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Testimony
Before the Subcommittee on Water and Power
Of the Committee on Resources
United States House of Representatives

Hearing on H.R. 4588 to amend the
Lower Rio Grande Valley Water Resources
Conservation and Improvement Act of 2000
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Disclosure Requirement
Required by House Rule XI, clause 2(g)
and Rules of the Committee on Resources

Name

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Organization Representing

Harlingen Irrigation District
Adams Gardens Irrigation District
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Education

Four years college at Baylor University majoring in Geology.

Credentials

Irrigated farmer in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas for 40 years.
Manager of Harlingen Irrigation District for 15 years.

Elected Offices

Board of Directors of Harlingen Irrigation District for 6 years prior to employment with the District.
Past President of Texas Water Conservation Association.
Vice president of Texas Irrigation Council.
Director of Southmost Soil and Water Conservation District for 21 years.

The Harlingen Irrigation District is a political subdivision of the State of Texas. The District has received a grant from the Department of Interior, Bureau of Reclamation for \$1,386,000 as a part of the original legislation for which this legislation seeks to amend. The District has recently been the recipient of a \$300,000 grant from the Department of Interior, Bureau of Reclamation from the 2025 initiative. The District is under contract with this agency on the original grant and has completed approximately 60% of this project. Contract negotiations on the second grant are just beginning.

Testimony of Wayne Halbert on H.R. 4588

Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on H.R. 4588, an amendment to the Lower Rio Grande Valley Water Resources Conservation and Improvement Act of 2000. My name is Wayne Halbert, General Manager of the Harlingen Irrigation District and Adams Gardens Irrigation District. I represent irrigation districts that supply irrigation water to over a million acres of farmland and raw water to municipalities for over 2 million people.

This committee has twice previously heard testimony on the forerunner to this legislation, once here in Washington D.C. and once in a field hearing in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas at Brownsville. We thank you for your support on that legislation that provided authorization for 19 similar projects. Several of those projects are in the beginning stages of construction.

The districts in the Rio Grande Valley have suffered for the past ten years with having to function with less water than we have had available in past years. Since 1992, Mexico has failed to deliver water that was allocated to the Rio Grande Valley in the 1944 Water Treaty. In that treaty Mexico agreed to deliver 350,000 acre feet on the average annually to the Rio Grande for United States use and the United States agreed to deliver 1.5 million acre feet to Mexico from the Colorado out West. Though the United States has never failed to meet their obligations from the Colorado, Mexico has determined that they need all the water that previously flowed to the Rio Grande. The critical issue here is that recent revelations tell us that Mexico continues to develop a need for all available water without regard to the obligations of the 1944 Treaty.

The major source of water from Mexico to meet treaty obligations is the Rio Conchos in the Mexican State of Chihuahua. In a recent conference in San Antonio, Texas, Mexican economists reported a steady increase in the change of crop mixes in this basin from low water use crops of grain sorghums to high water use crops of alfalfa and pecan orchards. New pecan groves are being planted in the Conchos Basin at the rate of between 8,000 and 11,000 acres per year. Barring any unforeseen changes in Mexican policy, water users along the Rio Grande in Texas have no choice but to find ways to increase our efficiencies and learn to live on less available water. Fortunately the area has been busy seeking solutions. For the past several

years the Border Region has been deeply involved in Integrated Resource Management studies to determine a direction for our communities to take in water resource management. The State of Texas gave direction to these studies in 1997 with legislation that required even more comprehensive determinations of water resource status. These studies have given us the information to help us know what to do, but have also painted some bleak pictures about the urgency of the issue.

We along the southern border of the United States are faced with unprecedented predictions in population growth. Already our region is the second fastest population growth area in the nation. To complicate matters, the Rio Grande is also the water source for the exploding population area to the south in Mexico. The hope and promise of better jobs and a better life attract thousands to the Border area from deep in the country of Mexico. All of this puts increased pressure on the agricultural regions along the border in Texas. In order to meet the needs of this increased demand from the municipal and industrial sector, the irrigation community must respond quickly and decisively on water conservation projects.

There is another importance to the urgent authorization of these additional projects. We understand that budget restraints are a fact of life and appropriation is slow in coming. Authorization of projects gives a sign of confidence that Congress and the districts are serious in their quest to solve the problems before us. Previous authorizations have allowed the districts to leverage both state and North American Development Bank funds for the implementation of many projects. The State of Texas has found funds to assist districts in engineering and planning as well as provision of limited grants and loans for project implementation. The North American Development Bank has pledged several million dollars in grants and loans towards many of the authorized projects. Authorization of the projects is considered a major step towards the commitment of the district and the community to water conservation.

The irrigation facilities that divert the waters from the Rio Grande for farmers, ranchers and most of the municipal and industrial needs, were constructed in the early 1900's. Many of the facilities are close to 100 years of age. In the 1950's and 1960's, most irrigation districts utilized Bureau of Reclamation loans to upgrade a portion of their systems and most districts annually make upgrades as budgets permit. Nevertheless many of the

facilities we must use are antiquated and not water efficient.

New irrigation technologies have been difficult to promote as the old irrigation systems were not designed to accommodate them. Districts are struggling to make wholesale changes to solve these delivery problems and take advantage of any and all water saving technologies. The water shortages in recent years have depleted the districts fund bases and the agricultural community that utilizes 85% of the water has fallen into hard times as many acres could not be planted for lack of water. However all the studies show that the agricultural community is where the biggest water savings are to be found. This legislation is a major step in giving the irrigated agricultural community the tools we need to balance the water supplies between the many needs along the Texas/Mexico border.

Again we want to thank you for all the support you have given us in the past with the previous legislation. The Harlingen Irrigation District project which I serve is approximately 60% completed and the completed portion is in operation, saving water for our farmers and ranchers as well as the municipalities we serve. The following pages of my report contain some photos of the work that is going on in my district and an example of the work that this legislation will initiate.

Thank you again. We are available for any questions.

The following pages are photo examples of work accomplished by the Harlingen Irrigation District on a project authorized by previous legislation. The District is approximately 60% complete with this project.



Replacing Failed Canal with Pipeline at Citrus Canal





Installing New Pipe at the Taylor Canal





Installing Liner at the Wyrick Canal





Installing Liner at the Wyrick Canal





Installed Antennas at Pump Houses





Installing Antenna at River Pump House





**Telemetry System Installed To Monitor
and Control Water Flow**

