

# Alice Hill State of Adaptation 2022

Tue, Nov 01, 2022 4:50PM 57:03

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

adaptation, climate change, people, climate, puerto rico, federal government, resilience, agencies, podcast, occurred, fraud, money, adaptation planning, hurricane, risk, conference, nation, talking, alice, resilient

## SPEAKERS

Alice Hill, Doug Parsons

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Doug Parsons 00:00

Hi everyone this is America adapts the climate change podcast Hey adapters welcome back to a very exciting episode joining the podcast is regular guest judge Alice Hill. Alice is the David Rubenstein senior fellow for energy in the environment at the Council on Foreign Relations, Alice returns to discuss a variety of adaptation topics we dig into the recent cataclysmic flooding that occurred in Pakistan and what that might mean for national security. We also discussed Puerto Rico and hurricane Irma in the challenges of getting on the ground resilience funding on the island Island, I discussed the challenges of bureaucracies to support adaptation planning and funding and why a national adaptation plan would be so useful as we ramp up resilience spending Palace also shares the lack of basic climate understanding among corporate leaders and how that inhibits making resilience a priority in the private sector. Always great to catch up with Alice Hill. Okay, upcoming episodes. Next up is a conversation with Dr. Carolyn Koskia of the Environmental Defense Fund, where we talked about her new book understanding risk insurance, I assure you, it's more exciting than then that title suggests and full of useful information. I'm also going to the National Adaptation forum in Baltimore, and I'll be interviewing young adaptation professionals and why they decided to pursue this career path. I'm also working on an episode with World Wildlife Fund and how mangroves are a key nature based solution to adaptation. I'll be headed to Maria Mexico for those interviews. And I'm also talking with Dr. Kelly period of Liberty Mutual about climate modeling, and what it means for the insurance industry. In light of the hurricane damage we've seen in the past few months. This is an increasingly important conversation. I've got an exciting opportunity for you join me and my new partner Battelle for the next annual innovations and climate resilience conference, or ICR 23. The theme is bold leaps in action. The conference will take place on March 28 to march 30 2023. In Columbus, Ohio. ICR. 23 is gathering innovators across industry, academia and government to share and inspire science and technology and focus on solutions that can make an impact in climate adaptation and resilience. Patel is taking a lead in the resilience space and they want you along for the ride. As an emerging sector. We're still not seeing participation from all sectors. In many of our meetings. This conference has a track record of bringing in government, nonprofit academia and the corporate sector. Very few conferences have success bringing the private sector in this one does industry will play an increasingly important role in the years ahead with adaptation. Guys, this is a rare opportunity

for all relevant players to come together to call for abstracts is now open. Here's your chance to share your important work and an important and emerging conference venue ICR 23 Some of the program themes include climate risk and national security resilient built infrastructure, innovative climate solutions for ecosystem restoration, and there are more themes for you to choose from. So share your innovative work during the curated technical program featuring keynotes platform talks, breakout sessions and two evening poster presentations. Join the conference where leaders and creators are sharing their groundbreaking ideas to impact climate resilience. If you aren't interested in presenting I encourage you to attend and connect with your peers think about all the partnerships and projects that are created during coffee and lunch breaks at these conferences. Don't forget submit your abstract today and help change the world visit [battell.org](http://battell.org) Ford slash adapt to learn more. That's [patel.org](http://patel.org) Ford slash adapt learn more links are in my show notes. Support for America depths comes from Patel where science and technology are applied to help create a safer, healthier, more secure world. Vitality can be done. Okay, let's join judge Alice Hill and dig into some of the most important adaptation issues of the day. Hey, adapters Welcome back. Today I have a very exciting episode. I'm talking with Judge Alice Hill. Alice is the David Rubenstein senior fellow for Energy and the Environment at the Council on Foreign Relations. Hi, Alice. Welcome back to the podcast. Hello, Doug. It's so good to be back with you. I know you've been on quite a few times. We've had conversations on different platforms. And it's something I really look forward to doing. But for those new listeners out there, could you just give a bit more background, a little bit of your history, but then the work that you're doing there? And yeah, just some of the projects that you're working on? Sure. Well, I came to climate change and climate adaptation and resilience in 2009. I previously served as a judge in Los Angeles County handling everything from murder to medical malpractice. And then my phone rang. On the other end was Janet Napolitano whom President Obama had asked to become the Secretary of Homeland Security. I had gone to law school with Janet Napolitano and she asked me, Do you want to come to Washington? Eventually I did come to Washington. I became her senior counselor and in 2009, President Obama issued an executive order

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#### Alice Hill 05:00

Order that required all agencies to engage in adaptation planning. That task fell to me and then from DHS after I helped craft led the task force that created the first adaptation plan for the Department of Homeland Security and its wide mission set, I moved to the White House where I became senior director for resilience policy on the National Security Council staff as well as special assistant to President Obama. And then I have worked at the Hoover Institution at Stanford. And now I'm at the Council on Foreign Relations, where I've written two books about climate resilience and policy levers that could keep us all safer going

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#### Doug Parsons 05:38

forward. Yes, Alice, again, it's a treat having you on I remember the first time we met, I went to the Hoover Institution, we actually got to do an interview in public. And I always tell the story just going in, you've probably been the most intimidating people that I've encountered. And I've interviewed because you just have this air and you're obviously one of the most friendly people you can meet. But I just, I look back fondly on that. And I look back fondly on some of the questions that I asked you, and you weren't having any part of it. The judge in you, the lawyer knew you were just kind of running circles around me. And I tell that story all the time. Because

that was, it was like, Oh, my goodness, Judge Hollis Hill. And you handed me if I'm a handed me my ass on one occasion, really. And I'm just like, Oh, I just had this coming. So it was great. It's always been a fun memory.

