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COVERING SOUTH TEXAS AND THE BORDER FROM EL PASO TO BROWNSVILLE & CORPUS CHRISTI

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Laredo-to-Brownsville Border Walk planned to protest border fence

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LAREDO - The Secure Fence Act passed by Congress last week and now awaiting the signature of President Bush proposes 176 miles of fencing from Laredo to Brownsville.



Jay Johnson-Castro, Sr.

Jay Johnson-Castro, Sr., a member of the Border Tourism Subcommittee, is planning a 176-mile walk from Laredo to Brownsville in protest against the fence.

The Border Tourism Subcommittee reports to the Tourism Advisory Council, which is part of the economic development and tourism department in Gov. Rick Perry's office.

Johnson-Castro said he wants thousands of others who live along the border and who are opposed to the fence to join him on the walk, which is slated to begin next Tuesday.

"We are calling this the 'Texas *Border Walk*' and we are doing it so those in Washington get the message that we do not want any more divisions between ourselves and our neighbors across the Rio Grande," Johnson-Castro said.

"When our so-called leaders come down from Washington they get treated like VIPs and are given the red carpet treatment. They don't get to hear from the grassroots. Now they will."

Johnson-Castro said he has received plenty of encouragement from the

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border elected officials he has so far contacted. He said more will be contacted over the next few days.

As well as moral support, he and the organizing committee are hoping to get food, refreshment, and accommodation along the way, as well as protection from traffic on the highways. He said the Border Walk could take ten days to complete.

Johnson-Castro owns a bed and breakfast in Del Rio. He said if the march from Laredo to Brownsville is a success, he might organize one in his hometown. He explained that his passion is protecting the Rio Grande River and he is concerned that the people and ecology of the Rio Grande Corridor will suffer if a border fence is erected.

“We have a unique culture along the Rio Grande. The river is no more a division between the people that live either side of it, than those that live either side of the Guadalupe, the Brazos, or the Colorado rivers that flow through this state. The powers in Austin and Washington, D.C. do not seem to recognize that,” Johnson-Castro said.

“We who live along the Rio Grande Corridor, on both sides of the river, are related culturally, through our families, through business and commerce. What is never recognized is that we are a culture within ourselves.”

Johnson-Castro said he realized President Bush could sign the Secure Fence Act any day. Bush has already signed a bill committing \$1.2 billion in federal funding for a border fence.

Regardless of whether Bush signs the Secure Fence Act, Johnson-Castro said the Border Walk would go ahead.

“We are offended and insulted by a border fence and we want our voices to be heard,” he said.

Johnson-Castro said anyone interested in walking a mile with him should call Sarah Boone at 830-768-0768.

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