



LaredoChamber
of Commerce

LEGISLATIVE POLICY

2024-2025

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About us

The Laredo Chamber of Commerce is the largest business organization in the city, representing the interests of businesses of all sizes and sectors in Laredo and the surrounding areas. Our membership includes over 800 businesses of all sizes and sectors, ranging from small entrepreneurial companies to large corporations. Our Chamber has been connecting businesses and members of our community since 1915.

We are dedicated to working with our local, state, and federal elected officials on promoting an environment where businesses can thrive; enhancing the skill set of our workforce; encouraging educational excellence; building positive relationships among area businesses; fostering collaboration with like-minded organizations; promoting tourism in South Texas; and recruiting new industry while assisting business retention efforts whenever possible.

We accomplish these things through our events, programs, and advocacy efforts. Whether you are thinking of visiting, moving yourself and your family, or relocating your business, our Chamber is here to help provide the guidance and resources necessary to make your process flawless.

The Laredo Chamber of Commerce is structured to serve the needs of its membership. Your Chamber, in fact, exists specifically to build a business-friendly environment and to improve the quality of life in the community.

The Laredo Chamber of Commerce is:

- a voluntary organization of business people working together to improve our community's economic and civic vitality.
- the voice of the Laredo business community.
- not a governmental entity (it is a private not-for-profit 501(c)(6) organization).
- an independent organization (it is not directed by any State or national affiliation, although it is an active member of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the American Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives, the Texas Association of Business, and the Texas Association of Mexican American Chambers of Commerce).

The Laredo Chamber of Commerce is a member-based non-profit association dedicated to serving the needs of our member businesses in a variety of ways: encouraging investment in Laredo, representing our members in the community, and improving the business climate for all member businesses. We are focused on providing

services to help our members sell more, expand their operations, create jobs, and develop new products/services while partnering with many other organizations in Laredo's business community.

Our beliefs are founded on our core values of honesty, integrity, trust, and regard. At the Laredo Chamber of Commerce, we are dedicated to improving our community and stimulating our economy.

Vision

To be a trusted resource and partner for the business community by listening, educating, cultivating, and advancing our region through engaged leadership and advocacy.

Mission

To provide leadership by connecting, building, advocating for, and growing the economic interests of business, tourism, and education of the Laredo/Webb County area while acting as a catalyst for emerging trends.

Value Propositions

Develop

The Laredo Chamber of Commerce is dedicated to fostering economic and workforce development in our community.

Encourage

The Laredo Chamber of Commerce promotes a planned development of resources and infrastructure in our region.

Promote

The Laredo Chamber of Commerce will promote community and business development and tourism in our region.

Advocate

The Laredo Chamber of Commerce will advocate on behalf of its membership.

The Chamber is guided by its mission to build a stronger local economy with emphasis on the following areas.

Promote a Pro-Business Environment:

- Facilitate a market-based economy by supporting rational regulatory and tax policies, promoting incentives for business expansion and supporting the efficient operation of regulatory agencies.
- Support infrastructure improvements related to energy, water, air, transportation and communications.
- Promote workforce development by supporting training and education.
- Oppose state mandates that impose obligations on local agencies or businesses without providing the necessary resources to comply with those obligations.
- Reform legislation that would promote regulatory approaches or mandates that are not unduly punitive or costly as well as promote the region's competitiveness for economic development and job creation.

Promote Government Reform:

- Support the elimination and consolidation of duplicative or overlapping agencies.
- Promote improved communication and coordination between governing bodies.
- Monitor planning, spending, and the implementation and progress of government programs and infrastructure projects.
- Support greater engagement and input from the business community in the allocation of public funds and resources.

Maintain an Active and Visible Chamber Presence:

- Keep governing bodies and decision-makers on local, state, and federal levels informed on important regional issues.
- Build coalitions and coordinate community, business, and government support for important regional issues.
- Regularly update members and create opportunities for their involvement and participation in the Chamber's legislative activities.

