

Lucio Predicts Prosperity For Port of Brownsville

AUSTIN, TX – Senator Eddie Lucio (D-Brownsville), praised the support given by the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) for its generous grant that will be used to train the South Texas workforce and enhance economic growth. "Today's grant, which will help 60 area workers gain the skills they need to enter high-demand fields in construction, is just one example of the valuable support TWC gives," said Lucio. "That figure represents not just 60 jobs filled, but 60 families who will be supported; 60 dinner tables with food on them; 60 Valley individuals who are receiving not a handout, but the tools they need to be self-sufficient."

"Alvarez: San Antonio has Toyota; the Valley will have LNG."*

BROWNSVILLE, RGV - Liquefied natural gas export terminals at the Port of Brownsville can have as big an impact on the economy of the Rio Grande Valley as Toyota's truck manufacturing plant has had on San Antonio.

This is the view of Julian Alvarez, the labor representative on the Texas Workforce Commission. Alvarez spoke at the Port of Brownsville last Friday when he made a check presentation to a local workforce training group.

Pointing out that Mario Lozoya, the executive director of the Greater Brownsville Incentives Corporation, used to work for Toyota in San Antonio, Alvarez said: "He (Alvarez) references Toyota multiple times because of what he did and the success he had in San Antonio. Well, let me tell you, with the LNGs and the CNGs that are going to be popping up here at the port, we have our own Toyota here in our backyard. We do."

LNG stands of liquefied natural gas. CNG stands for compressed natural gas. Three energy companies – Annova LNG, Texas LNG, and NextDecade Corp., which calls its facility Rio Grande LNG – are considering building LNG export facilities at the Port of Brownsville.

In his remarks, Alvarez pointed out that the Valley's unemployment rate used to be in the double digits. Now, he said, it is down to 5.4 percent. "It is going to drop even more. Are we ready? I challenge you, are you ready for the future? Because the future is here," Alvarez said.

Another speaker at the check presentation event was Pat Hobbs, executive director of Workforce Solutions Cameron. In a previous interview with the Rio Grande Guardian, Hobbs said 6,000 to 8,000 construction workers would be needed to build LNG export terminals at the Port of Brownsville.

John Reed is chairman of Brownsville Navigation District, which runs the Port of Brownsville. In his remarks at the check presentation event, Reed said boldly: "Welcome to the epicenter of what will soon be the single largest construction project in the great state of Texas. Welcome to the Port of Brownsville, the port that works."

Reed pointed out that much has been said in recent months about the need to deliver a quality, qualified workforce to satisfy the requirements of new industries locating at the port.

"Within months we expect thousands of workers will be needed to fill thousands of new jobs, all providing a living wage, helping lift our community from poverty to prosperity," Reed said.

Reed praised the Port of Brownsville's workforce training partners.

"Our workforce training partners have been deeply involved in proactive efforts to provide opportunities, to prepare skilled workers for these massive projects, with new jobs likely to reach up to 7,000 more in the coming years. As you can see, this is no small challenge and frankly has resulted in some sleepless nights for some of our workforce training partners."

Another speaker at the check presentation event was state Rep. Lucio, III. While waiting to speak, Lucio said he had been contemplating what was about to happen at the Port of Brownsville.

“Folks, we are on the brink of an era of the largest economic prosperity in our region, in Cameron County. That is the absolute truth. The stars have aligned for us,” Lucio said.

The Brownsville Democrat said all the local education institutions are at the peak of their course offerings, be they traditional or technical models. He said these institutions are going to prepare the skilled labor “needed to maintain the operations that have already committed to come here and those that are coming here in the near future.”

Lucio said: “The Port of Brownsville has been singled out as the single most important part of the economic future of our community.” He added: “Let’s keep our foot on the accelerator.”

Another speaker at the check presentation was state Rep. Alex Dominguez, D-Brownsville. Dominguez congratulated the navigation district for the “bold initiatives” happening at the port.

“We are at the cusp of a change in economic development like you have never seen. I don’t want us to ever be that community that ranks low on the poverty scale. We are changing things from inside, all homegrown, because we have great leadership and people with great vision,” Dominguez said.

Dominguez singled out port director Eduardo Campirano for special praise. “Eddie, thank you for having the courage to open your doors and bring industry that normally would not look this way. You are changing this community and to you we give the greatest thanks.”

Cameron County Judge Eddie Treviño, Jr., agreed. He said: “We would not be here if you (the Port of Brownsville’s leadership) had not taken an aggressive stand.”

Treviño said he was confident Valley leaders would take advantage of the economic development opportunities about to come to the region.

“Everybody now knows that the future of Texas and in my opinion the country, is right here in South Texas and the Rio Grande Valley. If we do not take advantage of this community we will have no one to blame but ourselves. But that is not going to happen.”

Treviño said the Valley had lost its best and brightest talent to other parts of Texas and the nation for the past six, seven or eight decades. He said this was about to stop.

“They are not going to leave any more because we are going to provide those jobs, God willing, that will allow them to stay and provide for their families.”

The check Alvarez presented on behalf of Texas Workforce Commission totaled \$125,850. It was paid out to a local nonprofit, Cameron County Education Initiative (CCCI). The funds will help train 60 workers.

Brownsville entrepreneur and philanthropist Mike Hernandez started CCCI. In his remarks, Hernandez said: “The port is the most important job creator. What I hope I helped to bring is to prove out the value of the compounding effect of cooperation. Meaning, one person can do one thing, and this can do one thing, but together, if they do it one plus one equals three. We are seeing that.”

Rita Hernandez, executive director of CCCI moderated the check presentation event. State Sen. Eddie Lucio, Jr., D-Brownsville, also spoke at the event.