

**DRAFT MEETING MINUTES**  
**California-Mexico Border Relations Council**

December 10, 2020 | 1 p.m. – 4 p.m.

The meeting was called to order at 1 p.m. by Chair Jared Blumenfeld.

**Logistics**

California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA) Deputy Secretary Yana Garcia introduced Carlos Diaz from TransLang as the interpreter for the meeting and explained how to access Spanish interpretation. Deputy Secretary Garcia then noted that the meeting was being recorded and webcast and that public feedback would be taken at the end of each agenda item. She thanked Michelle Hutzler and Leticia Syslo of CalEPA for assisting with public comment.

**1. Roll Call**

The following councilmembers were present:

- Secretary Jared Blumenfeld, CalEPA, Chair
- Secretary Lourdes Castro Ramírez, California Business, Consumer Services and Housing Agency (BCSH)
- Executive Director Josh Eddy representing Secretary Karen Ross, California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA)
- Secretary David Kim, California State Transportation Agency (CalSTA)
- Deputy Director Max Oltersdorf representing Chief Deputy Director Chris Dombrowski, California Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development (GO-Biz)
- Assistant Director Helen Lopez, California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES)
- Director Nancy Vogel, Governor's Water Portfolio Program, California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA)
- Assistant Secretary Julie Souliere, California Health and Human Services Agency
- Director Laura Ebbert representing Regional Administrator John Busterud, United States Environmental Protection Agency Region 9 (U.S. EPA) – ex-officio member

A quorum of councilmembers was established. Chair Blumenfeld thanked the councilmembers for joining. He expressed hope that the virtual meeting format allowed for higher attendance and thanked Deputy Secretary Garcia and Elizabeth King for arranging for simultaneous interpretation.

**Welcome and Introductions**

Chair Blumenfeld welcomed the public, Mexico government officials, particularly those from Baja California, representatives from Mexico's Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources,

Secretaría del Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (SEMARNAT), and distinguished guests. Chair Blumenfeld introduced Lieutenant Governor Eleni Koulanakis of California.

## **2. Welcoming Remarks from Lieutenant Governor of California, Eleni Koulanakis**

Lieutenant Governor Eleni Koulanakis thanked Chair Blumenfeld and welcomed councilmembers, members of the public, and partners from Mexico. She explained the importance of economic and cultural ties between Mexico and California. She emphasized the strength of these ties during the COVID-19 pandemic, and thanked officials from California and Mexico on their efforts to combat the health and economic consequences of COVID-19. She highlighted the Memorandum of Understanding, which reestablished the Commission of the Californias (ComCal), explaining the practical and symbolic significance of the memorandum and sharing that ComCal had met the previous day for a productive discussion on wide-ranging issues. She stated that she was looking forward to hearing from representatives and guests from both sides of the border.

Councilmember Comments:

- Chair Blumenfeld thanked the Lieutenant Governor and provided an overview of the agenda.

## **3. Transportation in the Border Region – California State Transportation Agency**

**Informational item:** Chair Blumenfeld thanked Secretary Kim for his work and stated that this agenda item would include a summary of COVID-19 impacts on cross-border transportation and an update on the Border Master Plan.

Secretary Kim shared the following update:

- Although pedestrian and vehicle traffic volumes are much lower than in previous years, there has been a slight increase in commercial cross-border traffic in recent months. This shows that the economic relationship between California and Mexico continues to be robust.
- Last week, the California Transportation Commission approved two billion dollars worth of new transportation projects from three programs created by Senate Bill 1, the Road Repair and Accountability Act of 2017. The projects will create more than 100,000 jobs throughout the state over the next several years and facilitate international trade. A few key projects were:
  - \$42.5 million for the Otay Mesa East Port of Entry Project
  - \$22.5 million for La Media Road Improvements Project
  - \$7.5 million for Calexico East Port of Entry Bridge Widening
  - \$106 million for the San Diego Subdivision of the Los Angeles-San Diego-San Luis Obispo (LOSSAN) San Diego Intermodal Improvement Program

