

THE TEXAS-MEXICO BORDER INTERAGENCY WORK GROUP

State of Texas Secretary of State
Nell Hays Conference Room, Room 413
Rudder Building
1019 Brazos Street
Austin, Texas

Thursday,
September 20, 2007
1:30 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

PHIL WILSON, SOS
HELEN ESCALANTE, SOS
CAMERON BELL, TWC
SOLL SUSSMAN, GLO
MARIA ARAUJO, TPW
RICHARD MARTINEZ, SOS
ALFONSO I. CASSO, SOS
AGUSTIN DE LA ROSA, TxDOT
ESTHER HITZFELDER, TxDOT
DIANA BORJA, TCEQ
ROBB STEVENSON, TDHCA
STEVE MENDOZA, ORCA
YVETTE GONZALEZ, SOS
STACIE FOWLER, RRC
ROBERT RUIZ, TWDB
LARRY REED, PUC
NORA HANCOCK, TEA
CATHY MARTINEZ, HHSC
CARY DUPUY, TDA
EDLI COLBERG, HHSC
GABE VALENZUELA, HCBIA

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P R O C E E D I N G S

1
2 MS. ESCALANTE: I think we can officially
3 start. You know, we may have some other people straggling
4 in. We're going to save a seat for the secretary, who is
5 going to be here this afternoon with us for a little bit;
6 so that you can all meet him for those who haven't and,
7 for those who have, you can all say, hello, to him.

8 Well, what can I say? It's always great to see
9 you. Even though some of you were here this morning for
10 another meeting, it's a great chance to continue to
11 talking roughly about the same thing, which is border
12 issues that we all know and love.

13 So, anyway, why don't we just start, for the
14 record, going around the room and introducing ourselves,
15 saying name, title, and what agency we're with. I'm Helen
16 Escalante, director of Texas Border and Mexican Affairs
17 with the Office of the Secretary of State.

18 MR. CASSO: Alfonso Casso, Border Affairs
19 Coordinator for the Secretary of State.

20 MR. MARTINEZ: My name is Richard Martinez.
21 This is my second day with the Secretary of State's
22 office, but this is also my fourth state agency.

23 MS. ESCALANTE: I'm sorry, if I could say
24 something. We're delighted to have him on board. His

1 background is mainly on lots of border issues and he's
2 going to be a great asset definitely. So you will be
3 seeing him a lot because he's going to be traveling quite
4 a bit.

5 MS. ARAUJO: Maria Araujo with Texas Parks and
6 Wildlife Department.

7 MR. REED: Larry Reed with Public Utility
8 Commission.

9 MR. DE LA ROSA: Agustin De La Rosa with Texas
10 Department of Transportation.

11 MS. HITZFELDER: I'm Esther Hitzfelder with the
12 Texas Department of Transportation.

13 MR. RUIZ: I'm Robert Ruiz. I'm with the Water
14 Development Board.

15 MR. BELL: I'm Cameron Bell. I'm manager of
16 area partnerships with the Texas Workforce Commission.

17 MS. FOWLER: I'm Stacie Fowler and I'm the
18 director of Intergovernmental and Public Relations at the
19 Railroad Commission. I have to commend you. He is an
20 excellent hire. I've had the honor and privilege of
21 working with him --

22 MS. ESCALANTE: Wonderful.

23 MS. FOWLER: -- at the Railroad Commission.
24 You've got a really good hand.

1 MR. MARTINEZ: Thank you for saying so.

2 MS. FOWLER: Richard, good to see you.

3 MR. MARTINEZ: Good to see you, too.

4 MR. CASSO: So how much did you pay her to say
5 that?

6 MR. MARTINEZ: I have to mow her yard.

7 MR. CASSO: In that case, I'm going to say some
8 nice words about you.

9 MR. MARTINEZ: She lives on a five-acre estate.

10 MS. GONZALEZ: Yvette Gonzalez, director of
11 Colonial Initiatives for the Secretary of State's office.

12 MS. BORJA: Diana Borja, director of Border
13 Affairs at Texas Commission on Environmental Quality,
14 TCEQ.

15 MR. MENDOZA: Steve Mendoza. I'm the Colonia
16 Specialist with the Office of Rural and Community Affairs.

17 MR. STEVENSON: My name is Robb Stevenson. I'm
18 the manager of the Office of Colonia Initiatives with the
19 Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs.

20 MR. SUSSMAN: I'm Soll Sussman with the
21 Renewable Energy and the Border Energy Program with the
22 General Land Office. I apologize. Before we got your
23 notice, we had scheduled a energy briefing for today and I
24 need to leave early.

1 MS. ESCALANTE: No problem.

2 MS. HANCOCK: Nora Hancock. I represent Texas
3 Education Agency and I'm the associate commissioner of the
4 Planning and Grants Committee.

5 MS. ESCALANTE: Wonderful. Like I said, it's
6 great to have all of you here. Is there anybody else
7 besides Soll who needs to leave early?

8 (No response.)

9 MS. ESCALANTE: Okay. Then why don't we do
10 this? Let's just go ahead and review what we're going to
11 work on today and let's start with you two so that you can
12 be ready to go.

13 We have, as you all know, a legislative
14 mandate, which is called the Border Interagency Board
15 Group. The mandate states that we have "to develop or
16 update a process to allow agencies to work together on
17 issues that face border communities, discuss and
18 coordinate programs and services offered to border
19 communities and residential border communities, develop
20 regulatory and legislative recommendations to eliminate
21 duplication and combine program services, consider the
22 effect of policies instituted by the federal government
23 impacting the border region."

24 So having said all this, we could go point by

1 point, but what we found out in the last meeting, and this
2 has been the case overall, is that all of these
3 recommendations, or I should say most of our actions and
4 mandates and duties fall under one or more of all of these
5 recommendations.

6 So if you want to give us an update as to what
7 you've been doing -- my goodness, I think the last time we
8 met was last year, September-ish -- so it's been about a
9 year, so if you want to give us a quick update as to what
10 you've done, what challenges you have encountered, if you
11 can tell us a few things that you can brag about, again
12 point out the challenges and what you think you can do to
13 solve them, or how we can help as a group, or even
14 ourselves as Secretary of State, if there's any way in
15 which you can support to help whatever is out there that
16 hasn't been able to go to completion, just let us know.

17 So why don't we just start over there with
18 Soll?

19 MR. SUSSMAN: Thank you. Well, our programs at
20 the Land Office are pretty specialized. We have field
21 offices in several border communities, especially with our
22 veteran land board programs. The programs that are
23 specifically border programs, I would say --

24 COURT REPORTER: Can you talk into the

1 microphone more?

2 MR. SUSSMAN: Sure. I think the two program
3 areas that are specifically border related at the Land
4 Office are our coastal, specifically the Oil Spill
5 Prevention and Respond Program which cooperates with MX
6 and the Marina de Mexico on oil spill prevention and
7 responses in Gulf of Mexico protection drills on a regular
8 basis.

9 More generally, our Border Energy Program has
10 worked now for about 15 years to encourage exchange of
11 information, business partnerships, clear air/clean energy
12 programs, and better cooperation to encourage renewable
13 energy and energy efficiency throughout the region. One
14 of the things we've done is attend the U.S.-Mexico Energy
15 Forum and our fourteenth annual one is going to be in San
16 Diego, California, in October.

17 MS. ESCALANTE: Does everybody have one?

18 MR. SUSSMAN: This is our first time in
19 California. It means that we'll have had the forum in
20 nine of the ten border states.

21 MS. ESCALANTE: All right.

22 MR. SUSSMAN: We're working on the *quincinera*
23 for Monterey. So we'll try to be within range of a lot of
24 people. We'll be back in Texas in Houston in 2009.

1 The program has really blossomed I think. The
2 interest in natural gas, renewable energy, and energy
3 efficient programs has really helped the program. If
4 anyone would like to share the agenda we've developed for
5 San Diego, we're pretty excited about it. We will have
6 video from the session on our website after it's over.
7 It's going to become a continuing process, very much
8 closely linked to the Board of Governor's Energy Working
9 Table and especially --

10 We hosted that the Mexican delegates in Abilene
11 in April for a wind energy tour. For those of you that
12 aren't familiar with it, at the Abilene-Sweetwater area,
13 that is really the core or the center in wind energy.
14 Commissioner Araujo lead that delegation. We're pretty
15 happy about that.

16 So there's activity in pretty much every one of
17 the ten major states. One statistic that I would point to
18 that I'm kind of fascinated by, if you looked at, on the
19 U.S. side of the border, even though as excited as we are
20 that Texas is now number one regenerating state, but if
21 you combine Texas, California, and New Mexico, we now
22 produce about half of the wind generation of the whole
23 United States.

24 MS. ESCALANTE: In the whole?

1 MR. SUSSMAN: Yes. So I think it shows the
2 potential of this region for renewable energy.

3 MS. ESCALANTE: Of course. Well, that is
4 great. What are your recommendations for this year's
5 Board of Governor's conference?

6 MR. SUSSMAN: We're really trying to focus, I
7 think the Energy Working Table is one of the most recent
8 additions to the list at the Board of Governor's
9 conference. We're in our fifth year now and our first
10 year that we're not trying to handle what renewable energy
11 was and how does this work. At this conference, we really
12 want to zero in on how can encourage additional projects
13 of renewable energy, energy efficiency, and identify any
14 roadblocks that might be holding up cross-border
15 infrastructure.

16 MS. ESCALANTE: All right. Thank you very much
17 for that update.

18 Nora?

19 MS. HANCOCK: Good afternoon. I'm Nora
20 Hancock. It's a privilege to share with you some of the
21 accomplishments that we had in the Education Work Table.
22 As you probably recall, last year we began the development
23 of the Education Commission. And so, we created bylaws to
24 actually make it a commission. So part of what we've done

1 this year is to continue to define all of our bylaws and
2 look at whittling down on what conceptually we had
3 created. So that has been a major accomplishment in terms
4 of facilitating the continuation of historical knowledge.

5 To that point, you'll recall that one of our
6 recommendations was to create in the Education Commission
7 Work Group a web page that would host the entire history
8 of the Education Work Table, now known as the Education
9 Commission. We have been successful in getting that done.

10 And so, we have our very own Education Commission website
11 where we post all of the history and all of the
12 declarations and everything related to education. So
13 we're very excited about that.

14 To that point, some of the major challenges
15 that we will always face in education, simply because of
16 the nature of the differences in the Mexican government
17 and the U.S. government, is the fact that in the United
18 States federal legislation allows every state, to the
19 extent possible -- of course there are certain federal
20 laws, but to the extend possible -- to have some local
21 control.

22 In the Mexican government in education, it's
23 uniform and standard. And so, we all acknowledge that.
24 So what we do to overcome that challenge is we share with

1 each other all of our information, understanding that some
2 can be acquired and duplicated and utilized and other
3 times it can't be.

4 So we, on our web page, have all of the major
5 curriculum testing information. We invite each other to
6 different forums that relate across all of the major
7 needs, our major focus, math, science, technology, English
8 as a second language. So, to that point, we really
9 strengthened at the very least the exchange of information
10 in allowing every state to be able to use that however it
11 is possible. So that's, in a nutshell, what we've done.

