



Houston, October 25th 2022

Honorable Anniken Huitfeldt

Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs
Oslo – Norway

Subject: Closure of the Norwegian Consulate General in Houston

Dear Minister Huitfeldt,

The Norwegian-American community in Texas and in the Southwest region of the United States have many concerns related to the recent [press release](#) announcing the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' intention to close the Consulate General in Houston (CGH). This petition is addressed to you as a joint effort by [The Norwegian-American Chamber of Commerce Southwest](#) (NACC) and [The Norwegian Society of Texas](#) (NST). Additionally, a couple of weeks ago, we initiated an [online petition](#), which has already collected well over 1,100 signatures and is still open.

Given the important role of the Norwegian CGH, it is in the interest of Norway that we are writing to you to most respectfully ask that you reconsider this decision. Reasons for our request are many, and we address them in the following pages. The presence of the CGH has long been and still is of high value to both Norway and the United States. Houston and Texas are among the fastest growing regions in the US, both in terms of entrepreneurial innovations and major corporate relocation. Many of the key growth industries are fully aligned with Norwegian

industrial strengths, strategic goals and future growth potentials. The importance of Houston for Norway was also clearly explained by your predecessor, Jonas Gahr Støre, in the context of his [visit to Houston as Norway's Foreign Minister, 5th of January 2012](#).

The broader perspective:

The CGH plays a pivotal role in promoting relationships, formal collaborations in the commercial, economic, industrial, scientific and technological sectors between the Southwest region of the United States and Norway. Additionally, the CGH is a vital partner for several institutions promoting Norwegian business interests and culture, such as [The Norwegian-American Chamber of Commerce \(NACC\)](#), [Innovation Norway](#), [Norwegian Energy Partners \(NORWEP\)](#), [The Norwegian Society of Texas \(NST\)](#), and [The Norwegian Seamen's Church](#).

Some vital facts:

Energy

- Houston is the undisputed “**energy capital of the world**”. More recently, that title has also come to include its position as a technology hub in [Clean Energy Solutions](#), [Renewables](#), [hydrogen](#), [wind power](#) and [Carbon Capture Utilization & Storage \(CCUS\)](#). The State is also a major Research & Development hub for global corporations engaged in those sectors.
- Texas is the leading producer of renewable energy in the US, illustrated by Texas being by far [the largest wind power state in the country](#). In fact, for the last decade and a half, Texas has led the nation in wind-powered electricity generation, producing [nearly 26 percent of the US wind energy in 2021 alone](#).
- Texas vast and diverse geography makes it a leader in solar-generation potential as well. The state ranks sixth in the nation in solar power potential. [In 2021, Texas was the country's second-largest producer, after California, of solar photovoltaic \(PV\)-sourced power](#).
- Texas is quickly becoming a major center for the ongoing energy transition, both onshore and offshore. As the energy capital of the US and arguably of the world, close cooperation with Houston and the region is both critical and beneficial to Norway's ability to make significant headway on energy transition and achievement of climate goals. **Texas is no longer an Oil & Gas State, but rather an Energy State, and an extremely important one at that.**
- Texas is establishing itself as a major battery developer and producer, including as a [business hub](#) and a hub for [research and development](#).

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- Innovative, global technology powerhouses are relocating to Texas from states such as California and beyond. Companies like Tesla, Amazon Web Services (AWS), Hewlett Packard, Oracle have all recently relocated to Texas and Houston. The same applies to major operators in the Energy sector.

Many leading Universities in Texas have strong, dynamic ties with Norwegian universities, also in the Energy sector. The universities in Stavanger, Bergen, Trondheim, and Oslo collaborate with leading Texas universities such as University of Texas at Austin, Texas A&M University, Rice University and the University of Houston, among others in the Southwest USA. *Please see attached note from Professor Arne Graue explaining the extensive collaboration between Norway and Texas in the Energy sector.*

Furthermore, in light of the ongoing military conflict in Ukraine, it is important to fully recognize the energy security risks in Europe. Having a diplomatic presence in the world's energy capital and Southwest region of the United States is of fundamental importance. [Nearly one-fourth of U.S. proved dry natural gas reserves and about 30 of the 100 largest natural gas fields are located, in whole or in part, in Texas.](#)

The Southwest region of the US has a different political tradition and climate than the East and West coasts of the country. Closing Norway's core voice and listening-post between the two coasts may not serve Norway's current and future interests.