Border Security and Immigration Reform

It is difficult, if not impossible, to successfully manage border security without immigration reform. Unfortunately, federal leadership handle these as separate issues. Treating the symptoms and not the causes of illegal entries, asylum seekers, and border security is not an answer to managing our southern border.

The Laredo Chamber of Commerce supports Common Sense solutions to address border security and immigration reform. What can our Representatives do to make a positive difference?

Focus on a smart wall solution to address security along the U.S./Mexico border. This solution combines a physical barrier strategically located at points along the border with technology such as drones, sensors, radar, and cameras to track and intercede on incursions. The Laredo Chamber opposes the construction of a continuous border wall, especially in the Laredo region. At best, it is a partial solution; and it is not the most effective solution, nor is it an efficient use of federal money. It also negatively impacts the environment and disregards private property rights.

A smart wall solution protects the nation's borders while ensuring the efficient flow of trade and commerce is maintained.

Update immigration and asylum laws. The root cause of much of the border security problem lies in outdated laws. Immigration and asylum laws must be reformed to meet the workforce needs of the U.S. economy and provide the full range of workers needed to sustain U.S. economic growth.

Most of the migrants crossing the border without permission are economic migrants. If the U.S. provides an acceptable, legal path for immigration and asylum reform, it will stop most migrants from crossing without permission. This will provide a chance to regain control of the border and allow U.S. Border Patrol to focus on illicit traffic. Allow for the speedier processing of green cards for individuals seeking legal residency in the U.S. and implement a temporary worker program for high-skilled and lesser-skilled workers.

Increase funding for immigration judges. Apprehensions are only successful if there is an adequate immigration judicial system to handle the 3 million plus cases awaiting adjudication in the system. Funding for more immigration judges will help resolve several issues, including an ineffective catch-and-release program and inadequate migrant detention facilities.

The process creates backlogs due to the lack of immigration judges. A secure border is defined by our ability to enforce the rule-of-law. However, the lack of immigration judges or post-apprehension consequences undermines the very rule-of-law we claim to enforce and protect.

Invest and improve border infrastructure. Every day, approximately \$2 billion in economic activity crosses U.S./Mexico border ports of entry, and hundreds of thousands of people legally cross the border on a daily basis. Current facilities cannot manage the traffic flow, and it costs the country's economy millions of dollars. Because of a lack of inspection personnel, technology, and infrastructure, these land ports are crossing points for international drug cartels to smuggle their contraband. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) reports more than 90 percent of drug seizures including cocaine, heroin, methamphetamine, and fentanyl are being smuggled into the United States through the ports.

Last year's federal approval through the issuance of a Presidential Permit to construct and expand Laredo's bridge "4/5" and World Trade Bridge will have little added value without the improvements to staging areas (industrial parks and transportation terminals) and onto the interstate highway system. Additional cargo bridge capacity will require additional CP and PGA (Participating Government Agency) personnel to manage the additional workload.

For security, completing Highway 1472/1021, AKA Mines / Las Minas Road would provide U.S. Border Patrol agents with much needed high-speed access to the river, greatly improving response times. To provide access to the river, the 44 miles of Mines Road that is incomplete between Laredo and Eagle Pass should be paved.

Laredo is the largest port in the nation, and the flow of trucks and trains serves the nation and helps our community move tremendous amounts of traffic. With over 20,000 truck crossings per day, trade through Laredo is expected to rise by over 200% by 2050. The time is now to build the corresponding infrastructure.

Clean up the Rio Grande River and create a linear park and security zone between the U.S. and Mexico. By eradicating and/or suppressing invasive plants such as Carrizo cane and salt cedar in Texas – a plan supported by environmentalists – and create a linear park between Mexico and the U.S.

