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June 25, 2012

The Honorable Doc Hastings
Chairman
House Committee on Natural Resources
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Hastings,

I am writing to respectfully request a hearing on the impacts of sea level rise on U.S. coastal communities and assets. My request is triggered by the disturbing trend of state legislatures ignoring the latest science on sea level rise. Recently, the North Carolina House of Representatives passed a bill that would prohibit state coastal resource managers from basing their management decisions on sound science. The bill dictates to managers that they can only use the observed measure of 8 inches of sea level rise over the past 100 years in managing the coastal zone for planning purposes, when in reality scientists predict that sea levels could rise by nearly seven times that much over the next century. This kind of poor decision making will leave taxpayers on the hook for enormous costs associated with replacing or relocating poorly planned structures.

Earlier this year, the Virginia House of Delegates stripped the term sea level rise from legislation requiring state agencies to report on how to address this very real problem, replacing it instead with the term 'coastal flooding.' Nevermind that sea level rise is without question the main cause of recent increases in coastal flooding, or that rising sea levels still pose grave danger outside of flood events. One Virginia delegate even went so far as to call sea level rise a 'liberal code word.'

Our military leaders, port operators, and others with significant investments along U.S. coasts disagree. Vital military and commercial infrastructure is at risk because of sea level rise. Failing to address this issue head-on puts our national security and coastal economies in jeopardy. Congress has a responsibility to ensure that the federal government does everything in its power to protect U.S. citizens and assets from danger, and the policies being considered by some states are dangerous.

There is nothing 'liberal' or 'conservative' about facts. While I agree with the 97 percent of climate scientists who say the evidence shows human activity is causing global warming, even those who do not agree must acknowledge that sea level has risen and will continue to rise, and that the United States will be dramatically affected. In fact, the U.S. Geological Survey reported over the weekend that the rate of sea level rise from Cape Hatteras to Boston – a stretch of shoreline with more valuable infrastructure at risk than almost anywhere else in the world - is more than three to four times the global average. This study was not based on modeling, but on real world observations that reaffirmed previous projections of models that have long predicted higher sea levels along the East Coast. Further, a National Research Council Report issued last week predicted that sea levels along the U.S. Pacific Coast could rise by more than five feet by the turn of the century. Even those who disagree with policies to reduce global warming pollution are doing their constituents a disservice by failing to prepare for sea level rise. Ignoring this basic physics problem will not make it go away.

Thank you in advance for considering my request for a hearing on the impacts of sea level rise on U.S. coastal communities and assets. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Matt Strickler or Heidi Geisz of my staff at 202-225-6065.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey
Ranking Member
House Committee on Natural Resources