

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center

H.C.R. 186
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International Relations and Trade
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Engrossed

DIGEST

In 1962, Pub. L. No. 87-525 authorized the construction of an international bridge across the Rio Grande to join Heath Canyon in Texas with the village of La Linda, Coahuila, Mexico, for the purpose of transporting refined ore into the United States from nearby mills in Mexico and to one day facilitate the movement of tourists interested in visiting the Sierra del Carmen mountain areas across from Big Bend National Park. Since the bridge was constructed, the Texas Department of Transportation has, without interruption, maintained Farm-to-Market Road 2627 as a paved two-lane highway for a 28-mile stretch connecting the bridge to United States Highway 385, which leads from that junction southward to Big Bend National Park and northward 40 miles to Marathon and United States Highway 90. La Linda Bridge, also known as the Hallie Stillwell Memorial Bridge, is still in place and is in good repair but cannot be crossed by vehicles or pedestrians because of barriers and the placement of "no trespassing" signs at the bridge since 1997 pursuant to orders issued by the governments of the United States of America and the Republic of Mexico. The La Linda international crossing is the only bridge structure in place and the only point of entry authorized by public law between the United States ports of entry at Presidio and Del Rio, a distance of 385 miles. The principal owner of the United States section of the international bridge at La Linda, the National Parks Conservation Association, is prepared to donate its interest in the bridge and associated properties to the State of Texas through the General Land Office so that the bridge may be reopened and operated as a legal border crossing. The tourism industries serving scenic and recreational areas joined by this bridge, including the Big Bend mountains of Texas and the Sierra del Carmen mountains of Northwest Coahuila, wish to promote, accommodate, and economically benefit from cross border tourism but are unable to implement those objectives if the La Linda crossing is not functioning. The safety of tourists wishing to enjoy the area, the binational scientific cooperation called for under existing international agreements, and the security and public safety of communities and citizens on both sides of the international border would be enhanced by a functioning border crossing at La Linda. The State of Coahuila and the commissioners court of Brewster County, respectively represented by the Instituto de Turismo and the Big Bend Border Council and joined by a coalition of local residents and the Big Bend National Park Superintendent, have twice requested that the Binational Bridges and Border Crossings working group, which is convened semiannually by the United States Department of State and the Mexican Secretaria de Relaciones Exteriores, take the necessary actions to have the bridge and border crossing at La Linda reopened by the United States and Mexican federal governments. The working group, composed of United States and Mexican federal authorities responsible for authorizing international ports of entry and required inspections along the international boundary, will convene again in the coming months to consider action on either reopening the bridge at La Linda or ordering its removal. It is in the economic, cultural, and security interest of the State of Texas and the homeland security interest of the United States of America to have a functioning border crossing station under the management and control of trained and equipped law enforcement and public safety officials in the extensive area known as the Big Bend.

PURPOSE

H.C.R. 186 submits the following proposals:

Provides that the 78th Legislature of the State of Texas hereby express its support and encouragement for the reopening of the bridge and border crossing at La Linda to accommodate trade and tourism between Texas and Coahuila, Mexico, and to better protect residents of both

countries and secure the protection of our nation from threats that might be associated with the illegal crossing of individuals or materials with a lethal intent. Provides that the legislature hereby urges the General Land Office to proceed expeditiously with the due diligence needed to make a determination regarding acceptance of an ownership interest in La Linda Bridge by the State of Texas. Additionally it requests that the governor, the Texas Department of Transportation, the secretary of state, the Department of Public Safety of the State of Texas, the Parks and Wildlife Department, the Texas Department of Economic Development, the Texas Historical Commission, and other appropriate state agencies render encouragement and assistance to the General Land Office as it proceeds in this matter and render encouragement and assistance as well to Brewster County and to private and public advocates for tourism in the Big Bend in their efforts to develop a regional tourism economy in conjunction with a reopened bridge at La Linda. Provides that the legislature hereby calls upon the United States Department of State to communicate the interest of the State of Texas in this matter to the government of the Republic of Mexico and to all other parties participating in decisions relating to either reopening or removing the bridge at La Linda. Likewise, it provides that the legislature respectfully memorialize the Congress of the United States to initiate whatever actions are needed to reopen La Linda Bridge as a border crossing. Finally it requests the Texas secretary of state forward official copies of this resolution to the president of the United States, to the speaker of the house of representatives and the president of the senate of the United States Congress, and to all members of the Texas delegation to the congress with the request that this resolution be officially entered in the Congressional Record as a memorial to the Congress of the United States of America.