

Congressman Vicente Gonzalez (TX-34)
Remarks
House Committee on Transportation and
Infrastructure
Member Day Hearing
Wednesday, May 14, 2025, at 10:00AM
Panel #3 (11:00AM – 11:30AM)
5 minutes

Suggested Remarks:

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

As you prepare to draft legislation and enact your agenda for the 119th Congress, I appreciate the opportunity to speak on a project that is critical to the 34th Congressional District of Texas – the Raymondville Drain Project.

South Texas is extremely prone to severe flooding from heavy rainstorms and hurricanes because it is relatively flat, low lying, and lacks adequate drainage infrastructure.

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 in avoided disaster recovery costs than it costs to build.

The Raymondville Drain Project will improve drainage by building new connecting 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 multiple major floods that have cost our region tens of millions of dollars in damage.

Just last month, severe storms brought nearly 20 inches of rainfall to the Rio Grande Valley in just two days.

Many of my constituents were forced to evacuate, abandon vehicles and property, and be rescued during and after the storms.

The rainfall resulted in massive flooding across Cameron, Willacy, and Hidalgo counties.

According to a preliminary report from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) this resulted in at least \$100 million in damage.

As of April 14, 2025, (FEMA) confirmed that over 5,000 homes were damaged or impacted, and that 235 were destroyed, 842 affected, 2,618 minor, 1,911 major, and 235 destroyed.

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

While the United States is one of the richest countries in the world, pockets of persistent poverty exist.

Sadly, financial hardship and poverty in these regions are exacerbated by severe weather and flooding.

The Rio Grande Valley is one of these areas.

Therefore, it is critical that the Raymondville Drain Project, which was originally authorized for construction in WRDA (Water Resources Development Act; pronounced: wur-duh) 1986—that's 38 years ago — and expanded by WRDA 2007, continues to move forward.

Once the Raymondville Drain is completed it will substantially improve storm water management for large sections of Hidalgo, Cameron, and Willacy Counties.

Hidalgo County Drainage District No. 1 (HCDD1), who is the lead non-Federal sponsor, for this project, originally submitted its feasibility study to the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works (ASA) for review in 2020.

Since then, the drainage district has worked closely with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to address their comments and plans to submit an updated Section 203 study to the ASA for approval in late Summer / early Fall of this year.

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 by the Army Corps, I urge you and your colleagues to consider including language authorizing the construction of this vital project in WRDA 2026 or any other eligible vehicle.

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