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News Flash

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Office of Public Affairs

COMMISSIONER GINER BRIEFS CONGRESS

The USIBWC, or U.S. International Boundary and Water Commission, may be one of the most interesting agencies you've never heard of. Our mission is part engineering and part diplomacy.

With that introduction, Commissioner Dr. Maria-Elena Giner testified in person before the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure's Subcommittee on Water Resources and the Environment in Washington, D.C., on July 13, 2023.



- Sanitation – Nogales, Arizona
- Flood Control and Dam Safety – Texas/New Mexico



Commissioner Giner with (right) Rep. David Rouzer, Chairman of the House Transport & Infrastructure's water subcommittee, and Rep. Grace Napolitano, Ranking Member of the subcommittee.

“Everything the USIBWC does safeguards the lives, health, property, and prosperity of U.S. citizens residing in the border area, whether agency activities are related to flood prevention, water pollution mitigation, or the efficient and equitable distribution between the United States and Mexico of water from the Colorado River and Rio Grande,” Commissioner Giner said in her written testimony.

Among the priority issues Commissioner Giner outlined for Members of Congress and their staffs:

- Water Delivery (Colorado River, Rio Grande)
- Sanitation – San Diego

Commissioner Giner reviewed the components of the agency's proposed 2024 budget:

- \$64,800,000 for salaries and expenses (S&E), an increase of \$6,865,000 over last fiscal year. Besides allowing the USIBWC “to continue critical or urgent maintenance and repairs at its facilities,” as well as infrastructure and sanitation projects, the request funds 263 positions.
- Of the \$64.8 million request, \$43.4 million will support continued operation and maintenance costs of existing infrastructure.

- The remaining approximately \$21.5 million in S&E includes \$31.9 million for administration, such as information technology improvements, and negotiations and supervision of joint projects with Mexico.
- The President’s budget requests contributed funds authority for the USIBWC, allowing the agency to receive funds from federal and non-federal entities along the U.S.-Mexico border.
- Approximately \$40 million for construction, more than \$13 million below FY 2023. Virtually all the funds will be realigned to pay “unexpectedly high costs to rehabilitate the South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant.”
- \$600,000 from the construction budget will remain dedicated to improvements at the Nogales International Wastewater Treatment Plant, where excess flows from Mexico have caused plant non-compliance with Clean Water Act standards.



Commissioner Giner with Congressman Henry Cuellar of Texas.

When she wasn’t appearing before Congress, Commissioner Giner visited key members of the House of Representatives, including Congresswoman Grace Napolitano of California and Congressman Henry Cuellar of Texas, as well as White House representatives.

In her remarks to Congress about water delivery, Commissioner Giner highlighted the USIBWC’s continued efforts to get Mexico to release more water into the Rio Grande under the terms of the 1944 Water Treaty.

“In the current treaty-designated five-year water delivery cycle, Mexico has delivered volumes near historical lows, providing only 45 percent of the volumes expected at this stage,” Commissioner Giner said. “The growing shortfalls

could become unmanageable, making it difficult for Mexico to comply with treaty requirements. USIBWC is negotiating with Mexican officials to provide tools to make deliveries earlier in the five-year cycle.”



Commissioner Giner with Brenda Mallory, Chair of the White House Council on Environmental Quality.

Commissioner Giner also discussed USIBWC efforts to repair and maintain the San Diego and Nogales wastewater treatment plans while continuing to work closely with Mexico, the source of most of the sewage treated at these facilities.

Another concern is dam safety, particularly at Amistad Dam, which received a Dam Safety Action Classification of “Urgent, Potentially Unsafe.” A minimum of \$30 million in unobligated carryover funds will be used to implement mitigation measures at this structure.

Commissioner Giner’s written testimony can be found on the USIBWC website under “Press Releases.”

Video of her testimony is at:



(Commissioner Giner’s testimony begins at 1 hour 23 minutes into the video and she answers Congressional questions at 1 hour 52 minutes and 2 hours 36 minutes.)