

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

July 20, 2023

The Honorable Antony Blinken
U.S. Department of State
Office of the Secretary
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken,

We write to invite you to tour the South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant (SBIWTP). This critical facility, managed by the U.S. International Boundary and Water Commission (USIBWC), has so badly deteriorated that it threatens to impede the United States' ability to fulfill our commitment to IBWC Minute 328. In fact, the disrepair is so severe that the California Environmental Protection Agency [recently notified](#) the San Diego Congressional delegation that the plant is no longer compliant with its Clean Water Act (33 U.S.C. § 1251 et seq.) discharge permit, "resulting in impaired water quality discharges into the marine environment and impacting the US EPA and IBWC's ability to fulfill their commitments under the USMCA Implementation Act."

As you know, last year, the United States and Mexican sections of the IBWC agreed to Minute No. 328 "Sanitation Infrastructure Projects in San Diego, California – Tijuana, Baja California for Immediate Implementation and for Future Development," committing both countries to repair and expand wastewater infrastructure, including wastewater treatment plants on both sides of the border. Currently, polluted wastewater is constantly flowing across the San Diego-Mexico border from Baja California, creating one of the largest environmental disasters in the Western Hemisphere; it requires immediate action.

In 2021 the San Diego Congressional delegation was able to secure \$300 million within the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement to expand SBIWTP from 25 million gallons per day (mgd) to 50 mgd. The expansion to 50 mgd would allow the facility to comply with the United States commitment in Minute 328. However, we recently learned that more funding is needed to rehabilitate SBIWTP before the USIBWC can expand the existing facility. SBIWTP rehabilitation is estimated to cost \$100- \$150 million. These new costs jeopardize the United States' ability to fulfill its Minute 328 treaty obligations. We ask you to help us identify funds to fill this shortfall as quickly as possible, so we do not in any way impede or delay the planning and construction of the SBIWTP to 50 mgd.

Additionally, we ask the State Department to continue prioritizing funding for IBWC maintenance in future yearly budget submissions. Due to the nature of the SBIWTP, this is a multi-agency issue and requires a multi-agency response to current problems and future upkeep. We hope to see continued efforts by the State Department to work with all relevant federal partners to ensure the deterioration of a facility crucial to our relationship with Mexico and the health of our region does not occur again.

Finally, we also ask you to help us understand how the SBIWTP could have fallen into such a terrible state of disrepair. Please investigate the circumstances that led to the devastating level of needed rehabilitation at the plant. Who was responsible for ensuring its maintenance? Who knew what when? And what measures will the State Department put in place to ensure it never happens again?

San Diegans are experiencing the second summer in a row of beach closures due to wastewater flowing north from Baja California, Mexico. Last week Members of the San Diego delegation [wrote](#) to Administrator Regan on the ongoing environmental impacts this is having on our communities. The beaches of [Imperial Beach](#) and [Coronado](#), which are closed for the summer due to contamination, offer the nearest and often most affordable access for many of San Diego's disadvantaged communities. These beach closures are impacting the lower-income and primarily Latino neighborhoods in South San Diego County, such as San Ysidro, National City and Chula Vista.

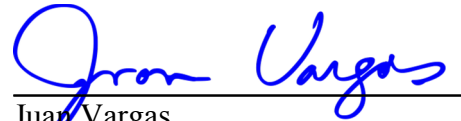
We look forward to working with you to resolve this matter and will follow up soon to determine your willingness to visit the South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



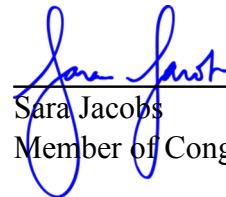
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Member of Congress



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