12 MS. GONZALEZ: Let me ask you a question about
13 it. At one point, I was on the Education Work Table and
14 one of the recommendations was the creation of a database
15 to facilitate the sharing of student records, especially
16 with our students along the border that are back and
17 forth.

18 MS. HANCOCK: Thank you for reminding me.

19 MS. GONZALEZ: Okay.

20 MS. HANCOCK: Yes, that is one of the
21 recommendations that we have for this year. The
22 bi-national migrant program -- which no particular state
23 in the U.S. has to be a part of or none of the Mexican
24 states have to be a part of, it's volunteer -- they

1 promote the students who migrate from Mexico to the U.S.,
2 back and forth, back and forth. To that point, it created
3 a transfer document that facilitates the transfer of the
4 information so that as students move back and forth
5 there's a document that they can take with them that more
6 easily lets them into the school system and solidifies
7 their education work.

8 And so, one of our recommendations this year is
9 to promote the use of the transfer document. We're very
10 careful. We can't mandate, but we can certainly encourage
11 and promote that because it helps the students move with
12 greater facility back and forth between the border. Thank
13 you for reminding me.

14 MS. GONZALEZ: I'm glad to hear that. Thank
15 you.

16 MS. ESCALANTE: We have a few new faces that
17 have come in. Would you mind saying out loud your name
18 and where you are from so that everybody can know you?
19 Preferably, if you can come closer to the table so that it
20 can be recorded, that would be great.

21 MS. MARTINEZ: My name is Cathy Martinez. I'm
22 with the Department of State Health Services in the Office
23 of Border Health.

24 MS. ESCALANTE: Great, thank you.

1 MS. DUPUY: I'm Cary Dupuy. I'm in External
2 Relations at the Texas Department of Agriculture.

3 MS. COLBERG: I'm Edli Colberg with the Health
4 and Human Services Commission. I work for Strategic
5 Decisions Support. Today, I'm filling in for David Luna
6 who is our lecturer for Border Affairs.

7 MS. ESCALANTE: Great. Thank you for being
8 here. Do you have agendas and everything?

9 MS. MARTINEZ: Got it.

10 MS. ESCALANTE: Thank you. Well, since we were
11 already starting over there, why don't we just continue
12 with you, Cathy, so that can tell us a little bit about
13 what has been going on in your department in the past
14 year, things that you can brag about, challenges that you
15 have encountered, anything that will allow us to work
16 better to improve the quality of life along the border.

17 MS. MARTINEZ: In the Office of Border Health,
18 we have three grants that we are supporting right now.
19 One of them is the block grant, which we have seen that
20 it's dwindled down. It's very little money. So we do the
21 best we can with that grant.

22 We partner it with our U.S.-Mexico Border
23 Health Commission grant. We do the ten essential
24 services. In all of our border counties, we have just

1 small granting with local or county governments. We work
2 with them to create a strategic plan, whether it's, maybe
3 they have food-borne issues, or vector control issues, and
4 so we work with them to get them to sustain themselves in
5 those projects.

6 MS. GONZALEZ: I'm sorry, one question. When
7 you say the ten basic services?

8 MS. MARTINEZ: There are ten public health
9 services that are essential --

10 MS. GONZALEZ: What are those?

11 MS. MARTINEZ: They are mobilizing, getting
12 together with communities and mobilizing them, linking
13 communities and either the people or the government, the
14 local government itself, to other helpful resources
15 around, depending on what their need are.

16 MS. GONZALEZ: Oh, okay.

17 MS. MARTINEZ: There's several. We don't work
18 in all ten in any one year. We may choose three. Like
19 this year, we've chosen to mobilize partnerships. We've
20 chosen to link community people to needed public health
21 services. And then, we've also chosen education, where
22 some of our code enforcement people in the local
23 governments are not as educated or don't have the
24 education needed to continue.

1 MS. GONZALEZ: Okay.

2 MS. MARTINEZ: And so, we've chosen those
3 three. Our biggest grant comes from CDC and that's the
4 one we're working really hard on because it's a very large
5 grant. It's for early warning infectious disease
6 surveillance along the border. We are funding our Big
7 Four local health departments, which would be Cameron
8 County, Hidalgo County, the city of Laredo, and El Paso
9 County.

10 We've activated in those four counties along
11 with our DSHS office. We have what we call Bi-national
12 Surveillance Teams, which has one epidemiologist and two
13 public health technicians, to be able to assist with
14 bi-national surveillance issues. We have a lot of cases
15 which need bi-national attention.

16 Last year, for our fiscal year -- I say, last
17 year, but it's actually January -- for us, it was fiscal
18 year '07, we started state to state strategic planning in
19 active surveillance. We started with the what we have in
20 Texas. We trade infectious disease information on a
21 weekly basis on ten notifiable conditions that have been
22 agreed upon between Texas and Tamaulipas.

23 In November of this year, we will move forward
24 with Chihuahua, in Mexico, and Texas will do the same

1 strategic planning. In February '08, we plan to add on
2 Coahuila, in Texas. And then, in late August, we will
3 finish up in Nuevo Leon. So we will have communication
4 between the border states as well.

5 MS. GONZALEZ: Cathy, you said Cameron, Webb,
6 El Paso --

7 MS. MARTINEZ: And city of Laredo.

8 MS. GONZALEZ: Webb County?

9 MS. MARTINEZ: Webb County.

10 MS. GONZALEZ: There were four of them?

11 MS. MARTINEZ: Cameron County, Hidalgo
12 County --

13 MS. GONZALEZ: Hidalgo, that's it.

14 MS. MARTINEZ: -- those are our Big Four. You
15 know, I left out our middle one, Starr County. Starr
16 County is coming up in public health. And so, we've
17 provided a small amount of funding to help them there.

18 MS. ESCALANTE: Oh, great. Can you tell us a
19 little bit, I understand that the Bi-National Health Week
20 is coming up in October?

21 MS. MARTINEZ: It is. It's the second week of
22 October. The same Big Four local departments, our Border
23 Health Commission, and ourselves, we've been meeting
24 regularly. We've going to have the events bi-nationally.

1 So each one has a lot of events planned for their own
2 little region in the area. Some of us will be visiting
3 different sites to kind of assess how well they've done
4 their planning and what can we do in the future to bring
5 in our Mexican components as well.

6 MS. ESCALANTE: All right. Very good. The
7 secretary is very, very pleased with Operation Lone Star
8 so thank you so much for putting together such a great --

9 MS. MARTINEZ: Oh, this year, we funded
10 Operation Lone Star. We have not done our after action
11 report, but we expanded to Laredo and it was a big
12 success. We will expand a little bit further along the
13 border.

14 MS. ESCALANTE: Right. Does everybody know
15 what Operation Lone Star is?

16 (No response.)

17 MS. ESCALANTE: Can you tell them a little bit?
18 It's a great exercise.

19 MS. MARTINEZ: Operation Lone Star started
20 years ago and the Office of Border Health expanded it as a
21 public health event. It mobilizes the military and DSHS
22 to serve kind of, it used to be kind of like a health
23 fair. It was free.

24 People would come and we would triage them

1 through a series of different things and link them to
2 different activities. We had a little bit of dental. We
3 had a little bit of immunizations, medical, well child
4 checks, and stuff like that.

5 Last year and this year, we expanded it as an
6 emergency preparedness drill, mobilizing the military and
7 ourselves to drill in case of an emergency and how fast we
8 could move mass. Last year, I think we served 42,000
9 people. This year, I think we served something like that.

10 It's a two-week event. Like I said, we
11 expanded to Laredo. We did two sites in Laredo. We did
12 it for two weeks. We did two sites in all of the little
13 cities up until we get to Webb County. Next year, we have
14 to expand it a little bit more, back to the Del Rio/Eagle
15 Pass area.

16 MS. ESCALANTE: Very good. Thank you. Like I
17 said, the secretary flew down with the military on what is
18 called VIP Day. He was very, very pleased.

19 MS. MARTINEZ: Did he go on the military plane?

20 MS. ESCALANTE: Yes, he did. Yes, he flew in
21 the Hercules. He had that opportunity to --

22 MS. MARTINEZ: Have that experience.

23 MS. ESCALANTE: Yes, absolutely. Yes, he was
24 very happy about that. So, thank you.

1 MS. MARTINEZ: Thank you.

2 MS. ESCALANTE: Who else do we have? Cary, do
3 you want to give us an update?

4 MS. DUPUY: I can. Do I need to get closer to
5 the table?

6 MS. ESCALANTE: Yes, please.

7 MR. CASSO: You can sit here. Go ahead and sit
8 here.

9 MS. ESCALANTE: The secretary should come
10 around 3:00.

11 MS. DUPUY: Oh, okay.

12 MS. ESCALANTE: No, it's fine, just fine.

13 MR. CASSO: It's about another hour and a half.

14 COURT REPORTER: Could you repeat your name for
15 me, please?

16 MS. DUPUY: I'm sorry. It's Cary, C-A-R-Y, and
17 Dupuy is the last name. It's D-U-P-U-Y.

18 COURT REPORTER: Thank you.

19 MS. DUPUY: One of the biggest changes within
20 the last year at the Department of Agriculture is actually
21 bringing in some of the food nutrition programs that the
22 Health and Human Services Commission, and bringing those
23 programs over to work with our child nutrition programs.
24 The U.S. Department of Agriculture actually administers

1 all of the programs and then it's split up within the
2 states as to how they do it. Now, instead of just doing
3 the public school lunches and breakfasts, we will also be
4 doing the private school and nursing home lunches and
5 breakfasts as well as the commodity programs.

6 So it's overall the state we do that, but I
7 know that there's an obesity crisis in the border region.

8 And so, we're hoping that bringing in some of those
9 programs through TDA, bringing them into our nutritional
10 marketing campaign, that we can affect and impact that
11 crisis down in the border region. We have promotional
12 materials that are in English and in Spanish on good
13 eating habits, fresh fruits and vegetables. The
14 commissioner is really going to make a push this fall for
15 National School Lunch Week to go down to a lot of the
16 schools and visit with them about healthy eating habits.

17 Along that same line, we also are working with
18 our Agriculture Work Table through the Board of Governor's
19 conference to develop a nutrition task force, a
20 bi-national nutrition task force where we'll work with our
21 Mexican counterparts to see what we can do to address the
22 obesity issue in the border region. So that's primarily
23 the biggest thing that we've been working on.

24 MS. ESCALANTE: I'm sorry. Could you compare

1 the degree or the statistics of obesity? Are they similar
2 on the Mexican side as well?

3 MS. DUPUY: I believe they are. I don't have
4 the numbers with me and I can get those numbers for you,
5 but it's my understanding that along the border region
6 they are substantially higher than across the state.

7 MS. ESCALANTE: I see.

8 MS. DUPUY: We also have, obviously, larger
9 participation in our free school lunch and breakfast
10 program in some of those border cities as well.

11 MS. ESCALANTE: Okay.

12 MS. DUPUY: And there's the after school
13 program that we run. We do have the after school program
14 with our nutrition programs. We also are starting a home
15 meal delivery program. It's similar to what Meals on
16 Wheels does, but it's \$20 million in the next two years
17 that non-profits can apply for to pay for meals for their
18 senior citizens. It's statewide as well. So that
19 definitely is an option for the border region.