- Secretary Kim met with Mexican Secretary of Communications and Transportation Jorge Arganis Díaz Leal. They discussed the Otay Mesa East Project and decided to form a standing binational border infrastructure policy working group to meet on a quarterly basis.
- CalSTA hopes to execute a shared Mexico-California vision agreement for Otay Mesa East. The agreement would set project delivery milestones, provide for the location of toll facilities in the U.S., and establish toll revenue sharing policies.
- CalSTA and the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) are working to build State Route 11, which will connect to the future Otay Mesa East Port of Entry. They have acquired all the necessary right of way permits to move forward with the project. CalSTA is working with Mexico's Secretaría de Comunicaciones y Transportes (SCT) staff on the Investment Grade Traffic and Revenue Study. They are also installing intelligent transportation systems on both sides of the border.

Councilmember Comments:

- Chair Blumenfeld thanked Secretary Kim.
- Secretary Ross thanked Secretary Kim and emphasized the importance of improving accessibility of cross-border transportation, especially for truck traffic.

#### 4. General Councilmember Updates

**Informational item:** Councilmembers shared additional border region updates.

**CALSTA:** No additional updates shared.

**CDFR:** Secretary Ross stated that, with less cargo going back and forth between the U.S. and Mexico, exotic fruit fly infestation numbers are down. CDFR is focused on working with the Mexican citrus industry and combating livestock diseases, which have been active this year. Due to collaboration between Californian and Mexican governments, they have successfully eradicated Virulent Newcastle disease and have a new communication system around poultry health. Secretary Ross thanked the Mexican consulate for their collaboration.

**CNRA:** Director Vogel shared that, in August, the California Department of Water Resources finalized a contract with the construction firm Pewitt to construct a 3,370 acre species conservation habitat project at the south end of the Salton Sea. The state team is working with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to conduct federal environmental review for the Salton Sea management program's 10-year plan in order to secure federal permitting for 30,000 acres of dust suppression and habitat projects at the sea. CNRA is collaborating with the Salton Sea Authority to advance progress on the North Lake Pilot Project and the North Shore Beach and Yacht Club Harbor Rehabilitation Project. The projects use funding from Proposition 68, the Parks Environment and Water Bond (June 2018). The team is working to establish a new office in Imperial County to increase community outreach. In Fall 2020, California State Parks completed excavation of the Goat Canyon Sediment Basin and removed nearly 20,000 cubic

yards of sediment and waste. California State Parks is responsible for the design and environmental impact report for the Nelson Swan Restoration Project, which seeks to restore the natural shape and native habitat at an abandoned quarry in the Tijuana River Valley. Through a 20-year period, the project will use one million cubic yards of sediment from the Goat Canyon Sediment Basin and other sediment management projects. The project could reduce cross border sediment flows by a third to a half.

**BCSH:** Secretary Castro Ramírez explained the responsibilities of BCSH and stated that the agency has been focused on protecting vulnerable communities during COVID-19. BCSH has provided protections and relief to households unable to pay rent and has connected landlords to financial relief. BCSH launched its Housing is Key initiative to ensure that families can stay housed during the recession. This was done under California Assembly Bill 3088, the Tenant, Homeowner and Small Landlord Relief and Stabilization Act of 2020. The agency has provided \$36 million to San Diego and Imperial counties to fund shelters and housing for homeless individuals. They have also launched the Homekey Initiative, which enables jurisdictions to buy hotels and motels to provide housing. Secretary Castro Ramírez offered to provide a list of such projects.

**CHHS:** Assistant Secretary Souliere, representing Secretary Dr. Mark Ghaly, described recent COVID-19 and intensive care unit (ICU) capacity trends. COVID-19 cases and deaths have all increased in recent months, and trends could overwhelm hospitals. Cases and deaths are disproportionately high in Latino and Pacific Islander groups. Governor Gavin Newsom announced the California Notify Exposure Notification App, and the app will launch today. The vaccine advisory committee met earlier that day to discuss vaccine phasing. Three areas of the state are under a stay-at-home order, with Sacramento being the most recently added. Assistant Secretary Souliere gave an update on COVID-19 positivity rates.

