

## BIPARTISAN LEADERSHIP ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE COAST

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[February 16, 2022] Two legislative proposals recently introduced in the Senate have significant importance to coastal America. It is striking that both are sponsored by senior members of both parties which shows that even in this era of extreme partisanship, climate change and the coast have strong supporters among mainstream members of Congress. Although one is nationwide in scope and the other focused solely on the coast, they both use different but complementary approaches to address resilience. Here are a few of their key points.

The lead sponsor of the “National Climate Adaptation and Resilience Strategy Act” (S. 3531) is Senator Chris Coons, a third term Democrat from Delaware, supplemented by Senators Murkowski (R-Alaska), Collins (R-Maine), Rosen (D-Nevada) and Cassidy (R-Louisiana). The bill requires a unified, collaboratively developed national climate adaptation and resilience strategy. To achieve that, it would create a Chief Resilience Officer appointed by the President and several working groups as well as related panels of state and local governments and other stakeholders. While there is likely to be debate about the details, the bill’s bipartisan objective of creating a national climate resilience and adaptation strategy administered by one White House office is both meritorious and achievable.

The “Shoreline Health Oversight, Restoration, Resilience, and Enhancement Act” (S.3624) has a ponderous name (dubbed the SHORRE Act) that belies some very basic and extremely important coastal objectives that are stated in its opening sections:

- (1) “[I]t is the policy of the United States to protect and restore the shorelines of the United States...from the damaging impacts of climate change and other factors contributing to the vulnerability of coastal communities and ecosystems. “
- (2) “[T]he protection and restoration of shores...from erosion and other damaging forces exacerbated by climate change shall be restored to a primary mission of the Corps of Engineers in carrying out water resources development projects.”:

There’s more that’s equally important. For example, the bill says that shoreline protection and restoration measures must be formulated to increase resilience. Some readers will know that standard is not necessarily the so-called “NED plan” that the Corps is currently directed to use. The bill also puts coastal ecosystem restoration projects, which by their nature have no monetized benefit-cost-ratio, on the same level of importance of coastal storm risk management projects such as beach nourishment.

I will get to one or two more groundbreaking provisions in this bill, but not before I mention its powerhouse sponsors - Senator Tom Carper, a Delaware Democrat, who chairs the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee and Senator Bill Cassidy, a Republican from Louisiana. An identical and equally bipartisan bill will be introduced in the House by Rep. Lisa Bunt Rochester (D-Del.) and Rep. Garret Graves (R-LA). The press release announcing this bill states clearly that “Fortifying our nation’s coastlines and rivers from the threat of climate change requires a robust, all-of-government approach. The *SHORRE Act* would ensure that coastal communities have greater access to federal climate resilience efforts.” The

bill's sponsors intend that most of its provisions, including new project authorizations, will be made part of the forthcoming Water Resources Development Act of 2022.

The bill also extends for another 50 years the authorizations of 7 beach nourishment projects in Delaware, Florida, and Georgia that were due to lose federal renourishment funding in the next few years. To deal with an issue that has ping-ponged between the Trump and Biden administrations involving the use of sand from authorized borrow sites located in a Coastal Barrier Resources Act unit to place sand on an authorized beach nourishment project located outside of any CBRA unit, the bill says any additional costs that result from having to choose an alternative offshore borrow site will be borne by the federal government. This provision applies to four Corps projects in New Jersey, South Carolina, and North Carolina but it also applies to other future Corps projects. Each of these provisions will undoubtedly be welcomed by the affected communities that are the projects' non-federal sponsors-

It will take tens of millions of federal dollars over the next few years (lots more in the future) to implement these last two provisions. Money only comes from separate appropriations bills. Barring disaster supplementals, Congress has in the most recent years provided between \$50 to \$60 million annually to place sand on federal coastal storm damage reduction projects. Based on past experience and no more additional funding for hurricanes or another infrastructure bill, the SHORRE Act's provisions may run into a funding wall where not all projects will get the money they need as project costs go up and funding remains relatively flat.

In our latest [WaterLog](#) podcast, Dan Ginolfi and I emphasized the need for federal leadership on climate change and its impact on coastal America. These latest proposals are an important step toward filling the leadership gap.

*Note: The text of both bills is available from [Congress.gov](https://www.congress.gov)*



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