

TESTIMONY OF ELIAS LONGORIA OF EDINBURG, TEXAS

Good morning Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee on Interior and Environment. I am Elias Longoria, an elected City Councilman from the City of Edinburg, Texas, located in the 15th Congressional District of Texas. My testimony today is related to the waste water and sewer system programs that fall under the jurisdiction of the Environmental Protection Agency.

Today, I appear before you to share with you some very important economic statistics from the City of Edinburg and tell you about some important jobs the City is creating even as we speak, and to seek your counsel regarding a dilemma that the City faces—how to fund the infrastructure upgrades needed to keep up with the City's booming economy and service the seven Colonias just outside the City that depend on our facilities.\

Edinburg Population and Economy Both Are Booming

Edinburg is located deep in South Texas, approximately 15 miles from the Texas/Mexican border. We are a city of 77 thousand people. The City has grown to this population from less than 20,000 in 1960, and is now the fastest growing city in South Texas.

Soon, we will have the grand opening of two major manufacturing and produce facilities which will add over 1,600 jobs to the City's employment rolls.

These two new plants are of enormous importance not only to the City but to the Nation. They are two important examples of what a community can do during the deepest economic recession our Country has faced in many, many years.

First, there is the new plant being established by Santana Textiles, the largest denim manufacturer in the world. Through the help of Governor Rick Perry and grants from the State of Texas Enterprise Zone Program as well as tax breaks extended by the City of Edinburg, the company is having the grand opening of the plant in August. This plant will hire 800 new employees to make denim in Edinburg, using US cotton and exporting the finished product all over the world.

The other new plant will house a major Don Hugo produce operation formerly located in Chicago. It will be opening its doors in Edinburg on April 2012, and the Don Hugo Company will hire 800 new employees to staff it. Don Hugo is a produce importer and is moving to Edinburg because of Edinburg's proximity to the border of Mexico in recognition of the fact that Mexico is shipping the lion's share of its produce through South Texas areas, making South Texas the largest importer of Mexican produce in the USA. Don Hugo is also taking advantage of similar tax breaks from the City and will become one of the biggest employers in the area.

These two new businesses are working on the final details of their new business venture in Edinburg, as I deliver my remarks today.

Also, our airport, which previously was used as a military defense airport and was converted to general aviation after WWII, is slowly but surely becoming a commercial airport, which it will need to be to adequately service Edinburg's business community. In fact, Fed Ex Ground has opened a new ground station in Edinburg close to our airport.

Edinburg also assists seven nearby rural areas known as colonias in South Texas. As described by the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, Texas colonias date back to at least the 1950s. Using agriculturally marginal land, land that lay in floodplains, or other rural properties, developers created unincorporated subdivisions. They divided the land into small lots, put in little or no infrastructure, then sold them to low-income individuals seeking affordable housing. Colonia residents generally have very low incomes. Per capita annual income for all Texas counties bordering Mexico-where most of the colonias are located-tends to be much lower than the state average. These communities clearly are overburdened, but they also provide many of the workers that fuel the growth of the Rio Grande Valley economy. Like it or not, many of the City's services end up being provided to the residents of the seven nearby Colonias.

The City government provides to the City's residents and the Colonias sewer and water treatment, fire fighting assistance, police assistance, emergency management assistance, and airport services in case of an emergency or natural disaster that requires people living in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas to seek a port of entry or egress, such as our airport and highways located north of the Texas/Mexican border. In short, during this period of growth, the City is working hard to make certain that its citizens and the businesses that have located in our community continue to have the necessary services for a good quality of life as well as being able to attract even more jobs.

Edinburg's Challenges

I fully understand that the Congress is out of the earmark business. However, I am here today to share with you a major dilemma the City faces regarding its sewer plant and water plants, airport, and law enforcement funding.

The City's population continues to grow because the City is working hard to add jobs, fight off the devastating economic effects of the recession, and do our part to stimulate economic growth. Thus, my job today on behalf of the citizens of Edinburg, Texas is to ask you what the federal government can do to assist the City with federal dollars other than earmarks to help us address the cost of building an \$11 million sewer plant and an \$8 million water plant.

Do you have suggestions as to where the City might find the public resources to build these plants that will support our economic development? Unfortunately, the citizens of Edinburg cannot afford both to pay for more necessary improvements to the City's utilities and also assist the other surrounding unincorporated communities as well as the seven Colonias. Yet, the City has been faced with fines from the federal Environmental Protection Agency because its burgeoning population is pushing the water and sewer facilities to their limits.

This current state of affairs does not do any of us any good, and for certain, the City will have to either work with you to find federal dollars to help the citizens of Edinburg get through these rough spots, or the City will begin to turn away businesses that are eager to invest in bricks and mortar and jobs in Edinburg.

The same goes for our airport, when FAA tells us that we need more volume in order to access money from the Airport Improvement Act to expand the runway, the City responds that it cannot get more volume with a runway that is too short for commercial planes. It's the proverbial

question of which comes first, the chicken or the egg. This is a good example of a government program that is not serving the communities it was designed to serve.

Finally, because of our proximity to the Texas/Mexican border, we also need federal dollars to spend on border security, due to the horrible problems that Mexico is allowing to spill over into the Texas side of our border with Mexico. This is a national problem, but part of that battle is being fought on the local level—by our City's law enforcement officers.

An Invitation for You to See the Problems First Hand

Today, I invite this committee to hold a hearing in Edinburg, tour the airport, the seven local Colonias that Edinburg services and let us show you exactly why we need help from the federal government. The dollars that we need from the federal government will be used carefully to help the City continue to be able to support its population growth as well as prove to you that the City is doing its part to stimulate the economy.

Come down to Edinburg, let the Mayor and I escort you to tour the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, see the Mexican border first hand, see the issues we face with drought and the need for irrigation, see the impressive farm land that produces sugar cane, feed grains, cotton, citrus, vegetables, and cattle, hogs and sheep, as well as the oil and gas industry, solar energy and renewable fuel, and what these industries mean to Edinburg and South Texas in terms of jobs, jobs, jobs.

Conclusion

Our area is one of the fastest growing areas in the USA, and we need help from the federal government to make certain we continue to grow, add jobs, and allow the people of Edinburg and South Texas to prosper. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify before the Subcommittee on Interior Appropriations today, and of course, I am prepared to answer any questions you may have for me or the City.

Elias Longoria