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Alice Hill 06:18

Oh, that's so funny. My kids do accuse me of having a judge voice sometimes. So I don't know. But I've appreciated and cherished our friendship over the years. So I'm glad you forgave me. For the first introduction. There was

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Doug Parsons 06:31

not forget, but it was more of me just being impressed. I felt like a teenager's like hello there. And it was just it was just a fun experience. Alright, let's jump into some content here. A lot of things have happened. Let's see if I can tee you up here you can acknowledge like something really big happened this summer. Can you tell us what that was?

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Alice Hill 06:47

Well, certainly the inflation Reduction Act, when we're talking about climate change that was highly significant, it will help the United States to achieve its goals of reducing its emissions by 50 to 52%, from 2005. And it sent a message to other countries that the United States is serious about addressing its emissions problems, as well as continuing to lead other nations in addressing climate change. And it created a long timeframe a decade for support for technology industry, to come up with solutions, clean energy and technology that will keep us safer. So it was a monumental achievement for our country.

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Doug Parsons 07:40

Yes, and I've talked about this, but it's obviously for us in the adaptation space. It's not our dream bill by any long shot. But it was still this really good news that came out of nowhere. And I kind of remember just, it seemed like when we heard about Senator Manchin getting on board with it, that seemed like that was all that was needed, even though there was a lot more steps when that happened. You just everybody kind of came alive. So it was it was pretty exciting. And I think most of us, myself included, really didn't understand what was in the bill for a long time, you're kind of reading into those details. And so but it was just a jolt of positive news in the climate space, at least, you know, more so on the mitigation side.

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Alice Hill 08:15

Absolutely. And even anyone who works in adaptation knows that we have to reduce the amount of greenhouse gas emissions in our atmosphere. So that is what this bill's primary focus is. And it's critical to adaptation success as well, because if we lower emissions will have less heating from this blanket of carbon and other greenhouse gases that is encasing the globe

and heating us up. But if we are successful in reducing the thickness of that blanket, we will have less that we need to adapt to. So it's a definitely a win, and for long term adaptation as well.

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Doug Parsons 08:58

Alright, so we're gonna pivot again here, but we'll follow the Inflation Reduction Act probably for years even on this podcast, because it'll be relating to things and so watching and even with a hit, there's a turnover and administration. What does that mean, but it's something to watch in the years ahead. But Alice, I want to jump into some world events that have happened related to our adaptation resilient side and in the area of national security. Pakistan just got smashed by flooding. And could you maybe give us a little bit of background what's been happening there? What what happened?

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Alice Hill 09:28

Well, Pakistan is a country that is almost uniquely threatened by natural disasters. It's in the top 10 of nations that are faced huge natural disaster risks, including earthquakes, but flooding is one of their big risks as well. And the monsoons came extremely heavy this year, caused about a third of the nation to be underwater, significant damage to their agricultural sector. They're one of their regions, which was responsible for about half the food for the country was very severely damaged bridges washed out and now population is suffering from waterborne diseases, gastrointestinal, it's also there's little protection against mosquito borne diseases. It's just a mountain of misery for a country that has had almost nothing to do with creating the climate change crisis that we currently have. Their emissions have been less than 1%. But certainly the worsening of the monsoons. Climate scientists, I believe, have already indicated that those monsoons were worsened as a result of human caused climate change. So we have already a poor country, its population, many millions thrown out of their homes by flooding, and a population in very desperate straits is predicted that they'll be boots or shortages, water shortages going forward that has significant security risks, including for the United States, because populations that are suffering are grounds for recruitment for bad actors, including extremist terrorists. And Pakistan already went down this road in 2010, after a very serious flooding on the Taliban, use that moment and use the fact that the government was struggling to respond to expand its territory. And that is a risk here going forward. What will happen for the Pakistanis, and their ability to keep their populations healthy? And Safe is a big question mark. Pakistan also has huge import for what occurs in November, when the UN convenience is 27 Conference of Parties, Pakistan happens to be ahead of the group of developing nations, I think it's called the G 77. They are raising this issue of, hey, we have been damaged heavily by climate change, we've had little to do with it developed world you need to pay up you need to help us get to clean energy, and you need to help us deal with these impacts. It's called in un speak, that's called loss and damage. But that issue will be I believe, highlighted at these convening in Egypt in November with the UN. What's your sense? I mean, maybe the conversations that you have with people and even your time in the Obama administration is that there's this immediate need to help people and the Pakistan is trying to help their people, and there's rebuilding and access to things like clean water. But does our military respond to these things even differently, in some ways, that flooding and you don't necessarily look at it that way. But this sort of it was like, things that you have to the implications for the military are huge. And like you just described, the national security implications for the Department of