20 MS. ESCALANTE: Oh.

21 MS. DUPUY: So that's just another aspect of
22 the nutrition programs that we're doing.

23 MS. ESCALANTE: Have you encountered any major
24 challenges?

1 MS. DUPUY: With the home meal delivery?

2 MS. ESCALANTE: Yes.

3 MS. DUPUY: That one, we are just starting that
4 program. The applications, sign up period, started on
5 September 10. So if you all know any organizations like
6 that in the border region that would be interested in
7 applying for that, all the information is on our website
8 or I can get you more information on it.

9 MS. ESCALANTE: Okay. How about the other
10 ones, the nutritional marketing campaign or anything else?

11 MS. DUPUY: We've been doing the nutritional
12 marketing campaign for quite a while. I think part of the
13 problem is just keeping up with the demand for the
14 information. We're getting new materials for the kids
15 that are going to keep them engaged, developing recipes
16 for parents, getting the parents engaged as well.

17 MS. ESCALANTE: Oh.

18 MS. BORJA: I'd like to make a comment. It's
19 sort of related. Here in Austin at the Texas Department
20 of Insurance, my husband works there, and every Thursday
21 he and the rest of the team go out and deliver food, Meals
22 on Wheels, at noon. They do it as a volunteer thing as
23 part of the state agency. Our agency where I work doesn't
24 do that, but I was thinking that the state agencies should

1 get into more volunteer work in their communities. You
2 know, many of us have offices there at the border, but
3 state agencies can also help with that. Every Thursday,
4 like I said, they deliver meals and it is so neat.

5 MS. ESCALANTE: Absolutely, there you have it.

6 MS. BORJA: You have a work force that might be
7 available.

8 MS. DUPUY: That's a good idea. I'll have to
9 take that back.

10 One other thing that is still in its conceptual
11 stage -- and it's more along the lines of agriculture, but
12 I think it would also help the economy of the border
13 region and develop the relationships with Mexico -- is a
14 Texas-Mexico agriculture exchange program, where we can
15 invite agriculture students who are involved in
16 agriculture operations in Mexico to work with Texas
17 operations to learn about how our infrastructure works,
18 how our planters work, and just develop those
19 relationships and help both sides of the border as well.

20 MS. MARTINEZ: How closely will you be working
21 with Webb County under the Zaffirini bill that was passed
22 regarding the diabetes? They're going to implement a
23 program in the schools that will kind of like check the
24 children at the beginning of school and then monitor the

1 children throughout because of the obesity problem.

2 MS. DUPUY: I will check with our food
3 nutrition program who works in our office and get back to
4 you on that. I have been working on tons of other
5 different projects, but I'll check with her on that.

6 MS. MARTINEZ: All right, thank you.

7 MS. BORJA: One other thing, we now have
8 Mexican cities on the border that have treatment plants
9 that never had them before at the level that they have
10 them now. And so, they have a lot of sludge that is a
11 byproduct of having those. Well, several of them are
12 wanting to know, what do we do with all of this sludge and
13 they're looking at processing it and agricultural
14 applications. Now, we've been working with several
15 cities, particularly Nuevo Laredo.

16 MS. DUPUY: Okay.

17 MS. BORJA: We brought them up here to show
18 them Hornsby Bend and what's going on there. We brought
19 quite a few cities over here and Nuevo Laredo made an
20 application to BEC for a study on doing that. They've
21 been meeting with the agriculture people there nearby in
22 Nuevo Laredo --

23 MS. DUPUY: Okay.

24 MS. BORJA: -- but there's a lack of trust.

1 They said, no, you apply that sludge that you processed on
2 your city or state land or something and if we see that
3 nothing dies or falls apart, then we'll consider it.
4 There's a lack of trust. And so, we have been working
5 with them on that.

6 MS. DUPUY: Okay. That's very interesting.
7 I'll visit with our hydrologist who works on a lot of
8 those issues, and see if he has any suggestions on how to
9 go about the trust with some of the agriculture producers
10 in the area, and how we can work that participation out.

11 MS. BORJA: Okay.

12 MS. GONZALEZ: I just have one more question
13 and then I'll leave you alone. Do you think there's an
14 opportunity -- I know we have a lot that is going on along
15 the border -- there would be an opportunity for us to
16 partner with you in assisting with the educational
17 outreach? This is the type of information we'd like to
18 get to our colonias.

19 MS. DUPUY: That would be wonderful.

20 MS. GONZALEZ: Often, they don't get to
21 participate in after school programs. So this is the kind
22 of information, either through *promotoras* or through the
23 ombudsman, but if we can help in disseminating that
24 information, we would love to assist with that.

1 MS. DUPUY: That would be very helpful to us
2 just to get the word out and to get more participation in
3 those programs. Obviously, the more participation we get
4 in those programs, the better it helps us the state, and
5 more money coming in, and just overall helping the state,
6 too. So I'll get you in touch with the folks that we need
7 to, to get that operation to you.

8 MS. GONZALEZ: I appreciate that.

9 MS. ESCALANTE: All right, very good. Is there
10 anything that you want to comment on?

11 MR. MARTINEZ: Well done.

12 MS. DUPUY: Oh, thank you.

13 MS. ESCALANTE: Maria?

14 MS. ARAUJO: I'm Maria Araujo with Texas Parks
15 and Wildlife. Since the last meeting, we have now a new
16 wildlife director in the federal government in Mexico.
17 Throughout the program, it was very important that there
18 were no wildlife responsibilities at the state level. And
19 so, Dr. Martin Vargas is the new director general in
20 Mexico.

21 This organizational process for the states is
22 going very well. All the states along the border now have
23 a wildlife agency. We're getting a lot of requests. The
24 Board of Governor's conference has been good for us in

1 terms of organizing ourselves through the Wildlife Table
2 after we gained independence from Environment Table. And
3 so, it's busy this fall.

4 There's still a little bit of duplication and
5 we just encountered some of the usual things. Some of you
6 want to do some projects and want to take the lead,
7 especially Mexico, because so many were in the leadership
8 role before the creation of these state agencies. And so,
9 they're facing the same things that Parks and Wildlife
10 faced many years ago when the Parks and Wildlife was
11 founded, and you have to deal with other NGOs like
12 [indiscernible] and others that were used to having the
13 lead. And so, that's something that we face.

14 There are a lot of concerns as to why there's
15 not more involvement in the Board of Governor's conference
16 and so forth and so on. So that's in terms of the
17 organizational process.

18 We're now having another expo. The 16th Texas
19 Parks and Wildlife Expo is coming up October 6 and 7. I
20 have lots of materials. If you can help me take some back
21 to your offices and distribute them among your co-workers,
22 I'd appreciate your help.

23 I'm still trying to figure out a way in which
24 every year we can bring a group from colonias, children

1 from colonias, and not have to turn it into a major
2 enterprise where we have to drop everything and apply for
3 a grant, but I haven't figured it out. The grants that we
4 have for community outreach are very small and so this
5 group will need everything arranged from their
6 transportation to their food and so on.

7 McKinney Roughs is willing to work with us, but
8 as you know, you have to pay for any service that you get
9 there. So we cannot figure out some way to do it. We
10 were able to do it last year, but we were not able to
11 continue because Communities in Schools funded a grant
12 last year, but they were not able to do it this year.
13 Communities in Schools is a program affiliated with the
14 Texas Education Agency.

15 Once you're working with --

16 MS. ESCALANTE: I'm sorry. Can I just say
17 something really quickly? The grant for those kids, for
18 the colonia kids, it was relatively small so I don't know
19 if any of you would be able to help that in the future, if
20 you know anybody. Not necessarily another state agency,
21 if you don't have authority to do that, but if you belong
22 to any non-profit, I think it would be well worth it.

23 MS. ARAUJO: Yes, anyone interested, I can send
24 you the proposal so you can see what the cost is and if

1 you know someone who can help.

2 VOICE: TxDOT has a little money.

3 MS. ARAUJO: Pardon me?

4 VOICE: That's transportation money.

5 MS. ARAUJO: Anyhow, it's not a lot of money.

6 I think some of you made that comment that it's just a lot
7 of regulations. You know, how we can spend the money just
8 doesn't fall into any category. That's why it's
9 difficult.

10 We're working with [indiscernible] to try to
11 figure out how we can better work with Mexico in terms of
12 the enforcement. And so, we've going to have a meeting.
13 A lot of your agencies are participating in that effort.
14 Zapata County is going to sort of a conservation planning
15 process and they have a number of committees on the water
16 and the fisheries committee, where we are trying to figure
17 out conservation issues and water levels.

18 MS. BORJA: Are you talking about Border 2012?

19 MS. ARAUJO: I think Zapata County pretty much
20 went out on their own in order to try to focus on the
21 problem of water levels for them. They're trying to
22 promote fishing tournaments in their area for economic
23 development, but they cannot depend on that so long as the
24 water levels are not somewhat constant. It just so

1 happens that when some major tournaments are interested in
2 being there is when they can least guarantee what the
3 water levels are going to be. That's a real big problem.

4 And so, with Mexico, we're trying to figure it
5 out. They went ahead and they have required now the
6 commercial fishermen to use different types of nets that
7 are going to be better for the protection of the bass and
8 the fish that the sporting fishing industry needs. So
9 we're basically trying to figure out a way to make the
10 commercial fishery and those working on fishing more
11 compatible.

12 I think that's all the main categories.

13 MS. ESCALANTE: Very good, thank you. Edli, I
14 apologize. I skipped you. I'm sorry. It's your turn.

15 MS. COLBERG: Well, I'm Edli Colberg with the
16 Health and Human Services Commission.

17 COURT REPORTER: I'm not getting your name.
18 I'm sorry.

19 MS. COLBERG: Oh, it's Edli, E-D-L-I,
20 Colberg --

21 COURT REPORTER: Thanks.

22 MS. COLBERG: -- with the Health and Human
23 Services Commission. This last year has been a very busy
24 year for the commission for the Office of Border Affairs

1 and for all other offices that have any programs that have
2 any impact on border populations. I'm going to give you a
3 few highlights.

4 At the Border Affairs office level, one of the
5 things that is being done right now, we are taking
6 advantage of the new technology in the area of geographic
7 information systems that is available. We are beginning
8 to track with a higher degree of accuracy the number of
9 clients that we serve through the variety of programs
10 under our system, in particular in colonia areas within
11 the border.

12 It's work that's being done now through our
13 division. I now work for the Border Affairs office, in a
14 research office under the Department of Strategic
15 Decisions Support. We have been using this graphic
16 information systems technology which takes advantage of
17 some information that has already been produced by
18 agencies like the Office of the Attorney General, the
19 Water Development Board, and so forth.

20 We are developing a capacity that we didn't
21 have before, which is to track client activity at the
22 colonia and other local community levels out on the
23 border. So we feel very good about that and we've made a
24 lot of progress in that area.

1 Agency-wide though there are a lot of new
2 programs and initiatives that apply statewide. You know,
3 they will be programs and initiatives that impact
4 populations across all areas, but in particular they will
5 have a greater impact I think on border populations and
6 border communities. These are programs that were created
7 in a manner that they leverage federal funds and to some
8 extent alleviate the consequence of having so much of the
9 health care that is provided through a variety of outlets
10 going uncompensated.