**Cal OES:** Assistant Director Lopez shared that Cal OES communicates with the Mexican Consulate and partners in Mexico, specifically those in Baja California, to share resources and information related to COVID-19. They share information and resources with community organizations supporting vulnerable populations, assessing needs on both sides of the border and providing personal protective equipment (PPE) to San Diego and Imperial counties, as well as Mexicali and Tijuana. They continue to monitor sewage flows in the Tijuana River, providing spill notifications.

**GO-Biz:** Deputy Director Oltersdorf shared that it is estimated that over 50% of goods that cross the border are inputs for manufacturing on the other side. Trade with Mexico was down in 2020, with exports down 18% and imports down 3%. GO-Biz has collaborated with Mexican counterparts to address issues such as strains on medical device supply chains, as many medical devices used in California are made in Mexico and sent to U.S. factories. GO-Biz has worked with the Mexican government to ensure access to medical supplies on both sides of the border. They are working under the ComCal agreement by meeting with Mexico government officials from Baja California Norte and Baja California Sur to discuss trade issues. They plan to work on a California pavilion for trade shows and share best practices on tourism to maintain a

strong trade relationship after the pandemic. Chair Blumenfeld thanked Deputy Director Oltersdorf and emphasized the importance of strong trade relations with Mexico.

**CalEPA:** Deputy Secretary Garcia shared that, in determining the location of pollution hotspots in California, CalEPA has found many are along the border. The California Air Resources Board (CARB) is working to monitor air pollution and determine sources. They have found that one major source is heavy diesel trucks, affirming the importance of working with partners in the border region to achieve zero-emissions goals. CARB is working with Tijuana to establish an air monitoring network. The network includes a two-year study of 50 emission sources and is similar to the system that already exists with Mexicali. This work is especially crucial during the COVID-19 pandemic because higher air pollution rates are associated with higher asthma rates on both sides of the border, making groups living in the area more susceptible to severe cases of COVID-19. CalEPA is also working with the California Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery (CalRecycle) to support waste reduction projects in Baja California. CalRecycle recently held a workshop on its five-year waste tire plan and invited partners from the border region. They discussed the waste tire pollution and its effect on the border region and binational waterways. Some ideas that came out of the workshop from Mexican partners include directing a large portion of the tire fee to address waste tires at the border, providing trainings for tire dealers and buyers, and promoting tire collection at the border. CalEPA has also been focused on addressing wastewater at the border. CalEPA is working with counterparts in San Diego and Tijuana to support projects on the Mexico side of the border and to address main channel challenges which, during wet weather conditions, cause emergencies affecting the estuaries and coastal regions. Senate Bill 1301, passed in the fall of 2020, calls upon CalEPA to create a binational watershed action plan for the Tijuana River Watershed. This presents an opportunity for CalEPA to find gaps that they can fill in existing watershed management planning processes. CalEPA is beginning construction of the New River Improvement Project in Calexico and is working to divert polluted water away from communities. Chair Blumenfeld suggested holding a virtual groundbreaking on the New River construction project.

**Public Comment:**

Alberto, resident: Alberto asked the councilmembers if they have analyzed the possibility of destroying waste tires in California to avoid their resale in Mexico.

- Council Response: Chair Blumenfeld thanked Alberto and stated that CalEPA has considered the possibility of shredding tires and sending them to various parts of the world. CalEPA's decision on the matter depends on the price of oil, as the tires are worth more when oil prices are higher. CalEPA's goal is to understand the flow of tires and to reduce them. Deputy Secretary Garcia added that CalEPA hopes to continue receiving public input on waste tires as the situation evolves.

Dr. Astrid Caldérez: Dr. Caldérez was interested to hear about efforts to expand the purple air monitors in the Mexicali area to the Tijuana area. She was curious why the monitors have not

been considered for use in Imperial County as well, since there are local air pollution sources that are not detected by monitors in the county.