Defense now gear up in different ways, because even though there's these immediate needs, it's like there are now real national security implications. It's almost gets a military operation or national defense operation. I don't know if the CIA even thinks about these things. But do you feel like that shift has really occurred in the last 10 years that we're in process, the United States has a proud history of being the number one provider of humanitarian assistance, and often it's the military. That's the first arrives on the scene providing that assistance. As the number and intensity of extreme events grows. There are greater demands on the US military, both domestically, but also internationally to help people through these disasters. Some military leaders have expressed concern that that this comes at the cost of operations actually, in Australia. This is debate that's currently laying out that if we are responding to these disasters, does it undercut our central mission, which is to provide the military security the defense forces for the nation so there's a tension there already for the military. There's an additional concern for the military will its installations its facilities will its troops will its weaponry perform under these new changing conditions. You might have recall that hurricane Michael basically wiped out one of the Air Force's primary bases including a training base in Florida Tyndall Tyndall Air Force Base, causing billions of dollars of damage that base is currently read being rebuilt. I don't know if it's in the line of fire for hurricane in which is currently approaching Florida but the air force hadn't planned to have to rebuild to the tune of \$5 billion, which they're doing, then you multiply that for all the installations across the globe of the United States military, which is the largest, most powerful military in the world. We have a huge bill coming do to make sure that we have the readiness of our forces, and everything that supports them. And then you have the third issue of what is this mean for global relations insecurity among nations in between nations. And that's where Pakistan comes in. If Pakistan, the Pakistani government cannot feed its population, and we could have young people who don't have work who are hungry, being recruited by extremists, and that could affect our nation right here within our borders, there are geopolitical hotspots that may develop as a result of climate, crises, drought, people on the move as a result of not being able to have water, devastation of crops, famine, all of those are highly destabilizing, and could have spillover effects for nations across the globe, including the United States. So I want to pick again here and so much is going on right now. And I want to talk about Puerto Rico, and they are just dealing with this right now. Even though the parking Fiona has gone through. We're just seeing more news stories come out on how that impacted the island. Actually a lot of great coverage in regards to like previous work that FEMA has done in the area. But can you just give us an update, like what happened there with Fiona? Well, Fiona hit Puerto Rico. And once again, the territory plunged into darkness. Of course, in 2017, after hurricanes Irma and Maria, Puerto Rico suffered the longest blackout and the United States history and the second longest and global history. So that had significant negative ramifications for its business community. Americans discovered that Puerto Rico happened to be a center for the manufacture of basic medical supplies, like those bags that are used for infusion of chemotherapy or blood. And when power went out, even though Puerto Rico had backup generators, just people couldn't get to work, and the price of those bags skyrocketed by 600%. Fast forward five years later, the grid goes down, again, revealing that the grid really isn't climate resilient. It's also revealed that a lot of the money that we the United States had allocated to Puerto Rico to be spent from its recovery from the hurricanes in 2017, hasn't yet been spent. And so there is still a huge amount of work ahead. There's a lot of finger pointing going on right now as to who's responsible for the week conditions that have been revealed by this hurricane Fiona, there are a couple of bright spots, we've seen that areas that had decentralized solar, there were lights were on in some places. So we can learn from that, that as we think ahead about what kind of grid Puerto Rico needs to have in place, there are lessons already revealed from Fiona is going to be another long slog for Puerto Ricans. One of the dangers I think, for the region is that there might be a brain drain. And we've seen that with after Hurricane, economic conditions tend to

decline and those who can may choose to leave to find a better life elsewhere, which for them, that's the right choice, but long term for Puerto Rico, that just is a loss of human capital, that also is a price they're paying. Alright, I want to dig into this because it's great timing. Actually, Washington Post put out an article today in Did you read this about the mitigation projects in Puerto Rico? It was just in today's Washington Post, if you haven't read that, no, I haven't seen it be very interesting for you. But things that you just touched upon in that since Hurricane Maria in 2017, that there was serious money allocated for Puerto Rico and they're talking the projects that I think there was something like 74 projects that have been submitted to get funded and only seven have just been allocated completely. And and they're actually working on these various stages of all these things. And that's what sets been five years. And this has gotten me thinking to and you talked about this originally, in your book, we talked about how government entities really need to communicate better, but there really hasn't been a lot of talk about just how bureaucracies can inhibit adaptation. I don't think we in the adaptation space really we just assume enough? Well, if we fund these things, or if we get the right personnel, and then we just sometimes forget that bureaucracies and the nature of how they even interact with each other is actually a serious hint.

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Doug Parsons 20:00

During its to adaptation,

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Alice Hill 20:02

well, I agree that a varying requirements can slow down. But I don't think we want to say that all so called red tape doesn't make sense. Sometimes red tape prevents fraud, sometimes red tape makes sure that we're actually doing something in a climate resilient way rather than just building it. So if there is a balance, I think one of the challenges when you step back with adaptation overall, is that a lot of this money is flowing through the federal government, the federal government reflects its history, we have the Department of Defense formed after World War Two, we have Department of Homeland Security formed after 911. And then we have Housing and Urban Development, each of these Department of Interior, each of these agencies have their own history, their own mission set, and their own legislation defining what they can and cannot do. And when they're focused on their own mission set, they can generally, in my opinion, often deliver in very significant ways. But when you get a cross cutting, threat, or risk, like climate change, and climate change is unfamiliar. Because conditions are different. From what we have historically seen in the past, we could rely on what occurred in the past to make a safe for the future. But the past is no longer a good guide, when you have sea level rise, storms intensifying very rapidly more rain falling than ever historically seen. So we have something that's affecting every single agency we have, and it affects each of their mission spaces. But what it's also is revealing is that there are huge gaps in what these agencies are authorized to do. And because their gaps, it leaves us ill prepared to respond in the kind of robust way that we need to respond. And short of creating new a new agency to deal with climate change. At a minimum, we need to have a better plan how all these agencies will work together so that they're more coordinated, so that the customer which would be Puerto Rico, or some community in Puerto Rico, can easily access the range of programs that are offered by all these different agencies. I was recently on a panel with a mayor from a town in the Midwest,

who said after a disaster, he had to deal with 25 Different agencies, that is just impossible for a small town mayor who doesn't have a planning staff or the resources to be chasing down 25 different agencies.

