

Statement of  
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Before the  
House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis  
Hearing  
"Generation Climate: Young Leaders Urge Climate Action Now"

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Good morning Chairwoman Castor, Ranking Member Graves, and Members of the Committee. My name is Lindsay Cooper, and I want to thank you for the opportunity to discuss a Louisiana perspective on climate concerns. Louisiana is, in many respects, the perfect case study for this committee as it grapples with a path forward for the nation in regard to climate change and its associated impacts. Before further detailing the role of Louisiana in this discussion, let me first introduce myself. I was born, raised, and educated on the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain in Louisiana. I attended Tulane University for my bachelor's degree where I graduated in Marine Biology and Public Policy in December 2018. During college I served as an environmental advocacy volunteer with No Waste Nola, a local nonprofit that fights to reduce waste in New Orleans; interned for the Gulf Restoration Network, a nonprofit focused on science-based coastal protection; served as a research assistant with the Tulane Institute of Water Resources Law and Policy; and, became President of the Tulane University Green Club my sophomore year.

Last year, I also served as a Louisiana Governor's Fellow where I had the privilege to work with Louisiana Governor John Bel Edwards and his Coastal Activities Office directly on state-wide policy initiatives. It was in this time that I discovered the extent of our Louisiana coastal crisis and the imperative with which it must be addressed. Therefore, upon graduation, I joined Governor John Bel Edward's Office of Coastal Activities where I serve as a policy analyst. I work diligently alongside the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority to move forward policies that promote coastal wetlands protection and restoration in Louisiana. However, it did not take my experiences in coastal policy to teach me that Louisiana faces unparalleled climate threats. In a state vulnerable to hurricanes, floods, and coastal degradation, my family and

countless other lifelong friends have confronted devastation after devastation from increasingly intense weather events. In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, my own family had to relocate for months while our schools were flooded, but many of my neighbors and friends were never able to return. In light of these circumstances, I am compelled to use my education and experience to fight for the culture, people, and the environment into which I was born. The Louisiana coast serves many national interests: fisheries, energy production, port, navigation, and trade activities; it provides countless ecosystem services and is home to over two million people. Our coastal wetlands are a key first line of defense to protect these interests and our people. Louisiana is home to approximately 30 percent of the nation's wetlands. Tragically, we are losing roughly a football field's worth of coastal wetlands every hour and a half due to sediment starvation, saltwater intrusion, and erosion. In the decades to come, sea level rise will play a larger and larger role in the sustainability of coastal Louisiana. Our communities have not moved to the Gulf for waterfront views, but the Gulf has moved to us. In 2005, Hurricanes Katrina and Rita underscored the importance of our coastal wetlands for the protection of inland communities including urban areas like the City of New Orleans and less densely populated portions of the southwest. In 2006, the Louisiana Legislature created the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA), a first in the nation organization tasked with coordinating the local and state efforts to save our coast. CPRA is responsible for developing the state's Coastal Master Plan every six years which calls for a \$50 billion investment in over 100 coastal protection and restoration projects over the next 50 years. These projects are essential both to create a stronger and more resilient coast and to reduce wetlands loss. The

Master Plan is based on sound science, public input and bipartisan approval from the state legislature.

Some call us a canary in the coal mine or harbingers of bad things soon to happen around us. We have lost 2,000 square miles of coastline since the 1930s and stand to lose much more in the years to come without significant action. To others, we are a living laboratory, a testing ground for new opportunities, and a place where community needs, cutting edge science, effective natural and manmade infrastructure, and good public policy can come together to balance the interests of economy and environment.

Regardless of whether you take the pessimistic or optimistic view of the outcome, it cannot be denied that we have all the elements necessary to craft a large-scale solution for the country. We have a long, painful history of natural disasters and lived experience of coastal land loss. We have a strong culture of appreciation for our natural environment from a recreation and commercial point of view. And we have an economy that is deeply connected to access and utilization of energy resources located offshore. We have also found a way to deal with the impacts of our changing coast that prioritizes science-based decision making and minimized politics. And we have completed 111 projects across all 20 of our coastal parishes since 2007.

In 2017 the Louisiana Legislature unanimously approved the third iteration of our Coastal Master Plan. When we developed our first plan in 2007, we had no money, but we knew that we needed a principled approach to make hard decisions and allocate scarce resources. We amended our state constitution with tremendous public support to dedicate all revenues we receive from the federal government from offshore oil and gas development to

coastal protection and restoration. And in the aftermath of the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill, the state also has relied on the Coastal Master Plan to guide our recovery and drive the investment of nearly \$8 billion that will come to the State through 2032 as part of the settlement.

In conclusion, as a Louisianan, I understand climate change. It's something my state lives with every day. Even as we sit here today, our Louisiana coastal wetlands are shrinking; people are migrating inland; some unique Louisiana cultures are being swept into the Gulf. For these reasons, I ask you to consider my testimony and the urgency with which we must work together to confront this massive problem. Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to share the urgency of what we face and what I am doing back home to help shape a better future for our coast, our state and our nation.