This recommendation makes the river a more effective security tool by greatly improving the U.S. Border Patrol's visibility along the river, providing direct access to the riverbank, and reducing the risk of danger to U.S. Border Patrol agents by eliminating a hiding ground. At the same time, it would serve to conserve precious water (a mature salt cedar can consume 100 gallons of water per day).

Building a binational linear river project – starting in downtown Laredo/Nuevo Laredo – in coordination with local DHS officials would create a huge river amenity between both countries in the central business district of each city, providing for improved quality of life and greatly enhancing border security. This would act as a demonstration project for other locations along the Rio Grande River.

Economic Development

For the local community and region to continue to move forward in an orderly fashion, a skilled labor force must be developed, and strategies that contribute to strong economic growth must be promoted.

The Laredo Chamber of Commerce advocates these strategies:

- Support continued use of a locally approved sales tax collected by cities to fund economic development efforts.
- Collaborations with local government to implement and/or modify existing Sports Venue 0.0025 tax for use as Type A Corporation or Type B Corporation Tax for economic development purposes.
- Funding Calculation Revision beyond traditional factors based on population to recognize all port infrastructure needs that support near-shoring, North American competitiveness, reduction of dependence on imports from China, and national security.

Business and Enterprise

The Laredo Chamber of Commerce stands by the notion that a climate conducive to the development of free enterprise will foster increased employment and a sound economy.

For this reason, it supports the following platform:

- Appropriation of funds into the Texas Enterprise Fund (TEF) to assist in the attraction of business to the State as well as implementation of additional transparency and oversight measures to the TEF.
- Support continuation of the annual “Free Sales Tax Weekend” for back-to-school purchases, with consideration for an increased inventory of allowable items.

- Oppose unfunded government mandates that shift the cost of financing programs to either the private sector or other levels of government.
- Advocate for responsible, increased price transparency for health care services and oppose policies such as health care mandates that contribute to the rising costs of health care.
- Support legislation that strengthens small business options when faced with unknown and/or uncertain regulations.
- Support efforts to reduce regulatory burdens through legislative or administrative action.
- Explore measures that provide fairness to businesses as it relates to property taxes.

Infrastructure and Transportation

The Laredo Chamber of Commerce and Laredo Economic Development Corporation support continued infrastructure expansion in Laredo. With over 5 million trucks and over 530,000 rail cars crossing the border to Mexico, the transportation of parts for the auto and electronics industries, foodstuffs, as well as finished goods has resulted in heavy truck and rail traffic. The outcome is an endless stream of 18-wheelers passing through Laredo, which has created a demand for infrastructure development in our international bridges as well as supporting structural arteries leading to Laredo.

Building and Expanding Bridges

Ask: Approval of Permits to Build and Expand International Border Crossings

Laredo has four bridges to Mexico. These bridges, among the busiest and most critical to USMCA trade, are under strain from heavy usage. Laredo has a need to build new and expand our existing bridges.

A new bridge of 10 lanes has been proposed and designed in south Laredo called Bridge 4/5. This bridge will be 10 lanes and be the nation's largest smart port connecting the US and Mexico. The World Trade Bridge is an existing bridge and the nation's busiest international crossing with over 20,000 trucks crossing daily. An expansion of this bridge has been planned and the permits filed.

Both bridge projects have been hampered by lengthy bureaucratic processes enacted in the last four years in the Executive Branch, and bipartisan support in both the House and Senate has called for expedited review of these

projects. Our organizations support the expedited review not just for our community's benefit but for the nation's supply chain.

Our vision is to have immediate expansion of the World Trade Bridge, and the issuance of a Presidential Permit for Bridge 4/5, including surrounding infrastructure and personnel to sustain these viable projects. An increase in the capacity of the World Trade Bridge will have little added value without the improvements needed for international trade cargo to continue out of the Import Lot to staging areas (industrial parks and transportation terminals) and onto the interstate highway system. Additional cargo bridge capacity will require additional CP and PGA (Participating Government Agency) personnel to handle the additional workload. These are some of the things being worked on or completed that will help the WTB and the commercial traffic. Improvement in this trade lane would have effects throughout the state of Texas, and the United States. International trade does not cost American jobs but strengthens the economy and creates new jobs.

