

Remarks by Joe E. Vega
Mayor of Port Isabel
September 12, 2012

Good morning Chairman Carona and Chairman Smithee and members of the Committee. My name is Joe Vega. I am here in various capacities to testify today. First and foremost , as Mayor of the City of Port Isabel, Texas and secondly as the Deputy Director of the Cameron County Parks department.

As a lifelong resident of Port Isabel, I have seen firsthand the growth and gradual progression of the Laguna Madre area when it comes to residences and businesses. I have worked hard with my colleagues on the city council to invest in our future. We have built parks, a convention center, boat ramps, soccer and baseball fields and other quality of life amenities to attract people to our city. Many of the citizens of Port Isabel work everyday across the bay on South Padre Island. The economy of the Laguna Madre area has a direct impact on Port Isabel, South Padre Island and Cameron County.

This issue is extremely important to the Texas Gulf Coast and I didn't want to miss this important hearing today because I wanted to make sure I came before you personally to ask that you find a solution to this serious problem. As Texans we work on solutions and fix problems. We stick together. We help each other out.

Port Isabel is a thriving community today. It hasn't always been that way. We have worked hard to bring back our economy from the brink of collapse. Should these surcharges and rates take affect we will go back to where we were years ago with residents not wanting to live in our city and businesses not investing and expanding.

Cameron County has approximately six coastal parks in and around the Laguna Madre area. Our parks system operates in a self sustaining manner through user fees and concessions. This gives us the ability to serve many coastal residents that visit our parks throughout the year. If these rates are put in place Cameron County will also be impacted.

Like my colleagues that have testified here today I am confident that you will work to come up with sound and well drafted policy to ensure that our coastal communities are not negatively impacted. This needs to be done in a way that does not discriminate against our coastal counties. The state motto of Texas is Friendship. We need to be reminded of that motto as we work to find a fairand equitable solution for all of Texas.

Thank you