11 One of them, the program that works under our
12 larger Medicaid program that is known as the Women's
13 Health Waiver program. That program impacts the border
14 and border women in particular in a disproportionate
15 positive way in the sense that it sponsors health care
16 services including reproductive services for low income
17 women regardless of citizenship status.

18 One of our biggest problems before was that we
19 were using Medicaid dollars to pay for emergency birth to
20 women that were not citizens who had lacked adequate
21 prenatal care. So we had issues where we were covering
22 expensive births and expensive health care postpartum for
23 women who had not had prenatal care all over the state but
24 in particular along the border. With this new program, we

1 think we're going to be able to see a reduction in terms
2 of uncompensated care costs and negative health outcomes
3 for this particular population.

4 Another program, it's new and that also
5 leverages federal funding, is happening under the auspices
6 of the Children's Health Insurance Program, what we know
7 as CHIP. It's known as the CHIP Prenatal Program. This
8 program, which also applies to or includes -- it can be
9 used by lower income, non-citizen women -- targets the
10 unborn children of these women for prenatal care services.

11 So basically just about every woman out there
12 in the state of Texas, low income, should have access to
13 prenatal care services either under the auspices of
14 Medicaid or CHIP. So it's very important development.
15 These are new programs and they are already having an
16 impact.

17 I assume that in the future they'll have even a
18 greater impact because the enrollment is growing on a
19 monthly basis. Right now, under the Medicaid Women's
20 Health Waiver program, I think last month we had over
21 60,000 enrollees and that's growing by the thousands every
22 month right now. So the numbers are growing very
23 aggressively.

24 Related to health care and to the idea of

1 trying to reduce the costs of uncompensated care, Senator
2 Nelson passed Senate Bill 10. Senate Bill 10, the
3 implementation of it will have a good impact, I think, on
4 the border population. It's the bill that they know as
5 the Medicaid Reform Bill and it's a bill that components
6 of it, before they can be implemented, they will require
7 approval from the federal government from the centers for
8 Medicare and Medicaid services in particular.

9 One of the central features of that piece of
10 legislation is the creation of what is known as a Health
11 Opportunity Pool Trust Fund. Without going into the
12 technical details about how that trust fund will be
13 funded, essentially they will be able to lock monies that
14 come from two important funding streams that are in danger
15 of being lost -- these are federal funding streams -- lock
16 them into a program through a waiver. The waiver is a way
17 of ensuring that you get some monies to promote a
18 particular program.

19 This Health Opportunity Pool Trust Fund, all of
20 the funding that will be sitting there will be used to
21 provide health care premium subsidies for people who are
22 at risk of being uninsured or losing employer-sponsored
23 health insurance, or people that may have an opportunity
24 who are low income, their jobs don't pay a whole lot,

1 they're employed and their employers offer insurance but
2 they don't have enough money to contribute their share of
3 the premium that they are expected to pay.

4 So since we have such a big problem in terms of
5 uninsured populations along the border, especially adults
6 who at the moment are not covered by your safety net
7 programs to the extent that children and pregnant women
8 disability populations are. This program, if implemented,
9 if we are able to put it in place, will have a positive
10 impact on those populations and a big proportion of that
11 population right now resides along the border. So we see
12 lots of opportunities in terms of improving access to
13 health care programs if these programs are successful in
14 terms of the way they're implemented.

15 The last one involves the settlement of a major
16 lawsuit, that the agency was engaged in, involving
17 complaints about inadequate access to health care services
18 under Medicaid for children. That lawsuit was settled.
19 As a result of it, the state legislature gave us the
20 opportunity to increase funding for health care services
21 targeting children, many of them who are residents of
22 border counties and border communities. That level of
23 funding was raised by more than \$1 billion.

24 So we think that with all the outreach effort

1 that will go along with implementing the different
2 programs that are going to be happening under the auspices
3 of that Medicaid loss of settlement program that we will
4 see a lot of activity in terms of additional clients that
5 we will be offering services to along the border area.
6 That's sort of a synopsis of the major programs that I
7 think will have a disproportionate but positive impact on
8 border communities and populations, that are the result of
9 recent initiatives or recently passed legislation that
10 will be implemented over the course of the next few years.

11 MR. CASSO: Questions?

12 (No response.)

13 MR. CASSO: Helen will be right back so I guess
14 we can continue going around the table. Who would be
15 next? Larry?

16 MR. REED: I'm Larry Reed. I'm with the Public
17 Utility Commission. We oversee electricity and telephones
18 in the state of Texas. Telephones have not had any
19 activity that involved the border group, but the
20 electricity side has had some advances I'd like to report.

21 Since deregulation has occurred in Texas, the
22 whole setup of the electric grid in Texas has taken some
23 changes. Along the border area, it's been harder to be
24 able to move power into and out of Mexico on a moment's

1 notice.

2 And so, there are two new DC ties have come
3 about. They were, I guess, still in the planning stages
4 last year. One of them is in service now and one of them
5 will be in service before the end of the year. Those two
6 DC ties will allow large transfer of power across the
7 border. In fact, the one in Laredo is 100 megawatt
8 capacity and it has been used in an emergency situation to
9 both import power into Texas and to export power into
10 Mexico. Since that occurred, I think it became
11 operational in May and it's already been pressed into
12 service twice for emergency situations.

13 This is something that as we see that this
14 works well, some of these ties we would expect them -- in
15 fact, the one I think at Laredo, no the one at McAllen is
16 scheduled to be able to double in size if the need is
17 there. So that's something that we're looking forward to
18 in the future. For the time being, there are two of them.

19 One of them is 100 megawatts and one of them is 150
20 megawatts and that should allow a lot of power to cross
21 the border for commercial activity and for emergencies.

22 MR. CASSO: That's it?

23 MR. REED: Any questions?

24 MR. STEVENSON: Do you charge for the transfer

1 of power?

2 MR. REED: It's in the deregulated market. It
3 would be a commercial transaction between the countries as
4 far as power. We would regulate the amount of the cost
5 that's associated with the facilities in Texas, but we're
6 not involved in actually any of the negotiating of
7 commercial transactions across the border. The companies
8 are responsible for them.

9 MR. STEVENSON: It's completely free trade, no
10 tariff, no tax, just whatever the market rate is?

11 MR. REED: Yes, it's in the deregulated market.
12 It's just the market rates.

13 MR. STEVENSON: Interesting.

14 MR. REED: That works both ways.

15 MR. CASSO: I was reading, I mentioned to the
16 Texas-Mexico Strategic Investment Commission, we met
17 earlier this morning and I had mentioned to the group
18 something that I had read in yesterday's paper. I have
19 the article here. It's regarding what you were just
20 talking about, the power grid, and they were mentioning
21 that the Feds haven't ruled yet. So maybe you can explain
22 it. They were saying that the federal government gets
23 involved and may just completely change everything.

24 MR. REED: Well, Texas is the only state in the

1 United States that operates its own internal power grid.

2 MR. CASSO: It doesn't share it with anybody
3 else. Right?

4 MR. REED: We don't cross any borders with AC
5 ties. These ties where we're crossing into the Mexican
6 border, it's going across the DC ties. So it is able to
7 be blocked off. It only occurs when a transaction is
8 approved.

9 The way the Texas grid, the area out around El
10 Paso is in a grid that's tied to the western U.S., and the
11 Beaumont area going into Louisiana, and northeast area up
12 around Texarkana going up towards Arkansas, and then in
13 the Panhandle, the Amarillo area going north, those areas
14 have electric power that come in across the state
15 boundaries. About 85 percent of the state is part of the
16 Electric Reliability Council of Texas, ERCOT.

17 MR. CASSO: ERCOT, yes.

18 MR. REED: ERCOT is not subject to federal
19 jurisdiction. And so, you know, we handle our own rates.
20 Now, there are issues, obviously, with the federal
21 government in the fringes, but they don't control our day
22 to day electric operation within ERCOT.

23 There is some concern, although I'm not sure,
24 with the international trade obviously that FERC might be

1 able to exercise control over our exports to Mexico or our
2 imports from Mexico. At this point in time, I think
3 that's really the issue on the table that hasn't been
4 decided. I don't think, it's not going to open up free
5 trade if it's going to bring in additional control from
6 the federal government.

7 MR. CASSO: Okay. Does anyone else have any
8 questions or comments?

9 (No response.)

10 MR. CASSO: I guess we'll continue on with Mr.
11 Gus.

12 MR. DE LA ROSA: Okay. I'm Gus De La Rosa. I
13 work in the International Relations Office with TxDOT. I
14 guess we've been pretty busy this past year. There's a
15 whole lot of stuff that's going on at the border that we
16 kind of oversee and try to stay on top of. In my office,
17 there's six of us including myself and we kind of
18 distribute all the functions around the office.

19 What I'm going to try to do is just hit the
20 highlights of some of what I think are important, the most
21 significant things that we're doing. I don't recall or I
22 won't cover everything, but I do want to go over some
23 things.

24 First of all, I want to go over a few studies

1 that we do within TxDOT. Some of them are ongoing, and
2 some of them have been completed, and some are going to
3 start.

4 Right now, we're doing a study called the
5 Border Travel Delay Study. It's looking at all the
6 international crossings between Texas and Mexico and
7 trying to identify low-cost, high impact-type projects
8 that could be built within a short time frame, say within
9 the next two to five years, basically to facilitate the
10 flow of traffic along the border. I think this has been
11 going on for, I don't know, a year now I guess.
12 Hopefully, that should be done soon where they'll try to
13 identify one or two projects in our border districts for
14 each of the crossings that they could implement to
15 facilitate the border traffic.

16 Another study that we're contemplating and want
17 to do, and I mentioned it briefly this morning, is what we
18 call a Border Wait Time Study. We're looking at doing a
19 study in one of the crossings. Right now, it's down in
20 the Brownsville, Cameron County area, where we are looking
21 at commercial vehicle traffic to try to determine how long
22 is it taking a commercial vehicle to get across the
23 border. We want to look at it from the time it hits the
24 queue on the Mexican side to the time it actually gets

1 here from our border safety inspection facility on the
2 U.S. side, from the time delays and maybe the impact it
3 has on trade and things like that.

4 So right now, some of the issues are funding.
5 We have about \$60,000 that we have identified so far, but
6 in order to do a study like that, significantly for
7 timing, we'll probably need another 60,000 to 100,000
8 probably. We're trying to see what we can do with the
9 funds that we have. So we're working with the Texas
10 Transportation Institute to do a scope of work and try to
11 finalize that. We're hoping to kick that off in the next
12 six months.

13 There is a study that was just completed that
14 looked at NAFTA data as to what type of data do all the
15 transportation planners need to determine what kind of
16 damage Mexican commercial vehicles will do on our highway
17 system once they open up the border. So that study has
18 been completed and we're hoping to get the final report to
19 you within the next 60 days. A lot of it is real
20 technical stuff which our transportation planners can
21 interpret. I can't, but it's interesting to see it.

22 What we're trying to do is go out and identify
23 all the federal and state agencies that collect data on
24 commercial vehicles, identify what that is, identify what

1 our planners require, what's missing and how do we go
2 about getting that information. That's what this study
3 did.