Shipping

- Houston is one of the largest shipping hubs in the world, with plans for huge investments in order to maintain that leading status, also to include the extensive use of renewable energy. [The Port of Houston, among the largest and busiest ones in the US, plans to become carbo-neutral by 2050. Between 2016 and 2021, the Port reduced its carbon footprint by 55% through initiatives, such as the use of 100% asset-backed renewable electricity.](#)

Healthcare and Scientific Research

- Houston is home to the [Texas Medical Center](#), the largest “medical city” in the world, including the world's largest children's hospital and world's largest cancer hospital. It is also among the top 10 medical research hubs in the world, and is the world leader in many medical fields, including Oncology and Cardiology. **The importance of Houston for the healthcare sector and medical research cannot be underestimated.**

There is an extensive and robust collaboration between Norway and Houston in cancer research. An example is the strong collaboration between [MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston](#), [the Oslo University Hospital](#), [the Norwegian Cancer Consortium](#), and [Radiumhospitalets Legater](#). That collaboration was renewed in Stavanger in 2012, and presented by distinguished guests such as the former United States Ambassador to Norway, Barry White and then Mayor of Stavanger, Christine Sagen.

In another clear example of the importance Texas has to the Norwegian medical community, Ketil Widerberg, General Manager of the Oslo Cancer Cluster, represented Norway in a panel session during the [Global Health Security Demo Day at SXSW2021](#). That particular event was organized by Austin Technology Incubator at the University of Texas at Austin, Australian Trade and Investment Commission (Austrade), Consulate General of Denmark in Houston, The Royal Norwegian Consulate General in Houston and the European Network of Research and Innovation Centers and Hubs, USA (ENRICH).

All along, the CGH has been a vital player in establishing and managing these relationships. Finally, it is also important to remember that **Houston is a global destination for cancer patients, including many coming from Norway, who are seeking treatments that are unavailable back home.**

Space and Military

- Houston is the Space capital of the US. Space technology is now the 3rd largest industry in Texas, and Norway has an expressed interest in establishing closer ties. Norwegian institutions in this field include the Norwegian Space Agency, Kongsberg Satellite Services KSAT and Andøya Space. As an example, [the ground-penetrating Rimfax radar on board NASA's Mars rover "Perseverance" is developed and built in Norway](#). NASA and Norway have multiple collaborations on Arctic security, communications technology, climate research and a number of other topics of an ever increasing importance.

History, Culture and Diplomacy

- In terms of the deep historical and cultural ties between the 2 countries, we would like to point out the upcoming 200-year anniversary for Norwegian immigration to America in 2025. Texas has a central role in this history as the home of Cleng Peerson who led the first group of Norwegian emigrants to America in 1825. [NACC Southwest actually featured an article about him in its October newsletter](#). Cleng Peerson lived his senior years in Texas and is buried in Bosque County, Texas. King Olav made a visit in 1982 followed by a 2012 visit by the then Norwegian Minister of Research and Higher

Education, Tora Aasland. The timing of closing of the CGH would also coincide with this important milestone for Norwegian history.

- Through CGH, Norway has invested 45 years of building strong relations and developing mutual trust between the 2 countries. We worry about the message being sent with the closing of this important diplomatic mission. Furthermore, our concern is also rooted in the fact that Norway would likely lose influence in promoting its interests and values in vital businesses, energy supply and security domains.

Norway's presence in the US

There are between 12,000 and 15,000 Norwegian citizens living in the region served by the CGH. In the Houston metro area alone, the estimated number is 6,000 making it the city with the largest Norwegian presence outside of Norway. With around 150 Norwegian businesses also represented locally, the city is the largest cluster of small, medium and large Norwegian companies. All these organizations draw much benefit from their partnership with the CGH to voice common goals and promote Norwegian interests in the 11 US States served by the CGH (Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Kansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Oklahoma, Texas, U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico). Combined, those states represent 25% of the US population.

Additionally, the southern region of the United States has about 550,000 individuals with Norwegian roots. The presence of the CGH in the region is important to preserve and promote their identity and cultural heritage.

Counter trend

Closing the CGH would, in effect, be a counter trend. Houston has the 3rd largest concentration of Consulates in the US after New York and Los Angeles. Norway belongs in this strong and important diplomatic cluster.

