

NARRATOR:

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[MUSIC PLAYING]

- Beaufort County is a county of islands, and we live and die by bridges.

- Why is it that we're focused on building roads wider so that people can evacuate, for places that may not be here in 30 or 40 years?

- We look at some of the climate change effects within 20 years and 50 years, 100 years, and we're - we're not here.

- And I think we must be very mindful that there are no throwaways. Every human life is precious.

- What we have to do is get awareness of how climate change affects us personally.

- We believe that climate change impacts everything we do or that everything we do impacts our relationship with climate.

- If we look just at the environment without looking at the economic and social structure, we're missing two parts of a very important equation.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

- It's amazing how few people want to talk about

climate change. They want to totally dismiss it, or they're in denial because they want to do what they're doing today.

- I think that the climate change is probably-- and I don't necessarily spend a lot of time in hyperbole-- but I think it is probably the most significant issue facing us as a human species today. It has been through the last 50 to 75 years in particular that we've been collecting data. We have been analyzing that data. We have been able to empirically, by observation and experimentation, show that our planet is changing-- not just changing, but changing on a very rapid basis, especially more recently.

- South Carolina is a wonderful place to live, and it's attractive to a lot of new people. So a lot of the issues we deal with have to do with the intersection of the human and the natural environment and how can we accommodate new growth and accommodate existing businesses while also protecting our natural resources.

- I fear we may lose some of it because the low country is one of the most desirable places to live. And so we have a new population moving into the low country rapidly that don't always understand, or they all don't understand what the low country tradition has been. And then we have the low country being one of the most vulnerable places to sea change, to climate change. And so we are very vulnerable in both cases. The cultural-- the culture is vulnerable to change, and for the worse. And so is the environment very vulnerable to change for

the worse.

- Climate change and-- in the special circumstances here in Beaufort are sea-level change. We've seen the sea level rising. We've got the documentation, the historical documentation, to prove something along the lines of about a foot over the past 80, 85 years. And what that's doing is it's inundating some of my roads on regular King tides, and even on some spring tides, where we're seeing 6, 8, 10, 12 inches of water on the roadways during the period of the high tide.

- Let's look at the regular tides. Let's look at the King tides. Let's look over a period of time at what the change was. And within a year, the water on my dock had risen 8 inches.

Now, there could be a lot of reasons. It could be that more people built docks, that the creek isn't flowing. Does it matter if there's 8 more inches there, because if there's 8 more inches there and we have a King tide, that means there's going to be 8 more inches on top of that. If we have a storm surge of 6 feet, that 6 feet's not going to start here. It's going to start here.

So when we talk about 2 and 3 and 4 feet, we're adding that to the rain events, which we, for whatever reason, have been having. We're adding that to the storm surge. So we've got a problem that is automatically going to be compounded by nature. And so it's something we need to look about to try to begin to educate the public and the politicians.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

- Well, I think the low country is a special place

because of its climate, its environment, where you have the physical environment, some of the lovely old trees, the waterways, the family ties. You go to the low country and you find families. You don't find individuals. And so you-- you really do get a feeling of being home in the low country. It's the essence of what folks say is the South,

- The Gullah people have a significant relationship to the land, the sea, and the marsh. They're sacred. They're sacred. The land is so sacred. I mean, that's another cultural thing that we brought up from West Africa, were some of the Western tribal religions. And supernatural beliefs that the ground has power, and-- and you have to make sure it stays fertile to be able to produce. And-- and to bear those fruits.

And-- and also because of during the time period when we were able to purchase land, being the first to be able to purchase land in the mid- to late 1860s. And some people still having their land from that time period. Our family still has our land from the late 1860s.

- If you go to what we call "the Point"-- the Point is sort of the Williamsburg of Beaufort. It is the pristinely, totally gentrified neighborhood where people have invested tens of thousands, if not millions, of dollars of fixing up old, important, beautiful antebellum homes. But a lot of that land was built on fill, and a lot of the land-- you're talking about 12, 14 inches above sea level. And of course, they were built back then, but they weren't built up to face the future.

You want to frighten people? Take them back to photographs

and images of the storm-- of the hurricane of 1893. This island was covered. It was gone. Families-- when my grandfather brought the American Red Cross on-- across on one of his company boats, there were animals and people floating out into the ocean, totally covered.

