

# 2011 STARR COUNTY LEGISLATOR TOUR FOCUSED ON EDUCATION

Starr County - The Rio Grande Valley Partnership's (RGVP) 2011 Legislative Visit to Starr County was coordinated by the Starr County Industrial Foundation (SCIF) and was successful in its objective of informing the legislator's about important issues that affect our community. On Friday, January 21, the delegation arrived at the Starr County line at approximately 8:45am and proceeded to visit Colonia Las Lomas, where they witnessed firsthand the need for better infrastructure in the area. They then continued to the South Texas College Starr County Campus Auditorium, where they were greeted by County Judge Eloy Vera and a large group of local officials and community members. After being officially welcomed by Judge Vera and some comments by RGC Mayor Ruben Villarreal, the lawmakers participated in an interactive presentation by Dr. Shirley Reed, STC President, about the impact of the states' proposed budget cuts.

When approached by the RGVP about issues to focus on in Starr County it was not difficult for the SCIF to decide on education. The visit was planned with the intent of offering the legislators a glimpse of the enormous value our community places on education and to highlight the many efforts it has made for advancement in spite of often receiving minimal state and federal funding. Additionally, the group was exposed to the economic and social benefits a community college offers to society. The recently announced \$28 billion dollar shortfall at the state level further emphasized the need for this group of decision makers to understand the devastating impact major reductions or eliminations would cause on Starr County. Rose Benavidez SCIF President and STC Vice Chair said, "a component of the responsibility of our organization is to ensure that the benefits and financial assistance our County receives at the state and federal level are not eliminated. Our organization knows the value of having a Community College located in our area; it is not only a tool in improving the lives of our residents, but also a major factor when approaching investors." "We understand there will be reductions, times are difficult everywhere, in this new session of cutting not spending, we just want to ensure that we keep what we are entitled to, just let us continue working," she added.

Later that day the legislators visited UTPA in Edinburg, where SCIF Chair Sam Vale participated in a roundtable discussion presented to them that focused on another issue that affects our community, border security. "We need to dedicate our efforts to ensure that legislators are educated and accurately informed about the needs and challenges of border communities, ours is a community that is connected not only by commerce, but stronger family ties," stated Vale when asked about the importance of reaching out to the legislators at the forum

The tour concluded at the STC Technology Campus on Sunday after visiting different locations in the Rio Grande Valley. For more information on the Rio Grande Valley Partnership, please visit [www.valleychamber.com](http://www.valleychamber.com). For information on the Starr County Industrial Foundation please visit [www.starrcounty.org](http://www.starrcounty.org), or call us at 956.487.2709.



L to R: STC Pres. Dr. Shirley Reed, SCIF Pres., Rose Benavidez, STC Chair Gary Gurwitz, Starr County Judge Eloy Vera



L to R: Representative Ryan Guillen, Starr County Judge Eloy Vera, SCIF President and STC Vice Chair Rose Benavidez