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Doug Parsons 22:47

Well, in defensive agencies like FEMA, and I worked for the National Park Service at the national level. And just even when you're giving grants, part of this is expertise. And I think this keeps coming up as people that just have no exposure, even thinking about adaptation planning vulnerability assessments. And so if your grant and it's associated with like, maybe rebuilding some infrastructure, but going forward, it needs to factor in sea level rise, it really needs to consider climate change. And a lot of these smaller communities just don't have the staff. We think they do, but they don't. And so even to get be eligible for the grants, they have to demonstrate that they're gonna start planning this way. And so FEMA is just ready to give these funds. But you know, they're required to say, all right, but these are going to be you know, folks, and I'm just using even example, it could be at the state going down to the city level. But that, I guess, that level of professional experience to do this work, it's still way off, even if the money's there the expertise to actually to implement in the right way is a big problem, I think, a huge problem.

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Alice Hill 23:43

I think you're absolutely right. What we've seen is an arms race among consultancies and modeling firms to try to aid different communities. But that's mostly the wealthy communities. That's a California or New York that can't afford to hire. But a small town isn't going to be able to afford and they probably don't have the expertise on their own staff. So they are left struggling. And we really don't have a website or a set of consultants in the federal government that makes it simple for a smaller community to figure out how to access the tremendous resources of the federal government. The government accountability office recently reiterated that federal government needs to get to a better data platform that makes it easier for people to understand their risks. And I believe it was in the Inflation Reduction Act. There also was a proposal for some kind of climate corps, a cadre of people who could assist for essentially help a local community or city town, figure out what their risks are, and then figure out what the programs are available that could system that bridging that gap would be a giant leap forward for the United States. Because then there would be a common understanding among agencies as to what the risks are for this community cities state, and then a way of identifying what programs will address the threats that are making this community city state vulnerable. It's a gap that we desperately need to close. There's another gap, though, that we have. And that is the federal workforce. We, as we've been talking about, we have millions, billions of dollars that is about to be spent, do we have the federal workforce that is trained on these issues, I suspect not simply because most people haven't had a chance to have any formal education on climate change. We just don't have a cadre of people who understand the threats, and what they will mean going forward for industries, for communities and for the economic health nation.

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Doug Parsons 26:13

You know, it just reminded me in a previous life, I did land conservation. And we're, you know, NEPA, the National Environmental Protection Act, the local governments have to do these

environmental assessments for basically everything. And I would hate for that to happen to the adaptations planning space is that, you know, not to knock all consultants gets great consultants out there doing some great work, but a lot of those cities, which is hire these consultants, do this environmental assessment, tick off these boxes. And for people in the conservation space, you're like, wait a sec, you weren't really considering water in the right way you do. And they did enough to get that assessment, you know, ticked off as part of NEPA adaptation planning. He's like going that same direction, as smaller communities are just like, listen, we just don't have the capacity to do Oh, look at this future mapping and all this sort of expertise, and they don't realize maybe other resort anyway, I just occurred to me like when there's environmental assessments, that just a lot of going through the motions there, and that can happen to adaptation?

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Alice Hill 27:06

Absolutely. And that's one of the reasons I very much like the idea of having a cadre of consulting services that are available to the less well off less resourced communities who need help. And without that, they are at greater risk of being left behind or as you say, checking the box and hoping that what they say passes with the agencies, even if they don't really fully understand what's at stake.

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Doug Parsons 27:35

And I just want to acknowledge your point about fraud. And I totally agree. Did you saw that story with all they just busted with COVID money? Oh, this tons of money that there was this fraud in regards, I think using COVID money for some children related like food, right? I forgot exactly. All the details, but it was a massive fraud.

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Alice Hill 27:52

Yeah. Right, including prisoners. Getting money. Yeah.

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Doug Parsons 27:57

And so my point is, there's parts of adaptation money out there. And if there's pots of future money, and even the infrastructure bill, there's a lot of that supposed to go toward. We don't want that happening in the adaptation space where we have people committing fraud saying, oh, yeah, we did climate adaptation here. And it's gonna be hard to avoid when you have big pots like that. But yeah, I agree that we need to be looking out for corruption and fraud. And of course, bureaucracies, hopefully help prevent that. But I think that's coming and the adaptation space needs to be ready for that, because it could just give a real black guy to a very emerging area.

