

Commission will deliver for southern N.M.

Written by By Sen. Martin Heinrich
Friday, 05 January 2024 00:00



The latest move to bolster border communities

WASHINGTON – U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich, D-N.M., a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, published an op-ed that details his years-long work to fully fund the operations of the Southwest Border Regional Commission.

The Southwest Border Regional Commission is one of eight authorized federal regional commissions and authorities, which are congressionally-chartered, federal-state partnerships created to promote economic development in their respective regions.

In December, Heinrich introduced the Southwest Border Regional Commission Reauthorization Act to reauthorize and fully fund the SBRC, which is working to grow thriving economies in the southern border communities in New Mexico, Arizona, California, and Texas.

Southern New Mexico is home to vibrant and resilient communities with proud histories, striving to build even stronger futures. For years, I have fought to deliver federal investments to support economic development and modernize infrastructure in this region, including the unincorporated communities and colonias that haven't historically gotten their fair share of federal investments," Heinrich wrote.

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A keystone of that work is finally standing up the Southwest Border Regional Commission – an economic development partnership between the federal government and local and state partners that is working to build prosperous and thriving southern border communities in New Mexico and our neighboring states of Arizona, California, and Texas.

The Southwest Border Regional Commission is one of eight authorized federal regional commissions that Congress has created over the last half century to strengthen economic development efforts and improve the quality of life in their respective regions.

Congress established the first of these federal-local economic development partnerships — the Appalachian Regional Commission — in 1965. In the decades since, that Commission has helped with everything from the Appalachian Development Highway System and clean water infrastructure to mining area restoration, workforce retraining programs, community health clinics and addiction treatment services.

Former Senator Jeff Bingaman first proposed creating a similar commission for the Southwest Border Region back in 2002. Then, he successfully authorized the creation of the Southwest Border Regional Commission as a new federal-state partnership as part of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 — also known as the Farm Bill.

In the past couple years, since joining the Senate Appropriations Committee, I have secured nearly \$9 million to help the commission kickstart operations. And, at the end of last year, I was able to secure the senate confirmation of Juan Eduardo Sanchez to be the first ever Federal Co-Chairman of the Commission. Mr. Sanchez has spent more than twelve years in public service working to improve the quality of life for people on the U.S.-Mexico border, including most recently as the Director of Economic Development in my office.

We still have a long way to go to get the commission functioning at full capacity. Right now, the commission's funding levels still lag other regional commissions, including the two other commissions that Congress established in the same year as the SBRC. A recent report from the Joint Economic Committee found that those two commissions have received between nearly three and 350 times more funding per person living in their respective regions.

Our border communities deserve our fair share of federal investment. That's why I made fully

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funding and staffing up an effective Southwest Border Regional Commission one of my top priorities as soon as I joined the Senate Appropriations Committee three years ago.

By fully funding the commission, we can better establish this region as a hub of economic progress. An active Southwest Border Regional Commission will help increase local access to trade-related jobs, enhance industry diversity and build up workforce development programs that will benefit our communities in the border region and our nation as a whole.

Now, as Congress begins to negotiate the next major Farm Bill legislation, I am leading the effort to reauthorize the commission and increase its annual funding to \$100 million for Fiscal Years 2023 through 2027 and to \$200 million for Fiscal Years 2028 to 2032.

As the commission becomes a real force for good throughout the entire southwest border region, I encourage community and business leaders throughout southern New Mexico to work closely with Co-Chairman Sanchez. And I encourage New Mexicans to continue to work with me, with Congressman Gabe Vasquez and our entire New Mexico congressional delegation as partners in identifying grant opportunities and delivering federal resources and investments to our communities.

By working together, we can deliver the opportunities our communities deserve.

By Sen. Martin Heinrich