And this is a culture that-- when you're out on a place like Saint Helena Island, Johns Island, Sapelo Island in Georgia-- many of these places that we've managed to keep intact-- it's all about self-sufficiency, which interestingly enough is what started here at Penn Center.

EMORY CAMPBELL:

Penn Center to me means education. It means transition. This place was an important place for transitioning out of slavery to freedom. Nearly a century later, there was a transition from segregation to desegregation. And all of those conversations were held right here on these grounds, first with Ellen Murray and Laura Towne developing a school here for people who were coming out of slavery and having the opportunity to get educated for the first time, to live in America as-- as we know it, as we knew it then. And then in the 1960s, Martin Luther King found this place to be a safe place for him to come and hold conferences and hold conversations about the change that would come from segregation to desegregation.

- One of the things on Saint Helena Island that Penn Center has been integral with is that-- making sure that we have land protections so that there aren't a lot of development on Saint Helena, even with golf courses-- things like that-- where you have the pesticides and runoff. Penn Center has been really integral in being a steward and standing up as an example in land preservation to make sure our waterways, our marshes, and our land can be clean, so that we can continue to live off and benefit

from what they are supposed to give to us-- the food from the farm and the fishing from the waterways.

BILLY KEYSERLING:

And the one thing a friend of mine who grew up on this island said-- we will never go hungry because we know how to use the land, and we get and we know how to find food in the sea. Well, if that disappears, not only do they go hungry, but they'll lose the land to farm, the sea will get contaminated as more washes into it. So these-- these rural island communities in many ways are more at risk. And because there are jagged edges, and there are inlets and streams, the complexity of how you save them even is greater.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

- In terms of climate change, that the globe is impacted. We are looking at temperature increases. Some of those temperature increases are leading to, for example, an increase in sea level because of thermal expansion and melting of ice.

BILLY KEYSERLING:

You can ride through the South Carolina country, whether it's Georgetown, Charleston, Colleton County, and you grow crossward lots of islands, and they're connected by causeways. And it is not rare that on a high tide or a great King tide, these causeways are covered.

- I have to run emergency vehicles through that, so we have to plan strategically. If we know that a road is certain to be inundated, do we want to pre-position a vehicle on the other side of if we have a number of calls for service that would dictate that? Or in some cases, we're having to work with County Planning, and we're getting to a point where we're having to condemn the houses because we can no

longer provide emergency services to those houses. And so they're no longer viable residences, either as vacation homes, second homes, rental homes, or primary homes in a couple of cases.

- Rural communities-- we have to adapt. That's one of things that I've seen over the years. When you talk about Saint Helena Island in 1959, when we were underwater-- Hurricane Gracie-- that was a major, major challenge for us. We could not get on or off the island.

I think it was once said that Beaufort County has 166 islands, and of those 166, about 77 are actually inhabited. But look at bridges and causeways what we have throughout the community, it makes it very hard to challenge, I guess, to get support in a lot of in these communities.

- I'm seeing more and more and more the effects of flooding at high tides during some storms. And not even significant storms-- just a nice storm that comes in the evening because it's hot or during the day. I'm seeing the effects on farming with floods happening in fields. I'm just seeing it on accessibility on our roadways, being able to get to one community and not be able to get to another.

And maybe the waterways being affected by that as well-- the runoff from the streets. That storm water affecting our creeks and our rivers and our marshways, because the marshland is also where we're getting our clams, is where we're getting our oysters, is where we have to go to get into the river. Every so often I'm seeing a significant rise in flooding.

- Beach erosion has been a major concern for a number of years. And as more storms and more

aggressive storms have passed by the coast, they don't necessarily impact inland. We don't have the rains and the trees down, this sort of thing. But it affects the beaches, and I worry about that.

We've lost a lot of Hunting Island. We've lost a lot of the campground. We've lost entire parking lots that the folks use. There were about 30 cabins on Hunting Island. Erosion has taken all but two of them. They're gone now.

We have homes on Harbor Island, which is a private residential community. We have homes on Fripp Island, again a private residential community, homes on Hilton Head, and homes on Daufuskie Island that all have been severely impacted by beach erosion, to the point where several of them have had to be condemned by County building codes because they're in danger of collapsing into the water.

- Because we've got some people who've got their life savings and their whole future plotted out totally invested in something that's going to be gone before they are? How are we going to relocate them? Where are they going to go? How are they going to get their equity so that they can move on?

