

WASHINGTON WEEKLY REPORT

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(The following is an overview of D.C. activities concerning Miami-Dade County, the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, the County's Congressional Delegation & the Administration)

THE SENATE WAS NOT IN SESSION

THE HOUSE WAS NOT IN SESSION

SEN NELSON HOLDS FIELD HEARING IN MIAMI

Senator Bill Nelson held a field hearing this week at Miami Beach City Hall to discuss the impact of rising seas. Miami-Dade County Regulatory and Economic Resources attended the hearing.

At a rare field hearing, U.S. Sen. Bill Nelson calls Miami Beach ground zero for sea level rise

*By Jenny Staletovich, Miami Herald
Apr 22, 2014*

Miami Beach became ground zero for climate change Tuesday when U.S. Sen. Bill Nelson convened a rare field hearing to draw national attention to the dangers posed by rising seas.

"For those who deny sea level rise and climate change, here is the proof," Nelson said halfway through the two-hour hearing at Miami Beach City Hall, and one of several times he pointedly called out colleagues in Congress who deny that climate change is occurring.

A half-dozen witnesses, including a NASA scientist, a mayor and a county commissioner, forecast a dire future with a three-foot rise in seas by the beginning of the next century. At that rate, large swaths of Florida's coast would be inundated, with billions of dollars in damage, even as climate change fuels more severe hurricanes. But the panel also offered hope, saying there's still plenty of time to plan.

"It's a slow, steady, persistent creep. But the fact that it's slow means there's time," said Fred Bloetscher, an associate civil engineering professor at Florida Atlantic University who testified about potential fixes for South Florida.

Nelson, the state's former insurance commissioner, said he held the hearing to make "part of the official record of the Senate" the federal government's take on climate change as well as the growing list of sea rise-related problems encountered by South

Florida residents — from contaminated drinking water in Broward County to Miami Beach's flooded streets. He also tapped an insurance industry expert to address whether the 5.7 million South Florida residents living along the nation's hurricane highway can expect coverage under increasingly waterlogged conditions.

Over the last 150 years, the earth's temperature has risen, said Piers Sellers, deputy director for Sciences and Exploration at the Goddard Space Flight Center in Maryland. At the same time, rising temperatures and warming seas have caused polar ice caps to melt. About 250 cubic kilometers are melting each year, he said.

Using 17 satellites positioned around the earth, NASA has measured an increase in sea level of about three inches since 1993, he said, which would mean the seas are rising at a faster pace. Scientists generally accept increases of about five to eight inches over the last century.

What's worse, he said, is South Florida will likely see more severe weather and an increase in the frequency of Category 4 and 5 hurricanes with warming oceans and a more volatile climate.

In Miami Beach, residents are already seeing changes, Mayor Philip Levine told Nelson. The seven-mile long island is lowest at its core, so water collects there. And not just during storms. When strong high tides occur, the island regularly floods, he said.

"Sea-level rise is our reality in Miami Beach," he said. "On a beautiful sunny day, we can see our streets flooded."

In Broward County, officials have wrestled with creeping saltwater contamination of inland freshwater wells, County Commissioner Kristin Jacobs said. Topography coupled with drainage canals dredged in the 1930s and '40s mean inland areas often suffer worse flooding, she said.

"At one foot [of] sea level rise, \$4 billion in taxable property is inundated, and that doesn't include Miami-Dade," she said.

The insurance industry has not accepted that climate change has caused changing weather patterns, and no companies include the risk of climate change in determining insurance rates, said Megan Linkin, a natural hazards expert with the Swiss Reinsurance America Corporation. But it does accept the United Nations' prediction from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change that more severe storms will come, she said.

And rising sea levels will likely make some properties so vulnerable, she said, that they could not be insured at a reasonable rate.

"People won't want to pay," she said.

Nelson welcomed the industry's recognition of increased hurricanes, but he complained that "myopic vision" had kept the industry from addressing the climate matters he started asking about 20 years ago when he was the state's insurance commissioner.

"The fact is there's been five to eight inches [of sea rise] in the last century and they're going to have to build it in" to models that calculate insurance rates, he said.

Most of those who testified Tuesday said steps can be taken to protect South Florida and address the gloomy predictions. Four counties including Broward and Miami-Dade struck agreements to create a joint action plan in 2009. Next week, Miami-Dade's climate change group is expected to approve its plan.