It is also worth mentioning that countries such as Poland, Hungary and Ukraine (pre-Russian invasion) have actually established new diplomatic missions in Houston. Other countries such as Denmark and Australia have actually upgraded their diplomatic presence in Houston from Honorary to full-scale Consulates General in pursuit of increased collaboration and export opportunities. As a matter of fact, the closure of the CGH would result in Norway becoming the only Scandinavian country not represented by a Consulate General in the city.

Texas is the 9th largest economy in the world. Houston alone would currently rank as the 26th largest economy in the world, which is about the same size as Norway. The only Consulate General to close in Houston in recent years is the Chinese one following instructions coming from the US State Department.

Parliamentary Committees

Over the years, we have registered the interest for Houston and Texas by several Storting Committees. Some Committees have in fact chosen Houston as destination for week-long study tours, with CGH functioning as host and facilitator. This includes both the Foreign Affairs & Defense Committee and the Finance and Economic Affairs Committee. These Parliamentary visits clearly illustrate the importance of Houston. We copy our petition letter to these two Committees, as well as to other Parliamentary Committees whose portfolios are directly related to Norway's interests and presence in Texas, and in the other States served by CGH.

Conclusion

Local representation in Houston has been and will continue to be essential to promote Norwegian business interests, manage and establish new connections, drive export and enhance mutual sustainable value creation. The continued presence of the CGH will likely also help maintain a positive impact on the Norwegian job market given the degree of interconnection between the two players.

It is therefore that we respectfully urge you to reconsider the decision to close the Norwegian Consulate General in Houston. In the possible event that budgetary restraints within your Ministry make this difficult, we take the liberty to suggest that an invitation be made to the Ministry of Petroleum & Energy and the Ministry of Trade, Industry & Fisheries to join the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in keeping the Consulate General in Houston. Both Ministries have, over the years, shown strong interest in and made good use of the services of that diplomatic mission as well.

Respectfully,



Mark Varhaug
President
The Norwegian Society of Texas



Ray Torgerson
Interim President
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Southwest Chapter

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Attachment

Note from Professor Arne Graue about Norway-Texas collaboration in the Energy sector
(University of Bergen, Department of Physics and Technology)

[Online petition](#)

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Houston, 20. oktober, 2022

Støtteerklæring for NGK Houston

Nyheten om at det er fremlagt planer for nedleggelse av Norges generalkonsulat (NGK) i Houston er mottatt med stor bekymring for videre forsknings- og utdannings samarbeid mellom USA og Norge innen energiomstilling og petroleumsrelaterte fag. Eventuell nedleggelse av NGK vil ikke bli forstått av de involverte fagmiljøene i Norge og USA, og vil kunne avstedkomme redusert interesse for videre framtidig engasjement.

Undertegnede er Professor i fysikk ved Universitetet i Bergen og har i over 20 år hatt et nært og godt, og særdeles fruktbart samarbeid, med NGK i Houston. Omfanget og betydningen av dette samarbeidet er beskrevet nedenfor.

Undertegnede driver forskning og undervisning i olje- og gass relaterte fag og er leder for Reservoarfysikk ved Universitetet i Bergen. Jeg leder også flere internasjonale forskningssamarbeid mellom USA og Norge innen petroleumsforskning og høyere utdanning innen CCUS og energiomstilling. Undertegnede er også Styreformann i Nasjonal forskerskole i petroleumsfag, Styreformann i NorTex (Norway-Texas) Petroleum Cluster og Styreformann i ColNor. NGK sin innsats i disse aktivitetene er, og har vært, av meget stor betydning. Totalt har mer enn 600 Master- og PhD studenter og ca 200 forskere- og industrirepresentanter deltatt i samarbeid hvor NGK Houston har vært instrumental både mht initiering, utvikling og ikke minst oppfølging av forskning- og høyere undervisning initiativ innen petroleumsrelatert fag og energiomstilling.

Som Professor i fysikk og Leder for forskningsgruppen «Reservoarfysikk – Energiteknologi, CO2 lagring og CCUS» ved Institutt for fysikk og teknologi, Universitetet i Bergen, har jeg uteksaminert mer enn 250 Master- og PhD studenter innen olje- og gass relaterte fagfelt. Mer enn 170 av disse studentene har deltatt i aktiviteter i samarbeid med NGK i Houston. NGK har vært behjelpelig med å integrere våre studenter med universitetsmiljøer og industri i Houston. Spesielt ved å inkludere studenter i sosiale sammenkomster med faglig profilering har studentene opparbeidet seg vitenskapelige nettverk av stor betydning for dem i deres framtidige karrierer.

