

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 1, 2017

The Honorable Rex W. Tillerson
Secretary of State
United States Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Scott Pruitt
Administrator
Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20460

Dear Secretary Tillerson and Administrator Pruitt:

We write to bring to your immediate attention a recent spill of over 143 gallons of sewage into the Tijuana River from Mexico. This constitutes the worst sewage spill in the region in over a decade. The leak began on February 6, 2017 and lasted for seventeen days, causing beach closures from the border to the City of Coronado. According to a report issued by the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System, the “rehabilitation of a major sewer collector” was cited as the probable cause of the spill. We are calling upon both the State Department (State) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to work with affected municipalities in San Diego County to further investigate and commit the appropriate resources to rehabilitate and secure the Tijuana River Valley communities.

As you both are well aware, the United States International Boundary Water Commission (IBWC) administers the Tijuana River flow project and other transboundary sewage treatment controls. IBWC was institutionalized through the Water Treaty of 1944 between the United States and Mexico and its mission is to provide binational solutions to issues that arise during the application of United States–Mexico treaties regarding boundary demarcation, national ownership of waters, sanitation, water quality, and flood control in the border region. In 2015, the United States and Mexico reached an agreement with Minute 320, which marks the first Commission agreement focused on sediment and trash problems in the Tijuana River Basin, and established a framework of binational cooperation to address these issues. Additionally, the EPA implements the Border 2020 program, which emphasizes “regional, bottom-up approaches for decision making, priority setting, and project implementation to address the environmental and public health problems in the border region.” Along with other authorizations, your respective departments have the capacity to ensure that communities along the border remain protected from an onslaught of sewage and other containments from across the border.

These spills have a deeply adverse impact on the quality of life of constituents in our Districts. The frequency of these incidents have not only affected the health of residents, but also disrupt community engagements that are key to the local tourism economy. We ask that you both provide greater accountability to the local regional IBWC and EPA offices in San Diego County for assessing and implementing the necessary structural changes. We look forward to working with your offices on these and other issues and for your full and fair consideration of these requests on the merits in compliance with all applicable laws and regulations.

Sincerely,



JUAN VARGAS
Member of Congress



SCOTT H. PETERS
Member of Congress