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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

Juan Vargas
51st District, California

COMMITTEE ON FINANCIAL SERVICES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INVESTOR PROTECTION,
ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND CAPITAL MARKETS

SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING,
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND INSURANCE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY,
INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
AND MONETARY POLICY

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

WESTERN HEMISPHERE, CIVILIAN SECURITY,
AND TRADE

MIDDLE EAST, NORTH AFRICA,
AND INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM

October 5, 2020

Imperial County Board of Supervisors
940 Main St #209
El Centro, CA 92243

Dear Esteemed Colleagues,

I believe it is vitally important to maintain an open line of communication between our offices and would like to take this opportunity to update you on the successes I have had in advancing important legislation on the New River and the Salton Sea since I last wrote you. I also humbly request a response to this letter with an update on what the Board has done to advocate for these issues to continue our synergistic efforts to address these important issues.

I am glad to report that in July 2020, two pieces of legislation were passed in the U.S. House of Representatives that included crucial language to address the ongoing environmental crises at the New River and the Salton Sea. First, language from my bill, the *California New Restoration Act of 2020* was included in H.R.2, the *Invest in America Act*. This piece of legislation will establish the California New River Restoration program, which will provide grants and technical assistance for planning and implementing conservation strategies for the New River and the surrounding region.

The second was H.R.7575, the *Water Resources Development Act of 2020*. This bill included language submitted by Congressman Raul Ruiz and myself for the implementation of Salton Sea restoration projects and a study for the construction of a perimeter lake to restore the Salton Sea. In addition, Representative Ruiz and I secured the first congressional hearing in 23 years that addressed the public health and environmental crisis at the Salton Sea. Furthermore, Congressman Ruiz and I are currently working on an additional bill, *Salton Sea Public Health and Environmental Protection Act*, to further push for Salton Sea restoration.

This past August, I introduced H.R.7991, the *Border Water Quality Restoration and Protection Act of 2020*, to address ongoing cross border pollution concerns in my district. H.R. 7991 is a companion bill to Senator Dianne Feinstein's legislation that will establish the California New River Public Health and Water Quality Restoration Program. This program will be administered by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to coordinate all New River restoration programs and infrastructure projects with federal, state, and local agencies.

Along with these efforts in Congress, on September 25, 2020, I sent an oversight letter to the Department of State (DOS), EPA, and the International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC). The letter demands an explanation for the most recent “planned spill” of wastewater and sewage into the New River that occurred on September 18, 2020. It is unacceptable that the IBWC not only failed to notify me of this spill but also only informed Imperial County with a 24-hour notice.

Clearly, I, and my colleagues in Congress, have been steadfast in advocating for additional funding and federal resources, resources that are desperately needed to mitigate pollution in Imperial County. These issues require committed efforts at all levels of government.

I would like to follow up on my letter to the Board, dated June 8, 2020. In your last letter to me the Board requested that additional treaty minutes be negotiated by the IBWC, which as evidenced by my response, I am enthusiastic to discuss. I would like to know if the Board has a draft of this proposed treaty minute. If so, has the Board shared the draft with the IBWC? I would be more than happy to follow-up with the agency and request an update.

As you know, New River projects located on the U.S. side of the border could be eligible for funding under the Water Resources and Development Act, but proposed projects must be submitted by local stakeholders directly to the Army Corps of Engineers for their approval. Has the County proposed any New River infrastructure projects on either side of the U.S.-Mexico border that are eligible for funding through the Border Water Infrastructure Program (BWIP)? If so, please share the details of the proposed projects so that I may assist in elevating them before the proper Federal Agency. Has the County submitted any projects to the EPA to be approved for BWIP eligibility? Having this information available will allow me and my staff to follow up with the EPA to ensure these projects are taken under consideration by the Trump Administration. What is the status of the New River Committee? Has the Board spoken with the Army Corps of Engineers regarding projects that might fall under their jurisdiction?

I am also aware that members of the Trump Administration, including President Trump himself, visited Imperial County over the last two years. Can the Board share with my office any aspects of important discussions, that occurred during those visits, on the topic of the New River or the Salton Sea? If so, what commitments, if any, were made on behalf of the Trump Administration that my staff can follow-up on? Has the Board extended an invitation to Trump Administration appointed leadership at the EPA, IBWC, Army Corps, and DOS to visit the New River and/or the Salton Sea? If so, I would be happy to follow up on with those agencies. Finally, if there are other local efforts regarding the New River or the Salton Sea that the Board has pursued over this past year my office would welcome hearing about them. I want to continue our strategic partnership for the residents of the Imperial Valley to achieve maximum results.

It is imperative that we continue our work together to resolve these critical environmental challenges. If you have any questions or concerns please contact Tomás Oliva at tomas.oliva@mail.house.gov or 760-312-9900.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Juan Vargas". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Juan" and last name "Vargas" clearly legible.

JUAN VARGAS
Member of Congress