



TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
COMMISSIONER SID MILLER

January 10, 2025

J. Bruce Bugg, Chairman
Texas Transportation Commission
c/o Texas Dept. Transportation
Austin, Texas

Mark D. Williams
Executive Director
Texas Department of Transportation
Austin, Texas

RE: Issues facing my constituent, Rene Ramirez, and his Zapata County Ranch, Ileana Ranch, also known as “El Milagro”

Dear Chairman Bugg and Director Williams,

Mr. Rene Ramirez has informed me about a situation involving TxDOT and his family's ranch in Zapata County. I understand that Chairman Canales in the House, Senator Zaffirini and Senator Royce West have also contacted you regarding this issue.

I am concerned that a significant portion of Mr. Ramirez's property—including the home and all buildings and structures that make the property a working ranch—is at risk of being taken through eminent domain. Mr. Ramirez has indicated that Commissioner Alvis committed to reconsidering this taking, provided Mr. Ramirez proceeds with the TxDOT appraisal process for his property.

Mr. Ramirez has communicated that much of the land TxDOT intends to acquire through eminent domain is not immediately necessary for any highway construction; rather, it is intended for a project related to Interstate 2, which is not expected to occur for at least 30 years.

Additionally, Mr. Ramirez informed me that he became aware of this issue late and not in 2019 when TxDOT sent out notices. He believes this delay is due to the local appraisal district having incorrect contact information for the property, which TxDOT used to notify landowners.

I urge you to carefully reconsider this taking. This is the fifth attempt in 52 years by the state—through TxDOT or other entities—to undertake an eminent domain action concerning this property. Mr. Ramirez and his family have owned this ranch for over 200 years, dating back to

the time before the Republic of Texas, during the era of Spanish land grants. And as of 2024, the Ileana Ranch has been recognized by the Texas Department of Agriculture's Family Land Heritage Program as a historical property.

It is essential that we, as a state, exercise the power of eminent domain wisely, prudently, and fairly. I encourage the Commission and the Department to thoughtfully review their actions regarding Ileana Ranch. If there are alternative routes that the Department can explore, which would allow Mr. Ramirez's ranch operations to remain intact, I ask that you consider those options carefully to determine if they would be more equitable for Mr. Ramirez and other property owners in similar situations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Sid Miller". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the left.

Sid Miller
Texas Agriculture Commissioner