4 Another study we're fixing to kick off, well it
5 started this month, we're looking at how Mexico does their
6 transportation planning. What is their process at
7 federal, state, and local levels? How do they get their
8 funding? How do they actually identify projects or
9 corridors, or even to build, how do they find those? What
10 type of public meetings do they hold to discuss those with
11 the populace? So that's being kicked off so that we can
12 better understand what their process is so that our
13 planners can also better know who to coordinate with, and
14 what their processes are, and everything. So we're really
15 excited about that one.

16 Another one is the Roma Suspension Bridge.
17 There in Roma there's a suspension bridge that is not
18 operational, but it needs to be worked on. They need to
19 go ahead and -- what is the word I'm trying to find --

20 MR. CASSO: Retrofit.

21 MR. DE LA ROSA: -- retrofit it. We've been
22 working on this since about the early 1990s. There have
23 been a lot of different issues that have come up. One of
24 them, of course, is funding. Mexico said they'd try to

1 come up with their share of what it's going to cost. They
2 did an estimate back in the early '90s of a little over \$2
3 million, 2.5, about 3 million. Our share was about 1.5
4 million. We had some monies that were earmarked for that,
5 but we haven't been able to use them because Mexico hasn't
6 been able to come with their portion of it.

7 That was in '94. Now, costs have gone up
8 tremendously. And so, there are additional costs that now
9 maybe the local government in the Roma area is going to
10 have to come up with that money. And so, there's been a
11 team working together to try to move this forward. So
12 that's another project that we've been trying to
13 accomplish.

14 MS. BORJA: Gus?

15 MR. DE LA ROSA: Yes?

16 MS. BORJA: Since we're on that subject, some
17 information that one of the declarations that the
18 Environment Work Table has is a request that EPA and FEMA
19 to monitor and reduce vehicle and commercial traffic
20 conditions on the ports of entry. In order to determine
21 impact of environment in our public health, the
22 information that's gathered will be a basis for decisions
23 made as to more efficient crossings. So that relationship
24 with your first study that you mentioned --

1 MR. DE LA ROSA: Yes, the time delays.

2 MS. BORJA: -- the effect of idling on the air
3 quality there. EPA is also talking about changing one of
4 its standards. If it does that, areas that were meeting
5 air quality standards may not meet it. We're watching
6 that very closely for particulate matter, which is one of
7 the problems there on the border crossings, fine dust.

8 MR. DE LA ROSA: Yes, our Environmental
9 Division is also monitoring that as well.

10 MS. BORJA: Okay.

11 MR. DE LA ROSA: Another project that we have
12 is our Border Technology Exchange Program. This is where
13 are able to work with our Mexican transportation
14 counterparts. We invite them over to visit with us, get
15 to know some of our technology, go to some of our
16 trainings and our conferences dealing with transportation.
17 Through this program, we have also established technology
18 transfer centers at the universities there in the Mexican
19 border states working with our Federal Highway
20 Administration office.

21 That program has worked very well. Over this
22 past year, we have had requests and we've been able to
23 provide to them visits to our different districts where
24 they might want to go look at a bridge to see how our

1 design of our bridge is, to maybe implement some of that
2 technology and those designs that we have here.

3 We're working with them on a program now to
4 coordinate a visit to our Pharr district. They want to
5 come and visit to discuss bridge designs. They are
6 planning on building a half a dozen or ten new bridges in
7 the state. So they want to come in and talk to our bridge
8 engineers on a specific design. So that's what we do
9 there.

10 We also handle a lot of foreign visitors. We
11 just had an individual from Israel. We're coordinating a
12 visitor from China who will come next month. We do this
13 throughout the year. And then, we also coordinate visits
14 from State of Coahuila. Some individuals want to come
15 down and visit, and see some of our maintenance and our
16 equipment that we use to determine the status of our
17 pavement and things like that.

18 We're also building the Border Safety
19 Inspection facilities in some of our crossings for
20 commercial vehicles. Right now, the one in Roma, the
21 Bridge of the Americas, is being completed and is
22 operational. The one in Ysleta, I think, is pretty close
23 to being done if it's not already completed. Both of
24 those are in El Paso. The other six are in the different

1 phases of the process of environmental and public
2 hearings, but we're hoping to have them all done by the
3 year 2010.

4 I mentioned the --

5 MS. HITZFELDER: Can I interject here?

6 MR. DE LA ROSA: Yes.

7 MS. HITZFELDER: I have a comment. All of
8 these crossings have safety inspection temporary stations.
9 The inspections are happening. It's just that the
10 permanent facilities aren't finished.

11 MR. DE LA ROSA: Yes, there were temporary
12 facilities built, giving operations for the past two or
13 three years, while the permanent facilities were being
14 constructed.

15 In 1999, 2000, TxDOT committed something like
16 \$1.8 million for funds along the Texas-Mexico border. As
17 of 2006, I think they had already contracted \$1.4 million,
18 but apparently the overall cost, because of the cost of
19 materials and all that, is now estimated, that 1.8
20 estimate that was done is now 2.9 million. The commission
21 is still committed to complete all of those projects. So
22 they're working on getting it done through some other
23 financing and other methods.

24 MS. ESCALANTE: Gus, pardon me, what year was

1 it when the 1.8 was estimated?

2 MR. DE LA ROSA: In 1999.

3 MS. ESCALANTE: Okay, thank you.

4 MS. GONZALEZ: As far as a road paving through
5 the access program, will there be a third call?

6 MR. DE LA ROSA: I understand there will be,
7 but I don't believe it's yet. I know we inquired on that
8 about a month or so ago, but I really didn't get an update
9 for this. When that's going to happen, I don't know. We
10 can follow up on that for you.

11 And then, we also participate in a number of
12 bi-national committees. There's a U.S.-Mexico joint
13 working committee that looks at the U.S.-Mexico border on
14 transportation issues that are impacting the border. We
15 sit on that committee. And then, you have the Federal
16 Highway Administration who are the co-chairs along with
17 their counterpart, the SET in Mexico City, plus all ten
18 U.S.-Mexico border states participate in that, as well as
19 CBT and GSA, General Services Administration. They're
20 building the federal facilities.

21 There's the bi-national bridges and borders
22 group that looks at all the 16 proposed border crossings.

23 We've also participate in that and we coordinate, we
24 participate in that, and we address those issues that deal

1 with new crossings, the funding, the staffing, and trying
2 to get the process completed to get them.

3 MR. CASSO: When is that creating committee
4 going to meet again, Gus?

5 MR. DE LA ROSA: Well, we met in Laredo in
6 early February, I believe. It was a regional meeting
7 where we only discussed the bridges in Texas border with
8 Mexico where there are crossings. Prior to that, we were
9 having two meetings a year where we would alternate, one
10 in Mexico, one in the U.S., where we would discuss all the
11 crossings.

12 So they're going to a regional format. And
13 then, I think they're also having a whole meeting for all
14 the states once a year as well, but they're trying to get
15 more into the regional aspects. So when they go and
16 discuss California, the five California crossings, you
17 know, we don't have to go over there to those.

18 Let's see. I guess another big program that we
19 have is the CBI monies, CBI funds, the Coordinating Border
20 Infrastructure fund. Texas received an earmark of \$200
21 million based on a formula for these CBI monies. Those
22 monies are specifically for projects along the U.S.-Mexico
23 border. Based on that formula, Texas was given 200
24 million. And then, we distributed those monies to our

1 three border districts to once again fund and conduct
2 projects on the border. So that's been a tremendous asset
3 for our border communities.

4 Those are kind of the major things that are
5 ongoing within TxDOT. Of course, there's the
6 establishment of the Regional Mobility Authorities down on
7 the border. There's one in Hidalgo and one in Cameron
8 County. And then, the city of Harlingen-San Benito I
9 think also has a -- no, those are MPOs. I'm sorry. The
10 RMAs are Hidalgo County and Cameron County. And then, you
11 mentioned also this morning about the one in Presidio that
12 we're trying to get going.

13 MR. CASSO: Yes, have they met with you all
14 regarding all that?

15 MR. DE LA ROSA: I met them briefly. I don't
16 know if they met with our commission yet or our
17 administrator. They probably have, but I personally met
18 with them briefly at a transportation conference that we
19 had here, last month I think, a month and a half ago, here
20 in Austin.

21 MS. ESCALANTE: All right.

22 MR. DE LA ROSA: Anything else, Esther, that
23 might be of interest?

24 MS. HITZFELDER: I don't know.

1 MR. DE LA ROSA: Those are just some of the
2 highlights. There is a whole bunch of stuff, but I didn't
3 bring my things to do list. So I don't know.

4 MS. ESCALANTE: No, but thank you for that
5 update. We have the wonderful presence of our secretary
6 here, who comes to say, hello. Some of you got a chance
7 to meet him this morning, but we didn't want to let this
8 opportunity go by without him getting to meet you since we
9 rely so much on you guys for information and you are just
10 wonderful to work with. So do you want to say, hi?

11 MR. WILSON: Hi.

12 MS. ESCALANTE: Thank you. Go ahead.

13 MR. WILSON: Thank you very much for being here
14 today. Some of you have already heard me give this spiel
15 so I apologize for having to go through it again. We have
16 two unique things happening today with the Texas-Mexico
17 Strategic Investment Commission meeting this morning which
18 about half of you were part of and now we're rolling into
19 this for the Border Interagency Work Group.

20 In some ways, they're complementary. In other
21 ways, they have very diverse charges. And so, what I
22 would like to see happen out of today is that the
23 complementary functions we can not have to replicate over
24 and over again, that we try to get on one sheet of music

1 so to speak to work with those issues where there are ties
2 between these two.

3 In this interagency work group, this has a
4 unique charge also by the legislature. I view the
5 Strategic Investment Commission as being really focussed
6 on Texas and Mexico and how we go about a collaborative
7 environment to enhance the border and also our state and
8 Mexico. In my mind, the Border Interagency Work Group is
9 much more focussed on Texas citizens and the service that
10 we deliver there, things we pay for, and making sure that
11 we're bringing the best value for our tax dollars to
12 people of our state, and also that we don't duplicate, and
13 replicate, and step all over each other because we're not
14 aware. So, truly, this is a communication function more
15 than anything else.

16 As I said this morning for the Investment
17 Commission, it would be really great if we'd have kind of
18 a master document for the interagency work group. That
19 way, we can understand your key challenges and issues, and
20 they may be the same. I heard some TCEQ and TxDOT
21 environmental issues that may bleed over to each other, to
22 make sure that they're complementary once again, because
23 you have some specific charges you have to do
24 legislatively, yes, as TxDOT, and there can be some

1 leverage points where we can work together.

2 So what I'd like to have happen out of this is
3 kind of a wish list, for your wish list as agencies as it
4 relates to the border and the charges you have, and how we
5 go about understanding those. I think number 4 on here on
6 our agenda items, "consider the effect of policies
7 instituted by the federal government impacting the border
8 region," whether it's water, or colonia, or other issues
9 that you touch here, please understand those and that we
10 have a strategic game plan that we're all working together
11 in concert with our commissions or our respective elected
12 officials or appointees.

13 So that's kind of my vision of where we need to
14 go. I appreciate everybody's hard work. This can be a
15 very empowering and can-do thing, and it's all about
16 execution with this group. I don't like to meet just to
17 meet. I worked with Stacie for probably more than 12
18 years off and on so she knows that about me. I think we
19 have an opportunity to make a difference in what we're
20 trying to do.