- Council Response: Deputy Secretary Garcia clarified that CalEPA is working on expanding monitoring in San Diego and Imperial Counties through the Assembly Bill (AB) 617 Program. They are engaged with community groups to expand the process. Deputy Secretary Garcia invited Dr. Caldéz to participate in the process by providing feedback to CalEPA. Chair Blumenfeld thanked Dr. Caldéz for her question.

Luís Olmedo, Executive Director of Comité Cívico del Valle: Executive Director Olmedo seconded Deputy Secretary Garcia's response to the previous question and stated that his organization is involved in determining the placement of air pollution monitors and that they are open to public feedback on the matter. He emphasized the need for a comprehensive approach to address the tire situation, taking into consideration the economy in Mexico that depends on tire recycling.

- Council Response: Chair Blumenfeld thanked Executive Director Olmedo and suggested that he team up with CalEPA's Border Program for future work on the issue.

Gabriella Torres, Policy Coordinator for the San Diego Surfrider Foundation: Ms. Torres stated that Surfrider would like to see a cleanup effort in the Tijuana River Valley because tires are causing health problems, impeding access to open space recreation, and impacting the ocean. Surfrider used to clean up tires in the area, but staff started to fall ill doing so. Surfrider therefore believes a professional cleanup effort with state funding is necessary.

- Council Response: Chair Blumenfeld thanked Gabriella Torres and Surfrider for their work and for raising concerns around the issue of tire waste.

Fay Crevoshay, Communications and Policy Director of Wildcoast: Ms. Crevoshay acknowledged CalEPA's interest in cleaning up tires in the Tijuana River Valley and stated that Wildcoast is working on cleanup efforts. She stated that there is not yet a feasible way to shred and recycle tires, but that there is opportunity for employment in tire recycling if a market is established. She appreciates CalEPA's work on the issue.

- Council Response: Chair Blumenfeld stated that CalEPA has worked with Wildcoast on sewage issues and thanked Ms. Crevoshay for her comments. He noted the prominent public interest in tire recycling and clean up and suggested to Deputy Secretary Garcia and Elizabeth King that CalEPA coordinate speakers on the subject for their next meeting.

Carlos Cristiani from Think Mexico LLC: Mr. Cristiani followed up on a comment from Director Vogel on California State Parks and Goat Canyon. Think Mexico proposed a trash boom project with KDI and Sherwood Engineering and is working on a more robust proposal to present to the State Coastal Conservancy in January. Mr. Cristiani offered to answer questions on the project.

- Council Response: Chair Blumenfeld thanked Carlos Cristiani and asked Director Vogel if she had a response to Mr. Cristiani's comment. Director Vogel had no comments, and she thanked Mr. Cristiani.

Dr. Paul Ganster, Director of the Institute for Regional Studies of the Californias at San Diego State University: Dr. Ganster stated that there is a comprehensive report on the CalRecycle website analyzing the flow of used tires from California into Baja California where they are used and improperly disposed of. He stated that the bottleneck in the process is freeing up funds, which are collected in California from selling new tires, for their disposal. He thinks that freeing up such funds would be helpful in resolving the waste tire issue.

- Council Response: Chair Blumenfeld thanked Mr. Ganster and asked that he put the link to the CalRecycle report in the chat if possible (<https://calepa.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2019/02/TireFlowStudy.pdf>).

Oswaldo Camacho, resident: Mr. Camacho explained efforts from local and state officials to improve the functionality and quality of the New River, such as building an urban park along the river bedding and constructing wetlands. He would like to see more consideration in project organization of the changes in river flow that we see as a result of climate change. He also believes that the project should be binational.

- Council Response: Chair Blumenfeld thanked Mr. Camacho and encouraged him to reach out to Deputy Secretary Garcia or Elizabeth King to get more involved in the project.

Steven Wright, Four Walls International: Mr. Wright seconded the Lieutenant Governor's remarks on best management practices. He is looking forward to binational collaborations that are possible because of Senate Bill 1301. Four Walls International recently made progress developing a monitoring framework using drones. They also co-authored an article in water resources research regarding the Border Impact Bond and potential savings to CNRA that upstream interventions present. He requested a follow up meeting with CalEPA to discuss speaking with financial experts about paid for performance contracts and inter-agency agreements.

