

1-1 By: Guillen, Raymond (Senate Sponsor - Zaffirini) H.C.R. No. 79
1-2 (In the Senate - Received from the House April 14, 2009;
1-3 May 6, 2009, read first time and referred to Committee on
1-4 International Relations and Trade; May 14, 2009, reported
1-5 favorably by the following vote: Yeas 7, Nays 0; May 14, 2009, sent
1-6 to printer.)

1-7 HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

1-8 WHEREAS, Border communities, such as Laredo, contend with
1-9 heightened responsibilities in the world today, and since the
1-10 advent of the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1994, Laredo
1-11 has become the busiest United States port of entry from Mexico and
1-12 the sixth-largest customs district in the country, with more than
1-13 \$167 billion in total trade in 2007; while the heavy flow of
1-14 international commerce is a boon to the local economy, it presents
1-15 tremendous challenges to the first responders who protect the state
1-16 and the nation as well as their own community; and

1-17 WHEREAS, The Bureau of Transportation Statistics calculated
1-18 that more than 1.5 million trucks and 300,000 rail containers
1-19 crossed through Laredo in 2006, and according to Texas Department
1-20 of Transportation estimates, truck tonnage will increase by some
1-21 250 percent by 2030; about half of this cargo includes hazardous
1-22 material, and more than 60 million square feet of warehouse space in
1-23 the city also contains significant amounts of hazardous materials,
1-24 creating a tempting target for terrorists and enormous potential
1-25 for a disaster that could not only endanger public health but also
1-26 disrupt major transportation systems and negatively impact the
1-27 national economy; and

1-28 WHEREAS, Relatively isolated on its side of the border,
1-29 Laredo is 150 miles from the nearest sizable U.S. city, and its
1-30 police, fire, and public health personnel are the primary emergency
1-31 responders for a region of more than 3,000 square miles; this
1-32 includes a long stretch of the Rio Grande, which is the primary
1-33 drinking water source for Laredo, Nuevo Laredo, and other
1-34 communities in the Rio Grande Valley, making swift response to any
1-35 contamination extremely critical; in addition, the United
1-36 States-Mexico Border Health Commission has recognized the region as
1-37 among those most vulnerable to perils such as bioterrorism and
1-38 epidemics; and

1-39 WHEREAS, The Laredo Police Department has increased
1-40 vigilance over border activity since the attacks of September 11,
1-41 2001, and confronts an escalating threat from violent international
1-42 drug traffickers, who have been linked to terrorism; the fire
1-43 department responds to a wide range of emergencies along the Rio
1-44 Grande, from the rescue or recovery of individuals who have
1-45 attempted to cross into the United States to bomb threats; and

1-46 WHEREAS, The emergency response system in Laredo requires a
1-47 higher level of funding to ensure public safety and meet homeland
1-48 security imperatives; for instance, the city has only one hazardous
1-49 materials response unit, purchased in 1991 and long overdue for
1-50 upgrades; it lacks a detection system for chemical, biological,
1-51 radiological, nuclear, and high-yield explosive weapons, as well as
1-52 for quick assessment and management of industrial accidents; among
1-53 other urgent needs are enhanced police staffing, improved radio
1-54 coverage in remote areas, and construction of a secure regional
1-55 emergency operations center where safety personnel and local,
1-56 state, and federal government officials can coordinate decisions
1-57 and resources in a crisis; and

1-58 WHEREAS, With an estimated population of 217,000, Laredo is a
1-59 much smaller city than other major United States ports; its own
1-60 budget is accordingly limited, and at the same time, its size has
1-61 been an impediment in the pursuit of federal assistance; homeland
1-62 security funding formulas currently use census figures rather than
1-63 threat risk in determining eligibility for such programs as the
1-64 Urban Areas Security Initiative and Targeted Infrastructure

2-1 Capability Grants Program, and, as a land port, Laredo is likewise
2-2 ineligible for the Port Security Grant Program, even though it
2-3 processes more international shipments than such grant recipients
2-4 as Mobile, Alabama, and Lake Charles, Louisiana; and

2-5 WHEREAS, Laredo, as the nation's second-busiest land
2-6 gateway, shoulders unique law enforcement, public safety, and
2-7 national security burdens far out of proportion to the size of its
2-8 population; increased federal funding is necessary to strengthen
2-9 first response where local agencies with strained budgets are
2-10 responsible for protecting our nation's critical infrastructure
2-11 and addressing international threats; now, therefore, be it

2-12 RESOLVED, That the 81st Legislature of the State of Texas
2-13 hereby respectfully urge the United States Congress to refine
2-14 Department of Homeland Security policy to consider risk levels as
2-15 well as population size in assessing the financial needs of first
2-16 responders in border communities along the international boundary
2-17 created by the Rio Grande; and, be it further

2-18 RESOLVED, That the Texas secretary of state forward official
2-19 copies of this resolution to the president of the United States, to
2-20 the speaker of the house of representatives and the president of the
2-21 senate of the United States Congress, and to all the members of the
2-22 Texas delegation to the congress with the request that this
2-23 resolution be officially entered in the Congressional Record as a
2-24 memorial to the Congress of the United States of America.

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