

**Testimony by  
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To the U.S. Congress and Select Committee on Climate Crisis  
Confronting Climate Impacts: Federal Strategies for Equitable Adaptation and Resilience  
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Good morning.

Chairwoman Castor, Ranking Member Graves, members of the Committee, thank you for allowing me to appear in front of you today.

My name is Matthew Jewell, and I am the President of St. Charles Parish, Louisiana.

South East Louisiana is an incredible place to live. Its natural beauty, rich resources, and the economic engine that is the Mississippi River provide the foundation of our \$87 billion economy. However, what truly makes Louisiana incredible is her people.

Louisianians are the most resilient people you will meet. For centuries they have called this place home and have stood steadfast as they have faced hurricanes, land loss, and now a global pandemic. Through it all, Louisianians continue to rebuild, adapt, and overcome despite those challenges.

#### **LOUISIANA ECONOMIC IMPACT**

South East Louisiana's Economy accounts for about 36% of the States total GDP. Last year we exported over \$105 billion of goods and services from the region. The state ranks 3rd in the country for natural gas production and 20% of the national oil refining capacity. In St. Charles Parish alone, we have 14 industrial sites, ranging from oil and gas, chemical and even a nuclear power plant which produces 1.1 gigawatts of carbon-free electricity, enough to power over 750,000 homes. Additionally, St. Charles Parish is home to Diamond Green Diesel, the largest renewable diesel plant in North America and the second-largest in the world. The fuel produced

at this facility reduces greenhouse gas emissions by up to 80% as compared to traditional diesel fuel.

The region also benefits from the Port of South Louisiana, which is the second largest port in the country by total tonnage and largest port complex in the western hemisphere. Additionally the benefit of multi-modal transportation including all six class one railroads, multiple interstate highways, and an international airport creates additional competitive opportunities for this region.

## **RESILIENCE**

Louisiana is no stranger to hurricanes and tropical storms. Most recently, Louisiana was devastated by Hurricane Ida, a strong category four hurricane. Ida was the strongest storm to impact St. Charles Parish and caused significant damage to four parishes leaving thousands of residents without safe drinking water and power for weeks.

Days following the storm, St. Charles Parish was still flood fighting in low-lying areas like Bayou Des Allemands where we worked with the National Guard to prevent water from breaching the current levee. Securing resources, including fuel, was challenging yet essential to keeping vital services like our emergency operations center and our water and sewer systems operational. Our communities came together with our industry partners, picked up the pieces, and got back to work.

Nevertheless, it is getting more difficult to be resilient due to policies coming out of Washington, D.C.

Bureaucratic hurdles have made it increasingly difficult and costly to construct flood protection and coastal restoration projects. Additionally, new policies around FEMA's flood insurance program have begun to put an economic constraint on people living in this region.

To reverse these impacts, we must begin by cutting the red tape on coastal restoration projects designed to restore our wetlands to their natural state, and time is of the essence. Since the

1930s, Louisiana has lost more than 2,000 square miles of land, an area roughly the size of Delaware. To solve this, we need an "all the above" approach to coastal restoration which involves dredging/marsh restoration, shoreline protection, and where they work, freshwater and sediment diversions to restore the natural process which created the land where we live.

## **SHORRE ACT**

Passing legislation such as the bi-partisan SHORRE Act will allow places like Louisiana to continue to advance critical storm protection and coastal restoration priorities for our vulnerable communities and habitats. The SHORRE Act puts into law that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers shall prioritize coastal restoration and eliminate legal and regulatory hurdles that have caused delays in implementing these projects.

The SHORRE Act would also allow the Corps to provide leadership to conduct the Lower Mississippi River Comprehensive Management Study. The study would enable the Corps to use the best available science to manage the river and use holistic approaches to enhance the resilience and sustainability of natural systems.

Additionally, the bill would allow the Corps to work directly with states, localities and other non-Federal sponsors to request project designs that directly address problems such as extreme rainfall and increasing sea level rise.

## **GOMESA (Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act)**

Raising or eliminating the cap on GOMESA revenues would provide the funding needed to make these projects a reality as it is currently the only consistent funding for the state's coastal program.

The Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act (GOMESA) of 2006 created a revenue-sharing model for oil- and gas-producing gulf states. Under the act, Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas

receive a portion of the revenue generated from oil and gas production offshore in the Gulf of Mexico. The act also directs a portion of revenue to the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

Under GOMESA, Gulf Producing States split 37.5% of qualified OCS Revenues, and the Land and Water Conservation Fund gets 12.5%. The Remaining 50% of GOMESA revenues remain with the federal government.

As it stands, the amount of funding that Louisiana uses to address coastal needs, will not be enough to meet the scale of the challenges our state faces. Making long-overdue improvements to GOMESA is needed.

The RISEE Act would establish several dedicated streams of funding for coastal infrastructure and resiliency in order to protect vulnerable communities and businesses most impacted by rising sea levels and coastal erosion. The legislation creates a new revenue sharing model from federal offshore wind revenue generation between the federal government and coastal states beyond six nautical miles from a state's coastline. The bill makes improvements to the National Oceans and Coastal Security Fund (NOCSF), and also dedicates a portion of wind energy revenues to the NOCSF. Finally, the bill reforms the Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act (GOMESA) to allow for a greater state share of revenue from Gulf energy production.

## **RISK RATING 2.0**

As we discuss resiliency, we must also consider economic resilience. FEMA's Risk Rating 2.0 puts an unbearable financial burden on homeowners. In 2012, St. Charles Parish was one of the epicenters of the Biggert-Waters Act. Residents received unaffordable policies that threatened to render them bankrupt and their homes worthless. Our community banded together with our Congressional delegation which was able to roll back the law. Now, under FEMA's new risk rating policy, we have seen new home policies that were traditionally as low as \$600 jump upwards of \$8500. These increases, coupled with the highest inflation our nation has seen since 1982, are not economically sustainable

According to FEMA's national rate analysis, 80% or more of policies in Louisiana will see increases. The current rates we are seeing are astronomical and will be detrimental to the future development of communities.

Phase 1 of Risk Rating 2.0 began in October 2021 for new policies. New policies affect people who are building or have recently completed a new home construction. These new policy quotes have already caused many residents to cancel new construction plans. Phase 2 will begin in April 2022 and will affect existing policy holders. Policy increases are capped at 18% and will end up at what FEMA has determined is an actuarial rate.

### **UPPER BARATARIA BASIN RISK REDUCTION SYSTEM**

We need more investment in flood protection to mitigate these risks, not policies that will force Americans to abandon their homes. Federal investment in projects like the Upper Barataria Basin Risk Reduction System will protect hundreds of thousands of people, property, and billions of dollars of infrastructure vital to our national economy. The Corps of Engineer's Chief's report says the benefits produced by this project are cost-effective. However, on the other hand, FEMA's flood insurance policies threaten to price people out of this area.

Last month, Lt. Gen. Spellmon, USACE Commanding General and 55th Chief of Engineers approved the Chief's Report for the Upper Barataria Basin (UBB) Louisiana Feasibility Study, paving the way for the project to move forward.

The multi-year project protects 800 square miles from storm surge for six parishes, including St. Charles Parish. The proposed structural alignment consists of 30 miles of levees spanning from the Davis Diversion to Highway 308 in Lafourche Parish, floodwalls, barge gates and drainage structures.

The Upper Barataria Basin Study received authorization in 1998; however funding was not made available to the project until 2018. The \$1.55 billion investment is anticipated to take three years to complete once approved by Congress.

Thanks to the efforts of members of our Louisianaian delegation, Congress signed a \$2.5 billion Hurricane Ida relief bill that included \$8 million for the preconstruction engineering and design phase on the UBB project, which can begin this year. For the first time ever, a project with a signed Chief's report can begin the engineering process prior to being fully funded by Congress which will expedite the project.

We have seen these systems work firsthand. I agree with section SPM.C.2.1 of the most recent IPCC report, which indicates that "structural measures like levees have reduced loss of lives" and that "enhancing natural water retention such as by restoring wetlands and rivers... can further reduce flood risk."

In closing, Southeast Louisiana is a crucial part of our national economy and is worth saving. Together, local, state, and federal governments can work to ensure we focus on making changes that will complement the resilient people of Louisiana. Thank you for your time. I look forward to answering any of your questions.