- Council Response: Chair Blumenfeld thanked Mr. Wright for the work of Four Walls International.

## **5. Baja California Updates – Secretariats of Baja California**

**Informational item:** Updates from the State of Baja California.

**Jose Carmelo, Deputy Secretary of Environment for Baja California Norte:**

- Baja California Norte continues its strong collaboration with California on environmental issues. Waste tires are one of the best examples of this collaboration.
- The Baja California government is working on a circular economy law aimed at reincorporating waste tires through repair and remanufacturing. The circular economy law will articulate what is already happening between Baja California and California.
- There is a need to understand the value of secondhand goods and to destigmatize secondhand trade. He suggested that Baja California buys tires that are no longer usable from California for use in Baja California to build infrastructure.
- The border should not be a limitation on this secondhand trade process. It could be considered consumer fraud if a consumer pays a fee to recycle a tire, and that tire is not recycled. This presents a legal grey area and serves to articulate the urgency of creating a strong system wherein California can sell waste tires to Mexico.

Councilmember Comments:

- Chair Blumenfeld thanked the Deputy Secretary for the comment and for his work. He encouraged those interested in waste tires to attend future meetings on the subject.

**Saul Guzmán, Director of State Environment Management Agency for Baja California:**

- Director Guzmán had no report but thanked CalEPA for its collaboration and for providing the Environment Management Agency with resources to monitor air quality and resolve other environmental issues.

Councilmember Comments:

- Chair Blumenfeld thanked Director Guzmán for his work and the work of his agency.

**Dr. Mellisa Mechado representing the Office of Secretary Perez-Rigo of the Baja California Health Department**

- Dr. Mechado coordinates the binational Tijuana Tecato Rosarito office focusing on infectious diseases, such as COVID-19.
- The Mexicali has the most COVID-19 infections present of any region in Baja California. Over four thousand people have died of the virus there.
- The majority of infections have not been serious, but, of those that have been serious, many result in death because patients do not seek out medical care until their symptoms are severe.
- The hospitals in Baja California are 62% occupied. The state will continue to employ preventative measures, such as social distancing. Dr. Mechado thanked the California state government for their collaboration in fighting the virus and for their communication.

Councilmember Comments:



- Chair Blumenfeld thanked Dr. Mechado.

### **Rigoberto Laborín, Commissioner for the Baja California Water Commission**

- The commission has spent \$16 million on restricting sediment flows to Imperial Beach. The pump station PB Cila interrupts the flow of water to Imperial Beach and diverts it to the Punta Bandera area. The new pumps are made in the U.S. and are more efficient than ones that have been used for the past 20 years.
- The commission spent \$10 million on the Colector Poniente repair. The U.S. EPA contributed much of the funding for this project, which took 400 liters of water per second away from the river. Commissioner Laborín provided an explanation of the times since September when water has flowed through the Colector Poniente and the reasons for each incident. Most were due to heavy rainfall, and one was due to a repair.

#### **Councilmember Comments:**

- Chair Blumenfeld thanked Commissioner Laborín for his work and for the work of his commission.

### **6. U.S. EPA/SEMARNAT Federal Updates**

**Informational item:** Federal updates regarding border activity shared.

#### **U.S. EPA Update:**

- Laura Ebbert stated that engagement with Mexico and with indigenous tribes and communities continues to be a priority for U.S. EPA. She introduced Idalia Perez, acting manager of U.S. EPA's U.S.-Mexico Border Program.
- Idalia Perez spoke about U.S. EPA's Border Program, which was implemented with support from CalEPA and partners in Mexico. The program is an eight-year endeavor targeting air, water, waste, emergency preparedness and response, and compliance and stewardship. The program takes a bottom-up approach using regional task forces and serves as a convener in the border region to facilitate dialogue around environmental issues in the region.
- This year, through the program, U.S. EPA has held task force meetings on environmental issues on the border region and sessions with tribal partners. U.S. EPA also held a bilingual webinar on wildfires, mental health, cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting.
- The program also includes Border 2020, a grant program organized in coordination with the North American Development Bank. Through the program, U.S. EPA has supported the development of several projects on air quality, water quality, waste management, and emergency preparedness.
- The program collaborates with U.S. EPA to ensure fulfillment of Border 2020 goals. One example of such coordination is an environmental justice small grant that raised

awareness around air quality issues in San Diego. The grantee worked with community members and local schools to educate families on health practices. Another grantee works to educate community members on environmental justice issues and their effects on air quality.

