



**NORTHEAST RISK
& RESILIENCE**
LEADERSHIP
FORUM
A Risk Mitigation Leadership Forum Event



OCTOBER 8, 2014 STAMFORD MARRIOTT, STAMFORD, CT

Special Guest Speaker
Christopher S. Murphy
Junior U.S. Senator for Connecticut

Comments on Coastal Resiliency Delivered at the Northeast Risk & Resilience Leadership Forum, October 8, 2014

If you are a historian or an amateur historian – as I try to count myself as - we have, in many ways, come full circle when it comes to this issue of coastal resiliency here in Connecticut. One of the state’s earliest European settlements was Fort Saybrook, which we now call the town of Old Saybrook, just west of New London. They chose the sites in about 1636 because it was going to be a beachhead in the British Empire’s ongoing efforts to try to hold that area against Native tribes and competing colonial powers.

We now spend a lot of time in this state, visiting places like Fort Griswold and Fort Trumbull - at the mouth of the Thames River – that had been a big part of this country’s history of building up garrisons all along our shoreline in order to protect ourselves from advancing armies.

And so, 150 years later after some of those settlements were built, 400 years after some of those original garrisons were built, we’re still faced with the same questions that our forefathers were faced with: how do we best protect and defend Connecticut’s coastline. So the enemy is different – we’re now pretty confident that we are not going to face assault from an invading army – but, we are faced with an equally pernicious and dangerous foe. That is, the rising level of the seas, the ferocity of storms, and the fact that we are talking about not if another Sandy is going to happen, but when it’s going to happen.

And so, I want to tease this conversation with a few thoughts and then open it up to all of you.

The first is this: when I think of my geographic location in the world, I orient myself off of Cheshire, Connecticut. I think about the Congregational Church, which defines Cheshire, Connecticut. Virtually everybody in and around Cheshire will tell you where they live based off of that Congregational Church. I grew up in Wethersfield, Connecticut and a lot of people will do the same thing in Wethersfield. It speaks to who we are as a state – we’re a state that is organized off of the 300 year old town meeting. Thus, we have 169 different towns which all have their own ability to set their own local policies, their own local budgets.

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And the first topic I want to present to you is a unique challenge that we have in New England, and a very unique one that we have here in Connecticut. It is increasingly impossible to take on these big problems of resilience when we're making decisions 169 towns at a time.

Now, we've shown that really forward-looking towns in Connecticut - with some help from the state and the federal government - can make a difference. Guilford, Connecticut, for instance, has done some incredibly forward-thinking stuff in terms of coastal resiliency. They've mapped out a long-term plan for projects they need to take on, and presented that budget both to the state government and the federal government to create a realistic pathway to building some new buffers between Guilford and the sea. They've started to re-zone areas of the coastline; they're talking about how to take assets like septic tanks underground; storage tanks - move them to higher ground. Guilford has shown us that really forward-thinking, innovative towns can do some important things.

But the reality is that when most of these towns are run by part-time officials - especially the small towns as you move more into eastern Connecticut - when you have on staff only one town planner, or one town engineer who has to be thinking about every single topic within their portfolio, they need some help from outside. Now I would argue that Connecticut has got to move towards a system of regional government. I would love to see a day in which, if not we see a returning county government, there is some coordinated regional planning done in the state. Every town belongs to about 50 different regional organizations but none of that is standardized.

But at the very least, we've got to provide some technological and logistical support to town planners and town leaders who want to think as forward-looking as Guilford is. Now we've done that here in Connecticut and we're right now beginning to stand up a new institute at the University of Connecticut, which will be a coastal resiliency center, whereby we can marshal some expertise that we can send down to our towns to help plan. That is going to be an ongoing challenge here in Connecticut. How do you do real coastal resiliency when you don't have any ability to plan outside of the local level and at the state level?

When you move to the challenges that we have in Washington, they are myriad. We allocate money for resiliency based on crises, and it is less sure now than ever, even when those crises occur, whether the dollars are going to be there. It used to be automatic. As short as nine years ago, when Katrina hit, it was automatic that we were going to appropriate money after Katrina to assist the gulf in cleaning up. That was not the case a year and a half ago, as we were arguing Sandy. It was not automatic any longer. In fact, the demand was made to offset the spending on Sandy. And so, we were in a new world where even after the disaster happens, it's unclear whether we are going to be able to come up with the money.

I would challenge that premise, I think that we need to get back to the point at which that is an automatic emergency expenditure. But the reality is that the whole way of funding resiliency is

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backwards. Much of the work that we're going to be doing out of the Sandy relief dollars are yes, specific cleanup and rebuilding projects, but there is going to be a lot of resiliency – a lot of long-term benefit – that comes out of those Sandy dollars. But why on earth do you have to wait for a natural disaster to hit before you can appropriate those dollars?

That means that we, as a Congress, have to step back and think about how better to appropriate this money. The most likely place to do that is through the biggest infrastructure account that we have going today and that is our transportation budget. We are going to be, in the spring of next year, debating the future of infrastructure spending in this country. I wish we could sort of stand up a permanent resiliency account of substance and substantial amount inside HUD – and that may be a conversation that will bear fruit – but I think it's more likely that you're going to be able to make a case through a bigger transportation and infrastructure spend, that portions of that money should go to resiliency.

Here in Connecticut, transportation and coastal resiliency are one in the same. Our main routes of transportation – Interstate 95 and Metro North, Shore Line East – are our buffers to the city. Any time you're improving those assets, you have the opportunity on and around them to do some real resiliency work as well.

But right now, we are only taxing about 50 percent of the money necessary to fund current expenditures, when it comes to infrastructure. We spend about \$36 billion dollars a year and we tax about \$18 billion dollars a year. We've got to have a bigger, more robust conversation in this country about the incredible amount of infrastructure that we have to build. Yes, roads and rails and bridges, but also all of the work that you're talking about here today and find a way to pay for it.

