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Comments at CIIMAR-GOM meeting, April 22, 2016, Universidad Juárez Autónoma de Tabasco (translated from original Spanish):

“The rector’s [Dr. Jose Manuel Pina Gutierrez] comments are accurate. The Gulf of Mexico is an integrated ecosystem. We must think of the Gulf as a whole in a global setting where climate is rapidly changing. Ecosystem connectivity is high across the region. The Gulf itself knows no borders. Natural resources are dependent on governments and other human-run institutions.

The Gulf is a place to appreciate for its natural resources and economic potential: energy and food resources are two critical considerations before us. Our respective governments aim to maximize economic production and minimize threats to the environment. Doing this requires understanding both economic and natural factors involved. Academe has a very important role in developing such understanding and informing governments.

Universities can support government institutions by educating students, employees of the future, and conducting research. We face challenges and similar issues throughout the Gulf. Local problems together cause regional problems. Regional problems together cause global problems. We can share approaches and solutions to solve these problems starting at the local level.

CIIMAR was designed with the intent to help carry out this unified approach across institutional boundaries. In the same vein, the Gulf of Mexico University Research Collaborative (GOMURC) was established as a bridge between governments and universities. I was an original signatory on the agreement that established GOMURC.

We founders wanted to bring together a group of universities in Gulf coastal states to work together to address natural and social problems. From the beginning, our focus was on providing a mechanism for universities to work together. Government organizations are of critical importance and should cooperate not only with each other, but also with the academic world. Academe must also have its own independent voice.

Human resources and education are critical. There is more to do beyond just developing closer exchanges and working relationships. We have to educate the next generation. Two languages that will be critically important on our planet in the future will be Spanish and English. No place in the world offers more opportunities for cultural exchange and teaching in these two languages as in our region including the U.S., Mexico, Cuba, and neighboring countries in the Caribbean.

This is a reality of our future!

As neighbors who use and received benefits from the Gulf we must work together. CIIMAR and GOMURC are now signing a new agreement of cooperation. We do not need more walls separating us. We need more bridges. By signing this agreement, we are building new bridges.”