21 I didn't do this, this morning, but I'm going
22 to now before I step out. Does anybody have any questions
23 about kind of what we're trying to do philosophically or
24 mechanically in this process?

1 (No response.)

2 MR. WILSON: Sometimes, you just want to meet
3 to meet and that's not good. So I want to make sure if
4 there are any questions about when we're going to try to
5 meet, hopefully in the next six months to a year.

6 (No response.)

7 MR. WILSON: Great. Well, you all keep up the
8 great work. I know we're going to try to do this again
9 very soon, but I want to have actionable items that we can
10 go do and a plan to go do them. I don't like white
11 papers. I don't like talking about it.

12 If we're going to take some trips to Mexico for
13 the Investment Commission, some of these things will lead
14 over into that process also, but we'll get a great team
15 with Helen and Alfonso, and Richard Martinez has just
16 joined us. We're making a difference and this is a big
17 part of our state. It's our largest trading partner.

18 We do things right down there, we -- you know
19 the old line about when Texas gets a cold, Mexico gets
20 pneumonia, it's true. And so, there are a lot of things
21 that we do that impact our border area can either be very
22 positive or very negative depending on what we do here.
23 So thank you all very much. I appreciate it.

24 MS. ESCALANTE: Thank you for coming.

1 (Pause.)

2 MS. ESCALANTE: All right. Do you want to
3 continue with the updates?

4 MR. RUIZ: Yes, Robert Ruiz with the Water
5 Development Board. Recently, we had some rule changes to
6 our Economic [indiscernible] program. That's going to
7 allow us some more flexibility to work with communities
8 that don't necessarily cross the I's and dot the t's when
9 they're applying for funding with us. It doesn't allow
10 colonia proliferation, but it gives them a chance, a 90-
11 day window, to kind of get their act together.

12 The state legislature approved \$750 million in
13 state water plan funding for us. That's going to be
14 statewide based on the statewide water plans that are
15 available. Also, there's a \$250 million statewide
16 referendum, constitutional item number 16. So that goes
17 to the voters on November 6. We're hoping that gets
18 approved.

19 Out of that \$87 million, we already have the
20 debt service issue coming in beating up on us for that.
21 So that's in a nutshell what we have.

22 MS. ESCALANTE: That's a lot, absolutely. Cam?

23 MR. BELL: I'm Cameron Bell with the Texas
24 Workforce Commission and I apologize. I haven't been in

1 this venue for quite some time and I found out at the
2 eleventh hour yesterday that I was going to be attending.

3 Anyway, I didn't put anything together for you
4 in particular. And so, I can't address anything
5 spectacular that's happened over the past year other than
6 to tell you that we do outreach in the border areas
7 through our Workforce Centers and our Workforce
8 Development Boards to provide employment services as well
9 as adult services under WIA, the Workforce Investment Act.

10 In addition, we have outreach to the employers
11 in the area and we try to make sure that we have a good
12 interface with them, as well as making sure that we've got
13 the people who are looking for jobs rounded up. We
14 identify the target occupations that are going to be the
15 most beneficial to not only the employers, but matching up
16 the people who are looking for jobs.

17 Finally, we manage a program called the Senior
18 Community Services Employment Program. Under that, there
19 is something that impresses older workers, but one of the
20 things that we focus on are barriers to employment that
21 older workers might be facing. One of those is language.

22 And so, we're very sensitive to that and we work
23 diligently to try to make sure that we make sure that
24 services provided are available evenly across the board to

1 all the seniors. That's really all I have now.

2 MS. ESCALANTE: That's great, thank you.

3 MS. FOWLER: I am Stacie Fowler with the
4 Railroad Commission, which is a very misleading title for
5 an agency. We do absolutely nothing with railroads any
6 longer. Back in 2005, what limited rail safety duties we
7 had were transferred to TxDOT and I can't tell you how
8 wonderful it is to tell people that. I don't need to hear
9 people complain about blocked crossings and trains blowing
10 their horns early in the morning.

11 MR. DE LA ROSA: I'll pass that on to those
12 people.

13 MS. FOWLER: In any case, we do regulate the
14 oil and gas industry, the exploration and production of
15 natural gas and crude oil. We regulate that aspect from
16 the wellhead to the refinery gate. We regulate pipelines,
17 pipeline safety of those pipelines within the state of
18 Texas, and for those pipelines that have non-refined
19 products of oil and natural gas, we also have the
20 environmental responsibility for those pipes.

21 In addition, we regulate the surface mining of
22 lignite and uranium and coal in the state of Texas. We
23 also, something that is new -- it's relatively new in the
24 state of Texas, mainly because of a renewed interest in

1 the product -- is the exploration of uranium. It has
2 ceased to be a cost effective manner to surface mine for
3 uranium and they do something they call in situ mining,
4 which is like they drill wells and kind of flush the
5 uranium up with water, which also can be a contentious
6 issue, which I am happy to send people to the TCEQ because
7 they regulate the in situ mining but we do regulate those
8 exploratory wells that are drilled.

9 That is something that is kind of picking up in
10 south Texas. Uranium used to be mined mainly out of
11 Canada and they had some flooding issues up there. And
12 the price of -- they call it yellow powder --
13 significantly went up, which made it of great interest to
14 folks in south Texas. So we worked a lot this past
15 session with Representative Yvonne Gonzales Toureilles in
16 getting some more newer updated legislation to help us
17 regulate some of those aspects of that industry.

18 You know, anybody who buys any kind of natural
19 gas product or petroleum product recognizes that it is
20 significantly higher than it was three years ago. That
21 has caused the industry to become very, very active in the
22 state of Texas. Texas does have a significant amount of
23 oil and a whole lot of natural gas.

24 One of the biggest plays, fields, in the

1 country, however, is up in the Fort Worth area called the
2 Barnett Shale. So we have been doubling and tripling the
3 drilling permits from what we used to do ten years ago,
4 five years ago. So that's kept us really, really busy.
5 Again, there's more activity in south Texas, but not
6 nearly like what we're seeing up in the Fort Worth area.

7 We continue to have a very active program in
8 plugging and remediating abandoned sites, abandoned wells.

9 There's a lot of historic activity on the border so we
10 frequently, through the Cleanup Fund which is a program at
11 the agency, will go out and work in abandoned wells and
12 clean up old, abandoned sites.

13 I think the most recent project dealing with
14 the border and Mexico would be Commissioner Carrillo's
15 trade delegation that he takes annually to Mexico City.
16 I've not gotten invited to that yet. So I'm working on
17 it.

18 MS. ESCALANTE: Did you go?

19 MS. FOWLER: No, not at all, no.

20 MS. ESCALANTE: Folks from the Office of the
21 Governor are the ones that put it together and go on a
22 yearly basis.

23 MS. FOWLER: In any case --

24 MS. ESCALANTE: Pardon me, but the secretary

1 did go.

2 MS. FOWLER: -- that apparently is very
3 successful also. I can't really point to any specific
4 projects we have going on the border right now. A lot of
5 production is down there and it gets equal attention
6 because of it.

7 MS. ESCALANTE: Okay, thank you.

8 MS. GONZALEZ: Do you want to go last?

9 MS. ESCALANTE: No, go on.

10 MS. GONZALEZ: Okay. Well, in the Colonia
11 Initiatives Program, we are happy to report that we're
12 adding an ombudsman to Nueces County. We're in the hiring
13 process. So we're very pleased and excited to be
14 assisting Nueces County with the colonia issues and
15 bringing additional services to Nueces County.

16 MR. RUIZ: Ombudsperson.

17 MS. GONZALEZ: I'm sorry, ombudsperson, thank
18 you.

19 MS. ESCALANTE: Oh, that's right. Thank you
20 for pointing that out.

21 MS. GONZALEZ: Thank you.

22 MS. ESCALANTE: Yes, exactly.

23 MS. GONZALEZ: Again, we're really pleased and
24 we're also hoping that, we completed, I guess our magnum

1 opus was the SB 827 report that thanks to the agencies
2 involved here, we put together a report per SB 827 and SB
3 99 updated that. So we're going to be looking at adding
4 additional state agencies to our work group, again just
5 for the effort of collecting data on the efforts and the
6 services out in colonias, tracking population and trying
7 to identify those colonias with the highest risk so that
8 we can work on providing them with the services, whether
9 it's their need of water, wastewater, electricity, or
10 planning.

11 So we're going to be looking to see if we can
12 collect data on additional counties. The first report, we
13 were only able to collect data on the six counties next to
14 the border and we're looking to expand perhaps to 13
15 counties, and eventually the 23 and the 32 that make up
16 EDAP. Anyway, that's going to be a challenge and we're
17 looking forward to continuing our partnership with the
18 agencies involved, again, a really big thank you to all of
19 you for helping us.

20 That has been our priority, I guess. Our
21 ombudsman assisted a little with Operation Lone Star.
22 They assist with the coordination. They have meetings out
23 there along the border with their stakeholders and again
24 try to work to complete projects. We're always looking

1 for partnerships and ways that we can improve the living
2 conditions in colonias. So that's why I asked lots of
3 questions. Do you have grant money?

4 So, anyway, are there any questions?

5 (No response.)

6 MS. GONZALEZ: That's, in a nutshell, what
7 we've been up to.

8 MS. ESCALANTE: I just want to say, just going
9 back tagging onto Operation Lone Star, do you want to just
10 let them know what the role of our ombudsman is?

11 MS. GONZALEZ: Sure. In general or just
12 Operation Lone Star?

13 MS. ESCALANTE: Well actually, in general just
14 in case -- pardon me, our ombudsperson -- in general, but
15 also specifically to Lone Star so that they can understand
16 better what the joint effort is.

17 MS. GONZALEZ: Okay. Our ombudspersons are
18 advocates. So they're coordinators. Their main job is
19 just to coordinate with the stakeholders, with the local
20 counties, with non-profits, with state and federal
21 agencies.

22 So in respect to Operation Lone Star, they
23 bring together the school districts and try to get buses
24 to go in and pick up colonia residents to bring them to

1 the sites. They also work in getting outreach to the
2 colonias and information to the residents. So they are
3 facilitators. They are mediators. They are coordinators.
4 They wear many hats. Again, for an agency, our program
5 does not have funds, but we bring together those with
6 resources so that we can get them out to the residents in
7 colonias.

8 MS. MARTINEZ: I have a comment. The reason we
9 like to work with *promotoras* and we fund that a lot is
10 because when we go out to colonias they're scared of us.
11 A lot of them are illegal. They think we're going to
12 report them to immigration, but when you have a *promotora*
13 who goes and helps you do your work, you get a lot more
14 response in the colonia. So that's why we like for them
15 to come with us.

16 MS. ESCALANTE: Very good. That makes sense.
17 Diana?

18 MS. BORJA: Well, we have staff in all our
19 border field offices. Our border field offices for TCEQ
20 are Harlingen, Laredo, and El Paso. We have Border
21 Affairs staff there, which has been very helpful for us
22 because our goal is on-the-ground projects. We can go
23 years and years and years with meeting, but we need on-
24 the-ground projects that do help the communities.

