

GOODLATTE WRONG ON CLIMATE

Posted: July 24, 2014

By **LESLIE GRADY JR.**

Rep. Bob Goodlatte's Fourth of July message to constituents came while I was attending week two of the Chautauqua Institution in New York. The theme for the week was "Feeding a Hungry Planet." As we listened to the forward-looking speakers during the week and grappled with the complex issues surrounding the future of agriculture in an age of changing climate, it was particularly disheartening to read the congressman's backward-looking and shortsighted views.

The entire focus of his newsletter was increasing the exploitation of fossil fuels in the United States. Unfortunately, increasing the production of fossil fuels is the worst policy we could pursue because it ignores and exacerbates the risks associated with global warming. Those risks were on my mind while reading the newsletter, because I had just read a report entitled "Risky Business, The Economic Risks of Climate Change in the United States," released in June by [The Risky Business Project](#), co-chaired by Michael Bloomberg, Hank Paulson, and Tom Steyer. That report provides critical information about the effects of climate change on key sectors of our national economy. It is based on an extensive study conducted by the [Rhodium Group titled](#), "American Climate Prospectus: Economic Risks in the United States," also released in June.

These studies represent the first comprehensive assessment of the economic risks our nation faces from climate change if we continue on our current path of fossil fuel use. Using a standard risk-assessment approach they focus on the clearest and most economically significant risks: damage to coastal property and infrastructure from rising sea levels and increased storm surge; climate-driven changes in agricultural production and energy demand; and the impact of higher temperatures on labor productivity and public health.

Because of sea-level rise, coastal property and infrastructure are particularly vulnerable. Even though we in the Shenandoah Valley do not share that vulnerability, we will certainly share the costs through our insurance premiums and tax revenues that will go to help our neighbors along the coast. We can minimize those costs, however, by acting now to reduce carbon dioxide emissions with their associated warming. As former U.S. Sen. Olympia Snowe has said: "If we were told — in any sphere — that we had at least a 90 percent chance of averting a disaster through changes we ourselves could make, wouldn't we take action?"

Farmers in the Shenandoah Valley may be luckier than those in the Midwest and South because the projected effects here are smaller. Nevertheless, because of the integration of modern agriculture, we will all be affected by changes in climate anywhere in the country. Thus, it is of concern that the yields of corn, wheat, soybeans and cotton in some parts of the country are projected to decline by 10 percent or more throughout the next five to 25 years if we continue on our current path of fossil fuel use.

Many have spoken of the ability of humans to adapt, thereby dismissing the impacts of a hotter world. However, given our current path, by midcentury many parts of the country will be so hot and humid in the summer that the ability of people to work outdoors will be limited or their productivity will be diminished. Furthermore, as parts of the nation heat up, the worst health effects will be felt by the poor and elderly, many of whom have no access to air conditioning.

If we act today to move onto a different path of fossil fuel use, we can avoid many of the worst impacts of

global warming. We are fully capable of managing climate risk, but only if we start to change our business and public policy decisions today. In short, we have a choice between just accepting the climate risks associated with our current practices or getting on another path.

As the “Risky Business” [report states](#), “This is not a problem for another day. The investments we make today — this week, this month, this year — will determine our economic future.” Encourage Rep. Goodlatte to help us get on another path.

Leslie Grady Jr. lives in Harrisonburg.