

Member Day: Select Committee on the Climate Crisis
Thursday, November 14, 2019
Written Testimony: Rep. Harley Rouda (CA-48)

I would like to thank Chairwoman Castor and Ranking Member Graves for providing this opportunity to come and testify today to recommend an important piece of legislation aimed at ensuring that our communities are resilient to the impacts of climate change.

As you and the members of this committee already know, climate change is not only real – it is already happening and Americans throughout the country are experiencing serious effects.

That's why, earlier this year, I introduced H.R. 1317, The Coastal Communities Adaptation Act. This piece of legislation is important to the district I represent and coastal districts across the country and has earned the support of 33 cosponsors.

For far too many coastal districts like the one I represent, climate change has already increased the frequency of coastal flooding, including what we would consider "regular" tidal floods. The combination of water expansion as the ocean has warmed and the melting of land ice into the oceans has driven sea level up about seven inches since 1990, and this rise is accelerating.

Just this summer, the Los Angeles Times reported that, "In the last 100 years, the sea rose less than 9 inches in California. By the end of this century, the surge could be greater than 9 feet."

My bill would jumpstart research and grant funding by the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the National Institute for Standards and Technology (NIST) into improved buildings and structures to account for extreme weather, create a prize competition to stimulate innovation for new techniques into natural shoreline risk reduction measures, direct the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to promote the adoption of windstorm preparedness and mitigation measures for HUD-code housing units, and order new research by National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) into the use and effectiveness of nature-based and nonstructural approaches to reduce flood risk.

Higher sea levels mean that deadly and destructive storm surges push farther inland and bring more frequent flooding to coastal communities. With sea levels expected to continue to rise, many vulnerable coastal populations will be further impacted. What was once a niche planning effort to limit seasonal storm damage is now a broad effort to integrate hazard planning and water management into all aspects of local comprehensive plans and related development codes.

We must consider high and extreme sea levels when making decisions that directly impact people and critical resources in coastal California and in the other 29 coastal states (including Great Lake states) across the country.

Coastal communities recognize the necessity of integrating climate change considerations into their planning – resiliency planning is a fundamental part of how communities plan, grow, and prosper. This is not a one-size-fits-all solution to a diverse and multi-faceted challenge. The financing tools provided by my bill will help communities large and small turn their unique resiliency plans into a safer reality.

The shorelines of Louisiana, Virginia, and Texas are shrinking. Beaches in North and South Carolina are disappearing. Places like Florida, Hawaii, and Guam are already drowning. And, California's coast is eroding more and more with each storm surge.

Our coastal lands are treasured natural resources, and they are also something else – they are places that many Americans call home. This is about more than sandy beaches, surf breaks, and boardwalks – this is about our lives, our businesses, and critical infrastructure.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today, and I urge the Select Committee to consider supporting this legislation because we need to address the reality of climate change if we want to maintain the same quality of life – our planet's oceans will not wait until we're ready – sea levels will continue to rise, whether we are prepared or not.