

## **OFFICIAL PRESS RELEASE: Rio Grande Valley Partnership's Alvarez brings the border to the Beltway in Washington trip**

WESLACO, TEXAS (NOVEMBER 20, 2012) – Rio Grande Valley Partnership President and CEO Julian Alvarez last week joined a delegation of fellow Border Trade Alliance board members in Washington, D.C. for visits with lawmakers, policy analysts and agency officials to discuss border policy.

The visit coincided with the launch of the post-election lame duck session of Congress, which, Alvarez notes, will be focused on what to do about the so-called "fiscal cliff," the mix of tax hikes and spending cuts that, if not avoided, could send the U.S. economy into another recession.

"The fiscal cliff was clearly on everyone's mind," Alvarez said. "While much of the coverage of sequestration – the across-the-board government spending cuts – has been focused on its effect on the defense sector, those of us on the border must brace for deep cuts to agencies like Customs and Border Protection, Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the Border Patrol. If those agencies experience staffing cuts, for example, then we could be looking at serious negative ramifications for our area's trade-based economy."

The delegation visited with Texas Senator John Cornyn on the eve of his election to Senate minority whip, the Republican caucus' second-highest post.

"I cannot stress enough the importance for the Rio Grande Valley of Sen. Cornyn's ascension up the leadership ladder," Alvarez said. "To have someone in that position of influence who possesses the knowledge and understanding of South Texas issues like Sen. Cornyn is a big win for our communities. There is a now opportunity to advance border-related legislation in the Senate in 2013 that might not have existed otherwise."

Such border-related subjects to be taken up in the next Congress could include immigration reform and legislation that would allow for more private sector and local government participation in port of entry infrastructure projects.

Alvarez went on to say, "Those of us in the Rio Grande Valley need to be prepared to engage with our elected officials to ensure that any border component of a reform package doesn't harm our quality of life."

Regarding the possibility of port of entry infrastructure legislation, Alvarez said such a deal is needed in light of the country's fiscal situation.

"We must acknowledge that gone are the days that our communities could count on the federal government to construct and remodel our ports of entry in order to keep up with the flow of cross-border trade. The money simply isn't there," Alvarez said. "We need to look for creative ways to augment federal dollars with private sector funds or existing local government dollars in order to ensure that our ports are able to keep up with today's trade demands. The BTA is also searching for new ways to boost border staffing levels beyond what is appropriated by Congress. I was encouraged by our meetings with Sen. Cornyn and with Rep. Henry Cuellar that there is a genuine desire to change the way we pay for port projects and staffing."

The BTA delegation also took time on the trip to bid farewell to Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison and to Rep. Silvestre Reyes of El Paso. Alvarez and current BTA Chairman Jesse Hereford are both former members of Sen. Hutchison's staff.

"We are losing two strong voices for the border with the departures of Sen. Hutchison and Rep. Reyes," Alvarez said. "I know that for Jesse and me, Sen. Hutchison has played a huge role in our professional lives. She will be missed greatly. And you can't easily replace the border insight that Rep. Reyes, as a former Border Patrol sector chief, brings to his job in Congress. We look forward to working with their successors, but it's hard to say goodbye."

Alvarez, who joined the BTA Board of Directors and Executive Committee earlier this year, says he expects the BTA to return with another delegation to Washington in early March, but that the organization will continue to analyze issues as they arise and advocate for a border environment that reflects the nation's economic and security needs.

"The work for the border never stops, whether we're in the Valley or inside the Beltway," he said.

South Texas members of the BTA include, among others, the City of McAllen and Cameron County.

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