

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE WAYNE T. GILCHREST AT THE SEPTEMBER 26, 2007
HEARING OF THE U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS
ON THE IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON THE CHESAPEAKE BAY

Thank you, Madam Chair, Ranking Member Inhofe, and distinguished Committee Members for this opportunity to testify before the U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works on the nexus of two policy issues that are of paramount importance to me and to my district—Maryland's 1st Congressional District. We hold the Chesapeake Bay and our rural and coastal communities in great esteem. For more than 20 years, local policy leaders and citizen groups have worked against great odds to restore the Chesapeake Bay in a national model of scientific achievement, collaborative effort, and passion. We are now grappling with new challenges, including greater projected growth, the management of biofuel production and its impacts on water quality, and climate change. Affecting every driver of the Bay's overall health, climate change is an additional challenge to an already stressed ecosystem.

Consisting of the entire Delmarva Peninsula within Maryland and portions of western counties that surround the Chesapeake Bay, Maryland's 1st Congressional District relies heavily on the health of the Bay as its economic engine—for abundant seafood, recreation, transportation of commercial goods, tourism, and a growing real estate market. Much of my district is geographically divided from the rest of the nation by the Bay, so the Bay and coastal waters are of even greater importance to the people living and working in the beautiful, bountiful area known as Maryland's Eastern Shore.

My district includes the largest share of Chesapeake Bay shoreline in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, and my constituents will directly experience the impacts of climate change, including coastal flooding, shoreline erosion, and infrastructure damage from severe coastal storms. The Delmarva Peninsula, upon which much of my district rests, is basically a sand bar formed by the confluence of the Susquehanna River delta and the Atlantic Ocean. As a geological feature of water flow, and with its greatest elevation at 100 feet above sea level, the Peninsula is extremely vulnerable to severe weather, flooding, and sea level rise.

As vulnerable as it is to climate change impacts, the Chesapeake Bay and its 64,000 square mile watershed are in a uniquely powerful position, geographically, functionally, and culturally to contribute to reducing and sequestering greenhouse gas emissions. With the highest land to water ratio of any estuary in the world, the watershed and its commitment to restoring the Bay through best management practices, can greatly contribute to the national and even global effort to reduce greenhouse gases. For instance, when we are stuck in traffic in the Washington Metropolitan Area, we are spending just a little bit less time on that than our friends in the New York Metropolitan Area, because of patterns of land use and development. The Urban Land Institute reported recently on the contribution of sprawl to greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles. Better informed and coordinated land use planning, new state commitments to control vehicle emissions, and green buildings can solve this problem. We can plan ahead—the Institute predicts that two-thirds of the residences and office buildings needed by 2050 have yet to be built.

The Chesapeake Bay's restoration goals, like planting forest buffers and preserving open space, could help sequester carbon. State and local government and citizen action to increase energy efficiency in buildings and transportation are also helping the cause. Counties in my district, like Worcester County along the Atlantic Coast, are not only striving to become energy independent but are also actually planning new communities so that fewer residents and less infrastructure are

vulnerable to flooding. As these local actions are taken to both restore the Chesapeake Bay and address and adapt communities to climate change, the core of the climate change problem is the need for a national policy to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

I come before the Committee today, not only as Maryland's 1st Congressional District Representative, but also the co-chair and co-founder of the Congressional Climate Change Caucus, to urge you to work closely with your colleagues in the House to craft and pass legislation during this Congress that will meaningfully reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 60% to 80% below current levels by 2050. The survival of communities in our watershed and the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem depends on it.

This legislation should have broad-based support from environmental and business stakeholders alike. It should not only reduce greenhouse gases, but also help the U.S. economy to grow and to keep the U.S. at the lead of international development of new energy technologies. I cannot stress enough that the policy we ultimately create and pass must be acceptable to utility ratepayers and consumers—it must not significantly reduce their quality of life.

Therefore I urge the Committee, in crafting its legislation, to focus on the first ten to twenty years of the policy's implementation. We must get it right in this time frame because this is when consumers will judge their tolerance for it. It is also during this time that we must invest the capitol and take the necessary risks to develop new energy technology and delivery systems in order to achieve our climate change goals. If the investment we make during this time is not sufficient nor targeted enough, new technology may be insufficient to achieve the downward trajectory of emissions we need over the next 40 years.

I believe a 'tipping point' will occur in this policy debate, after which both the impacts of global warming will be irreversible, even over generations, and our economic opportunity to address the problem will be unrecoverable. I believe this tipping point may occur sooner rather than later. However, the opportunity for climate change policy to generate a stronger U.S. energy economy and a better global environment during those years is tremendous.

Madam Chair, I want to congratulate you and express my profound appreciation for your leadership on climate change. Your persistent work on this issue has helped bring Congress to its own 'tipping point'—the point past which Members can coalesce around a solid piece of legislation that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions and grow the U.S. economy.

The people dedicated to the Chesapeake Bay are enthusiastic, well-informed, and eager to restore the functioning ecosystem of the Bay, including humans as a productive part of the landscape. They have kept the Bay's status in equilibrium, in spite of the millions of people who have moved to this lovely place since the early 1980s. I admire their fierce determination and hope you will join me in supporting Chesapeake Bay restoration—as far as we can take it—2010 and beyond.

Thank you again, Madam Chair, and I look forward to continuing our work together.