1 What we have is our program named Border 2012.
2 It's a state, federal, local program. So if you can
3 envision the 100 kilometers either way from the border, we
4 have state, federal, and local committees. So let's see,
5 you have a water committee, air, water, or waste,
6 environmental health and environmental education, and
7 emergency preparedness and compliance assistance. These
8 committees are very ground up and they've already begun.
9 The first phase was to identify the environmental problems
10 they had.

11 So, for example, you have the emergency
12 preparedness people identifying their problems. So we
13 have a list of the issues that they consider a priority in
14 the area from Falcon down to the mouth of the river. We
15 have another group that's in the Laredo-Nuevo Laredo, San
16 Benito, Hidalgo, Nuevo Leon, and Zapata County and the
17 other counties. And then, there's another group that's
18 Eagle Pass-Piedras Negras, Del Rio-Ciudad Acuna.

19 So we are getting ground up priorities from the
20 municipal standpoint, state, and federal. We have already
21 had some successful projects that have occurred. The list
22 is just really good and interesting. One other thing is
23 from that area that's New Mexico, Chihuahua, West Texas,
24 we have another big section, but we have now formed a

1 rural task force of Eastern Chihuahua and West Texas
2 because you know how it is, you put anything together
3 where El Paso is involved, we take over, and West Texas
4 gets no attention. Ojinaga, Presidio, all of that, they
5 get no attention.

6 So we now have a rural task force and they are
7 going to be meeting soon. The co-chairs of the task force
8 are Judge Agan, County Judge Agan, and the mayor of
9 Ojinaga, to also work on air, water, emergency
10 preparedness, all of those topics, and tell us what the
11 priorities are there.

12 There is funding that goes with this from EPA
13 called Border 2012 funding. It's not a whole lot, but it
14 is there. So that is taking up most of our time.

15 The other thing that is very important to have
16 this going is that since the municipal time for the
17 Mexican cities is three years -- I think in Chihuahua and
18 Coahuila it's four years, but for the rest of the cities
19 it's three years -- you have the possibility of all the
20 staff leaving and they're starting from scratch. So we
21 need to be sure that the technical ability stays at the
22 same level. So that's very important to stay real close
23 to that.

24 The other declaration for the Border Governor's

1 conference is in order to deal with issues relating to
2 scrap tires, their management and final disposal or life
3 cycle, we've proposed the development of markets for their
4 use, scrap tire markets, and the implementation of the
5 necessary programs.

6 What we have is that there are a lot of U.S.
7 tires -- and when I say U.S., I'm not only talking Texas;
8 they can trace them from New York, Michigan, all over --
9 tires that are at the tail end of their life span, they're
10 taken to Mexico and sold there. Of course, they don't
11 last very long. And so, what you have is huge tire piles
12 in their landfills, legal and illegal. That is a big
13 problem. If it even catches fire, both sides are hurting.

14 EPA has spent a lot of money to reduce some of
15 the size of those tire piles in Tijuana and El Paso, but
16 we have sporadic. You can drive up and down the border,
17 up and down the Valley, and you'll see tire piles. So we
18 want to work on developing more markets for that. There
19 are many health problems related to tire piles.

20 The Mexicans would want us to post people on
21 the border crossings to make sure that these tires are not
22 taken over there. Of course, that can't be done. We
23 can't do that. I mean, TCEQ can't get on the border
24 crossings since September 11 unless we're armed. None of

1 us are armed at TCEQ. One of the state reps tried to get
2 us to be on the border crossings for another reason, not
3 tire piles.

4 Anyway California is funding a program to try
5 to reduce the amount of those tires that are getting to
6 the Mexican side because they have the most dangerous
7 situation, the biggest tire piles. You're talking about
8 millions and millions and millions of tires. If you ever
9 get to see one of those tire piles, you think, my gosh,
10 it's as big as that building over there. It's enormous.
11 It's just enormous, those things.

12 We do have a program that we're working on. We
13 have worked with the markets on the Mexican side,
14 particularly taking tires to the Monterey industries that
15 are using them for fuel and other reasons. We have
16 reduced the tire piles on the border on our side quite a
17 bit, particularly in Del Rio, Eagle Pass, and parts of
18 Laredo, but we need to do a lot more because we still have
19 a lot of tires coming in like I said from the northern
20 United States all over, down to here, onto the Mexican
21 side and then just being dumped there, if they're not used
22 very long.

23 MS. ESCALANTE: Diana?

24 MS. BORJA: Yes?

1 MS. ESCALANTE: One question, sometime ago, I
2 remember, it was either you or somebody else from TCEQ --
3 it may have been back during Commissioner Marquez --
4 talking about scrap tires being used as fuel for cement
5 kilns.

6 MS. BORJA: Yes.

7 MS. ESCALANTE: Is that still going on?

8 MS. BORJA: Yes.

9 MS. ESCALANTE: Oh, okay. So you're looking at
10 other uses?

11 MS. BORJA: Oh, yes. Eagle Pass got a grant
12 from EPA to tell the people in the community, bring all
13 your tires over here, and they did. They are sending them
14 to, I think that Monterey said that they wanted them. Of
15 course, one of the big barriers of doing this, the biggest
16 cost, is the transportation cost of the tires.

17 The other thing, that reminds me, that we have
18 going on, and EPA and ourselves are working on it, and so
19 is the Mexican counterpart to EPA, SEMARNAP --that's their
20 acronym, in Nuevo Laredo there is a pilot project of Nuevo
21 Laredo advertising to the community and making it a
22 community thing to bring their household hazardous waste.

23 And so, you wouldn't believe how much stuff they got that
24 they collected. They are taking it for proper disposal.

1 EPA, Bill Flores of EPA, he's from Laredo,
2 would like to start such programs all along the border,
3 both sides. Household hazardous waste is a big problem.
4 He'd even like to advertise it as a toxic free zone. As
5 you all know, the border is considered the cesspool of the
6 world or of the United States. Unfortunately, people who
7 live there live in the dirtiest place in the world, or at
8 least the country.

9 Unfortunately, that general belief even goes to
10 the ridiculous. The communities on this side have, most
11 have superior drinking water systems on this side. Yet,
12 you'll find that most people buy bottled water. They go
13 to that expense because they really do not believe they
14 have clean water in their houses, my family being one of
15 them. I can't convince them, you don't have to do that.

16 Your bottled water which you get out of your
17 bottles, that's regulated by FDA. The EPA standards are a
18 little stricter on drinking water. So to start something
19 that talks about a toxic free zone is very interesting to
20 me and we'd like to join with EPA on trying to get that
21 going.

22 MS. ESCALANTE: All right, very good. Thank
23 you.

24 MR. DE LA ROSA: I just want to mention really

1 quickly that TxDOT has a big scrap tire program. Each
2 year, we give this report and we work with TCEQ in trying
3 to eliminate these piles and piles of tires that are
4 stored all over the state. I know that this gentleman we
5 were mentioning during lunch that used to work with me in
6 El Paso --

7 MS. BORJA: Oh, Jorge.

8 MR. DE LA ROSA: -- Jorge Castillo, he tried to
9 initiate a program a couple of years ago where they put
10 together this group where they were trying to do some
11 follow up, but then he left and it kind of just died.
12 There was some interest on the Mexican side on trying to
13 put together some sort of a program to look at this issue.
14 It is a problem. It is a big problem. You know, we all
15 use tires, replace them, and we pay \$2 or whatever it is
16 that they charge us to dispose of them, but they're
17 getting piled somewhere.

18 Of course, we also use scrap tire to do some of
19 our paving. It's a little bit more expensive, but I know
20 the El Paso district has a pretty good program on that.
21 So we're working and trying to help that issue.

22 MS. BORJA: Yes. In some border crossings,
23 bridges, the aduana is very aware of this and active in
24 this. In Laredo, one of our staff, using a TCEQ van, was

1 going to Nuevo Laredo for a meeting. You know how those
2 vans have the tires in the back. It was a tire that was
3 in pretty bad shape and so the aduana did not let him
4 cross as long as he had that tire on the van because they
5 just knew that he was going to sell it. Of course,
6 there's no way, but we were very glad to see that, on the
7 other hand, that the aduana is a little more on top of it
8 to stop those bad, at the tail end of their life, tires
9 from crossing.

10 MR. CASSO: Texas doesn't have the problem that
11 California does, right, where they dumped them in the
12 ocean?

13 MR. DE LA ROSA: We don't have an ocean. We
14 can put them in the river.

15 MR. CASSO: Well, you know, to keep them,
16 because California, they've really got a problem over
17 there with all these tires that ended up in the ocean.

18 MR. DE LA ROSA: Well, I'm sure that somebody
19 can dump their tires down there.

20 MR. MARTINEZ: Just put a rope on them and hang
21 them off trees or something for the kids.

22 MR. DE LA ROSA: Then we'd have problems with
23 trees, but it is a big issue, you know.

24 MS. ESCALANTE: Your best guess is, we're

1 talking on a yearly basis, that how many tires get
2 discarded?

3 MR. DE LA ROSA: We provide a report each year.
4 It's called the scrap tire report or something. It's on
5 our website. If you'd like, I will tender that to you
6 after the meeting. It identifies how many tires were used
7 for the asphalt, and how many were used for the year, and
8 where they're stockpiled in the state of Texas.

9 MS. ESCALANTE: Yes, I'd be interested to see
10 that, please.

11 MR. DE LA ROSA: Our GSD does that.

12 MS. ESCALANTE: Pardon me?

13 MR. DE LA ROSA: Our General Services Division
14 does that report.

15 MS. ESCALANTE: Oh, okay.

16 MR. MENDOZA: I'm Steve Mendoza from ORCA. As
17 you all are aware 12.5 percent of our funds that we get
18 from HUD are defined and routed directly to the border.
19 The HUD requires up to 10 percent be used for colonias and
20 the state legislature added another 2.5 percent to that.
21 The 2.5 percent goes to Robb, but the remaining 10 percent
22 that we have goes out to various funds. We have colonia
23 funds that include colonia planning, infrastructure, and
24 then we have our regular community development grants that

1 every community that's not entitlement -- eligible for.
2 In many cases, you see a lot of these funds on the border
3 going to help colonias as well.

4 MR. CASSO: colonias?

5 MR. MENDOZA: colonias, we're known for that.
6 Just about everything we do goes to colonias, but you know
7 that's the same old, same old.

8 One of the things that I'm working on now is to
9 try to come up with a tracking system for colonias that's
10 based on a JS coordinate system. While it's nice to have
11 the wonderful 100 kilometers, our program allows us to
12 track colonias to 150 miles from the border, but we've
13 also created a non-border colonia fund as well.

14 What we're going to attempt to do is set up a
15 system that will allow us to pick up numerous specifics
16 for each colonia and then the people that go out -- we
17 actually do a site visit to each one of the contracts, or
18 each one of the projects that we fund -- they will take a
19 GPS system or unit and actually hit the perimeter of the
20 colonia to get an exact area for it.

21 So this is something kind of new. We're going
22 to see how it works. We're going to have a guy in house
23 write all the code for it and see if we can come up with a
24 database model that may be able to be used in other

1 places, but for the most part, we're here to help.

2 MR. CASSO: That was 12 percent of what?

3 MR. MENDOZA: Well, we get an allotment from
4 HUD every year. It's been as high as 87 million. Right
5 now, we're about 74 million. So each year, depending on
6 where the dollars go in the federal government and what
7 HUD gets through the budget, we get a little piece of it.

