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H.C.R. No. 79

HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

1 WHEREAS, Border communities, such as Laredo, contend with
2 heightened responsibilities in the world today, and since the
3 advent of the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1994, Laredo
4 has become the busiest United States port of entry from Mexico and
5 the sixth-largest customs district in the country, with more than
6 \$167 billion in total trade in 2007; while the heavy flow of
7 international commerce is a boon to the local economy, it presents
8 tremendous challenges to the first responders who protect the state
9 and the nation as well as their own community; and

10 WHEREAS, The Bureau of Transportation Statistics calculated
11 that more than 1.5 million trucks and 300,000 rail containers
12 crossed through Laredo in 2006, and according to Texas Department
13 of Transportation estimates, truck tonnage will increase by some
14 250 percent by 2030; about half of this cargo includes hazardous
15 material, and more than 60 million square feet of warehouse space in
16 the city also contains significant amounts of hazardous materials,
17 creating a tempting target for terrorists and enormous potential
18 for a disaster that could not only endanger public health but also
19 disrupt major transportation systems and negatively impact the
20 national economy; and

21 WHEREAS, Relatively isolated on its side of the border,
22 Laredo is 150 miles from the nearest sizable U.S. city, and its
23 police, fire, and public health personnel are the primary emergency
24 responders for a region of more than 3,000 square miles; this

1 includes a long stretch of the Rio Grande, which is the primary
2 drinking water source for Laredo, Nuevo Laredo, and other
3 communities in the Rio Grande Valley, making swift response to any
4 contamination extremely critical; in addition, the United
5 States-Mexico Border Health Commission has recognized the region as
6 among those most vulnerable to perils such as bioterrorism and
7 epidemics; and

8 WHEREAS, The Laredo Police Department has increased
9 vigilance over border activity since the attacks of September 11,
10 2001, and confronts an escalating threat from violent international
11 drug traffickers, who have been linked to terrorism; the fire
12 department responds to a wide range of emergencies along the Rio
13 Grande, from the rescue or recovery of individuals who have
14 attempted to cross into the United States to bomb threats; and

15 WHEREAS, The emergency response system in Laredo requires a
16 higher level of funding to ensure public safety and meet homeland
17 security imperatives; for instance, the city has only one hazardous
18 materials response unit, purchased in 1991 and long overdue for
19 upgrades; it lacks a detection system for chemical, biological,
20 radiological, nuclear, and high-yield explosive weapons, as well as
21 for quick assessment and management of industrial accidents; among
22 other urgent needs are enhanced police staffing, improved radio
23 coverage in remote areas, and construction of a secure regional
24 emergency operations center where safety personnel and local,
25 state, and federal government officials can coordinate decisions
26 and resources in a crisis; and

27 WHEREAS, With an estimated population of 217,000, Laredo is a

1 much smaller city than other major United States ports; its own
2 budget is accordingly limited, and at the same time, its size has
3 been an impediment in the pursuit of federal assistance; homeland
4 security funding formulas currently use census figures rather than
5 threat risk in determining eligibility for such programs as the
6 Urban Areas Security Initiative and Targeted Infrastructure
7 Capability Grants Program, and, as a land port, Laredo is likewise
8 ineligible for the Port Security Grant Program, even though it
9 processes more international shipments than such grant recipients
10 as Mobile, Alabama, and Lake Charles, Louisiana; and

11 WHEREAS, Laredo, as the nation's second-busiest land
12 gateway, shoulders unique law enforcement, public safety, and
13 national security burdens far out of proportion to the size of its
14 population; increased federal funding is necessary to strengthen
15 first response where local agencies with strained budgets are
16 responsible for protecting our nation's critical infrastructure
17 and addressing international threats; now, therefore, be it

18 RESOLVED, That the 81st Legislature of the State of Texas
19 hereby respectfully urge the United States Congress to refine
20 Department of Homeland Security policy to consider risk levels as
21 well as population size in assessing the financial needs of first
22 responders in border communities along the international boundary
23 created by the Rio Grande; and, be it further

24 RESOLVED, That the Texas secretary of state forward official
25 copies of this resolution to the president of the United States, to
26 the speaker of the house of representatives and the president of the
27 senate of the United States Congress, and to all the members of the

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1 Texas delegation to the congress with the request that this
2 resolution be officially entered in the Congressional Record as a
3 memorial to the Congress of the United States of America.