

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 1717 AND SJR 63

Regarding the Gulf of America

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INTRODUCTION

The Texas Public Policy Foundation supports Senate Bill 1717 (2025) and Senate Joint Resolution 63 (2025), introduced by Senator Middleton. These legislative measures propose to rename the “Gulf of Mexico” to the “Gulf of America” within Texas statutes and the Texas Constitution.

This paper outlines the rationale behind this proposal, provides historical and geopolitical context, and highlights the economic significance of this body of water to Texas and the United States.

LEGISLATIVE OVERVIEW

SB 1717 seeks to amend various Texas statutes to replace references to the “Gulf of Mexico” with “Gulf of America,” arguing that the current terminology is “inaccurate and outdated.” The bill establishes the “Gulf of America Statutory Language Initiative,” directing the Texas Legislature and the Texas Legislative Council to adopt this new terminology in all new and revised laws ([SB 1717, 2025, Sec. 452.001](#)).

Similarly, SJR 63 proposes a constitutional amendment to update references in the Texas Constitution, with a voter referendum scheduled for November 4, 2025 ([SJR 63, 2025, Sec. 5](#)).

RATIONALE FROM PRESIDENT TRUMP

A key justification for this renaming comes from President Donald J. Trump, who, on January 20, 2025, signed Executive Order 14172, “Restoring Names That Honor American Greatness.” This order mandated the U.S. Department of the Interior to rename the U.S. Continental Shelf area, previously known as the Gulf of Mexico, as the “Gulf of America.” In his proclamation on February 9, 2025, designating the first “Gulf of America Day,” President Trump stated: “[The] area formerly known as the Gulf of Mexico has long been an integral asset to our once burgeoning Nation and has remained an indelible part of America” ([Trump, 2025](#)).

The President further emphasized that this renaming aligns with efforts to “[restore] American pride in the history of American greatness” ([Trump, 2025](#)). Texas, as a state with significant coastline along this body of water, should align its legal framework with this federal initiative to honor America’s contributions and assert its historical and ongoing stewardship over this vital region.

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HISTORICAL NAMING OF THE GULF OF MEXICO

The name “Gulf of Mexico” originates from early European exploration. Spanish explorers, notably following Christopher Columbus’s voyages, began mapping the region in the early 16th century. The term “Golfo de México” first appeared in Spanish cartography around 1500–1510, reflecting Spain’s claim over the area after Hernán Cortés’s conquest of the Aztec Empire in 1519–1521. The earliest known map explicitly labeling it as such is attributed to Italian cartographer Giovanni Battista Ramusio in 1554 ([Hoffman, 2004](#)). The name persisted through colonial periods, despite the region’s shifting political control, due to its association with New Spain (modern-day Mexico).

However, this historical designation overlooks the significant role of the United States—and Texas specifically—in shaping the region’s modern identity. Since the U.S. acquired Florida (1819) and Texas joined the Union (1845), American influence has dominated the northern and eastern Gulf, justifying a name that reflects contemporary geopolitical realities.

ECONOMIC SIGNIFICANCE: IMPORT-EXPORT TRADE

The Gulf of America is a critical international trade route.

The main U.S. Gulf Coast trade ports—Houston, New Orleans, and Mobile—handled about \$550 billion in trade in 2023 ([U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.](#)). This includes both exports and imports, with a diverse range of goods such as petroleum, petrochemicals, and manufactured products.

The U.S. Gulf Coast trade is roughly 3.5 times larger than Mexico’s east coast trade (\$550 billion vs. \$157.5 billion).

Mexico’s east coast trade is primarily conducted out of Altamira, Tampico, Tuxpan, and Coatzacoalcos. These ports handle a variety of goods, including oil, chemicals, manufactured products, and agricultural commodities. Based on 2023 estimates the total trade value was approximately \$157.5 billion ([INEGI, 2023](#)). Mexico’s east coast trade contribution is about 17.5% of the national total, most trade being overland to the U.S.

EXCLUSIVE ECONOMIC ZONE (EEZ) ANALYSIS

The Gulf of America is a semi-enclosed sea bordered by the United States, Mexico, and Cuba. Each of these countries has an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) extending up to 200 nautical miles from their coastlines, granting them exclusive rights to explore and exploit marine resources in those zones ([UNCLOS, 1982](#)). However, due to the Gulf’s geography, there are also unclaimed areas (often referred to as “doughnut holes”) that lie beyond the 200-nautical-mile limit from any country’s coast. These are considered international waters.

These figures below represent the portions of each country’s EEZ that lie within the Gulf of Mexico where they have special rights to marine resources ([Brilliant Maps, 2025](#)):

- United States: 268,341 sq mi (695,000 km²)
- Mexico: 285,716 sq mi (740,000 km²)
- Cuba: 31,394 sq mi (81,309 km²)
- Unclaimed areas (“doughnut holes”): approximately 14,048 sq mi (36,383 km²)

The U.S. has 45% of the Gulf’s expanse while Mexico’s EEZ accounts for 48%, with Cuba allotted the remainder. Thus, no one nation has an absolute majority of the Gulf’s area.

GEOGRAPHIC FEATURES WITH ALTERNATE NAMES

Renaming geographic features is not unprecedented. Globally, many places have dual or alternate names reflecting political, cultural, or historical shifts:

- Falkland Islands / Islas Malvinas: Claimed by the UK (Falkland Islands) and Argentina (Islas Malvinas), reflecting colonial and sovereignty disputes.
- Persian Gulf / Arabian Gulf: Iran uses “Persian Gulf,” while some Arab states prefer “Arabian Gulf,” tied to national identity.
- Sea of Japan / East Sea: Japan uses “Sea of Japan,” while South Korea advocates “East Sea.”
- English Channel / La Manche: Known as “English Channel” in English-speaking countries and “La Manche” (The Sleeve) in French.

These examples—estimated at over 100 globally—demonstrate that renaming the Gulf of Mexico to “Gulf of America” aligns with a common practice of updating nomenclature to reflect contemporary significance (Smith, 2018).

SUPPORT FOR SB 1717 AND SJR 63

SB 1717 and SJR 63 modernize Texas law by aligning it with federal action and recognizing America’s preeminent role in the Gulf’s history, economy, and security. The Gulf of America’s integration into American identity—through trade, resource extraction, and coastal stewardship—merits a name that honors this legacy. President Trump’s proclamation provides a compelling national framework, and Texas, with its 367 miles of Gulf coastline, should lead in adopting “Gulf of America.” This renaming is a symbolic and practical step to affirm Texas’s and America’s enduring connection to this vital waterway.

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