's about providing our kids with the best education possible.

We can try to flood money to every school in an attempt to meet the needs of every student.

Or we could more efficiently empower parents to choose the school that best fits their child's needs.



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When it comes to education, we need to remember that one size doesn't fit all. What fits Dan, may not fit Joe.

Parents, not government, are best positioned to make decisions about their child's education. Parents should be empowered to choose the school that's best for their child.

Sen. Taylor, I agree: No child should be in the wrong school because of their zip code.

Every child should have a chance to succeed in life.

And, yes, Rep. Simmons. Every child should have the ability to attend the school that's best for them.

Thirty states have school choice. Let's make Texas the 31st.

Every man and every woman in this state should have greater opportunity for economic advancement.

To promote that goal, we need to further diversify our economy by attracting jobs to Texas from outside the energy sector.

The Enterprise Fund has been doing just that.

In the past two years, the Fund has attracted more than a half a billion dollars in capital investment and added thousands of new jobs.



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For example, a corporate expansion of pharmaceutical giant McKesson, the fifth largest Fortune 500 company, will add almost 1,000 jobs. Another 1,000 jobs will come from the massive campus built by Charles Schwab.

The Enterprise Fund has added jobs from Amarillo to the Rio Grande Valley.

If you don't think a deal closing fund is important, consider this: Last year, a company that's a natural fit for Texas was lured away by Arkansas. SIG Sauer is one of the most renowned firearms manufacturers in the world. Let this sink in: Texas was out-gunned for this project by Arkansas.

Texans deserve those jobs.

We need a deal closing fund that has the ability to fight for them.

If you are truly committed to adding jobs and growing our economy, you need to fully fund the Enterprise Fund.

One reason Texas attracts so many jobs is because of the strides we've made on tort reform. But our work is not done.

Hail-storm litigation is the newest form of lawsuit abuse.

To reduce the economic havoc, I want legislation on my desk that limits abusive hail-storm litigation.



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Another way for Texas to grow jobs is by cutting taxes and regulations on business.

Ben Franklin said the only two certainties in life are death and taxes.

As far as I'm concerned, the only good tax is a dead tax.

We must continue to cut the business franchise tax until it fits in a coffin.

Speaking of taxes, Texans are being crushed by property taxes.

Their property tax bills often increase far faster than household income.

No government should be able to tax people out of their homes. No government should be able to disregard the private property rights of its citizens.

Texas should not stand for it.

We must remember: Property owners are not renting their land from the city.

That is why we need property tax reform that prevents cities from raising property taxes without voter approval.

We need serious property tax reform with a real revenue cap.

Sen. Bettencourt, thank you for your leadership on this issue.

As it concerns our budget, Texans know how to live within their means. No less should be expected from their government.



G O V E R N O R G R E G A B B O T T

Just as families have to balance needs versus wants, so must we.

That process doesn't start with the next budget.

It starts now.

We must cut spending in our current biennium to ensure we live within our budget. To accomplish that, I am today directing state agencies to impose an immediate hiring freeze through the end of August.

This should free up about \$200 million in our current budget.

And in the next biennium, I'm confident we can balance the budget without looting the Rainy Day Fund.

Central to keeping Texas the bastion of liberty in America, we need to shore up cracks in our democratic process.

The faith that people have in their democracy is linked to the trust they have in their elected officials.

That trust is eroded if they perceive that elected officials are acting in anything other than the people's best interests.

It's time to let Texans know if elected officials have government contracts paid for by taxpayers.



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Voters deserve to know if officials are working for themselves or the people who elected them.

I want to thank Rep. Geren and Sen. Van Taylor for approaching this effort in ways to avoid the pitfalls that led to the demise of ethics reform last session.

I am once again declaring ethics reform an emergency item.

While we are cleaning up government, we should end the practice of government deducting union dues from the paychecks of employees.

Taxpayer money shouldn't be used to support the collection of union dues.

Sen. Huffman and Rep. Sarah Davis have a good bill that addresses this problem.

Let's get it to my desk.

For decades, the federal government has grown out of control.

It has increasingly abandoned the Constitution, stiff-armed the states and ignored its citizens.

This isn't a problem caused by one president. And it won't be solved by one president. It must be fixed by the people themselves.

That's why we need a Convention of States—authorized by the Constitution—to propose amendments.



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Rep. Miller, you know my support for this. I wrote a book on it.

More importantly, there are hundreds of thousands of Texans who are motivated by this.

The proposed amendments would include things like term limits, restoring the 10th Amendment, an amendment that reins in federal regulation and, yes, Rep. Workman, a balanced budget amendment.

We should demand that the federal government do two things. One: Fulfill important—but limited—responsibilities as written in the Constitution. And two: On everything else, leave us alone, and let Texans govern Texas.

Sen. Birdwell and Rep. King, the future of America can't wait for tomorrow, so I'm making this an emergency item today.

Texas is the Lone Star State for a reason: We stand apart as a model for the rest of the nation.

It's of no small significance that we unite today under the San Jacinto Battle flag.

One of the most decisive battles of the world, it changed the course of history and brought liberty to Texas.

It's our privilege, our duty to preserve that cause of liberty.

Courageous heroes died so Texas could be free.

Let's use this session to build a Texas worthy of their sacrifice.



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Let's keep Texas the most exceptional state in America.

May God bless us in our efforts, and may God forever bless the great state of Texas.