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Alice Hill 28:31

That's a risk and when you have a lot of money to give away and pressure to give it away, we



see see that with the reporting on how much fraud was revealed during the COVID payouts that people could easily claim one thing if not another, you know, my prior life before I was a judge, I was a an assistant United States attorney, I was prosecutor I headed the Fraud Unit in Los Angeles, I know that fraud occurs and detecting it can be extremely difficult. So it is wise for the federal government to be aware of that risk. Because once the money's gone, it's often I know as a prosecutor, very hard to get the money back you might be able to prosecute the person, and they might go to prison, but the money's gone

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Doug Parsons 29:23

quickly just my own experience working for the federal government and just dealing with how the government deals with fraud you when you're traveling, you got to account for your receipts and everything then did some travel for the National Park Service and I was called by some accounting part of the agency because there was a discrepancy in a coffee it was like four bucks or something and so I just had to explain it. It was a pleasant conversation. I'm not gonna hurt you when she did her job. It was great. But I just mentally I was thinking all right, I'm getting paid X amount an hour she's getting paid X amount an hour. And just to track down this \$4 piece of fraud and just like this, this is not good. This is its own fraud in its own way. But again, you hear about these all these big fraud things that happen and you got to keep on people. So,

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Alice Hill 30:06

right. It's a balance between common sense. And then how do we make sure that we're just not pouring money out the door that we'll never get back?

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Doug Parsons 30:14

Okay, we're gonna do another pivot here. There's a report out from the Government Accountability Office about climate change and resilience. Right up both are alleys. And I actually hadn't dug around much into it. i It was out there. But it just for some reason I let it go and a lot of really good stuff in there. And I wanted to just ask you a few questions about that, because I do think it serves as sort of a ground truthing what the government is doing on these things, and there are some recommendations in there. Let's talk about that for a little bit.

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Alice Hill 30:40

Sure. I actually worked a lot with the GAO on when I was at the Department of Homeland Security, the GAO had investigated the department for a huge number of things. And when I arrived, there were so many backlog recommendations that one of the projects I took on, in addition to climate change adaptation was trying to work with the GAO to resolve those recommendations so that the department could move forward. And I had a chance to understand how they approach things. And then I began to work with them on issues about climate change. And they have been one of the earliest advocates for action on climate change by the federal government of all agencies since at least 2013. They have put the federal government, very wealthy entity, the High Risk List for the Government Accountability Office,

which is the watchdog for the federal government, they're making sure they're supposed to make sure the federal government's doing what it should be doing. And they said, Look, climate change impacts are a high risk for US economic impacts, we have to agricultural insurance, and agriculture certainly will be threatened. So all that insurance we pay up there we have the federal government has the Flood Insurance Program, which is deeply threatened by climate change. And then we just have these massive growth in billion dollar events. And we simply aren't doing enough. So they have been really clamoring and urging and pushing the federal government to do more. And I think they are one of the most insightful groups out there as to ideas for how the federal government could do a better job.

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Doug Parsons 32:31

I'll just want to read a little bit from the report, I'm very high level. And for folks who want to dig around that I'll have a link in my show notes to the report, but it's called Climate Change, enhancing federal resilience. And they say we identified five areas in which government wide action is needed to reduce federal fiscal exposure to climate change. These areas include the federal government's roles as one insurer of property and crops, as you just mentioned, to provider of disaster aid. Three owner or operator of infrastructure for leader have a strategic plan to coordinate federal efforts and five provider of data and technical assistance to decision makers. And you're just your initial reaction. To me, it seems like you're impressed with the work they're doing. But you think that's a nice kind of summary, those five approaches are really good way to kind of cover most of the areas.

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Alice Hill 33:15

Yeah, I think they have identified the big areas that are out there are there more, of course, because this is a never ending iterative process. But we need to start with the highest priority, I think they've also called out the need for the federal government to prioritize where chooses to make investments, what we do now is a little light sprinkles on a cupcake, and you just sprinkle all over in place. But what we really need to do is make sure that the sprinkles are occurring in the places that are engraved at greatest risk, because if we spread it out very thinly, we don't have the kinds of investments that will truly keep certain areas safer, very difficult politically, to make those choices. But if we don't aren't willing to say no, we're going to make an investment in building something to hold back the sea in this area and not do something on a smaller scale here. If we're unwilling to do that, we could end up with a lot of money being spent but not achieving the kind of long term resilience for the nation that we need.

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Doug Parsons 34:25

Okay, let's look at that. Number four. And this is a conversation that's happening. I did a whole episode on it, you know, a strategic plan to coordinate federal efforts and I read that as like a national adaptation plan and strategy and currently in Congress. It's a bipartisan bill to do that. Do you have you heard anything and he sort of I had some math Medlock on and she gave me her own update, but what's your sense of that and the sort of the the need for such a thing?

