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Chancellor, UT System**

**Remarks  
Opening of the UT Education at Research Center at Laredo  
Nov. 30, 2021**

**Welcome and Introduction**

Welcome, everyone, and thank you for joining us for this celebration. Today is a very special day, as we dedicate the UT Education and Research Center at Laredo and expand UT's mission to support this community and its students. Today, three UT institutions are joining forces to create a center for training and education in some of the most vital health care fields we need to support all Texans.

We are pleased to have many guests with us today, and I especially want to acknowledge the high school students gathered with us as we embark on a revitalized mission to serve you, as you consider your future career opportunities. Thank you all for being with us.

We're also joined by presidents of two UT System institutions: Taylor Eighmy of UT San Antonio, and Giuseppe Colasurdo of UTHealth Houston. President William Henrich of UT Health San Antonio could not be here today, but he is represented by Dr. Sudha Seshadri, MD, director of the Glenn Biggs Institute for Alzheimer's and Neurodegenerative diseases.

When our institutions collaborate like this, big things are bound to happen, and the expansion of UT in Laredo will mean big things for our institutions and the community.

**History**

Today, we take a major step forward as we mark the beginning of a new era for our academic, research and clinical health care work here in Laredo. That means training students for the health care jobs that are needed in this region and throughout our state and nation.

The new UT Education and Research Center at Laredo will expand upon the work of UT Health San Antonio over the many years that this place was known as the Laredo Regional Campus. For more than 20 years, this campus educated occupational and respiratory therapists, nutritionists and dieticians, and more. It has provided clinical rotations for dental students, collected data and promoted research.

But what we've achieved so far isn't enough to fully serve such a fast-growing hub of commerce, cultural exchange and entrepreneurship like Laredo. That's why the Texas Legislature—thanks to the perseverance and leadership of Senator Judith Zaffirini—ensured a new investment and new legislation to make this a multi-institutional effort, and to have the largest public university system in Texas keep up with, and get ahead of, the increasing demand for frontline health care, training, and research.

We need to do more, and we're ready to do it. And like Senator Zaffirini, it is my hope that we will continue to develop and provide more educational opportunities to the students of this region.

By bringing together three powerful UT institutions, we're helping develop homegrown talent that will keep South Texas healthy for years to come. This new commitment means putting to good use the classrooms, laboratories, and library we've built here, and providing new opportunities and new degree options for local students.

I'm grateful to UT Health San Antonio for its history here, and I'm also excited to welcome UT Health Houston and UT San Antonio to the Center.

### **Demographic Trends and Needs**

That fact is our state in dire need of centers of the innovation and training this Center will provide. In Texas, we face an uphill battle when it comes to improving health outcomes. In fact, we're ranked close to the bottom in nearly every measure. Despite a booming population, the accessibility and affordability of health care in Texas puts us at 42nd overall, and we continue to have the highest uninsured rate in the nation.

The state population is projected to double by 2050 --- and that's in addition to the fact that Laredo's population already doubled over the last 30 years. As a state, we must simultaneously meet the needs of a growing elderly population *and* those of a state that is becoming bigger and younger overall.

### **Looking Ahead**

To serve that population, we must work to expand access and affordability to higher education, grow our pipeline of medical professionals, and invest in the scientific and medical breakthroughs that will serve our communities.

The new UT Center at Laredo will offer new certificates and degrees to equip the next generation with the skills they need to care for our elders, build opportunity for the young, and create a healthier Laredo and a stronger Texas.

For example: UT San Antonio is working to offer a community health worker certificate, which will train students for good jobs working to connect people with the health care they need.

UT Health Houston will offer accelerated masters' degrees in computer science and public health through its School of Bioinformatics. The School of Bioinformatics, by the way, is the only standalone school of its kind covering the ways we use technology and artificial intelligence to unlock information from our bodies, like our genes. This can help us detect, treat, and prevent diseases and illness.

UT Health San Antonio's will prepare new physician assistants, a field expected to grow by more than 30 percent in the next decade, and its dental programs will help address a shortfall of hundreds of dentists in the coming years.

That's what makes today special, as we move into a new era of supporting students and the Laredo community with educational programs that meet the needs we face.

## **Conclusion**

It should come as no surprise that we're able to make this transition thanks to the hard work of Senator Judith Zaffirini. As I said, she sponsored the legislation that made this possible. As a UT graduate herself and a Distinguished Alumna, she's always pushing to advance the UT System and ensure that it meets the demands of our state. That's what she's done as a senator for more than 30 years, and this event is yet another red-letter day in that long and continuing history of service.

My conversations with Senator Zaffirini set the tone and the vision for this project, and for the new phase we begin here in Laredo today. Her insights, abilities and determination continue to expand opportunity here in Laredo and across Texas. Senator, thank you.

And thank you all, again, for being a part of this celebration.