Highways Supporting Trade

We support the continued expansion of I-35 and the funding and construction of I-69, I-27, I-2. Laredo, being the largest port in the nation, hosts over 20,000 commercial trucks a day, on average. The continued flow of trucks and trains in our community serves the nation and helps our community move tremendous amounts of traffic. The final vision is to have four interstate highways starting and ending in Laredo to serve the trade coming through our Port. Trade through Laredo is expected to rise 221% by 2050. The time is now to build the corresponding infrastructure.

The I-35 currently carries the majority of the trucks that enter the US from Mexico. The four-lane highway is inadequate to carry this trade. We support funding to expand this road to six lanes. In addition to the expansion of I-35, we support the expansion of the Border Patrol Checkpoint. A 10-minute improvement in trade time adds \$312 Million in additional commerce from Mexico to the US according to a 2023 Atlantic Council study.

We support the continued funding and expansion of I-69 which will connect the border to the Heartland to Detroit. This Interstate has been under construction for the last decade and we hope to improve the current US Highway 59 to the limited access I-69 highway sooner than later.

We support the Ports to Plains Initiative known as I-27. The recently designated I-27 will connect the border cities of Laredo, Eagle Pass, and Del Rio to the front range of Colorado and eventually Alberta, Canada. This Instate will service the fast growing front range areas of Denver and the heartland of Canada thereby improving

trade abilities of the American west from not just an oceanic transcontinental footing but to a trilateral USMCA footing.

Our organizations realize the importance that inland ports play in the interconnection with seaports, commercial airports, and manufacturing centers in the state. However, the key role they play as an integral part of the state's trade corridors is too often superseded by headline-grabbing issues involving immigration and law enforcement, which in turn put them in a secondary tier in terms of funding. Supporting trade improves border security by driving economic growth in both our nations.

The Laredo Chamber of Commerce supports the following initiatives:

- Funding to support the rebuilding and modernizing of Texas roads and highways, rail system, waterways, and airports.
- Funding the construction of I-69 and I-27
- Create a finance system to support various infrastructure projects with loans to be repaid through dedicated public or private funding streams.
- A dedicated funding structure to support the development of infrastructure of inland ports, particularly those at border crossings that facilitate cross-border commercial traffic vital to the manufacturing and transportation industries of Texas.
- Timely and effective Presidential Permitting Processes for International Crossings.

Energy & Environment

The American Trucking Association and the Laredo Chamber of Commerce is committed to environmental stewardship and support practical policies and technologies that will reduce pollution from commercial truck operations. To that end, ATA advocates for science-based federal laws and regulations to maintain and protect the environment while ensuring uniformity across all levels of government. The trucking industry has long supported data-driven public policies that encourage investments in cleaner,

more fuel-efficient equipment. As government invests in development and deployment of electric, alternative fuel, and zero-emission vehicles and the infrastructure to support them, ATA strongly encourages policymakers to consider the unique needs of heavy-duty commercial motor vehicles (CMVs).

BACKGROUND: In order to reduce the environmental impact of trucking, fleets must invest in new, cleaner equipment, and government agencies and utilities need to build out charging and fueling infrastructure, increase power generation, and improve the electric grid to support the needs of CMVs. Through major advances in engines and emission control systems, trucking has reduced emissions drastically in the past forty years: 60 trucks manufactured today emit less pollution than one truck manufactured in 1985. These clean trucks can be more widely deployed – 53% of trucks on the road today were manufactured before 2011 and are not equipped with the most advanced clean engines and emissions-reduction technologies. Replacing those trucks with clean diesel models currently available in the marketplace would reduce emissions from trucking by over 80%.

