

**Chancellor Milliken Remarks**  
**UT System Eliminate Tobacco Use Summit**  
**April 11, 2019**

Good morning. Thank you all for being here. It's great to have so many representatives here – from all over the UT System – and beyond, all committed to improving health.

And on behalf of the System, I want to give a special welcome to those of you from other universities, systems, state agencies, and all the organizations who share our desire to eliminate tobacco from university and college campuses – and everywhere else!

From someone who moved seven months ago from New York City to the Lone Star State, welcome to Texas!

As Chancellor, nothing is more important to me than the safety, health and well being of our nearly 240,000 students, and all of the members of our campus communities.

The UT System was created was to serve the people of our state, helping them lead prosperous, productive, and healthy lives.

It's hard to think of many things *less* helpful to that mission than tobacco.

As you know, it's the leading cause of preventable disease and death – claiming 28,000 lives each year, just in Texas.

As smoking sickens our friends, family, and neighbors, it also drains our coffers, costing the state of Texas nearly \$900 billion a year in health care costs.

The stakes could scarcely be higher – which means the opportunity in front of us is enormous.

One of the many reasons I'm glad to be in Texas is the sense of optimism and confidence that we can turn the toughest challenges into opportunities.

I commend and thank two Texans, Drs. Lakey and Hawk, for leading the effort to do just that.

Texas has already come a long way.

Six years ago, more than 19% of adult Texans smoked. Today that number has been cut by almost a fifth, to 15.7%.

But 15.7% is still millions of people.

Here's another way to look at our evolution.

Some of us in this room are old enough to remember an American culture that – when it came to smoking – bore little resemblance to today.

I think a lot of people simply wouldn't believe you if you told them you used to be able to smoke on airplanes. I remember my first flight to Europe in college; I sat in non-smoking, but one row in front of me, with no barrier, was the smoking section!

What's unthinkable today was, for decades, the norm.

As someone who has spent 30-plus years in higher education, I can attest that the reduction in smoking on campus has been significant, and gratifying.

I can recall in my English classes – not sure why it was always English – there were small foil ashtrays in the classroom for smoking during class.

Today, I'm happy to say that all 14 UT System campuses are smoke free – as were all 24 CUNY campuses and many others across the country.

That's important, but not enough.

One of, if not the biggest challenge we face domestically as a nation is providing affordable health care to all. I am convinced we cannot do this simply by increasing investment in research, education of health professionals, and treatment.

We must lower demand – i.e., increase good health – through changing lifestyles. Beginning with one of the

most predictable contributors to disease and mortality, smoking.

When I talk to people across Texas about our challenges and opportunities as a state, one is clear to me – successfully managing growth. Our population may double in thirty years – from 28 to 56 million people.

The biggest challenges will be ensuring adequate, quality education and health care to that much larger population. And it's not as if we're doing it now.

David Lakey has talked to me about the East Texas he knows well, where if it were a separate state, it would rank 47<sup>th</sup> in chronic lower respiratory disease mortality, 49<sup>th</sup> in heart disease mortality, and dead last in stroke mortality.

It won't surprise you that smoking is 60% higher there than the rest of Texas. We've got to change this if we are to have a hope of achieving the health outcomes we all want to see.

So I thank you for all you're doing. It begins with young people, and all schools should be smoke free, and young people – and old – need to understand the economic and human toll smoking takes.

You're clearly in the lead in this vital work, and I thank you.

Have a great day.