

# Rio Grande

## GUARDIAN

### International News Service

#### **PEREZ: THE RIO GRANDE VALLEY IS TRANSFORMING RIGHT BEFORE OUR EYES**

By Ron Whitlock  
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MCALLEN, Texas - **Dr. Nolan Perez, MD**, a Harlingen native and University of Texas System regent, says great things are happening in the Rio Grande Valley.

At the conclusion of an exclusive video interview with the Rio Grande Guardian about the state of healthcare in the Valley, Perez was asked if there was anything else he would like to add.

"I just want to thank you guys for what you continue to do to highlight great stories across the region. There are so many great things. I believe it's our time right now, the Rio Grande Valley. Finally, there are a lot of folks paying really good attention to us. A lot of amazing things are happening. I think the Rio Grande Valley is transforming right before our eyes," Perez said.

By way of example, Perez highlighted the investment being made in higher education and infrastructure.

"You have the University of Texas-Rio Grande Valley, UTRGV. It is growing so rapidly. The School of Medicine. You now have (Texas) A&M coming down here wanting to do graduate medical education. You have (Texas) A&M trying to support the Port of Brownsville. Anywhere you look you have more folks wanting to do stuff down here, and it's just our time.

"LNG (liquefied natural gas) has come in. You have Elon Musk investing more. And so I believe it's just our time to to get it right.

"I've always said, talent is universal, opportunity is not. So it's our job collectively, as adults, as professionals, to make sure that we provide the opportunities for our brilliant young people that are born here and raised here.

"The talent is there. It's our job to create the educational and workforce opportunities for them to achieve the American Dream."

While there are great things happening in the Valley, there are still many challenges in the healthcare sector, Perez acknowledged.

"We still don't have enough primary care physicians, whether that be pediatricians, family practice, family

medicine, doctors, internal medicine doctors. We still are lacking in the primary care aspect."

Perez continued: "Some other things that come to mind: there's a huge need for psychiatry and mental health. There's a huge need for neurology and neurosurgeons. We are really behind the eight ball in terms of in terms of providing great neurologic care.

"Also, when you look at other specialties, like cancer care, really we have a deficit in breast surgeons, urologic oncologists. And then, GYN oncology surgeons. Those are some of the areas that we don't have enough of.

"Even urology as a whole, as a specialty, we don't have enough urologists down here. And even in our specialty, we don't have enough gastroenterologists down here. We're probably still about 10 or 12 too few gastroenterologists in the region. And also too few colorectal surgeons, and too few bariatric surgeons.

"And so, across the board, there's just not enough but I think the greater needs really are the ones I mentioned before, starting off with primary care, pediatric, OBGYN physicians, not enough physicians to deliver babies."

#### **Grand opening**

Dr. Perez gave his exclusive interview at the conclusion of the official opening of the state-of-the-art Jackson Medical Plaza on N. Jackson in McAllen. Texas Digestive Specialists (TDS), a company Perez heads, is situated on the second floor. TDS offers a full range of diagnostic and therapeutic services for diseases of the digestive tract, liver, and pancreas. It also specializes in treating the full range of diseases and disorders that affect the colon, rectum, anus, appendix and small bowel.

On the first floor of the Jackson Medical Plaza is the McAllen Surgery Center, run by HCA Healthcare. Rio Grande Regional Hospital is part of HCA. Its CEO, Laura Disque, spoke at the official opening.

Many hundreds of VIPs were in attendance.

In his speech at the official opening, Perez pointed out that Texas does not fare well in national healthcare rankings.

"Texas, not the Rio Grande Valley, ranks 45th. I'm just going to merge the numbers but... 42nd for specialists, 48th for primary care doctors, 45th for the number of physicians per capita in the United States. That's Texas, as big and as fast as we are growing. So, you can imagine how far

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behind we are for the Rio Grande Valley.”

Perez said Texas Digestive Specialists “loves” to create partnerships. He gave some examples.

“Our partnership downstairs with HCA, the McAllen Surgery Center. We partner in so many ways with other hospitals and facilities, UHS, our physicians work there. I know that UHS is now getting involved with graduate medical education. That’s incredible. HCA is now getting involved with UTRGV with graduate medical education. Incredible. Down the street we’re not too far from DHR and we’re really proud to partner with them in many ways and help them get a liver transplant program. We desperately need a live transplant program in this region and so hopefully we’ll have one soon. We partner with Prime across the Valley. Incredible facilities. And then, of course, Tenet hospitals as well. Incredible. They have a long standing tradition of supporting undergraduate and graduate medical education. I love creating partnerships and creating collective impact solutions for all the healthcare needs of our region.”

Perez thanked the “amazing leaders” from the world of healthcare that attended the official opening. One of them was Matt Wolthoff, president of Driscoll’s new children’s hospital in Edinburg.

“I told Matt Wolthoff, one of the CEOs who was here earlier... we can’t stop until we can say that 99 percent of our people can get their health care in the Rio Grande Valley. In our lifetime, let’s make that possible.”

#### Biography

Here is the biography of Dr. Nolan Perez that is posted on the UT System website:

Harlingen, Texas, was appointed to The University of Texas System Board of Regents by Governor Greg Abbott in March 2019 and was reappointed to a six-year term in April 2021.

Dr. Perez served in the U.S. Navy as a Medical Corps Officer and received the Navy Commendation and Navy Achievement Medals.

Dr. Perez is the Chairman of the Audit, Compliance, and Risk Management Committee and serves on the Academic Affairs Committee; the Facilities Planning and Construction Committee; and the Health Affairs Committee. He also serves on the Board for Lease of University Lands.

Dr. Perez is a member of The University of Texas System

Chancellor’s Council Executive Committee; The Holdsworth Center Governing Board; Philosophical Society of Texas; **Texas Business Leadership Council**; and is Medical Director for Platinum Surgery Center; Medical Director for Brownsville Surgery Center; and an Expert Panelist for the Texas Medical Board. He also serves as a Trustee for the Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District.

Dr. Perez is former Chairman for the Texas Woman’s University Board of Regents, and a former member of the clinical faculty at The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley’s School of Medicine. He has also formerly served on many other local and statewide councils, foundations, and boards including The University of Texas Foundation Board; The University of Texas at Austin Development Board; The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Development Board; Lone Star National Bank Board of Directors; Rio Grande Valley Angel Network; The University of Texas College of Education Foundation Advisory Council; Educate Texas Committee; The Texas Lyceum, FIRST in Texas Foundation; Humanities Texas Board; Texas Foundation for Innovative Communities Board; and Harlingen School of Health Professions Advisory Committee.

He earned a Bachelor of Arts from The University of Texas at Austin and a Medical Doctorate from The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio. He is board certified in Gastroenterology and is a Fellow of the American College of Physicians and American College of Gastroenterology