8 So it fluctuates considerably. For the last four or five
9 years, it has been a downward trend, dropping in excess of
10 \$10 million, but this year we went up about 200,000 or
11 250,000 so at least we're holding ground.

12 MR. CASSO: How much was the amount again?

13 MR. MENDOZA: Pardon me?

14 MR. CASSO: How much was the amount?

15 MR. MENDOZA: For?

16 MR. CASSO: For the whole HUD funding, I'm
17 sorry.

18 MR. MENDOZA: It's between 74 million and it's
19 been as high as like 87 million-and-change, but at least
20 our downward slope has kind of come to a halt. So
21 hopefully, depending on how things go in the war, maybe
22 we'll be able to see an increase in funding in years to
23 come.

24 MR. CASSO: Okay, thank you.

1 MS. ESCALANTE: Any questions?

2 (No response.)

3 MR. STEVENSON: My name is Robb Stevenson.

4 Again, I'm a manager of the Office of Colonia Initiatives
5 Division of the Texas Department of Housing and Community
6 Affairs. We have two major programs. One is what Steve
7 just alluded to. It's our colonia Self-Help Center
8 program. That's funded from a 2.5 percent setaside of the
9 same 70 or 80-odd million that Steve just described.

10 With that, we operate seven centers all up and
11 down the border from El Paso to Brownsville. In the
12 centers, we run various activities. They're four-year
13 contracts. We have tool-lending libraries where colonia
14 residents can come and check out tools with which they can
15 go back and help to consolidate their homes. We have
16 construction classes, home ownership classes.

17 We also offer various kinds of grants and
18 loans. We do home ownership down payment assistance types
19 of grants. We also do, the majority of our money at the
20 Self-Help Centers is probably for housing rehab, some
21 reconstruction. We even, through non-profits, do some new
22 housing construction.

23 And then, our other major program is the Texas
24 Bootstrap Program. That's funded through general revenue

1 bond funds. We're just about to a NOFA fund for \$6.5
2 million next month.

3 We're excited about that in one special way.
4 That is that we're changing the way that we distribute the
5 money. We're no longer taking applications. What we're
6 doing is we're basically prequalifying folks and then
7 having it be on a reservation system. We'll let them
8 reserve funds that will let them be able to build or rehab
9 up to ten homes at a time.

10 We're really hoping that this will move funds.

11 Instead of non-profits -- just to back up a little bit, a
12 lot of non-profits and even counties will apply for a lot
13 of funds and then shelve money. They'll just move whoever
14 is yelling at them at a time. That's a problem because we
15 need to move money in order to be able to ask for more
16 money.

17 And so, this is a system where we're only going
18 to let them move a little bit at a time and they're going
19 to have to come to us whenever they're through with what
20 they're using. So they're not going to be able to take
21 500,000 and shelve it. They're going to have to be able
22 to move 50,000 at a time essentially.

23 We're looking forward to that. We've expanded
24 to the whole state. There is a two-thirds setaside of

1 that, in this case, \$6 million allocation that will go to
2 the border area.

3 MS. ESCALANTE: Any questions?

4 (No response.)

5 MS. ESCALANTE: We have one new face. Who are
6 you?

7 MR. VALENZUELA: I'm Gabe Valenzuela. I
8 represent House Commission on Border and International
9 Affairs.

10 MS. ESCALANTE: Oh, hi, Gabe, welcome. We've
11 only spoken over the phone. Thank you for coming. Would
12 you like to sit over here?

13 MR. VALENZUELA: No, I'm fine.

14 MS. ESCALANTE: Do you have any updates or any
15 questions for us? Would you mind coming over so that your
16 voice can be recorded?

17 MR. VALENZUELA: Not at all. I'm just here to
18 learn what I can.

19 MS. ESCALANTE: Okay, great. Well, thank you
20 all for your updates. As the secretary said, his approach
21 to this group is definitely one of action and
22 productivity. What we're going to do is definitely take
23 this. Thank God we have a court reporter who will give us
24 a transcript of this group.

1 And then, we will send you, definitely a
2 transcript so that you can have it for your records, but
3 also remember, for those of you that were here last year,
4 we send out a survey that you were kind enough to fill in
5 and then send back to us. We will add a few things to
6 that survey this year so that it can be updated.

7 The survey will run you through this, but if
8 you could also let us know what are the main points that
9 you want to highlight, let's just say your bragging
10 projects, and then what are some goals, some challenges,
11 that you can identify, and then what are some steps that
12 you need to take in order to reach those goals or overcome
13 those challenges. That would be great. Also, if there is
14 any help that we as Secretary of State can provide to make
15 that happen or to take those projects to completion,
16 please count on us, and we would also like to know if that
17 is the case.

18 Does anybody else have any questions? I think
19 we're running a little bit early, but if that's okay with
20 everybody, we can just wait for questions and then we're
21 done.

22 MS. GONZALEZ: Helen, there is one thing that I
23 forgot to mention.

24 MS. ESCALANTE: Sure, absolutely.

1 MS. GONZALEZ: I wanted to see if I could
2 coordinate with Maria and with Esther and Gus because we
3 have found out in El Cenizo, we have a little issue where
4 they received a grant from Texas Parks and Wildlife to
5 develop a park that they've been wanting for years, and it
6 turns out that the land or the area that was designated
7 for the park, it cannot be developed because there is some
8 drainage going through there that was paid for by the
9 TxDOT Colonia Road-Paving Access Program.

10 The county went ahead, I guess, and just put
11 drainage and pipes in through the area that would be the
12 park because it hadn't been developed just yet. And so,
13 anyway, we may have to look at, okay, funds have already
14 been expended for the drainage, but yet there's a grant
15 pending, what can we do. So we need to meet and so we can
16 discuss and figure out how to help El Cenizo because the
17 residents have been asking for this park for years.

18 MR. CASSO: Where is El Cenizo?

19 MS. GONZALEZ: El Cenizo is in Webb County,
20 *afuera de* Laredo.

21 MR. CASSO: Okay.

22 MS. GONZALEZ: The county was aware.

23 MS. ESCALANTE: Yvette, pardon me, I think she
24 did not understand what *afuera* means. It's right outside

1 Laredo.

2 MS. GONZALEZ: Oh, I'm sorry, it's outside
3 Laredo. And so, the county, they decide where they're
4 going to put the pipes and all that, but what can we
5 possibly do. I don't know if they can take it out.
6 Anyway, we'll have to meet because they don't want to lose
7 that grant.

8 MS. ARAUJO: I'll check with my folks in the
9 office --

10 MS. GONZALEZ: Okay.

11 MS. ARAUJO: -- and see what's going on.

12 MR. CASSO: What is the amount of the grant?

13 MS. GONZALEZ: I'm sorry, I don't know.

14 MR. STEVENSON: We have, I'm sorry, I don't
15 forgot how much it was.

16 MS. ESCALANTE: Is it ORCA grant?

17 MR. CASSO: It's Parks.

18 MS. ESCALANTE: Oh, okay.

19 MR. STEVENSON: There's also money from TxDOT
20 and Parks and Wildlife.

21 MS. ARAUJO: Usually that's the way they work
22 it out is to try and match it.

23 MR. STEVENSON: Right, so our money is a match
24 for Parks and Wildlife.

1 MS. ESCALANTE: Okay.

2 MR. STEVENSON: I think TxDOT funds were used
3 to do the drainage.

4 MR. MENDOZA: Apparently, the county deeded
5 over the property to the city. And then, when they got
6 this money, they were trying to alleviate a drainage
7 problem and somebody wasn't checking to see what happened.

8 So they just put the drainage facilities through the
9 city's property without notifying the city that they had
10 done so.

11 MR. DE LA ROSA: Oh, we'll have to do that.

12 MR. MENDOZA: So --

13 MR. STEVENSON: I don't know who the funds
14 were, but --

15 MR. DE LA ROSA: Well, we'll have to contact
16 our district intermediary down there and find out how we
17 can coordinate a relief.

18 MS. GONZALEZ: Okay. And then, I'll be sure
19 and bring you guys deeds to that.

20 MR. STEVENSON: It's a bit of an interesting
21 situation just to back up a little bit. It's a cliff on
22 the river is what they're talking about. They wanted to
23 use really an absurd amount of money to level out the
24 cliff to put a park. So it really might not even be the

1 best place for a park actually, if you've ever seen it.
2 It's really where the drainage is going to have to flow.

3 MR. DE LA ROSA: It's overlooking the river?

4 MR. STEVENSON: Yes, it's on the river.

5 MR. DE LA ROSA: So maybe that's where -- it
6 may be a moot issue with what they're going to do with the
7 wall.

8 MS. GONZALEZ: Yes.

9 MR. MENDOZA: That was another issue that we
10 were discussing because it's a potential location for the
11 fencing wall project.

12 MS. GONZALEZ: Well, yes, we're trying to help
13 them develop a park which they have been asking for and we
14 don't want to lose the grant.

15 MS. ESCALANTE: Yes, okay.

16 MS. GONZALEZ: So, yes, we'll have to meet and
17 maybe take a trip down to El Cenizo and try to work
18 something out. Thank you.

19 MS. ESCALANTE: Are you guys involved as well?

20 MR. STEVENSON: Not TDHCA.

21 MR. MENDOZA: He was the coordinator at the
22 time.

23 MR. STEVENSON: I kind of fought it.

24 MS. ESCALANTE: Okay.

1 MR. STEVENSON: I mean, I want them to have a
2 park, but there's interesting politics going on. The city
3 of Laredo, their ETJ has swallowed the city of El Cenizo
4 and they won't let them expand. So there's no place they
5 can put a park and there's a lot of politics in that.

6 MR. CASSO: Yes, it's a donut.

7 MR. STEVENSON: It's a little it.

8 MR. CASSO: It's a donut. Yes, when I was
9 there, I was trying to get them to incorporate and just be
10 annexed into the city.

11 MR. STEVENSON: That's what you wanted?

12 MR. CASSO: That's what I was arguing for.

13 MS. GONZALEZ: But we don't want to lose the
14 funds.

15 MS. ARAUJO: We'll find a place somewhere.

16 MS. GONZALEZ: Thank you.

17 MS. ESCALANTE: All right. Are there any other
18 questions or comments?

19 (No response.)

20 MS. ESCALANTE: No?

21 (No response.)

22 MS. ESCALANTE: All right. Well, then I think
23 we're adjourned. Thank you all for coming.

24 Just FYI, one last thing, it takes roughly two

1 weeks for the court reporter to complete the transcript.
2 So it won't be until about at least two weeks from now
3 that we can get that to you, but we'll definitely forward
4 it.

5 (Whereupon, at 3:26 p.m., the meeting was
6 adjourned.)

C E R T I F I C A T E

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IN RE: Texas-Mexico Border Interagency
Work Group

LOCATION: Austin, Texas

DATE: September 20, 2007

I do hereby certify that the foregoing pages,
numbers 1 through 86, inclusive, are the true, accurate,
and complete transcript prepared from the verbal recording
made by electronic recording by Sunny L. Peer before the
Office of the Secretary of State.

(Transcriber) 10/05/2007
(Date)

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