

Bekah Hinojosa, South Texas Environmental Justice Network
Testimony for Roundtable, "Holding Big Oil Accountable for Extortion, Collusion, and Pollution."

Good afternoon. I appreciate the opportunity to speak on the roundtable discussion regarding the issue of big oil and gas companies unfairly accessing millions of dollars of subsidies from low-income communities. My name is Bekah Hinojosa and my pronouns are she/her. I am a co-founder of the South Texas Environmental Justice Network, a local organization located in the Rio Grande Valley region of Texas. I have deep roots in this community, which is on many frontlines, including being near the militarized US/Mexico Border and the Gulf Coast, where we experience the impact of climate change through hurricanes and are often targeted for fossil fuel expansion and private space industry activities such as rocket testing. The Rio Grande Valley region is predominantly made up of Latine, Indigenous, and people of color, and we often experience environmental racism. Our community has historically been exploited for cheap labor and has suffered from corporate exploitation, leading to 24.7 percent of families living below the poverty line in the region.

Currently, we are facing two proposed methane gas export projects – Rio Grande LNG and Texas LNG – that would receive property tax abatements that exempt them from paying over 300 million dollars in taxes to our already impoverished community of Cameron County. These LNG companies were able to take advantage of these tax breaks due to a flawed process that favors big businesses. Our organization has attempted to communicate with the elected officials –the county commissioners– to highlight the detrimental effects of LNG facilities and the injustice of these companies seeking tax cuts while using taxpayer-funded resources. Unfortunately, many of these elected officials declined to meet with us, their constituents, while their staff willingly met with representatives from these LNG companies. We have urged for the opportunity to present our research, expert testimonies, and reports during the public hearing regarding the LNG tax abatements, but we were denied this opportunity by the elected officials. On the other hand, the LNG company officials were given almost two hours to make corporate sales pitches during these hearings. Our organization looked at the fine print of the LNG tax abatements and published a report about the injustices, which showed that the LNG companies threaten existing jobs in the shrimping, eco-tourism, and sports fishing industries, which employ hundreds that rely on access to clean waterways and would be impacted by the companies' pollutants. To be clear, these LNG companies would become the largest single source emitter of toxic air pollution and climate-killing emissions in our community, which does not have easy access to healthcare. Conversely, the LNG projects would only provide about 123 permanent jobs to residents within a 50-mile radius – and essentially, the taxpayers would be footing the

bill for the salaries of these workers. Our organizations opposed Rio Grande LNG's \$10 million donation to a community project fund as part of the tax abatement agreement. It appeared that the company purchased the support of an elected official, which would result in these elected officials ignoring an LNG explosion or leak were to happen – and we've witnessed these officials do with Elon Musk's SpaceX. The private space corporation received a tax break on claims that they would invest in the community but ended up causing environmental damage and violating regulations with no response from elected officials.

The two LNG projects would burden taxpayer-funded infrastructure. Construction of these massive industrial facilities would damage our public roads and require services paid for by taxes. Rio Grande LNG has been clear-cutting the wetlands and pristine lands at their leased site for the last year and has utilized police to patrol the highway for trucks, construction equipment, and HWY road blockage. Giving away our local tax money to an industry that does not pay taxes exacerbates our problems. This includes crumbling roads, severe drought, poor flooding infrastructure, and low-income community members who are never given the same opportunity for tax breaks.

Continuing to provide subsidies or prop up the fossil fuel industry in any way results in communities like mine being sacrificed with the pollution of these facilities and an even lower quality of life without funding for basic needs like flooding infrastructure. Subsidies for fossil fuel corporations must end.

Thank you.