The biggest barrier to deploying newer, cleaner trucks nationwide is the antiquated 12% Federal Excise Tax (FET) on heavy-duty vehicles. This World War I-era tax adds over \$20,000 to the cost of new lower-emissions diesel equipment, and significantly more than that to the purchase prices of zero-emission, battery electric, and alternative fuel vehicles. Pricing challenges have been compounded by a lack of semiconductors availability in recent years, driving up costs and limiting the availability of environmentally friendly trucks. As heavy-duty truck manufacturing supply chains normalize, repealing the FET by passing the Modern, Clean, and Safe Trucks Act (H.R. 1440, S. 694) will further lower the cost of cleaner trucks and accelerate emissions reduction from freight transportation.

One further challenge to the deployment of next-generation trucks, particularly for hydrogen or battery electric vehicles, is the current inability of our national electric grid and alternative fuel distribution networks to power those heavy-duty trucks. Supporting the buildout of fueling station infrastructure that can support commercial motor vehicles through utility grid investments under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act will ensure the viability of those alternatives for motor carriers and encourage the deployment of those clean technologies.

ATA has a long history of working with federal agencies to develop regulations with goals that are realistic and achievable for the industry. ATA worked closely with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) as the agencies finalized the Phase 1 Rule for greenhouse gas reductions in 2001. Technology developments under that rule led to an estimated fuel efficiency increase of 23 percent, a reduction of CO₂ emissions by 270 million metric tons. The

subsequent Phase 2 Rule, where ATA again collaborated with federal agencies and industry stakeholders, will result in an additional 34 percent improvement. As EPA implements the new Heavy Duty Truck rule on NOx emissions and looks to finalize a Phase 3 GHG rule in 2023, ATA will continue working with agencies to set and achieve ambitious emissions reduction goals.

The volatile price of diesel fuel, the primary energy source for moving America's freight for 75 years, creates constant challenges for trucking. Fuel is on average the second-highest operating expense for a trucking company, and fuel cost increases are difficult for trucking companies to absorb or pass along to their customers. Additionally, the Highway Trust Fund relies on federal fuel tax receipts to maintain and expand the interstate highway system that enables our nation's commerce. Proposals to modernize the funding system for our nation's interstate highway system while encouraging decarbonization must fairly apportion costs among all road users and take into account the vital importance of trucking to the American economy. In the interim, ATA supports a national energy policy that ensures an adequate supply of reasonably priced fuels to ensure that trucking keeps America moving forward.

IMPACT: The transition from reliance on diesel fuel to electrification or alternative energy sources will not happen overnight. Even without that wholesale transition, trucking has made major strides over recent decades in reducing its emissions footprint and will continue to do so. Ensuring that federal agencies account for the needs of the trucking industry is important to ensure that regulatory and economic hurdles do not slow the decarbonization of transportation. In particular, addressing financial incentives and taxation, and directing the infrastructure buildout funded by the IIJA are opportunities to take positive steps forward in environmental stewardship.

SOLUTION: ATA will work closely with Congress and federal agencies to encourage repeal of the FET by passing the Modern, Clean, and Safe Trucks Act (H.R. 1440, S. 694). ATA supports implementation of competitiveness measures that will provide long-term availability of critical truck manufacturing components such as semiconductor chips, and investment in the buildout of transmission, charging, and fueling infrastructure to support the next generation of clean commercial trucks as well as all other road users.

Manufacturing

Skilled Workforce Development for Webb County and Beyond

The Issue

The challenge of finding skilled workers who can generate organizational value and positively impact their communities has grown increasingly pressing. A shortage of talent undermines productivity and hampers societal development. While STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) initiatives emphasize hard skills, many practitioners are urging academic institutions to place greater emphasis on career-readiness skills. These include effective communication, professionalism, collaboration, critical thinking, and ethical leadership—skills essential for thriving in today’s fast-paced, interconnected world.

