

**TESTIMONY BY
THE HONORABLE JOHN CARNEY
GOVERNOR, STATE OF DELAWARE
TO THE
U.S. SENATE ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE
ON
Examining Shoreline and Riverbank Restoration in the Face of Climate Change
February 23, 2022**

Last year, the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control launched Delaware's Climate Action Plan – a result of a year-long process involving residents, businesses, and technical experts. This roadmap shows how Delaware can prepare for climate change in the decades ahead by reducing carbon emissions and focusing on resilience. In 2017, we signed on to the U.S. Climate Alliance – committing to reduce our carbon emissions by 26 to 28 percent by 2025. We're not there yet, but we're making good progress.

We are here today to talk about the impacts of sea level rise caused by climate change. Delaware has already experienced over one foot of sea level rise at the Lewes tide gauge since 1900. By midcentury, sea levels are projected to rise another nine to 23 inches and by 2100, up to an additional five feet.

This threatens our beach and Bay environments, neighborhoods, and businesses. And for residents of these communities, it threatens their way of life.

Delaware is our country's lowest-lying state, and the effects of sea-level rise pose significant risks across our State's economy.

In Sussex County, tourism employs 17,000 people and contributes \$213 million in state and local taxes. These might not sound like big numbers to our friends in other states, including my friend Governor Bel Edwards in Louisiana, but those are big numbers for here in a state of one million residents.

During COVID-19, I made decisions with the understanding that you need to have a healthy community to have a healthy economy. It is also true that you need to have a healthy environment to have a healthy economy.

To that end, we're grateful for the investments in infrastructure that are coming to the state, championed by our federal delegation, including EPW Chairman Senator Carper. The infrastructure bill achieves exactly what President Biden intended – a bipartisan piece of legislation that enables us to 'build back better' for the next decade.

These investments will address the impacts of climate change by embedding climate resiliency in all infrastructure projects and focus in on reducing carbon emissions. This includes a \$17 million investment to expand Delaware's electric vehicle charging network.

To paint the picture for you of what climate change means for us, I'm going to talk a little bit about an area many Delawareans don't know a lot about.

Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge in Milton has experienced some real encroachment on their operations. The old parking lot off Fowler Beach Road has been washed away – 20 yards into the Bay. The dunes to the north of the Refuge have been restored, but that’s only a temporary solution. The Corps does an incredible job managing the refuge and re-building the dunes, but this is an example of how saltwater encroachment can impact businesses and ecosystems and agriculture as it has done at this Federal Refuge site.

The beaches and bay are part of Delaware’s history. The Delaware Bay was a lifeline and resource during the early colonial periods. It fueled transportation and a maritime economy that ultimately supported the foundation of our state.

Today, we’re approaching a ‘new normal’ under climate change. Storms, hurricanes, and other weather events are more prevalent – we’re seeing 100 years floods every few years instead of every century.

When I took the oath of office to become Delaware’s 74th Governor, I pledged not only to uphold our Constitution, but to ‘respect the right of future generations to share the rich historic and natural heritage’ of our state. We live in a beautiful state, and we should take care to preserve that heritage.

That includes upholding the goals laid out in our Climate Action Plan and incorporating the Action Plan’s objectives into the resources provided by the federal infrastructure bill.

We can only do this by minimizing emissions. We need to expand clean and renewable energy, put in place energy efficiency measures, transition our transportation sector to zero-emission vehicles and reduce and manage greenhouse gases beyond carbon dioxide.

We also need to prepare for the environmental challenges we’re just now beginning to see. Resiliency efforts like improving real-time data collection of coastal flooding, and providing training, tools and technical assistance on climate change impacts may sound simple but they are critical for us to be prepared.

Thank you for this important discussion today on the SHORRE Act which will protect our coastal communities and beaches from the impacts of climate change.