

# Lucio Raises Concerns Over Access to Internet in RGV

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**MCALLEN, RGV – State Sen. Eddie Lucio (D-Brownsville)**, was among the first border lawmakers to express concern over the negative impact the digital divide will have on Rio Grande Valley students while their schools are closed.

## **Gonzalez tells Trump about access to Internet problems in the RGV \***

Now, Congressman Vicente Gonzalez has expressed similar concerns – in an open letter to President Trump.

Gonzalez said any disruption in internet service could have lasting impacts on academic performance and development.

According to the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, the three metropolitan statistical areas in South Texas – Brownsville, McAllen and Laredo – are among the least “wired” communities in the country.

“As K-12, college and university instruction and coursework move online, we must ensure students and teachers have the tools and resources they need to continue learning and teaching,” Gonzalez wrote, in his letter to the president.

“The Federal Communications Commission, in conjunction with the Department of Education and telecommunications companies, should work to improve access for students that may have difficulties accessing the internet, particularly in areas that already experience limited access, such as rural America. Any disruptions in internet service could have lasting impacts on academic performance and development.”

One of the ideas Gonzalez is mulling is a request to PBS to run educational programs throughout the day in the Rio Grande Valley. Gonzalez recently brought PBS back to the Valley as an “over the air” broadcast. The congressman is concerned that too many Valley families do not have Internet access in their homes.

Sen. Lucio said he is backing moves in the U.Senate that call on Federal Communications Commission Chairman Ajit Pai to temporarily allow schools to use E-Rate funding to provide Wi-Fi capable devices and hotspots to students during the current health crisis.

“As the Coronavirus outbreak begins to close our public schools, I strongly urge our federal government to do everything in its power to ensure that children who lack internet access at home, especially from lower income and rural communities like those in South Texas, are not

negatively impacted by the Coronavirus,” Lucio, a member of the Senate Committee on Education, stated.

“That is why I join efforts in calling for Congress and the FCC to appropriately adjust the E-Rate program to provide needed Wi-Fi capabilities so that all children have the ability to learn remotely through the internet. Every possible step needs to be taken to ensure that the health and academic success of our children are not negatively impacted by the Coronavirus outbreak.”

In his wide-ranging letter to Trump, Gonzalez also expressed concern about the census, healthcare, small business, housing, and debt collection.

Here is the letter:

March 19, 2020

The Honorable Donald J. Trump  
President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave.  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Trump,

As we work to mitigate the myriad of challenges associated with the novel coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, I write to request that your administration take all necessary and appropriate administrative actions and back legislation to support our students, small businesses, seniors, state and local governments, the uninsured, and ensure an accurate decennial Census. We are confronting unprecedented challenges and we need to adapt, and quickly.

Internet Connectivity

As K-12, college and university instruction and coursework move online, we must ensure students and teachers have the tools and resources they need to continue learning and teaching. The Federal Communications Commission, in conjunction with the Department of Education and telecommunications companies, should work to improve access for students that may have difficulties accessing the internet, particularly in areas that already experience limited access, such as rural America. Any disruptions in internet service could have lasting impacts on academic performance and development.

Healthcare

We must focus on testing, prevention, and treatment for all COVID-19 patients regardless of their economic circumstance. Even seemingly small co-pays are an unacceptable barrier to care. Our communities need free drive-thru testing in every county in every State across the United States as soon as possible in order to make testing more efficient and reduce exposure for health care professionals. I also recommend establishing electronic delivery of test results and

guaranteeing free treatment for all COVID-19 patients and any conditions that have worsened due to the virus.

### Census

The administration needs to ensure the 2020 Census can be accurately recorded while following guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). I believe an extension to the enumeration period should be implemented to maintain the quality of the count this year and allow people time to participate. The 15th District of Texas, and many others across the country, have hard-to-count populations living in rural areas that must be considered. Absent contingency planning, these groups are at a greater risk of being left out.

### Small Business

We must make more funds, in the form of grants, loans, and capital, available for small business owners and in turn ensure that the Small Business Administration (SBA), Department of the Treasury, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, and the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System release these funds in a timely manner to both small business owners and regional and community banks. I ask that the aforementioned agencies expedite the review of such requests, provide technical assistance to applicants, and implement any other measures to expedite the distribution of aid once approved, particularly to areas heavily dependent on international trade and adversely impacted by supply chain disruptions.

### Rental Assistance, Foreclosures, and Evictions

Housing is a basic necessity that must be given the utmost attention when delivering resources to those in need. We must ensure that we provide additional support and personnel to assist with the housing of our most vulnerable populations, including children and seniors. It is imperative that during this crisis we do not create homelessness, and that is why I am calling for a moratorium on evictions or foreclosures for the duration of this situation. These property owners, however cannot be thrust into bearing this burden, so it is critical that rental assistance be provided through the federal government, so that our nation's affordable housing supply is not further shrunk.

### Consumer Credit, Debt Collection

Consumer credit should not be impaired by virtue of income interruption caused by this crisis and debt collection must not continue in the face of these conditions. Having said this, it is important that we do not choke the businesses that we depend on for employment, goods, and services in this time of crisis. It is therefore important that we consider the suspension of collections related activities for commercial enterprises at this critical time.

### Student Loan Suspension

Our nation has faced an impending student loan crisis for years, and COVID-19 will not absolve us of our inattention to this looming threat. Suspending collection activities for student loan debt

is the barest of relief that we can provide, and I urge you to consider a reprieve from these loans. At minimum, a moratorium on interest accrued could be beneficial to those currently in school.

Taking immediate action to implement these measures now will make all the difference as we continue responding to this pandemic. I urge you and your administration to act accordingly.

Sincerely,

Vicente Gonzalez  
Member of Congress

CC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
U.S. Department of Commerce  
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development  
U.S. Department of Education

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\*Taylor, Steve "Gonzalez Tells Trump About Access to Internet Problems in RGV", The Rio Grande Guardian, 20, March 2020  
<https://riograndeguardian.com/gonzalez-tells-trump-about-access-to-internet-problems-in-rgv/>