- U.S. EPA is working in coordination with federal, local, and state agencies to implement provisions in section 821 of the USMCA. Short term, U.S. EPA has pursued temporary river diversion to the International Wastewater Treatment Plant (complementary to a sediment and trash control basin in developed by the County of San Diego in Smuggler's Gulch). Long term projects include an assessment of diversion treatment reuse and source control of sewage and sediment entering the Tijuana River.
- U.S. EPA's border program has also begun issuing more frequent newsletters.
- As for future projects, the U.S. EPA is doing a closeout of the 2019-2020 action plans for the region and hosting virtual meetings including a San Diego Tijuana equality task force meeting. Ms. Perez offered to take questions.

#### Councilmember Comments:

- Chair Blumenfeld thanked Ms. Ebbert and Ms. Perez for their work.

#### **Updates from SEMARNAT:**

##### **Chair Blumenfeld**

- CalEPA is working on a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with CNRA and SEMARNAT which looks at strengthening natural disaster response, sustainably managing resources, expanding recycling programs, promoting clean and renewable energy and zero-emissions transportation, and working across public and private sectors in the U.S. and Mexico.

##### **Fernando Sosa, representing Professor Ivan Rico, International Coordinador**

- SEMARNAT, in collaboration with CalEPA and CNRA, has nearly finalized the negotiation process on the MOU, which includes new areas of cooperation such as clean energy sources. They are in the final stages of reviewing the document. Mr. Sosa thanked the councilmembers and offered to take questions

#### **Public Comment:**

Luís Olmedo, resident: Mr. Olmedo is concerned that communities hardest hit by natural disasters and COVID-19 may not have a say in how COVID-19 resources are distributed. He is worried about the lack of sanitation resources at the border, especially during the pandemic. He noted that progress has been made but that resource distribution is still inefficient. He emphasized the importance of using a bottom-up approach to inform the MOU, allowing communities affected to have a seat at the table.

- Council Response: Chair Blumenfeld thanked Mr. Olmedo and stated that he agrees that including stakeholders in the writing process for the MOU is important. He invited Mr. Olmedo to send a list of the specific issues he sees at the border.

Salvador López, Chief Environmental Officer with the North American Development Bank (NADB): Mr. López thanked the councilmembers and stated that the NADB is committed to engaging in border issues such as Tijuana River and New River transboundary flow issues. He would like to collaborate with CalEPA on air quality issues. NADB continues to implement the border infrastructure fund, which has recently funded improvements in the Colector Poniente. They also continue to support U.S. EPA and SEMARNAT on their border program. NADB recently published a report summarizing environmental services. The Border Environment Commission (BECC) has been merged under NADB, and its functionality and goals have stayed constant throughout the merger.

- Council Response: Chair Blumenfeld thanked Mr. López for his work and for the work of the NADB.

### **10 Minute Break**

### **7. Update on Impacts and Protections for Border Communities, including Binational Workers, during COVID-19 at the Border**

**Informational item:** The Council shared updates on supporting safe workplaces at the border, including workplaces for food and agricultural workers.

#### **Josh Eddy, Executive Director CDFA**

Executive Director Josh Eddy thanked local partners, especially essential workers in the Central Valley. CDFA's three areas of focus are executing the Housing for the Harvest program, delivering PPE and providing testing, and executing the Farm to Family program:

- Executing the Housing for the Harvest program
  - The program, announced by Governor Newsom, allows temporary housing for those exposed to COVID-19.
  - The program was helpful in providing security to farmworkers and allowing them to continue working during the pandemic.
  - Six counties are currently participating in the program
- Delivering PPE and providing testing to farmworker communities
  - CDFA working with the County Farm Bureau, the Vegetable Growers' Association, the Mexican Consulate, and local health departments to provide mobile testing units in Imperial Valley.

