

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

June 27, 2023

The Honorable Antony Blinken  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken,

We are writing to urge you to assist in expeditiously resolving delays that several Texas communities have faced when seeking from the White House presidential permits for cross-border bridges. Infrastructure connections between Texas and Mexico play an essential part in our state's and our nation's economy. Mexico is one of the United States' most important trading partners with billions of dollars exchanged in exports and imports each year. These cross-border bridges will expand such trade, creating vital jobs and economic opportunities in the Texas border region.

Early in this administration, three project sponsors submitted applications for proposed bridges in Webb County and Cameron County, Texas. A fourth project in Maverick County, Texas is expected to be filed soon. In August 2022—well beyond the 60-day requirement for the State Department to make a recommendation to the president—applicants received a letter from the State Department demanding full and final environmental assessment reviews before the State Department would make its recommendation to the president for his consideration. A completed environmental assessment is unnecessary and contradicts past precedent. We urge you to ask the White House to instead restore the past practice of issuing presidential permits contingent on an environmental assessment being successfully completed.<sup>1</sup>

As you are aware, the State Department must provide its recommendation to the president about whether granting a permit for an international crossing is in the foreign policy interest of the United States. Permits for Texas-Mexico bridge projects, however, have been needlessly delayed because the State Department, after consultation with White House staff at the National Security Council and the Council on Environmental Quality, has told project sponsors that they must first complete a lengthy environmental assessment before a recommendation will be given. This additional bureaucratic hurdle should be eliminated because it is both unnecessary and ignores the positive cultural and economic impacts that make these projects in our foreign policy interest.

First, the question for the Secretary of State is not whether a particular crossing complies with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) but rather is it in the *foreign policy* interest of our country. This question is separate from whether the *construction* of a crossing complies with

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<sup>1</sup> The environmental assessment is conducted pursuant to the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act, or "NEPA."

NEPA. Further, these projects are nearby or adjacent to *existing* crossings, undermining the argument in favor of first conducting a laborious environmental study of the impact construction will have on local species or ecosystems.

Second, the White House can issue presidential permits *conditionally* on NEPA reviews. This was, in fact, how the previous administration treated this process. It issued presidential permits for bridges in Pharr and Laredo, Texas, notably without requiring full and final NEPA assessments. Such a conditional approach is also consistent with the intent to evaluate foreign policy interests when making a presidential permit decision under the International Bridge Act of 1972, which makes no mention of environmental policy. Importantly, no environmental shortcuts are taken with a conditional approach as federal agencies with relevant jurisdiction will still review NEPA documents before a project can commence. The disparity in treatment between bridge projects in the prior administration and those in the current administration suggests, at best, a lack of standardized and transparent processes for reviewing applications and an unnecessary bureaucratic hurdle.

The current practice of withholding approval until a lengthy and costly environmental assessment is completed also makes project planning and financing considerably harder. Unlike land crossings that may be owned or operated by the federal government, these crossings will be financed largely privately or locally. Bureaucratic delays create significant project uncertainty, hinder potential economic growth, and forestall a higher standard of living not only for our Texas border communities, but for all Americans. Many of the affected Texas communities routinely rank as some of the lowest-income towns in the state. They stand to benefit immensely from the expanded and efficient cross-border trade and tourism that these projects will bring.

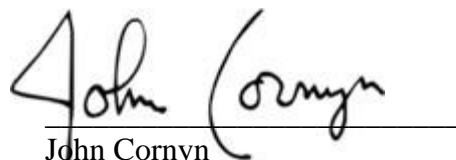
We strongly urge you to ask the White House to remove the unnecessary requirement that international bridge project sponsors complete a lengthy environmental assessment before the State Department will make its recommendation to the president about a permit request. Furthermore, we ask that, within 60 days of receipt of this letter, the State Department recommend to the president that he approve the permits for these projects. The president's approvals could be conditioned on the project sponsors completing all other permitting requirements prior to construction, consistent with how recent permits for Pharr and Laredo, Texas were approved. If this administration is unable provide such regulatory certainty for our communities, then Congress may need to update the International Bridge Act of 1972 to facilitate the timely approval and completion of vital cross-border bridge projects.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

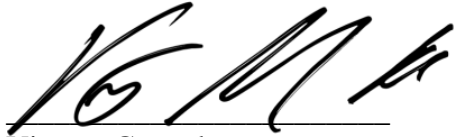
Sincerely,



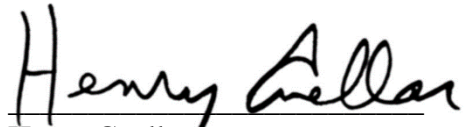
Ted Cruz  
United States Senator



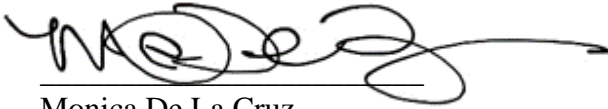
John Cornyn  
United States Senator



Vicente Gonzalez  
Member of Congress



Henry Cuellar  
Member of Congress



Monica De La Cruz  
Member of Congress



Tony Gonzales  
Member of Congress