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NEWS RELEASE

COUNTY'S CHANGING ROLE WITH CITY, STATE PRESENTING NEW CHALLENGES, EMMETT SAYS

*State of County Attendees Also Treated To Astrodome Visit,
Where Emmett Renews Call For 'Visionary' Park Concept*

As Harris County's top officials take on an increasingly wide range of social problems, County Judge Ed Emmett called for state officials to allow local authorities more flexibility to manage the constantly changing face of the state's most urban county.

"The population of unincorporated Harris County will soon surpass the population of the City of Houston," Emmett said. "Yet people and organizations continue to discuss urban issues only in terms of the city. Harris County needs policymakers and agencies in Austin and Washington to recognize that our residents need a different approach than that applied to rural counties and to urban counties in which the vast majority of people live in incorporated cities."

And with the county, the state and the nation facing sweeping changes in health care, Emmett also called for a frank discussion about changes in local health care delivery, asking whether it is now time for the state to consider establishing regional health care systems to replace the patchwork of local hospital districts and smaller public agencies.

Emmett concluded his address with a call to renew and strengthen support from the county, City of Houston, TxDOT and Metro for TranStar, the building that houses "the premier emergency operations center in the nation." The 20-year TranStar operating agreement among the four partners expires next year.

Emmett's speech was his eighth State of the County Address since becoming county judge, but this year's event was the first to be held at NRG Park, the county-owned park that is home to NRG Stadium, NRG Center, NRG Arena and the venerable Astrodome. NRG Park also will host Super Bowl 51 in February 2017.

Emmett concluded this year's event by inviting the nearly 1,000 attendees across the street to the floor of the Astrodome, which turns 50 years old this spring. Emmett, the Urban Land Institute and other leaders have called for conversion of the Dome into the nation's largest indoor park.

"If we all pull together, the Dome can be a memorable site for some of the Super Bowl fans' experience," Emmett said. "It would be a shame to miss such an opportunity."