I'll just give you my two-cents. I joined together with a rather conservative senator from Tennessee, Bob Corker, to put on the table an increase in the fuel tax - phased in over two years - that would give us enough money to fund all of our current obligations and, by indexing that tax to inflation after 2016, enough money to do much of the reconstructive and resiliency work we have been talking about at this conference. Right now, we are the only two sponsors of that piece of legislation, despite that fact that quietly, lots of Republicans and Democrats tell us that they know that all of this building work has to be done around the country - especially around the coastlines - and in the right circumstances at the right moment with the right offsets that they can see themselves supporting the kind of proposal that we put forth. But it just speaks to the fact that we can't continue to just count on Congress responding in the wake of a disaster in a way that gives us the resources to do the projects we need to do. We've got to have a bigger conversation.

But none of this will work if we don't get serious about attacking the causes of these disasters in the first place. And I'll leave it here and then open this up to some conversation.

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The latest international climate change report, which is the survey of scientists all across the globe, say that there is a 95 percent certainty that it is human activity that is contributing to the rapid pace of climate change. A greater number of scientists believe that to be the case than 95 percent, but they are making that finding with a 95 percent degree of certainty. If you told me that my kids, who are standing on the sidewalk, were going to have a 95 percent chance of getting hit by a stray vehicle coming off the road unless I move them to a safer place, I would do everything within my power to move them as quickly as I can. And yet, when Congress is faced with that same 95 percent certainty, we sit back and do little to nothing.

Now, I have not given up on the prospect of Congress rising to this challenge, in part because the demographics tell only one story. When you poll younger voters – voters between 18 and 35, or even 18 to 45 – they speak with an almost unanimous voice, in that 97 percent of them want to vote for a member of Congress who is going to cast proactive legislation to combat climate change. And so, if you are a member of Congress today who is sitting on the outside denying science, or standing in the way of the things that will actually combat climate change, then your time in office is limited because young voters who will be middle-aged and older voters pretty soon, have made up their mind on the subject.

And so, if we continue to raise awareness about this, then we are going to have, at some point, a Congress that's willing to do something. But as you know, the clock is ticking, and especially when it comes to CO₂. If we don't make some changes here in the next several years, then it's too late. So our efforts in the Congress – those of us who care deeply about climate change and see it as maybe the most important issue of our generation – are going to largely spend our time right now backing up what the president is doing; supporting his efforts to continue vehicle emissions standards, moving forward to particular spending time backing up his efforts at the new clean air standards, and then finding some targeted ways that we can move the ball forward legislatively until we have greater unanimity of thought.

Two areas that we may be able to get some progress on in Congress are building standards and non-carbon dioxide sources of pollution. We got very close to a green buildings bill passing the United States Senate – I think that the votes are there, I can't speak to the House of Representatives. Companies are doing this without us, but we can provide some incentives for more private owners of commercial buildings, as well those who operate public buildings, to more rapidly adopt green standards. Senator Jeanne Shaheen and republican Rob Portman of Ohio have a bill that would do that, and we're hopeful to get a vote on that soon.

And then, the only other climate change bill that has been introduced in a bipartisan manner is a bill that I have with Senator Susan Collins that attacks non-CO₂ sources. We have a piece of legislation that charts a better path forward on controlling both domestic and international HFC leakage. Things come out of air conditioners and out of refrigeration units, taking on methane -

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particularly out of landfills and out of gas and oil distribution facilities - and doing some good things internationally on the issue of black carbon.

Those pollutants don't have the same politics attached to it that carbon dioxide do, and so we are hopeful that we are going to be able to make some progress there. If we leave those, what we call fast acting climate pollutants or short-lived climate pollutants unchecked, they become about 40 percent of the problem over the course of the next decade – today they are a much smaller share. So I think that there are some smaller places where Congress can work while we wait for a consensus on the larger problem. I think the president's actions alone, quite frankly, get us to our goal of reducing carbon emissions from this country by 17 percent by 2020, so let's support what he's doing.

Here in Connecticut and in the Northeast, let's think about the ways in which we can regionalize disaster remediation, disaster preparedness, coastal resiliency. Let's think about the assets that we can provide to help those individual towns along, and then let's all engage in a broader conversation at the federal level about how we are going to be honest about coming up with the money to pay for all of our infrastructure needs. If you want to really rebuild this country, then you have to pay for it, and it is not enough for people in this audience alone, or your friends or your colleagues to complain about the state of American infrastructure; to complain about the fact that we know what we should be doing in Stamford, and in Greenwich, and in Old Saybrook, to prevent the kind of disaster that we saw and could have seen on an even greater level with Sandy.

You have to also be talking about where we're going to find the remedy to do it. There are a couple of us who have made the decision to go out on a political limb and talk to voters about what that solution is. In my case, raising my claim that you need to raise the federal fuels tax to do that, but we need all of you to be doing that as well. Whether you pick that particular revenue source or not, we have to level with the American people that we have enormous infrastructure needs in this country and on a variety levels, and you can't get it for free. There has to be some sacrifice, somewhere, in order to get what we need to protect our coastlines and our river banks into the future.

Again, I leave here gratified that there's such an enormous interest here in Connecticut and around the region on this topic. To our sponsors, thank you for challenging yourself to convene this conference. You could focus on your narrow business interests but you realize that your business interests are much broader and that you can just focus on the financing of liabilities or you can think about working with your clients to protect them from the kind of costs that you will ultimately have to cover. Your generosity in putting this together is not lost on those of us who go down and do this work in Connecticut. Thank you very much for being here and thank you very much for having me.

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