Potential Solutions (Big Picture)

Workforce development programs targeting both hard skills and career-readiness skills offer a path forward in addressing the current labor shortages across various industries. Such programs become even more impactful when paired with opportunities for formal education and degree attainment.

In other words, a collaborative effort is required—one that harnesses the expertise of esteemed non-profits like the Laredo Chamber of Commerce and the Laredo Economic Development Corporation, alongside higher education institutions like Texas A&M International University (TAMIU). By aligning our efforts, we can elevate our community and empower individuals to achieve sustainable success.

TAMIU's Role in Workforce Development

At TAMIU’s Sanchez School of Business, centers of excellence are already making meaningful contributions to the community while fostering the dissemination of knowledge. Key initiatives include:

- **The Center for the Study of Western Hemispheric Trade**, which translates academic research into actionable insights.
- **The Texas Center for Border Economic and Enterprise Development**, which engages the transportation and international logistics industries with practical, innovative solutions.
- **The Small Business Development Center**, which supports entrepreneurs in building and growing their businesses.

In addition to these centers, the newly established **Banking Academy** will mentor future bankers and financial industry leaders, equipping them with the tools to succeed. Meanwhile, TAMIU’s doctoral and master’s programs ensure the delivery of education that is both academically rigorous and practitioner-ready.

Strategic Academic Programs

Some colleagues have identified disciplines such as **accounting, banking and finance, transportation and international logistics, and information systems** as high-potential areas for transforming TAMIU into a destination campus. Furthermore, these programs can strengthen the “common business denominator” of our campus community by offering:

- **Financial literacy and accounting fundamentals** to navigate today’s dynamic economic environment.
- **Information technology/systems and analytics education** to harness emerging opportunities.
- **Logistics-focused training** to leverage our location as an international trade hub.

A Call for Synergy

TAMIU’s longstanding commitment to improving the quality of life for its alumni and the surrounding community is evident. However, there is room to enhance synergies among stakeholders, including government agencies, to position Laredo as the international trade giant it deserves to be. By fostering collaboration and innovation, we can achieve a brighter future for Webb County and beyond.

Healthcare

Laredo faces critical healthcare challenges, with a staggering 32% of its population uninsured—significantly higher than both Texas (20%) and the national average (10%). Recognized as a Medically Underserved Area (MUA), Laredo struggles with limited access to primary healthcare, specialized healthcare, high infant mortality, and extensive poverty. Its healthcare infrastructure is further strained by a severe shortage of both primary and specialty care physicians, ranking at the very bottom both nationally and within Texas for healthcare provider availability.

Particularly pressing is the prevalence of diabetes, affecting 23% of the county's population, leading to high rates of hospital admissions and amputations for uncontrolled diabetes—surpassing many other Texas counties.

The financial burden of diabetes care, notably amputations, significantly exceeds state and local averages, highlighting the economic impact of healthcare deficiencies in the area.

This situation underscores an urgent need for targeted interventions and policies to improve insurance coverage, access to healthcare services, and management of chronic conditions like diabetes. Enhancing Webb County's healthcare services is crucial for improving the overall health and quality of life of its residents.

For this reason, the Laredo Chamber of Commerce endorses the following:

- Address the lack of health insurance among the uninsured population in South Texas and implement access, education, and promotional programs to combat this disparity. Increase funding for community health centers while conducting educational campaigns to raise awareness about available insurance options, and launching marketing initiatives to promote affordable plans to reduce strain on the healthcare system and health workers. By partnering with insurance providers and offering enrollment assistance, we believe that this will reduce reliance on state and federally-funded programs while improving access to healthcare for underserved populations.
- Support for physical plant and utilities, weighted (academic) programs, medical and clinical research, and Graduate Medical Education (GME) for medical resident accredited programs accessible to South Texas.
- Recover and sustain state funding and Laredo/Webb County and other South Texas/Middle Rio Grande counties along the border to support historically successful student academic programs, and research and clinical training opportunities provided by the University of Texas and Texas A&M systems.
- Support funding and resources for the Primary Care Residency Programs for Family Medicine and Internal Medicine established as a collaboration between the Laredo Medical Center, Gateway Community Health Center, and the University of the Incarnate Word School of Medicine which will ultimately serve as a medium for the relocation of physicians into the South Texas area.
- Support H.R. 4261, Amputation Reduction and Compassion Act of 2023, as this would reduce financial burden on local hospitals and the healthcare system as a whole. Laredo was ranked as having the highest cost per amputation in the State of Texas with an average amputation costing \$214,300 in Webb County vs the State average of \$123,857

