



**Congressman Vicente Gonzalez (TX-34) Remarks
House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
Member Day Hearing
Wednesday, January 14, at 10:00AM**

Thank you, Chairman Graves and Ranking Member Larsen for holding today's Member Day hearing.

As you prepare your agenda for the second session of the 119th Congress, I appreciate the opportunity to highlight two key issues affecting South Texas; modernizing local drainage infrastructure and ongoing efforts to construct a seawater desalination plant.

South Texas is disproportionately prone to severe flooding from heavy rainstorms and hurricanes due to our landscape and aging infrastructure.

The Raymondville Drain Project will improve our region's ability to withstand flooding by building new drainage channels, widening existing ones, and making additional improvements to the approximate 63-mile drainage system from Edinburg Lake in Hidalgo County, Texas, to the Laguna Madre in Willacy County, Texas.

Over the last few years, South Texas has suffered from multiple, major floods that have cost our region hundreds of millions of dollars in damage.

The completion of this project is critical to mitigating future floods and enhancing drainage capacity. It is also cost effective and, in the long term, will save the Federal government substantially more money to prevent widespread damage from a disaster rather than rebuild in its aftermath.

For families I represent, excessive rainfall and these dangerous floods have forced many to evacuate their homes and abandon vehicles or property while waiting to be rescued.

For example, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), a devastating three-day flooding period in South Texas last year resulted in at least \$100 million in damage.

Congress must do more to effectively address the risk of severe flooding in communities like mine.

Therefore, it is crucial that projects like the Raymondville Drain continue to move forward, originally authorized in the 1986 WRDA (Water Resources Development Act) — that's 38 years ago — and expanded by WRDA 2007.

I urge both this Committee and the Army Corps to stay focused on quickly completing projects like the Raymondville Drain to ensure they don't lose momentum.

Once the Raymondville Drain is completed it will substantially improve storm water management for our region.

I want to thank the Committee for including a provision in WRDA 2024 directing Army Corps to expedite the review and coordination of this feasibility study.

Once this review has been completed, I urge the Committee to consider including language authorizing the construction of this vital project in WRDA 2026 or any eligible vehicle.

Additionally, I want to stress the importance of desalination plants for the Committee.

Although South Texas is prone to floods, we don't have the infrastructure to capture and store excess floodwater for use during the state's frequent droughts. So, we must come up with innovative solutions, or we won't be able to meet demands soon.

For example, the City of Corpus Christi is currently facing a severe water shortage and is projected to hit a level one water emergency by November 2026.

If this happens, Corpus Christi will be forced to enact a mandatory 25 percent cut across the board in municipal water use that will have a devastating impact for the area.

To prevent this outcome, the city is currently working on several different desalination proposals including the Inner Harbor Desalination Project and the Harbor Island Seawater Desalination Facility.

These projects will greatly improve South Texas' long-term water security and are an essential part of our region's drought-proof water strategy.

As you and your colleagues on the Committee begin the process of crafting legislation to strengthen our national water infrastructure, I urge you to keep the vital importance of these desalination projects in mind.

Thank you, and I yield back the remainder of my time.