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Alice Hill 34:48

Well, I've spoken and written publicly about it. In fact, I spoke at an event sponsored by one of the sponsors Senator Chris Coons in favor of the bill. We desperately need a national strategy for adaptation. And what does the strategy get us? It gets us first of all a understanding of what the federal government goals are with regard to adaptation so that state, local, tribal, territorial governments and the private sector can understand what the federal government believes it will do. And then they can figure out those other entities can figure out how they nest within whatever the federal government's goals, it also can set metrics for what does adaptation success look like? It can help with this prioritization issue, making sure that we are thinking through what where it makes sense to spend money, and it can in an iterative process work from the bottom up and the top down to get at some of the harder issues that we are, will be facing, such as relocation of populations as land disappear. So the idea of a national adaptation plan is not new planning is not viewed as particularly sexy, but without a plan. And what we get is some a lot of confusion. And right now we have President Biden has ordered each agency to do their own individual adaptation plan for their agencies. But what those plans at the end of the day are unlikely to add up to and I think Jesse Keenan did a really wonderful job on your program, showing that they won't add up at the end of the day to an integrated approach. So we need a national adaptation plan, I would point out that we're a bit of an outlier at this point, and not having one China issued its first in 2013. And it just issued re issued a new version calling for it to be a climate resilient nation by 2035. And it has some very ambitious climate resilient programs that it calls for including shipping large amounts of water from an area that has a lot of fresh water to drier areas. So really a lot of ambition from China as to how it will be resilient. And then we see France, Germany, the EU, Pan Russia, all having their own plans. Now, they could be a varying strengths. But the fact is, they've gone through the process of doing it, and one of the nations that engaged in this very early stage, the Netherlands, has had some remarkable success in implementing some of the choices it has made with regard to strengthening it to its major threat, which is sea level rise.

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Doug Parsons 37:43

Well, it would be good, because if we had a national adaptation plan, and just another way to interface with the international community creates some common language and approaches. And you know, the US doesn't always play nice on the international stage. And so I'm hopeful. And I guess my concern is that from the legislation that I know, and I had the author of the bill, come on, and kind of walk us through it, support everything about it. But you know how sometimes you have a national thing. But even the federal agencies are not playing nice with each other. And I get again, it's supposed to help coordinate that. But when you don't have a budget associated with it, like all these other parts that GAO just said provider of disaster aid, those are big things. And you know, then, like how they integrate with just a small office doing a national adaptation strategy. That's tricky. You really need I guess, even at the presidency level of saying, all right, you guys are going to really make this work together, or it'll be a missed opportunity. So they will

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Alice Hill 38:35

need leadership, no doubt about it, and probably a person with the president's ear. We have an interesting development right now, which I think is a very exciting development, President Biden has brought back John Podesta, to head up efforts under the Inflation Reduction Act. I had the honor of working with John Podesta when I was in the White House, I think he is widely

recognized that he is a very, very productive and talented leader, one of the best, if not the best in the federal government, he knows the levers to pull and he knows how to get things done. So I even at one point, wrote a little article about climate work before John Podesta in the White House and after John Podesta because I hadn't arrived a couple of months in the White House before he arrived. And then when he got there, you could tell the difference. And I'm sure that's happening right now. That is a wonderful development, I think, for the success of that bill,

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Doug Parsons 39:36

I guess the final thought and regarding the national adaptation strategy, which again, I support, I promoted it on this podcast numerous times is, you know, the National Climate Assessment is a congressionally mandated thing. Great resource. The science going into that is amazing. It's there when I worked out in the states and even the local level. It's just it wasn't really being used and I don't know if this is communicate issue, but I would hate for something like that similar to happen in the adaptation space because so much effort, so much resources that go into the National Climate Assessment. And it's just people don't know necessarily how to interface with it, and that that's a lost opportunity. And so like, again, maybe there's some consistency. And there's I forgot the name of it. But for this number five provider of data, there's a new portal that they just announced, I don't know if you know the name, you know, what I'm talking about, it has that map. And there's,

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Alice Hill 40:25

I do not recall the name, but I've been on it. But it does suffer a little bit from challenges of earlier versions, it's difficult to navigate. And then if you really just want to get down to your property level, it can be difficult, it's sometimes just county wide information. And if you're in a really large county, or very, very County, that might not be as relevant to you, it is still a ways to go. I would say that, and I don't know what modelling they're using, I haven't been a part of it. But the first street foundation as really leapt into the creation of future information about risks to particular property, so you can go on to their website and type in your address or the I think it's Redfin, that also carries their information, and also the flood score, the wildfire, threat, etc. I don't know about the underlying modeling, but that is the goal that we would hope we would have for the entire nation that that is credible information, I have no reason to believe it's not credible, but it's not a government source, it's from a private entity. Okay, that's

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Doug Parsons 41:37

just not encouraging, I haven't poked around the resource like that. And again, you're at a local government level, and you know, it's just not meeting your needs, you're gonna instantly, even if you've ever been exposed to it, you're not going to use it, it's gonna be a missed opportunity of creating more integration across. So hopefully, again, and I'm sure as you're falling, and you probably get invited to speak, one of probably the few really profitable areas in the adaptation space that has come out relatively early. It's just, you know, climate data, climate modeling and such. And there's these private firms and startups that are coming up at which is exciting in its own space. But if we have 50 of these 100 of these different firms all providing different

modeling different data for communities, and the private sector, that could itself create all sorts of problems. And their information might be reliable, how they created their model, but it's a bit of the Wild West, when I think it's coming to climate data at the moment,

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Alice Hill 42:30

that modeling is a big challenge. Absolutely. And over the years, I've gotten to know a lot more about modeling. And there are just some risks, including a modeler gets very attached to the way they see things. So that could undermine the results from the model. And then there's also the risk that we follow the models too closely. It's kind of like when you're looking at Google Maps, and you drive into the lake, you just have assumed that this is accurate. It's a remarkably challenging problem to project future events, we are certain that the events will occur, but there is uncertainty about how and when they will occur and trying to project that is just a remarkably challenging task that adds to the difficulties that governments private sector, and individuals are having to adjust to a future in an unstable climate. But we need to figure out the ways what's trustworthy, what's not trustworthy, and most important thing is to embark on it. Because we've been talking about these hurricanes, the big risk is right after everything dies down, people are accounted for. There'll be a push to build back. We need to build back communities that are resilient to the events of the future, not just what they've just been through. And that is an enormous task.