- Support the 340B Act and allocate funding for tailored prescription drug programs. Legislation should be enacted to protect consumers from price gouging on life-saving medications, ensuring transparency and regulation of drug pricing. Additionally, outreach campaigns should be launched to inform residents about available resources for affordable prescriptions, empowering them to access necessary medications without financial burden.
- Curtail the shortage of healthcare professionals in South Texas by implementing recruitment initiatives offering incentives such as signing bonuses and relocation assistance. Additionally, expand student loan forgiveness programs specifically for those working in public health facilities like federally qualified health centers, aiming to attract and retain doctors, specialists, dentists, and psychologists. Foster collaboration between healthcare organizations, educational institutions, and community stakeholders to create supportive environments and pathways for healthcare professionals to serve in underserved areas.

Skilled Workforce Recruitment Program for Industrial Production

ISSUE: Difficulty in finding skilled workers to fill factory jobs deflates productivity and stalls or altogether can curtail the development and growth of a needed and growing U.S. manufacturing industry. With a worker program that targets needed skill sets, the U.S. can successfully address the current gap of experienced workers particularly in the manufacturing industry. Tapping into an abundant talent base that exists outside of the U.S. and eager to live/work in the U.S., a process that includes a thoughtful immigration pathway, you will:

- Fill the skilled labor gaps and expedite the growth of local manufacturing
- Integrate training and apprenticeship programs to provide the necessary skills to local communities
- Attract and retain foreign talent
- Attract investment incentivized by the availability of a skilled labor force and a “MADE IN AMERICA” designation
- Generate job growth and economic stability through skills development in impoverished, low-skilled regions o Provide a secure and productive pathway to potential immigration of a targeted talent pool

Background: Some years ago, a high-level dialogue between the US. and Mexico proposed a binational solution to challenges faced by communities of the four border states with Mexico by addressing issues related to competitiveness, workforce development, and productivity. The US-Mexico Bilateral Agenda recommended

working in a coordinated manner to change the perception of the border to one of mutual and sustainable prosperity; and a focus on high-impact strategic actions to increase competitiveness, connectivity, economic growth, and productivity”.

Although border demographics provide a workforce that supports a competitive manufacturing industry, higher skilled, higher paid jobs such as engineers and trained technicians require time to develop and remain a career path that, while highly encouraged, still lags behind the industry’s need. While this high-skills gap is most prevalent along the border, it is nonetheless a gap across much of the U.S. manufacturing industry. On the other hand, Mexico has an abundance of experienced engineers and technicians in the industry. A study on U.S. and Mexico workers by the SMU Texas-Mexico Center concluded that “encouraging and supporting integrated industries, rather than discouraging them, will boost the U.S. manufacturing sectors.” 1. [‘Are Mexican and U.S. Workers Complements or Substitutes?’, Dr. Raymond Robertson, 2018]

Request for Consideration: Create a productive industrial workforce by recruiting and vetting a pool of highly skilled, experienced talent from the abundant manufacturing base in our neighboring countries. Creating a pilot program that targets workers with specialized skill sets such as engineering, production, and technology and research, will address the skills gaps currently faced across the U.S. and in border areas with plentiful, albeit primarily low-skilled, populations. In partnership with existing programs such as the D.O.L.’s Office of Foreign Labor Certification and the American Apprenticeship Initiative, this program can deliver a high-impact solution toward U.S. productivity and serve to revitalize the U.S. manufacturing industry currently spurred by nearshoring advantages. In predominantly low-skilled areas like border regions, growing the high-skilled base will attract manufacturing and R&D facilities that generate jobs for more economically stable, sustainable, and secure border cities

