

01.14.14 Governor Patrick Delivers Climate Change Preparedness Announcement

AS DELIVERED:

Governor Deval L. Patrick
Climate Preparedness Announcement
New England Aquarium
Tuesday, January 14, 2014

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This administration has consistently governed with an eye towards the future. That's why we have invested strategically in education, innovation and infrastructure, a proven strategy to grow jobs and expand opportunity. That's what "generational responsibility" is all about.

In that same spirit, I believe we must address the multiple threats of climate change. We are experiencing stronger storms, more extreme temperatures, and altogether more disruptive weather, all of which present challenges to public health and safety, our economic vitality and our overall quality of life.

We have worked together -- government, the private sector, ordinary citizens, and the many, many advocates for our environment -- to change behavior and develop technologies and a burgeoning industry around clean and alternative energy, and we have made significant progress.

Solar capacity has grown from 3 megawatts when I took office to over 425 megawatts today, wind from 3 megawatts to more than 103 megawatts today; and we are poised to be home to the nation's first offshore wind farm.

\$1.6 billion of investments in energy efficiency has yielded some \$6 billion of economic and environmental benefits, and earned us first place rankings in the nation in energy efficiency.

That's all good. But we must do more.

2012 was the warmest year in United States history. Midwest farms were drenched by the wettest spring on record, then parched by the worst drought since the Dust Bowl. Western wildfires scorched an area larger than the state of Maryland. A heat wave in Alaska shot temperatures into the 90s.

Here in Massachusetts, in my second term alone, we have endured a major snowstorm in October, tornadoes in central and western Massachusetts, Tropical Storm Irene, Superstorm Sandy, and a February Nor'easter they called "NEMO." The summer of 2012 saw a significant increase in Eastern Equine Encephalitis, and last summer oyster beds closed for the first time in Massachusetts history because of vibrio. I'm sure no one here has yet forgotten the arctic temperatures of just a week or two ago.

The costs of these events is measured in lost lives and lost livelihoods, lost homes, lost businesses, hundreds of billions of dollars in emergency services and disaster relief.

Sea level rise between 1 and 6 feet would put thousands of lives and \$463 billion worth of assets at risk in Boston alone.

So the question is not whether we need to act. The overwhelming judgment of science -- and some 97 percent of scientists, including some who were once skeptics -- has put that question to rest. The world's climate is changing and human activity is contributing to it.

Massachusetts needs to be ready. So, working across every single sector of government, and with leaders in business and environment across the Commonwealth, we have developed the following plan.

First, we must harden our energy sources.

If you lost power during that October ice storm in 2011, or any one of the other weather events we have experienced, you particularly appreciate the importance of improving the resilience of our energy grid.

In partnership with the New England Generators Association we will survey generation vulnerabilities and preparedness plans, enabling us to better communicate and work with these independent stakeholders to protect our communities during future storms. Through joint work between the DPU and the utility companies, we will accelerate the important work already underway to harden critical assets through our grid modernization proceedings. DOER will also launch a municipal resilience grant program to enable cities and towns to harden energy sources at critical locations using clean energy technology. Through these initiatives we will bolster our utilities all along the energy distribution path, from generation to transmission and distribution, keeping residents safer during times of danger.

Next, we must consider how best to assure our transportation infrastructure can withstand extreme weather changes. Transportation assets built to withstand past weather patterns may be vulnerable to climate change. Consider the washout of Route 2 that impacted North Adams, Florida, Savoy and Charlemont after Irene, cutting off a key artery to the northwest part of the state. I congratulate the team for repairing that damage and recovering from that disaster in record time. At the same time, we have to consider how improvements in engineering can make key infrastructure like that less likely to fail in a weather disaster. Today, we are investing billions of dollars in much-needed transportation improvements to enable growth and expand opportunity in our communities. Let's make sure they last for many generations to come.

In Massachusetts, we have 351 local boards of health, some of which are ill-equipped to deal with the consequences of a changing climate.

Going forward, DPH will work with local health boards to identify areas of special concern and models to meet those challenges, along with enhanced education

and training.

For example, in communities affected by the increase in vector-borne disease in both oysters and mosquitoes, EEA and DPH will coordinate to increase analysis and monitoring capacity for both.

Our Office of Coastal Zone Management will work closely with local authorities to assess the vulnerability of our coastal communities, and reduce risks associated with coastal storms and sea level rise. Doing so is essential not only to aid our coastal residents, so often battered by storms and rising costs, but also to ensure we are building more resilient communities able to withstand the rising tide in the future.

And because we recognize that natural systems often prove the best defense against natural disasters, we will also pilot a series of projects to reduce storm surges and control flooding. These "Green Infrastructure" pilots, as they are often called, will bolster natural features of the coastal landscape, including beach and dune enhancement, salt marsh restoration, and bio-retention areas for stormwater, to reap the benefits of flood control, storm surge reduction, as well as ecosystem and recreational benefits.

The point is that this Administration will consider future climate patterns across all our planning processes, including Smart Growth Planning, designs for future state building and infrastructure construction, as well as emergency management.

And we will create an online portal on climate preparedness resources for easy public access.

It ought to be clear to everyone by now that we must invest the ideas, the time, and the money now to create a better Commonwealth for tomorrow. That's what it means to govern for the next generation, instead of the next election cycle. I want to thank you for what you have done – and will do -- to help us on that journey.