Som Styreformann i Nasjonal forskerskole i petroleumsfag (NFIP, www.NFiP.no), hvor alle norske universiteter med PhD studier i petroleumsrelaterte fagfelt er medlem, har vi initiert flere petroleumskonferanser og energiomstillingskonferanser i samarbeid med NGK. I 2011 inviterte NGK til at NFIP kunne utvikle den første student konferansen i regi av Science Week. Statsråd for Olje- og energi Departementet fremhevet nettopp det i sin åpningstale for Transatlantic Science Week. Daværende Generalkonsul, Jostein Mykletun, fikk inkludert i Statsrådets program en signerings-seremoni for en MoU mellom NFIP og University of Texas, Austin, hvor også ledelsen i Olje- og energidepartementet deltok. NGK arrangerte også et møte med NFIP's Styreleder og Presidenten på Rice University, som førte til en MoU mellom Rice University og NFIP. I alt har NFIP signert 9 MoU'er med universiteter i USA, NGK har vært instrumental i flere av disse. Generalkonsul Jostein

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Mykletun var personlig til stede ved flere av signeringene. Disse MoU'ene har vært av betydelig verdi for forskningssamarbeid og studentutveksling. NFiP har i alt hatt 1600 PhD og MSc studenter med i våre aktiviteter.

Undertegnede koordinerte en Energi kommisjonsbesøk i North Dakota, med ledelsen i Olje- og Energi Departementet til stede og med Statoil som vertskap. NGK sin støtte til dette var av avgjørende betydning både for utfallet av besøket og for pressedekning og logistikk.

Et samarbeid mellom NFiP og NGK i Houston under Science Week førte til et initiativ til å etablere NorTex Petroleum Cluster (NorTex) som et samarbeidsorgan mellom de 4 største universitetene i Texas, fem universiteter i Norge og olje- og service industrien i Texas og i Norge. Undertegnede var formell initiativtaker og har siden vært Styreleder for et Styre bestående av industrirepresentanter og forskere fra USA og Norge. Aktiviteter i NorTex for studentutvekslinger og forskningssamarbeid er dokumentert ved <https://nortexpetroleum.org/>.

Siden 2010 har NFiP i samarbeid med NGK avholdt 7 internasjonale petroleums- og energiomstillingskonferanser. Åpningsseremonier hvor Norges Generalkonsul holder åpningstale og sosiale samlinger av konferansedeltakere i regi av NGK har uvurderlig betydning både for å tiltrekke oppmerksomhet i Houston, men også internasjonalt, slik at det vitenskapelige programmet også får en mer formell dimensjon. Dette har spesielt ført til mer kontakt med petroleumsindustrien i Houston.


Erfaringer fra NorTex har ført til at undertegnede også har etablert Colorado-Norway Clean Energy Transition Research and Educational Collaboration (ColNor). De 4 største universitetene i Colorado og 5 universiteter i Norge samarbeider med flere US National Labs og industri i Colorado innen energiomstilling.

Siden 2010 har vi erfart at alle daværende og nåværende Generalkonsuler har stilt opp for NFiP, både Jostein Mykletun, Morten Paulsen og Hilde Skorpen har alle gjort en usedvanlig god innsats for NFiP og for over 600 Master- og PhD studenter og ca 200 forskere- og industri-representanter under besøk i Houston. Lokal representasjon av norske myndigheters interesser i Houston har en uvurderlig betydning for kontakter mellom norsk og amerikansk industri og for samarbeid mellom universiteter i begge land, spesielt innen energiomstilling og petroleums relaterte fagfelt.

Konklusjon:

Jeg håper denne redegjørelsen kan bidra positivt for å sikre NGK sin videre eksistens i Houston, verdens energihovedstad. På vegne av norske myndigheter har NGK Houston vært en viktig pådriver for transatlantisk forsknings- og teknologisamarbeid, med en rekke målbare resultater. Jeg håper vi kan regne med NGK Houston som en sterk medspiller også framover, spesielt innenfor petroleum og energi-omstilling hvor aktiviteter i Houston er meget viktige for norske universitets- og industri interesser innen disse fagfeltene.

Mvh,



Arne Graue
Professor