And outfitting canals with pumps farther east can direct water and keep saltwater from rushing in, FAU's Bloetscher said. FAU is also in the process of improving flood maps. Old maps, he said, miscalculated the amount of land that would be inundated by as much as 50 percent. Once better maps are created, better solutions can be tailored for specific areas.

The biggest challenge will be what to do with all the water once it is collected, he explained. Dirty urban water can't be dumped in the ocean or the Everglades, which is undergoing a massive restoration.

"Quantity is easy," he said. "Quality is the problem."

Nationally, the matter is drawing increasing attention, particularly with the IPCC's report last month warning that countries are not doing enough to prepare. Even so, on Tuesday, between 20 and 30 demonstrators with the Sierra Club and 350.org, an international environmental group, gathered outside the hearing with signs, insisting that more urgency is needed.

"We were happy that Sen. Nelson was there to address the issue of sea level rise, which is the big issue for us in South Florida. But that's just a start," said Jim Harper, president of 350.org's South Florida chapter. "Talking about things is great, but we need more action to address the increasing severity of climate change. We need climate action now if we want to be able to have some future here in South Florida."

Inside the hearing, Nelson, who was born in Miami and grew up playing in Biscayne Bay, echoed the sentiment.

"I hope we can continue to keep these discussions going," he said, "so we can come to a reasonable conclusion as to what we need to do before it is too late."

REP. WILSON DISCUSSES CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE IMPACT TO SOUTH FLORIDA AS IT RELATES TO THE FIELD HEARING

Congresswoman Frederica Wilson joined Senator Bill Nelson at the Senate Science and Space Subcommittee hearing. Congresswoman Wilson is a member of the U.S. House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology. Congresswoman Wilson released the following statement:

"Climate change is no longer a theory. It is our reality. In South Florida we are at the forefront of the potentially catastrophic effects of climate change. Greenhouse gas emissions are causing sea-level rise, land erosion, and an increase in the number of extreme storms, which together are creating the potential for an uninhabitable landscape.

"The longer we take to deal with it, the more costly it will be to address. Some people argue that we simply cannot afford to act, that the cost of combating climate change is prohibitive. But the truth is, the cost of inaction is even higher."

REP. GARCIA ALSO HOSTS PANEL DISCUSSION ON CLIMATE IMPACTS TO THE ECONOMY AND COMMUNITY

In honor of Earth Week, Congressman Joe Garcia, along with Congressman Frank Pallone, Voces Verdes and the University of Miami, hosted a panel discussion on the impacts of climate change to the local South Florida economy and community.

The conversation was focused on the impacts the changing environmental climate has on our industries that feed our economy, a rare angle on the topic. For Congressman Garcia, whose district is fueled by tourism in the Keys, and agriculture in South Dade, this topic was the focus of several events he attended throughout this past week.

"It's irrelevant whether or not you believe in such ominous projections when we are faced with very real economic impacts now" exclaimed Garcia. "From the tides of Key West, to the agricultural fields down in the southern portion of my district – inundated with ankle-deep storm water run-off, I've seen the effects on our community first hand."

Throughout the event, the panel discussed ways to incorporate smart environmental policies that would benefit South Florida. Each panelist spoke to the effects of a changing environmental landscape in South Florida, and the impacts such changes may have on their specific industries.

Representatives from local business and Chambers of Commerce spoke to the role they could play in identifying solutions to maintaining the economic surge and preventing further damages to both the economy and the community.

"Our economy has been the best that it has been in years" said Barry Johnson, Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce President. "How are we going to be able to build in a way that is sustainable? How are we going to deal with sea level rise?"

Johnson went on to explain how the South Florida community was forced to reconsider how it builds, after Hurricane Andrew decimated much of the region –

“We have to start thinking about building buildings differently. We cannot wait to react to an event like [Hurricane Andrew], we have to think proactively.”

Wayne Pathman, a local attorney and partner at Pathman Lewis, LLP who deals with zoning and city planning matters in Miami Dade County, recounted a trip with the Miami Beach Chamber of Commerce Board to the Netherlands where they had travelled to learn of ways of dealing with rising sea levels –

“We noticed there, the whole community is involved in dealing with these problems. Business, real-estate, environmental groups, municipalities. Very rarely do you see the business community involved here. No one wants to be an alarmist but we have to be proactive.”

According to some estimates, up to 18 inches of sea level rise could plague regions like South Florida over the next 100 years.