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Doug Parsons 44:07

Okay, Alice, one final pivot here. And you get asked to speak a lot. And you know, virtual speaking has been a thing for last couple of years. And even from the last time you went on, and I I just want to get your advice and pick your brain a little bit on your speaking like, who are some of the groups that you've been speaking to? So you guys, I mean, you are just one of the leaders in this space. And so obviously, you get asked to be on panels, you get asked to do keynotes, what have been some of those, I guess, even the last three to six months that have that you've been doing?

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Alice Hill 44:34

Well, I very much enjoy speaking I speak to everyone from groups of students. I'd love to be invited to be a guest lecturer of students of various disciplines because I always learned from them but I also be too two groups who have particular expertise might be financial companies. Sometimes I'm speaking to groups of have scientists it's really wide ranging, one of the delightful things about being on the Council on Foreign Relations is how much international speaking and of course, that you can do this with a pairing virtually is really a gift. So I speak to audiences ranging from the Asia to an audience recently in Singapore, looking at the energy transition the Middle East Europe and interacting with a variety of audiences, there's typical questions allows me to get at least a sense of, and very anecdotal sense of what is occurring and what the thought processes are. Couple of takeaways is that we are still at the very beginning of this journey, resilience is still the poor cousin to mitigation. And there isn't quite the appreciation yet of the fact that mitigation and adaptation now have to go hand in hand,

although 2022 has certainly been an eye opener for many because of the variety, and the velocity. And the volume of these events that we've seen, shows that climate change is very much arrived and is already causing severe damage and wars ahead

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Doug Parsons 46:24

with these groups that aren't necessarily in the adaptation space, maybe not even at all related, but they're just curious to learn more. That's why they've invited you on they know that you have a reputation this, anything that kind of stands out to you that is curious to you that you're like, wow, these type of questions where they might have just completely missed conceptions on even what it is like anything kind of stand out to you in that regard.

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Alice Hill 46:45

And one of the biggest things is the different levels of understanding of climate change. I think that we have a phenomenon where there are people or leaders simply haven't had a chance to study climate change. And one of the scary or concerning aspects of that was brought to light to me by somebody at CFR who observed that in her interactions on climate change, she noticed that people often fell silent. And she didn't think it was because they weren't worried about climate change. They were worried about embarrassing themselves because they didn't know that much about climate change. And we see statements, we saw the President of the World Bank last week asked about the consensus on that humans have caused climate change. And this is a consensus agreed to by scientists across the globe, the UN, all nations have agreed to that consensus. And his response was I'm not a climate scientist. That was pretty surprising. And then in 2019, New York University's Stern Business School did a study of I think was the top Fortune 100 companies, these are publicly traded companies, and they looked at the resumes of some 1200 different board members of those companies. And it was they could only find a handful of resumes that had any mention of environment. So you have a lot of leaders being asked to make decisions about climate change. And odds are given their age, and what was available in institutions of higher education about climate change at the time they were educated. Odds are, they didn't have a chance to get educated. So you saw the World Bank president after there was a huge outcry about his response to this question. He said, Well, I'm happy to be educated by the scientist and that response, that's great. He wants to be educated, but he's running an organization already that is responsible for assisting the developing world with its challenges. And climate change is certainly at the very top of the list of those challenges. I would say that it has been a consistent takeaway for me that the work is still here. And this is really true in the United States. I think that we have more skepticism about climate change than you have in many other parts of the world.

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Doug Parsons 49:21

Yeah, it's gonna take decades to flush that out. It's just people you hang out in the climate or bitch, like, Oh, everybody knows about the, you know, you know, even people that don't, aren't hostile to what you do. They don't even have an introductory level of knowledge of some of these things. It's just going to take a lot of effort and hopefully, like a national adaptation plan, hopefully, like awareness building would be a big part of what they expect us to do. So

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Alice Hill 49:43

I think that's an excellent point, because just the planning process will educate anyone who's involved in that. And that is what we need is we need the engagement and the opportunity for people to learn through that engagement to understand what's at stake.

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Doug Parsons 49:57

And that's what I suggested to the author The bill was like it needs national communication strategy is that a subplot of all that just that's all I'm, that's very important to me.

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Alice Hill 50:07

excellent suggestion.

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Doug Parsons 50:09

There's a lot of my listeners out there that are talking to people and just even explaining resilience and adaptation, still a struggle, any advice to them, it'd be at the local level be at the state level to insight to how they might be able to speak to the topic to the people that they're talking to.