- CDFA is working statewide and within Imperial Valley in collaboration with the California Department of Public Health (CDPH), local agricultural commissions, and other employers to distribute masks in Imperial Valley.
- Executing the Farm to Family program
  - The program is part of the California Association of Food Banks, and it allows farms to donate fresh produce to be distributed in communities in Imperial Valley.

Councilmember Comments:

- Chair Blumenfeld thanked Executive Director Eddy for his work and the work of his agency.

**Max Oltersdorf, Deputy Director, GO-Biz**

- The pandemic has caused shutdowns among small businesses, particularly those owned by Latinx immigrants. This poses an urgent threat to the California economy, so GO-Biz has introduced new small business tax relief, loans, and grants. The funds will be distributed to community development financial institutions to distribute relief through grants to underserved small businesses
- GO-Biz recently launched the California Rebuilding Fund, which provides low-interest loans to small businesses, especially those in historically underserved communities.
- The Office of the Small Business advocate at GO-Biz has organized PPE distribution to small businesses.
- GO-Biz has hired regional small businesses specialists in their offices throughout the state. The specialists help small businesses access federal and state relief.

Councilmember Comments:

- Chair Blumenfeld thanked Deputy Director Oltersdorf for his work.

The Council shared an overview of essential worker protections during COVID-19, and COVID-19 rates and protections:

**Silas Shawver, Labor and Workforce Development Agency (LWDA)**

- The LWDA is committed to promoting workplace health and safety; paid leave, workers' compensation, and disability insurance; and anti-retaliation protection.
  - LWDA monitors workplace policies on distancing between employees, face covering mandates, disinfecting, and procedures to address outbreaks and exposure
  - LWDA educates workers on supplemental pay programs that are accessible to workers who test positive for or are exposed to COVID-19. LWDA also educates workers about disability benefits available to workers who experience long-term health effects from COVID-19.

- LWDA has organized education around anti-retaliation protection and encourages dialogue in the workplace around workplace safety policies.
- LWDA distributes informational materials and performs outreach to communities to promote these goals. LWDA is also working to partner with other groups to support its efforts.

### **Esmerelda Iniguez-Stevens, CDPH**

- CDPH's Office of Binational Border Health acts as a communication liaison with Baja California to communicate about disease-related issues. This role is essential as the border region is one of the most impacted by COVID-19.
- The U.S.-Mexico binational technical workgroup is a group of epidemiologists and public health officials from state and federal agencies. The group put together a protocol three or four years ago for U.S.-Mexico binational communication and coordination which outlines how the two countries would share epidemiological information.
- Through its system, the California Reportable Disease Information Exchange (Cal-REDIE), CDPH shares information about cases of any diseases linked to Mexico with Mexican partners. Mexican partners share the same information with CDPH. This system has been especially crucial during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- CDPH communicates with binational health plans, which are facilities in Mexico which are authorized to see patients from the U.S. The health plans report COVID-19 cases to CDPH, and CDPH communicates the information to the appropriate authorities.
- CDPH works with the Centers of Disease Control (CDC) U.S.-Mexico unit and the Mexican Consulate and with local partners in San Diego and Imperial counties to exchange information. All of these entities report COVID-19 cases to CDPH.
- CDPH participated in ComCal and found it to be valuable. CDPH looks forward to seeing the outcomes of the project
- CDPH's partners in San Diego, Imperial, and Tijuana have organized various educational campaigns around COVID-19. Some examples include:
  - The San Diego Office of Border Health organizes biweekly binational public health calls with public health professionals from San Diego and Tijuana.
  - The U.S.-Mexico Health Coalition organizes seminars on COVID-19 along the border.
  - Imperial County has organized public health campaigns featuring videos of the Mayors of Mexicali and Imperial discussing the importance of working as a region to combat COVID-19.
- CDPH communicates almost daily with Baja California partners such as the State Epidemiology Office to share COVID-19 information.

