

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

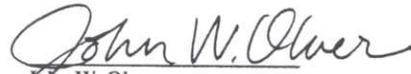
June 19, 2002

Dear Colleague,

We would like to draw your attention to the attached article from the front page of the New York Times Sunday, June 16, 2002 entitled, "Alaska, No Longer So Frigid, Starts to Crack, Burn, and Sag."

For more information on global warming or to join the Climate Change Caucus, please contact us or have your staff contact Sally McGee in the office of Congressman Wayne Gilchrest (5-5311) or Abbie Meador in the office of Congressman John Olver (5-5335).

Sincerely,


John W. Olver
Co-chair Climate Change Caucus


Wayne Gilchrest
Co-chair Climate Change Caucus

The New York Times

June 16, 2002

By TIMOTHY EGAN

ANCHOR POINT, Alaska, June 13 - To live in Alaska when the average temperature has risen about seven degrees over the last 30 years means learning to cope with a landscape that can sink, catch fire or break apart in the turn of a season.

In the village of Shishmaref, on the Chukchi Sea just south of the Arctic Circle, it means high water eating away so many houses and buildings that people will vote next month on moving the entire village inland.

In Barrow, the northernmost city in North America, it means coping with mosquitoes in a place where they once were nonexistent, and rescuing hunters trapped on breakaway ice at a time of year when such things once were unheard of.

From Fairbanks to the north, where wildfires have been burning off and on since mid-May, it means living with hydraulic jacks to keep houses from slouching and buckling on foundations that used to be frozen all year. Permafrost, they say, is no longer permanent.

Here on the Kenai Peninsula, a recreation wonderland a few hours' drive from Anchorage, it means living in a four-million-acre spruce forest that has been killed by beetles, the largest loss of trees to insects ever recorded in North America, federal officials say. Government scientists tied the event to rising temperatures, which allow the beetles to reproduce at twice their normal rate.

In Alaska, rising temperatures, whether caused by greenhouse gas emissions or nature in a prolonged mood swing, are not a topic of debate or an abstraction. Mean temperatures have risen by 5 degrees in summer and 10 degrees in winter since the 1970's, federal officials say.

While President Bush was dismissive of a report the government recently released on how global warming will affect the nation, the leading Republican in this state, Senator Ted Stevens, says that no place is experiencing more startling change from rising temperatures than Alaska.

Among the consequences, Senator Stevens says, are sagging roads, crumbling villages, dead forests, catastrophic fires and possible disruption of marine wildlife.

These problems will cost Alaska hundreds of millions of dollars, he said.

"Alaska is harder hit by global climate change than any place in the world," Senator Stevens said.

Scientists have been charting shrinking glaciers and warming seas in Alaska for some time. But only recently have experts started to focus on what the warming means to the people who live in Alaska.

The social costs of higher temperatures have been mostly negative, people here say. The Bush administration report, which was drafted by the Environmental Protection Agency, also found few positives to Alaska's thermal rise. But it said climate change would bring a longer growing season and open ice-free seas in the Arctic for shipping.

"There can no longer be any doubt that major changes in the climate have occurred in recent decades in the region, with visible and measurable consequences," the government concluded in the report to the United Nations last month. It does not take much to find those consequences in a state with 40 percent of the nation's surface water and 63 percent of its wetlands.