

Good Morning Chairman Luis Alejo & Assemblymember Eduardo Garcia;

My Name is Luis Olmedo, executive director of comite civico del valle. We are an environmental justice organization working at the forefront of the environmental justice movements in California.

I am also the founder of the IVAN Environmental Justice Enforcement Networks, which has expanded to 6 counties in California including Fresno and Kings County. I have also served as an environmental justice advisor to the AB32 Scoping Plan Update and to the Good Neighbor Environmental Board to the President and Congress. Where I have the pleasure to serve alongside Commissioner Drusina and Deputy Director Jose Angel.

In Imperial County, comite civico is the conscience that fearlessly advocates for environmental justice policies that reflect the needs of the over 85% Latino Population who's Voice is far too often minimized or ignored.

The residents of this border community, living in the second largest trade corridor in the US/Mexico Border Region have been denied the right to live in a toxic free environment.

The New River continues to be a nuisance to the disadvantage communities of Calexico. The New River has also served as a corridor for illegal transport of hazardous waste traveling from Mexico into Calexico in direct path of working class Latinos who live alongside this polluted rivers flood plane.

I have worked tirelessly with the families that live in this community, many who recount their stories and experience with

environmental government agencies who at one time or another promised they would clean the river and politicians who reached out to shake hands with empty promises.

When I heard these stories I thought to myself, well in this country a promise is only as good as the paper its written on, but I was wrong. These families still believe that handshakes and spoken words still mean something.

Residents in the area live in fear of illnesses and cancer clusters because many in their neighborhood suffer form some type of health ailment; Cancer, leukemia, respiratory disease, birth defects and learning disorders. All suspected and attributed to the new river by local residents.

No one living here can deny the smells so putrid they impair the quality of life for those living near the river.

In 2007 “Las Madres Del Rio Nuevo”, a group of Latina advocates saw hope when former Asssemblymember Manuel Perez introduced and passed legislation AB1079, the New River Strategic Plan. This group of mothers from Calexico worked hard to educate the public and policy makers on the benefits of AB1079. This Bill brought significant hope to our community.

This legislation brought together for the first time diverse stakeholders from throughout the Imperial Valley to agree on a clean up plan and a river parkway project.

Like all promises before that, little has been done in California or at the Federal Level to finance even elements of the strategic plan that make most financial sense, such as financing a trash screen in Mexico to keep the trash from floating north into Calexico.

Truth is that government agencies just don't know how to work together and low-income communities of color mirrored by those living in Calexico are the ones affected.

I have first hand experience with dysfunctional bureaucracy such as the legacy left behind by past administrations of the California Department of Toxics Substances Control when they allowed hazardous waste to be transported to Mecca CA and the Department of Water Resources who can't even pull together a meaningful restoration project for the Salton Sea. Time and time again we see low performance and zero accountability.

A.) I recommend here today that the New River Strategic Plan be given a serious consideration for funding which will improve the quality of life for disadvantaged communities located along-side the river flood plane. This was not made clear in Proposition 1 expenditure plan.

B.) Government agencies must be willing to work together in a bi-national manner to solve this critical problem that has impaired the economic growth for Calexico, hindered in the development of a river parkway and has disproportionately affected the health of the disadvantaged Latino communities living along the new river.

Government agencies cannot do it alone, an oversight committee must be commissioned to audit progress and for accountability. The residents living along the New River cannot afford, not one more diplomat stopping progress and interfering with dialog with Mexico between the US Federal and California Government.

California's Environmental Protection Agency Secretary Mathew Rodriquez can make the New River a priority and can make it a priority of the California-Mexico Border Relations Council.

C.) In Addition; The department of Toxics Substances Control in partnership with the California Regional Water Quality Control Board must be funded to set up a monitoring network along the new river to fingerprint industrial grade hazardous waste that may be attributed to US Companies operating in Mexico as a result of the NAFTA. These companies must be held liable for their contribution to the polluted river.

The California Office of Environmental Health Hazards highlights the Imperial Valley among the 25% most polluted regions in California.

While California is finding new ways to finance failing water infrastructure and overcome climate change challenge, rural border communities remain largely unrepresented and under funded.

In Closing, I would like to end in a positive note, the California Regional Quality Control Board and the DTSC's Certified Unified Program Agency (CUPA) have done a remarkable job in recent years to in response to community environmental justice concerns.

The Regional Water Board has brought into compliance almost 100% of feedlots that were in some type of violation of waste water discharge permits and have pulled the plug on National Beef who have left a legacy of pollution on the New River costing billions to the environment and to residents.

The DTSC CUPA continues to be the model partner for environmental justice and their new SEP policy reflects their commitment to investing violation money back where the violations occur.

I ask that through your leadership we can continue to work together to improve the quality of life for residents who live along the Border Region and along the New River Flood Plain.

Thank you for this opportunity to share my perspective today.