### Councilmember Comments:

- Chair Blumenfeld thanked Dr. Esmerelda Iniguez-Stevens for her work.

### **Helen Lopez, Assistant Director Cal OES**

- Cal OES has been collaborating with other state agencies, local partners, the private sector, community organizations, and the Mexican consulate to share information.
- Cal OES meets daily with state agencies and local partners to identify needs and priorities and organize targeted resource distribution. Out of these meetings Cal OES and partners have established regional task forces.
- The Imperial Valley Task Force provides resources, technical expertise, and shares COVID-19 statistics on both sides of the border. Cal OES also distributes resources such as PPE.
- Cal OES provided 2.4 million PPE to San Diego County in September. San Diego County donated it to the San Diego Mexican Consulate for distribution to healthcare workers in Tijuana. Cal OES distributed 1.5 million masks via Imperial County to the city of Mexicali for use in their healthcare and transit systems.
- A private sector partner secured a donation of 1.4 million face shields for use in Mexicali and Tijuana.
- Cal OES is in constant communication with Mexican consulates and community based organizations to share information and provide resources for distribution to vulnerable populations in their communities. They have joined Mexican consulates on Facebook Live sessions to discuss COVID-19 precautions.
- Cal OES provided 13,000 disaster readiness guides to farmworker communities and provided disaster preparedness audio messaging in indigenous languages.
- Held four virtual engagement meetings with over 150 community organizations representing Imperial and San Diego counties.
- Cal OES participates on biweekly calls with the binational workgroup, which includes government officials from San Diego and Baja California Norte.

Councilmember Comments:

- Chair Blumenfeld thanked Assistant Director Lopez for Cal OES's collaborative work and to build systems to allow for a complete and focused response to COVID-19.

## 8. California-Mexico Border Relations Council Draft Annual Report

**Action item:** Deputy Secretary Yana Garcia explained that the council would vote on approval of the 2019 annual report. If approved, the report would be submitted to the legislature. The report contains councilmember updates, many of which were described in this meeting.

**Action taken:** Secretary Karen Ross moved to approve the annual report and send it post-haste to the legislature. Deputy Director Max Oltersdorf seconded the motion. All members in attendance were in favor with no nays and no abstentions. The motion therefore unanimously passed, and the report was approved.

## 9. Vote to Approve Draft Minutes

**Action item:** Draft minutes from the November 19, 2019 Council meeting were reviewed by the Council.

**Action taken:** A motion to approve the minutes from the November 19, 2019 council meeting was made by Chair Blumenfeld, moved by Assistant Director Lopez, and seconded by Deputy Director Oltersdorf. All members in attendance were in favor with no nays and no abstentions. Minutes were therefore unanimously approved.

## **10. Future Meeting and Agenda Items**

Councilmember Comments:

- Chair Blumenfeld recommended including border region waste tires in the next meeting agenda.
- Assistant Director Helen Lopez, Cal OES: Thanked the Council for choosing important topics.
- Undersecretary Melinda Grant, BCSH: Thanked the Council for the relevant topics, specifically the COVID-19 item.
- Chair Blumenfeld: Thanked Deputy Secretary Yana Garcia and Elizabeth King.

Public Comment:

No comments received.

## **11. Public comment on additional matters**

Melissa Corona, engineer with the San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board: Ms. Corona gave an update on total maximum daily loads (TMDLs). The Regional Water Quality Control Board is developing indicators for bacteria and trash in the lower Tijuana River. The Regional Water Quality Control Board has developed a draft staff report that outlines the TMDLs for both indicators and possible solutions to meet them. After the draft is reviewed the draft will be sent out for scientific peer review and then public review. The draft will be sent to the board for review in Fall 2021. Ms. Corona provided her email and encouraged attendees to email her with any questions.

- Council response: Chair Blumenfeld thanked Ms. Corona. Deputy Secretary Garcia stated that the regional board's TMDL information will be included in the annual Border Council Report.

**Adjournment at 4 p.m.**