Two Programs that Protect People's Health and the Environment on the U.S.-Mexico Border Area are Eliminated

What challenges does assistance and investment in the U.S.-Mexico border area address?
The U.S. and Mexico share a 2000-mile border and water and air pollution that does not respect international boundaries. The rivers carry untreated sewage that pollutes drinking water and winds carry polluted air across the border, posing serious health risks to residents of border communities. Fourteen million people live on both sides of the border. More than half of them live in the U.S. The area contains three of the ten poorest counties in the U.S. and twenty-one border counties have been designated as economically distressed areas. The unemployment rate in the border region is 250-300 percent higher than the rest of the country. A significant number of residents in the U.S.-Mexico border area lack basic services such as potable water and wastewater treatment and suffer health problems closely linked to poor air and water quality, improper management of pesticides and illegal or inadequate disposal of solid and hazardous waste. The elderly and children are particularly vulnerable. Tribal and indigenous communities, which are more likely to have inadequate water supply and treatment systems and lack mechanisms for the proper management of solid and hazardous waste, face increased risks.

What will be lost if the program is eliminated?
- People living along the U.S. Mexico border, especially vulnerable children and the elderly, would continue to suffer the serious health effects of exposure to raw sewage, contaminated drinking water, hazardous waste and air pollution.
- Border communities would lose the funding and government support needed to construct or improve drinking water and wastewater infrastructure essential to protecting people's health and the environment.
- Water quality improvements and reductions in air pollution on both sides of the border would be threatened.

How does the U.S. Mexico Border program work?
In 1983, recognizing that actions were needed to address the serious public health and environmental problems in border communities, the U.S. and Mexico entered into the landmark La Paz Agreement to work cooperatively to prevent and control pollution along the border. In the years since, the two countries have collaborated on drinking water and wastewater infrastructure projects and worked together to improve environmental conditions on both sides of the border.

The Border 2020 Program, established under the 1983 agreement, is an environmental and public health partnership among U.S. border tribes and federal, state and local governments in the United States and Mexico. The program has five goals: reducing air pollution; improving access to clean and safe water; promoting materials and waste management and clean sites; enhancing joint preparedness for environmental response; and enhancing compliance and environmental stewardship. The program:
- Helps communities meet national ambient air quality standards that protect human health and works to maintain effective air monitoring networks and provide real-time access to air quality data.
- Focuses on specific pollutants in high priority water bodies and watersheds, pollution prevention, urban planning and the use of effective practices to control water pollution from stormwater

runoff. It also works to provide the public with timely access to water quality data. The goal is to connect at least an additional 5000 homes to safe drinking water and provide at least 42,000 people with adequate wastewater sanitation.

Water infrastructure grants fund the planning, design and construction of high-priority water and wastewater treatment facilities in underserved communities along the border to reduce exposure to raw sewage and drinking water contaminants, which can cause acute and chronic illnesses. To receive funding, projects on either side of the border must provide a positive effect on public health and the environment in the United States.

- The U.S. and Mexican governments have collaborated on water infrastructure projects that have protected people from waterborne disease and reduced health risks among sensitive populations of children and the elderly.
- Recognizing it is easier to prevent contamination than to clean up contaminated water bodies, wastewater projects in Mexico have improved water quality in shared and U.S. waters.

Successes of the U.S. Mexico border programs:

Significant progress has been made through the cooperative efforts of local governments and communities on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border and infrastructure investments:

- More than 54,000 homes have been connected to clean sources of drinking water.
- Over half a million homes have been connected to wastewater systems that reduce contamination from untreated sewage.
- Thirteen million scrap tires have been removed from border communities. Runoff from tire fires can pollute land and water and tires collect standing water where mosquitoes carrying diseases like West Nile virus can breed.
- Mandatory vehicle-smog checks in Baja, California are expected to reduce vehicle emissions by 12 to 24 percent annually. Programs like this decrease air pollution, which can cause serious heart and respiratory problems and trigger asthma attacks.
- Drinking water and wastewater utilities have implemented sustainable practices to reduce operating costs, improve water and energy efficiency and adapt to climate change.
- In New River, California and the middle Rio Grande, New Mexico, levels of fecal coliform bacteria, which can cause intestinal illness and affect water quality, have dropped by over 80 percent due to the construction of jointly-funded wastewater treatment plants in Mexicali and Ojinaga, Mexico. California border beaches once closed due to wastewater pollution from Mexico now remain open throughout the summer. The Santa Cruz River in Arizona now supports a healthy fish population where only bloodworms once thrived.

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