- There is some pushback because these are these people's homes. They're their dreams. Even if it's not their primary home, that's their dream home. They built it to be on the beach to enjoy the quality of life that we have here in Beaufort County.

And it's a hard issue to deal with when you tell someone no. And they don't like it. And of course, at the local level, we're the first level of-- of response. We're the first level of folks they can reach out and touch. And so we take some grief from them, and I have taken some grief recently from some

homeowners.

And I'm not really the one telling them no, but I'm relaying the no message from other people. And it goes with the territory. I have to shoulder it. But it is difficult. And you do sit there and wonder, is there any other option besides telling them no? And when you've explored all those and you still come back to no, then you tell them no. And then they have to sit back and decide, you know, do I sell, do I demolish-- what do I do.

- So our land use planning decisions have an impact on how far we drive to work. Our protection of farming resources and agricultural resources have an impact on how far our food has to travel to get to us and our ability to grow food locally. The types of energy we use-- whether our homes and buildings are energy-efficient or whether we can rely on renewable energy-- has an impact on our climate.

And then our access to clean air and clean water and some of the public health concerns related to climate change also intersects with our programmatic work. So we think about climate change not just in isolation, but with its relationship to all four of those areas-- land protection and development, sustainable agriculture, energy, and clean air and clean water.

- Well, I think the biggest change I've seen in my life, living here in the low country, has been the population change. We've had a dramatic population change between, say, 1980 and now. And so we've seen other things that-- reaction to the population.

We've seen more paved roads. We've seen more buildings. We've seen the result of these-- buildings and road paving

that have caused different changes in our environment, particularly the waterways. And so the whole-- whole population changes brought about a number of other changes.

- A lot of times people do think that it's about just storms and, you know, catastrophic events. But not knowing those small changes in the environment that can affect their-- their daily lives. And so culturally, we need to be more aware of that. You know, you still have people here who farm, people who, you know, fishing and shrimping, and, you know, all the things culturally that helps them to provide for their families.

- Can the Gullah culture and people be-- can it be portable in other areas? I'm afraid that it-- it may not be because it's such a strong connection-- sacred connection-- to their land and which has been passed on from generation to generation. I don't know if it's portable, if our culture can be portable. My heart says maybe not.

EMORY CAMPBELL:

I don't believe people have really become aware of the effects of climate change because people are not as dependent on the mess of fish or the mess of shrimp that they would have caught in my lifetime. So the changes and-- and what happens to the waterways does not affect people as they once did. The shrimp that they go to get now is in the supermarket already. They don't-- they don't have to haul it into a boat, and so they don't want to see the effect of climate change on their food ways as immediately as they would have, you know, when I grew up.

- So the fact of the matter is that we are in an interconnected, ecosystem-based social and

economic feedback loop. And what happens when the climate change is-- is not going to be just a coastal response or a coastal impact-- it's going to be a global response and a global impact. With increasing temperature, we may see more vector-borne diseases moving through the different strata, both the ocean environment as well as the atmosphere and even the terrestrial environment.

So what we're talking about here today largely is coastal in nature. But this is a community, and I mean the big catholic community of the globe issue that-- that we have to deal with. And there will be impacts throughout.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

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- In Beaufort County in particular, we have a sea level rise adaptation plan that the County developed with the community in mind, and the community was very engaged in that stakeholder process. They ranked steps that you can take to address climate change and to make your community more resilient, such as prioritizing protection of high-risk areas, involving the community and education, investing in a transfer of development rights process so that you can transfer development rights from the high-risk areas to the safe areas with respect to rising seas, to invest in setbacks and beachfront retreat.

Those are some tools that Beaufort County has prescribed. And I think that because they've been community-driven, there's an ownership over those tools and hopefully an ownership over those outcomes.

- Realize that the sea is rising. Look around you.

Find the areas where there's definitely something you can do. In some cases, it's not terribly expensive. In some cases, it's long-term. What are you going to do? Are you going to build a bridge? Are you going to raise the causeway incrementally?

Every time you pave a new road-- pave a road-- maybe you're going to raise it 6 inches, 8 inches, or a foot-- put more dirt on it-- and that road can also help you control it. You may want to build-- put in large culverts so you can move the water. You may want to put in gates in those culverts so that the tidal areas that fill up, that overflow into people's yards and their property-- you can-- you can-- you can guide it. But you're always going to have to find a place for the water to go.