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Alice Hill 50:23

I don't want to sound to flip. But over the years, there's two things I've gotten first kiss, keep it simple, keep it stupid, I don't mean stupid, but you need to explain that we have this blanket of admissions that are covering our globe. So never assume that people really know what greenhouse gas emissions are. And the second is try to tell stories. And that was chaired by Fran O'Connor, who has worked in the Arctic for a long time and decades. And she was on a panel with her. And she was asked, as you look back on this, what do you wish you'd done in terms of communicating why we should care about the Arctic, and she said, tell more stories. And I thought that was excellent advice. It's sometimes there's a tendency, I have a tendency you get kind of in the wonky, the policy. But really, ultimately, it's about stories that people care about. And if we can find stories that resonate, we can help people understand this challenge and make better choices. Alright,

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Doug Parsons 51:27

so we're gonna wrap this up here. And this is a question I ask all my guests. And you've answered this before. And it's been a while since you've been on so you've, I'm sure you've met a lot of people. But if you could recommend one person to come on the podcast, who would it be?



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Alice Hill 51:38

Johan rock strim. He's not unnecessarily an adaptation expert. But he is a scientist who can communicate what's ahead for the globe in a way that I found very accessible, but also very inspiring. And he moves beyond just the focus on climate change, but to the focus on other factors that will be influenced by climate change, that could affect the overall health of the globe and the planet as we know it. And I think it's useful to step back occasionally. And I focused so much on climate change, but also to try to understand what other forces are play, like the stress on ecosystems, that could be a risk to achieving the kind of life that we want to have here on the globe.

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Doug Parsons 52:33

Okay, I'm sorry, you probably said if it did, well, who's he with? And like, where's the bass?

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Alice Hill 52:37

Oh, he's based in Sweden. I think now, I think he's at the Potsdam Institute. And his name is Johan rock strim. When I was at the White House, I invited him to speak, I was so impressed with his work, I'd seen him speak elsewhere. And he is just remarkably articulate about how the planet works. And what we need the different areas we need to keep a close watch on to keep ourselves safe.

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Doug Parsons 53:04

Sounds like an excellent recommendation. And I don't think I've had anyone based in Sweden come on before so I need to do a little homework. Alice, always a treat to have you on open invitation. I'll be checking back in with you. There's other topics things I'm sure you're going to be busy in the next six months, 12 months and we'll always have you back on America dabs to talk about these things, but thanks for coming on.

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Alice Hill 53:23

Well, thank you for having me. What a pleasure and I so enjoy your podcasts. I really always learn something when I listen. So thank you for your work.

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Doug Parsons 53:37

Oh, okay, adapters that is wrapped thanks to judge Alice Hill for joining the podcast. Alice has been on many times, and it's always a treat to chat with her and get her views on the adaptation issues of the day. She's one of our sector's leading voices, and certainly a mentor to many of us. I especially enjoyed our conversation on the challenges of federal agencies to provide funding even if funding is available is not always easy to distribute. That level of expertise varies at local, state and federal levels and funding agencies need to be responsible with dispersing this aid. That said, we can't wait until there is some baseline level of adaptation awareness to make our communities more resilient. Many groups, especially at the local level



are going to have to step up their educational efforts to let the relevant staffers know of the funding and climate data that is available to help them plan. I'll be talking with a future guest about the reliability of climate data and why that's such a frustrating part of planning for people in adaptation. Thanks again, Alex for joining the podcast. So it looks like I'm going to national adaptation forum in Baltimore this year. It's been a while since I've been to a conference I'm on assignment for this episode, and previous forms, I've been able to connect with listeners. I love meeting people in person a chance to chat about the work that you do. If you plan to go feel free to reach out in advance. I'll be on the lookout for you when I'm there. Maybe you're on a presentation panel. Let me know I'll try to check it out. As a reminder, check out the show notes for the Battelle innovations and climate resilience conference in Columbus, Ohio, March 28 through 30th summit in abstract you'll hear more from me about this calm rents in the coming months. Okay, folks, you hear me talk about this all the time. What's your adaptation story? I'm about to go to Mexico to tell WWF mangrove adaptation story we're going to tell Patel's adaptation story at their conference. So do people that you engage with understand what is climate adaptation? Are you finding that webinars and white papers really aren't resonating in ways that promote your work will consider telling your story in a podcast, sponsoring podcasts allows you to focus on the work you're doing wish and sharing with climate professionals from around the world. And as I said, I go on location for the sponsor podcast increasingly so post COVID. And this allows you a different diversity of guests to come on. You will work with me to identify experts that represent the amazing work that you're doing. I've mentioned that WWF has been a previous sponsor, while I've worked with NRDC, University of Pennsylvania, Wharton, Harvard, UCLA, many groups really wanting to tell their adaptation story. Why don't you it's a chance to share your story with my listeners who represent the most influential people in the adaptation space. And I like to point this out. Most projects have communications written into them, consider pledging in a podcast, podcasts have a long shelf life, they're much more interesting than these white papers or conference presentations. That's my humble opinion. And those are worked into many communication strategies. There's no better platform than this podcast to get the word out on adaptation to some of the most influential and active adaptation professionals in the world. And if you're interested in having me speak at a public or corporate event, folks, I do keynote presentations. I love doing them. This is an emerging issue. A lot of people especially in the private sector, don't understand what's coming don't understand their role in adaptation. I give keynote presentations around the subject talk about my previous guests my previous life doing adaptation policy, you can learn more at [AmericaDaps.org](http://AmericaDaps.org). And don't forget, I love hearing from you guys. I mean it. Just say hi, tell me what you do for a living. Seriously. It's the highlight of my week. I'm at [AmericaDepths@gmail.com](mailto:AmericaDepths@gmail.com) Okay, adapters Keep up the great work. I'll see you next time.