In addition to local development, tourism also plays a big role in the South Florida community. Andy Newman, Media Relations Director for the Monroe County Tourist Development Council, outlined the economic impact these climatic changes are having on the local economy –

“The Florida Keys leads the nation in hotel occupancy with more than a 94% occupancy rate and rakes in more than \$2.5 billion in tourism dollars annually” claimed Newman. *“If we fail to get in front of these issues, our economy will suffer drastically.”*

Congressman Garcia also invited Congressman Frank Pallone, a senior member of the House Natural Resources committee who represents portions of New Jersey that saw devastating effects from Hurricane Sandy. Pallone expressed his concerns in relation to his experiences in his own district –

“The consequences of climate change, sea level rise and extreme weather are here and they are real,” said Congressman Pallone. *“I represent a part of the Jersey Shore that was one of the areas hardest hit by Superstorm Sandy and I have personally lived through and seen the economic and human toll that climate change is capable of. Other communities throughout the nation will inevitably face similar challenges, which is why it is critical that we work to do everything in our power to combat climate change now, so regions like South Florida and New Jersey can avoid future devastation.”*

The discussion was part of a weeklong tour around South Florida looking at the changing environmental impacts to local businesses and communities. Overall, more than 70 people attended the event.

SEN. RUBIO SPEAKS AT NRA ANNUAL MEETINGS

On Friday, Senator Marco Rubio delivered a speech at the NRA annual meetings and Leadership Forum in Indianapolis, Indiana.

REP. ROS-LEHTINEN COMMEMORATES ANNIVERSARY OF BAY OF PIGS

Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen issued the following statement on the anniversary of the Bay of Pigs. Said Ros-Lehtinen:

"On this tragic anniversary, we honor the memory of the brave Cuban exiles who gave their lives for the cause of a free Cuba. Over 100 members of Brigade 2506 were butchered by the Castro regime and more than 1,000 were captured, and more than 50 years later, this cold-blooded regime continues to oppress and violate the basic dignity the Cuban people. The members of Brigade 2506 have inspired pro-democracy leaders to continue the legacy of calling for respect for human rights and democratic change, but they are met with intimidation, beatings, and unjust arrests. I urge the Obama Administration to condemn these gross human rights violations and support these freedom seekers who constantly risk their well being and even lives to advance democratic values. In order to fulfill the dream of the courageous brigadistas, we must advocate and support freedom for the Cuban people."

REP. GARCIA ISSUES STATEMENT ON ARMY CORPS CENTRAL EVERGLADES PROJECT DECISION

Congressman Joe Garcia issued the following statement in response to the decision yesterday by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Civil Works Review Board to delay the approval of the Central Everglades Planning Project (CEPP).

"I am greatly disappointed by the U.S. Army Corps' decision to needlessly delay the approval of CEPP. Everglades National Park is a one-of-a kind natural wonder that we have a responsibility to protect, preserve and restore for the benefit of current and future generations. A critical component of the comprehensive long-term plan to restore the Everglades, CEPP will do a great deal to improve water quality, supply, and flow through both Everglades National Park and into Florida Bay. That these critical efforts will be delayed for bureaucratic reasons is deeply concerning. I am committed to working with my colleagues and other stakeholders to make sure that the Corps gets this process back on track, addresses the review board's concerns, and approves CEPP as quickly as possible."

SEN. RUBIO, REPS. ROS-LEHTINEN AND WASSERMAN SCHULTZ COMMENT ON SITUATION IN UKRAINE

Senator Marco Rubio issued the following statement regarding the Jewish registration flyers that have been distributed in Donetsk, Ukraine:

“The success of today’s reported agreement in Geneva will be determined by Russia’s willingness to immediately halt its efforts to destabilize Ukraine. President Putin’s rhetoric earlier today should raise concerns about how serious Russia is about respecting Ukraine’s sovereignty or in resolving this crisis peacefully.

“I am also deeply troubled by new reports that Jews in eastern Ukraine are being told to ‘register’ to separatist forces. This sort of intimidation and persecution is unacceptable and cannot be tolerated in the 21st century. It is important that the international monitors from the Organization for the Security and Co-operation in Europe deploying to Ukraine as part of today’s agreement examine this issue closely to ensure that religious and ethnic minorities do not become targets.

“Despite today’s agreement, we need to maintain the pressure on Russia because of its unlawful annexation of Crimea and take concrete steps to reassure our allies in Central and Eastern Europe of our commitment to their security. We also need to support the Ukrainian government’s efforts to bring stability and security to all of Ukraine. The administration’s announcement today of nonlethal assistance is a first step in the right direction, but much more is required.”

Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Chairman of the Middle East and North Africa Subcommittee, made the following statement as well:

“While it still remains unclear exactly who is behind this disgusting and despicable scheme, and what they are aiming to achieve, this rhetoric is emblematic of a rising trend of anti-Semitism around the world. All parties in Ukraine should immediately and unequivocally condemn this act and work to uncover who is behind such vile and blind hatred. This appears to be a politically motivated attempt to foment fear and further stoke the unrest in an already volatile situation in Ukraine. There is just simply no place for this sort of scheme in today’s world, but the sad reality is that we must all redouble our efforts to eliminate such wanton discrimination.”

Secretary of State John Kerry said the leaflets are “grotesque” and “beyond unacceptable,” while speaking at a news conference in Geneva following four-party peace talks.

Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, R-Fla., who served as the House Foreign Affairs Committee chairwoman until last year, called the leaflets a "disgusting and despicable scheme," and said in a statement it still remains unclear who is behind it and what they hope to achieve.

"This rhetoric is emblematic of a rising trend of anti-Semitism around the world," she added. "All parties in Ukraine should immediately and unequivocally condemn this act and work to uncover who is behind such vile and blind hatred. This appears to be a politically motivated attempt to foment fear and further stoke the unrest in an already volatile situation in Ukraine"

Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz also issued the following statement after these reports surfaced:

"These are deeply alarming and offensive reports. We certainly need additional firsthand accounts from Jews in the area, as well as better information from Russian and Ukrainian authorities, but the fact that some actors are reusing tactics from the worst chapter of modern history adds a new, disturbing layer to an already intense and rapidly deteriorating situation in the region."

"I urge all parties involved to ensure that Jews, and any other ethnic or religious minorities, are not persecuted for who they are or used to foment violence and unrest."

"I will be actively monitoring this situation and looking into it further."

REP. GARCIA HONORS TWO LOCAL SOUTH FLORIDA STUDENTS FOR SERVICE ACADEMY APPOINTMENT

Congressman Joe Garcia hosted a ceremony this week in his district office honoring two local students, Frederick Albion and Victoria Cambe, who were recently appointed to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, respectively. Victoria and Frederick were the only two students from District 26 selected for this prestigious honor.

"It is an honor to be able to say two students from my district will be representing our community at their respective Service Academies. I have no doubt both Victoria and Frederick will excel in all they do and will make District 26, and the rest of South Florida, proud" said Garcia.

Victoria, a student at TERRA Environmental Research Institute and aspiring US Naval aeronautical engineer will attend the Naval Academy starting this fall.

"I come from a Navy family so I wanted to carry on the family tradition. I thought the best way to do this is to attend the Naval Academy. My dream and goal is to graduate as an Aerospace Engineer and work for NASA", stated Victoria.

Frederick, a Miami native, MAST Academy student and Tennis All-Star, has been appointed to the United States Military Academy at West Point. He explained his aspirations in joining the military –

“My goal is to learn the necessary skills to become a military officer and outstanding role model, achieving academic excellence, utilizing skills to motivate others, working toward an extreme fitness level and maintaining it, and serving my country with duty and honor.”

Both the U.S. Military and Naval Academies are long-standing, prestigious institutions of higher education preparing young men and women to become professional officers of competence, character, and compassion. Acceptance into these institutions is incredibly competitive and takes Congressional nomination to be considered.

REP. WILSON RECEIVES THE ‘HERO OF MAIN STREET’ AWARD

This week, Congresswoman Frederica Wilson received the ‘Hero of Main Street’ award from the National Retail Federation, the world’s largest retail trade association. Congresswoman Wilson released the following statement:

“I am honored to receive the ‘Hero of Main Street’ award for my support of the American retail industry. This award represents my commitment to move job creation and full employment to the top of the Congressional agenda.

‘The unemployment crisis remains as serious as ever. Nearly 12 million people are still out of work and tens of millions more are underemployed or have simply given up looking.

‘I stand with the National Retail Federation in our shared passion for ending the unemployment crisis that continues to burden our nation.

‘In order to maintain the world’s strongest economy, we must promote policies that prioritize Main Street, that are based on fairness, hard work, responsibility, and opportunity – not outsourcing, corporate loopholes, reckless financial deals, or special tax breaks.

‘Let’s return this Congress to its rightful mantra: Jobs, Jobs, Jobs!’

LOOKING AHEAD

April 28 – May 2, 2014:

- The House will be in session
- The Senate will be in session

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