



Testimony of

**The Honorable Roy Cooper
Governor of North Carolina**

Before the

House Committee on Natural Resources

February 6, 2019

Chairman Grijalva, Ranking Member Bishop and members of the committee:

As a lifelong resident and now its governor, I know North Carolina is a fantastic place to live, grow a business and raise a family. Between our majestic mountains, miles of coastline and scenic tourist areas, a visit to North Carolina is bound to be the time of your life. But just like many places in our country and across the globe, we're beginning to feel the harsh effects of climate change on our communities and our economy.

Scientists have found that climate change makes weather more erratic. It makes storms larger and more powerful and intensifies heavy rainfalls and droughts. North Carolinians unfortunately know this the hard way. We've weathered two so-called 500-year floods in two years and three in fewer than 20 years. In the Western North Carolina mountains, volatile weather has caused mudslides, damaged infrastructure, cost apple growers valuable crops and forced ski areas to close mid-season, hurting local businesses and putting jobs in jeopardy. In Central North Carolina, soaring summer temperatures have killed poultry and crops, costing farmers critical income. Fort Bragg and Military Ocean Terminal Sunny Point, two of the many important military installations we're proud to have located in our state, were recently listed at current and future risk for wildfires and recurrent flooding, respectively, in a [U.S. Department of Defense report](#) on effects of our changing climate. And the worst damage has been in Eastern North Carolina, which is now more vulnerable than ever to devastating storms and floods.

In September, just two years after our state was deluged by Hurricane Matthew, Hurricane Florence slammed into North Carolina. Its powerful winds and storm surge decimated coastal communities and crushed coastal tourism and fisheries. The storm stayed for days, dropping trillions of gallons of rain, inundating communities, drowning crops and bringing rivers to historic flood levels. Hurricane Florence caused at least \$17 billion in damage and tragically took 43 lives. One month later, another tropical storm, Michael, took additional lives and caused millions more in damage.

For survivors of a storm like Florence or Hurricane Matthew before it, the true cost is incalculable. I've traveled to hard-hit communities and listened to North Carolinians whose lives are forever changed: Tireless first responders who kept showing up to work even though their own homes were destroyed; children who went weeks without school; families whose livelihoods were washed away. I spoke with an elderly woman who was pulled from floodwaters by a first responder, bringing with her only the few possessions she could carry. When I saw her in a shelter, I told her how sorry I was. She said, "I thank God I'm alive, I thank God for that firefighter who rescued me and I thank God for all of these volunteers helping in this shelter. Many of them had their own homes flooded. I'm going to make it."

As governor of North Carolina, I have a responsibility to help her make it. I have a responsibility to help keep all our people safe. I've told them we have to do everything we can to rebuild our state smarter and stronger and we're pursuing unprecedented efforts to help North Carolinians get back on their feet.

Weeks after Florence, I announced the new North Carolina Office of Recovery and Resiliency (NCORR), which is administering U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development-funded Community Development Block Grants for Disaster Recovery for Hurricane Matthew recovery efforts. NCORR is also planning for additional federal funding for residents hurt by Florence and will develop and implement strategies to protect North Carolina from future storms. We've continued to invest in the North Carolina Flood Inundation Mapping and Alert Network (FIMAN), a state-of-the-art flood mapping technology that helps indicate where to direct first responders and which communities remain most at risk during disasters, as well as the safest locations to rebuild. I've worked together with members of the North Carolina General Assembly to appropriate state relief, including \$65 million to help our state draw down federal disaster recovery dollars and \$200 million to fund the North Carolina Farmer Recovery Reinvestment Program.

We're also making a difference together. I'm pleased that members of our congressional delegation and federal agencies are helping provide meaningful relief to North Carolinians hit hard by the storm. We've approved over \$1 billion in state and federal recovery resources, including over \$100 million in individual housing assistance from FEMA, over \$550 million in estimated claims paid through the National Flood Insurance Program and more than \$380 million in low-interest loans for homeowners, renters and business owners from the U.S. Small Administration.

While we've come a long way, we have much more work to do. I'm submitting two documents for the record: The first is a [damage and needs assessment](#) related to Hurricane Florence produced by the North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management; the other is North Carolina's [request to Congress for assistance](#) in the aftermath of Hurricane Florence, which I shared with the North Carolina delegation and federal appropriators in November. I look forward to continuing to work with members of Congress throughout the federal appropriations process.

But when storms are becoming more destructive, it's not enough to pick up the pieces. We must take action to prevent this kind of devastation in the future. I urge this Congress and all our federal partners to match the same level of determination brought to disaster recovery in our fight to reduce the effects of climate change.

We in North Carolina are doing our part to address those effects. I've signed an executive order that sets a goal for our state to achieve a 40 percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2025, increase state building efficiency and get at least 80,000 zero-emission vehicles on the road in North Carolina. North Carolina is second in the country in installed solar capacity and my order directs the development of a state clean energy plan to ensure a continued transformation of the power sector away from fossil fuels and toward clean energy. My executive order also directs state agencies to begin using more zero-emission vehicles in our state motor fleet. Further, it directs our state Department of Commerce to grow our strong clean energy economy by supporting the expansion of clean energy business, service providers and companies with commitments to using clean energy. North Carolina is a national leader in

clean energy and technology innovation and we're taking steps to promote the growth of energy efficiency, solar, land-based and offshore wind, storage and other clean energy resources.

In 2017, I ordered that North Carolina join the U.S. Climate Alliance, a bipartisan group of 20 governors committed to uphold the goals of the Paris Agreement on climate change, including by collectively achieving our share of the U.S. emission reduction target. The Alliance represents 47 percent of the U.S. population, over half of the national GDP and 1.5 million clean energy jobs. Alliance states are tackling climate change and growing our economies at the same time. We're working across party lines to share best practices and defend our nation's most important environmental, energy and climate policies.

I've also worked with coastal community leaders and business owners to fight seismic testing and offshore drilling, two activities that endanger the health and economic success of our coast.

While local and state action is critical, federal partners must join us in taking action to protect our people from the growing harm of climate change. State and local governments, researchers and the public rely on federal data, research and analysis to inform policy decisions. Federal funding fuels critical scientific research and drives innovation that can help solve our climate crisis.

We need federal legislation and regulations that promote emission reductions and the preservation of forests, marshes, barrier islands and other natural infrastructure that protect communities from the worsening effects of storms. We need federal leadership to work with global partners to fulfill and strengthen international agreements. We need consistent federal action that meets the urgency of our global climate problem. Our communities, our economy and our future depend on it.