- At the Beaufort County Sheriff's office and emergency management division level, we try very hard to do as many things as we can open. We host lots of open meetings, lots of community meetings. We invite people to stop by and ask questions so that we can explain to them and get an opportunity to get our message out there.

- I think communication is key. But I think more important than communication is there has to be a bond built and a trust created. I think when a people who are most at risk, who do the least amount to affect climate change, suffer the most unbearable suffering, I think at that time, you have to look at who are the people they come to week after week that they trust, they trust will have their back.

If a Category 2, 3, or 4, hurricane hits Hilton Head, I don't want to wonder if the people I love, the people I serve, will be

safe because of chance. I want them to be safe because of choice.

And I believe when they trust somebody, they will listen to those people. They will do what is best and good for their family and for their pets. But I think when they don't have that, I think they look at their past and what has done and what they were able to rely on, and I think it falls short all too often.

- The Gullah culture was created simply because of isolation on the island. And so therefore, when I say awareness, It's about allowing others to come in and be able to have engaging conversations with others about climate changes so that-- you know-- and if you-- how can I say this? I guess to say so that you can once again be more aware of the situation that is at hand.

- Or if they go down the highway and they're flooded, they can't get anywhere because-- because the highway's flooded with this water that's caused by the sea rise or the King tide, then that-- that'll be their moment, a teaching moment, at the time. And I think we'll have to switch to the teaching moment rather than look at teaching now for something that would happen in the future.

VICTORIA SMALLS :

Climate change is inevitable. It's going to happen. It's happening now. And what do we save? Who do we save? Do we save these wonderful national monuments? Do we save the culture? Do we save the people?

That's a very difficult choice to make, but I really think and feel that a people, the Gullah people, definitely need to have a say in the matter. They need to have a voice. They need to be asked. And we do see some of these questions being asked

of the community and the community giving input with many climate change forums that are happening throughout the state of South Carolina along the coast.

Penn Center was able to host one last year in 2016, and we had a huge attendance and a lot of questions and a lot of concerns. But as long as we keep communicating with the people in the community, you're going to hear what they want and then hear what they need, and that's definitely where you need to start.

- Everybody needs to be aware of and able to own the nature of these issues and to be informed enough and responsible enough in order to then respond.

- You know, everybody talks about transparency. And it's a really catchy buzz word. You've got to really practice it. And the Sheriff's office, we do twice a year what we call "citizens police academy," 10 weeks of-- of-- of night-- of one session a week where we bring everybody in-- the finance people, the planning people, the operations people.

And they tell the class, and those classes are always full-- 25, 30 people. We've trained about 2,000 people, now, through that. And we give them an opportunity to ask any question you want to. That's how we will get past the vilifying of government, at our level, at least.

And then the others-- they've got to learn-- the state legislature-- they have a gallery, but does anybody ever going to sit and watch what they're doing? All the meetings are required to be public at every government level. But you go to County Council meetings and the room's empty, unless somebody has a specific issue they wish to address, and then

they leave.

Getting involved is the answer to doing that. Government cannot de-vilify itself. We've got to have the folks come in and get to know us, and then rebuild that trust with them from our standpoint.

- We need to make sure that we elect officials who actually have a vested interest in the natural resources that we have in the area so they can continue supporting all those things.

- Because we need people first in offices who care about those things. It isn't enough to call our local community assemblymen and representatives if they don't have their heart in it for what we-- we need. We need the people first to be appointed who do care about the culture, the richness, the beauty, the people-- go from there.

- When you brought in the conversation, there's a tendency to say, oh, that doesn't matter to me, or that doesn't matter to me yet. So by making the conversation about climate change and resilience very local, I think we have the opportunity to be successful because we can allow for the intersection of health and home and food and economy and environment to really support the idea that we must take action to be a more resilient community.

- So my goal-- in a small city, we going to never get attention. So my attitude was, let's get out front. And we're at a point now where we're ready to get a grant for engineering on what we call the hot spots. We've identified the hot spots, the most vulnerable

places. And the next is to get a grant and go ahead
and engineer it.

So that when all of a sudden Washington wakes up, Columbia
wakes up, and they say we've got to do something, I'll give
them my drawings, I'll give them my plans, and I'll say, let
Beaufort, South Carolina, be a pilot project.

[MUSIC PLAYING]