

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 7, 2025

Contact

Jeffrey Clemmons, Communications Director

214-244-6058

CENTRAL TEXAS SENATOR SARAH ECKHARDT GOES DOWN TO THE BORDER: “LOTS OF PRETTY HORSES, NOT MUCH ACTION.”



A view of Del Rio-Ciudad Acuña International Bridge, first opened in 1930; the bridge is accessible 24 hours a day and touts one of the shortest crossing times of all ports of entry along the border.

AUSTIN—On Monday, March 3, Senator Sarah Eckhardt, a member of the Senate Border Security Committee, traveled to the city of Del Río to gain insights into ongoing state military operations along the Southern Border. Home to nearly 35,000 Texans, Del Río is also home to the Laughlin Air Force Base—the largest pilot training base in the entire Air Force—and the privately run Val Verde Correctional Facility. Del Río is also a major port of entry, contributing over \$5B annually to the US economy as of 2017. Del Río is one of the staging areas for Operation Lone Star. Earlier this year, the Governor deployed an additional 400 Texas National Guard troops to the Rio Grande Valley to continue supporting the OLS mission¹, bringing the total number of OLS-dedicated personnel in the region to 5,100.²

¹ Press Release: Governor Abbott Directs Texas Military to Coordinate With Trump Administration (January 27, 2025)

² Senate Committee on Border Security Interim Report 2024, pg. 4; indicates that as of November 2024, there were 4,700 active troops.

Sarah Eckhardt

★

Texas State Senator



Senator Eckhardt speaks with Colonel Freeman Martin, Director of the Department of Public Safety, while in flight over the Rio Grande



Senator Eckhardt and Sheriff Joe Frank Martinez discuss his office's role in local border security measures.



A section of border wall divided by spikey brush. Since 2021, the Legislature has appropriated over \$3B for the construction of a border wall. As of the Senator's trip, about 50 miles of wall have been completed. In his recent trip to Washington, Governor Abbott indicated interest in 100 miles of the wall being completed by the end of 2026, funded through state appropriations or federal leasing.³ Previously, state officials have suggested more than 800 miles of the Texas border are in need of border fencing, whether steel barrier walls or other kinds of barrier.

Senator Eckardt made the following remarks on border barriers, including the Texas Border Wall:

“Texas shares 1,254 miles of border with Mexico, more than any other state. The expensive promise by state leadership to build the federal government’s wall is of very limited utility. It will never be continuous and smugglers will always be able to go around it. The money and effort is better spent on technological surveillance of all land and air traffic crossing our border to intercept smugglers of people, drugs and guns.”

³ Matthew Choi. “US can have our walls, bases, and detention cells, Abbott tells Trump.” *Texas Tribune*, 5 February 2025. <https://www.texastribune.org/2025/02/05/abbott-trump-white-house-border/>

Sarah Eckhardt



Texas State Senator



Views of the American and Mexican sides of the border; (top left) a view of Ciudad Acuña; (top right) Mexican National Guard patrolling the brush; (bottom right) a collection of homes on the American side of the Rio Grande which are located between the Texas border wall and the river, a common occurrence in those areas where it is not feasible to construct the wall because of failure to secure rights from private landowners or other easements.

Sarah Eckhardt



Texas State Senator



Senator Eckhardt meets the horses and personnel of the Mounted Border Unit, which primarily work to apprehend individuals in brush areas which are otherwise inaccessible by man or machine. The Mounted Border Unit typically sources their horses from private contractors before training them, a time intensive process that has limited the size of the unit.

Sarah Eckhardt



Texas State Senator



Senator Eckhardt receives a briefing on operations of the Val Verde Texas Processing Center (VVTPC), operated by private contractor Recana Solutions, with District Attorney Tonya Ahlschwede (Kimble County), who serves as the Chair of the Border Prosecution Unit (BPU). The BPU has traditionally pursued crime related to cartels, but in recent years deployed more resources to processing thousands of criminal trespass cases stemming from Operation Lone Star, which have otherwise strained local judicial resources.

At the time of the Senator's visit, there was only one detainee at the VVTPC facility—an American smuggling defendant awaiting indictment. The temporary facility is intended to handle overflow from local jails, mostly charged with nonviolent criminal trespass. The Senator raised questions about future plans for these temporary or permanent processing facilities as volume has diminished to a trickle.

Sarah  **Eckhardt**
★
Texas State Senator

Senator Eckhardt released the following statement about her visit to Del Rio:

“Monday’s visit to Del Río is a part of the homework I’m doing to inform my work on the Senate Border Security Committee. The exploitation of border communities for political theater has come with an implicit expectation that under different federal leadership, Texas would stop spending state dollars on federal obligations. **It’s unclear whether that expectation will be met.**

“There are real issues at the border. Border communities are on the front lines of the seasonal migration emanating from around the world. Texas certainly has a role to play and **we should be prioritizing strategies that respond to changing conditions, are fair to our personnel, and effectively get to the root of issues.** I would like to focus state resources on violent crime while supporting and expanding the vibrant trans-border commerce of our border communities. That support includes public infrastructure—roads, hospitals, connectivity—and economic development, which is often stymied by intensive missions such as Operation Lone Star. **As Texas’ work continues at the border, it is not enough for us to look good without actually doing good there, both now and in the long-term.**

“I look forward to future visits to the border and my work on the Border Security Committee. A prosperous and law-abiding border is a secure border.”

###

Sarah Eckhardt is the third-term Democratic State Senator representing District 14, comprising Austin and surrounding areas. She serves on the Administration, Border Security, Nominations, and Veterans Affairs committees in the 89th Legislative Session, and has previously served on the Water, Agriculture, & Rural Affairs and Local Government committees. A proud UT Law and Public Affairs alum, Senator Eckhardt was the first woman to serve as Travis County Judge from 2014-2020.