Secondary Water Source and Infrastructure for the Laredo Region

REQUEST: The Legislative Agenda Committee of the Laredo Chamber of Commerce and the Laredo Economic Development Corporation strongly supports the development of a secondary water source for the Laredo / Webb County Region. Our region is seeking federal and state funding sources to contribute to the infrastructure expenses to support the region’s public well-being of the under-served populations, support the necessary growth of the City of Laredo as a key contributor to global trade, economic prosperity and national security of the nation, and reduce the region’s dependence of the Rio Grande. We are seeking funding assistance from federal agencies

such as USDA, EPA, US Department of the Interior, and others, along with Texas state agencies such as the TWDB and TCEQ. The regional delegation is also seeking funding from legislative appropriations at the state and federal levels.

BACKGROUND: The city of Laredo has a population of 260,000 and 270,000 in total within Webb County. However, the region contributes well beyond our size as the local economy thrives on commercial and industrial warehousing, transportation, imports and exports, and boasts the largest port in the Western Hemisphere. Port Laredo provides efficient and safe processing of critical products in every industry that was facilitated by the tri-national trade agreement USMCA and its predecessor NAFTA. Due to the strategic location of Laredo along with its supply chain expertise and global trade infrastructure, the region is experiencing unprecedented industrial real estate development along with secondary economic development in the residential and commercial sectors. Despite this, along with some recent progress, the Laredo / Webb County region still maintains a high level of poverty along with populations without public water availability.

Growth beyond the city limits is hampered by limited budgets to support infrastructure investment which is compounded by the city's aging water system and 100% reliance on the Rio Grande. Laredo's water source is pulled from the river with storage up-river at the Amistad Reservoir. Significant voluntary annexation requests from developers and investors have been denied due to insufficient city funding to extend water and waste-water pipelines along with concerns over sustainable water capacity. The majority of the water for Laredo and our downstream border city counterparts comes from the watershed in Northern Mexico. Water levels at the Amistad Reservoir are mostly maintained at the discretion of our neighbors to the south and furthermore, the government of Mexico is not fulfilling the terms of the bi-national 1944 Treaty between Mexico and the United States for the Utilization of Waters of the Colorado and Tijuana Rivers and of the Rio Grande.

Groundwater sources have been discovered in the region and have been proven to be plentiful and sustainable by national hydrology experts. In 2022 the Texas legislature approved the creation of the Legacy Water Supply Corporation (LWSC), a public entity, and was signed into law by the Governor. The LWSC will serve as a non-profit wholesale water supplier for a private development, be a primary water source to the underserved colonias, be secondary water source for the city of Laredo, and support growth throughout the region. Interlocal agreements have been secured creating AGUA, Area Groundwater Utility Agency, between the City of Laredo, the County of Webb, and the LWSC to jointly advocate for funding to reduce the costs to the municipalities and residents and expedite the development of the critical infrastructure.

ISSUE: Federal and State funding is critical to support the urgent timing needs of the water system infrastructure in the region and to reduce the costs to the city and county municipalities as they support necessary repairs to their current system.

Government funding sources will lead to a quicker and more comprehensive water system for our region that lessens our dependence on an endangered and polluted river. Government funding will also lower the water rate fees paid by economically disadvantaged and rural community residents.

The consequences of not expediting the implementation of a secondary water source could be devastating to the region, the state and the national economies. The Rio Grande has run dry in modern-day history, the last time in 1953, and some experts have predicted the river will not be able to provide sufficient water to the region by 2040. In addition, thousands of residents of unserved communities will continue to be disadvantaged.