

**Testimony of *Ciro D. Rodriguez***  
**House Budget Committee**  
**March 11, 2009**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Ryan and Members of the Committee:

I would like to begin by telling you a bit about the district I represent, the 23<sup>rd</sup> District of Texas. My district is very large, spanning 785 miles of border with Mexico. I also represent South and Northwest San Antonio. My district is both very urban in San Antonio and very rural in West Texas. We have farming and ranching and we have state of the art military and biotech research. And just like the district itself, the needs of the district are very diverse.

As you well know, the President released his budget requests last month. That budget does not reflect the many priorities and needs of my constituents and I hope this committee, under the leadership of Chairman Spratt and Ranking Member Ryan, will provide a budget blueprint that better suits the needs of my district.

The budget recently submitted by the President shows a definite shift in priorities and shows much promise to begin to set a new course for our economy. I would like to talk specifically about programs that are important to my constituents.

**Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC)**

Military installations in San Antonio are expected to bring an unprecedented economic boom to the entire region. San Antonio will provide much of healthcare as well as the medical training for the entire Department of Defense as a result of BRAC. Funding to implement BRAC recommendations is widely supported in Congress. Any delay or under funding can increase future construction costs. I respectfully request the committee not only provide for full funding of the BRAC recommendations but also provide legislative language to prioritize any BRAC construction related to Defense Health Programs.

### **Advance Funding for VA**

I am a member of the House Appropriations Committee. The VA budget is one of the 12 major appropriations bills that we are tasked to pass every year. But the VA has only received one on-time budget in the past 12 years. Late funding negatively impacts operations, and can lead to the reduction or elimination of vital programs, such as mental health and traumatic brain injury research and treatment, or recruitment programs for doctors, nurses and other healthcare providers. The health care and services of our veterans should not be subject to delays caused by the annual struggle to pass appropriations bills. I strongly support advance funding for the VA, which would essentially fund the VA one year ahead of time in order to be more efficient.

### **Law Enforcement on the Border**

As I mentioned I represent the longest stretch of border with Mexico. Our law enforcement is tasked with securing our homeland and protecting our people. This mission is not just the mission of our able federal law enforcement on the border. Our local police and sheriff's department dedicate much time and resources to keeping our communities safe. Local law enforcement on the border for the most part are small agencies in very poor, and rural areas. While they do the best with what they have, they often do not have the resources to adequately deal with drug smuggling and trafficking that is on going along the border. Just like we have the obligation to adequately train and equip our federal law enforcement, we should do our best to not leave our police and sheriff's deputies behind on the border. I recommend this committee look toward prioritizing local law enforcement to our officers on the border.

### **US-Mexico Border Program**

The US-Mexico Border Program at the Environmental Protection Agency funds the Project Development Assistance Program (PDAP) and Border Environment Infrastructure Fund (BEIF). The US Mexico Program account received \$25.5 million in FY08, a \$24.5 million cut from FY07. Recent budget requests have been as low as \$10 million in FY09 that would have led to fulfilling only 5% of the program needs. This program has received as much as \$100 million in annual appropriations. From FY03 to

FY06 the US-Mexico Border Program received \$50 million. The US-Mexico Border program leverages \$2 additional dollars for every \$1 of federal funds. This is a great program. Many small, rural, low income communities rely on programs like this to provide the most basic necessities such as water and wastewater infrastructure. In most cases this is the only source of federal funding for water and wastewater programs on the border. I strongly urge the committee recommend \$100 million for EPA's US-Mexico Border Program.

### **International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC)**

Last year, a small border town in my district suffered a major disaster after storms and multiple water releases from rear by Mexican Dams cause levees along the Rio Grande to break. This inundated this community and displaced many residents. The International Boundary and Water Commission, is in charge of maintaining infrastructure and enforcing water treaties with Mexico. The IBWC has to virtually replace 18 miles of levee at a cost of over \$57 million. Additionally, a recent routine safety inspection found that four dams operated and maintained by IBWC were all found to be unsafe. IBWC does not believe there is immediate danger, but continued neglect could lead to disrepair and danger. IBWC has estimated the U.S. costs to rehabilitate dam infrastructure to be around \$30 million. The largest and most in need of repair is the Amistad Dam also in my district. The water reservoir created by the dam is the Amistad National Recreation Area. This unit of the National Parks system hosts over a million tourists a year and is home to some of the best bass fishing in the world. Despite these extensive infrastructure challenges, this agency remain severely under funded. The agency was able to receive emergency funding after the flood and additional some economic stimulus funding. There are still lots of improvements to be made and issues to be addressed. A significant commitment to maintaining and rehabilitating our infrastructure is needed. I request this committee recommend \$30 million for IBWC's construction account.

### **Southwest Border Regional Commission**

Southwest Border Regional Commission (SBRC) was established under the 2008 Farm Bill. The Commission was modeled after the successful Appalachian Regional Commission to help develop economically-distressed regions.

The SBRC would be an enormous boost to local economies and infrastructure along the border. This commissions would help the economically-distressed southwest border communities create and implement regional economic development plans to reduce chronic poverty and improve the quality of life for border residents. The SBRC is authorized to receive \$30 million in funding but has yet to be budgeted. This should be a major funding priority for FY10.

### **Cattle Fever Tick Eradication Program**

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Services (APHIS) operates a program to eradicate cattle fever ticks from cattle in South and West Texas. Fever ticks, which are native to Mexico and spread from white-tailed deer to cattle, are a devastating to the cattle industry along the border. The president requested \$9.674 million for FY2007, but the program received only \$7.653 million. Funding levels have been stagnant while the need has increased. USDA dedicated an additional \$513,000 in contingency funds for the program during FY2007 due to increased tick presence. Maverick County and other counties in my district have been hit hard and a cut in resources means a greater strain on both local resources and the cattle industry of Texas. I respectfully request that the committee consider \$12 million for the Cattle Fever Tick Eradication Program at USDA.

### **Conclusion**

I would like to thank the committee for the time. As I mentioned, these are only a few programs that are important to the communities of the 23<sup>rd</sup> district of Texas. This committee's leadership in creating a funding blueprint by which the Congress provides appropriations is vital to the process. I strongly urge you to consider the needs of my constituents. Thank you for your time and I'll be glad to answer any questions you may have.