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HEARING ON RESTORATION PLANS FOR THE CHESAPEAKE BAY: MAY 18, 2004.

Good morning, I would like to welcome everyone to what I believe will be an exciting, educational and important hearing on the future of the Chesapeake Bay.

Earlier this year, I wrote to every high school in my Congressional District, and I challenged students at those fine institutions to identify the problems facing the Chesapeake Bay, the human activities that should be changed to help reduce those negative impacts and to suggest ways that we can lessen those impacts in the future. I am not sure there has ever been a Congressional Hearing like this before but I am anxious to hear the testimony of students from Bohemia Manor High School, Broadneck High School, Pocomoke High School and South River High School.

These young men and women have dedicated themselves to this project and as the future leaders of their communities, it is their restoration plans that can serve as a model for the future.

In 1612, Captain John Smith looked upon the Chesapeake Bay and proclaimed that "heaven and earth never agreed better to frame a place for man's habitation". For those of us, who have the privilege of living along the Chesapeake Bay or one of its tributaries, we are proud that this majestic body of water is the largest estuary in North America. The watershed includes all or portions of 6 states; it holds more than 18 trillion gallons of water; it supports more than 3,600 species of plants and wildlife; and it produces some of the finest seafood in the world.

It is, therefore, not surprising that President Ronald Reagan once declared that: "the Chesapeake Bay is a national treasure that is worth preserving for its own sake". In recent years, this 15,000 year old treasure has suffered from the effects of growing human population, over harvesting of its resources and water quality degradation. While millions have been spent and restoration plans, like the Chesapeake 2000 Agreement, have been implemented, the job of restoring the bay is far from completed.

In the final analysis, for us to reach our goal of restoring the bay, it is essential to have local citizen involvement and that includes the students, and their parents, teachers, families, and friends that are with us today. The shores of the Chesapeake Bay cradled our first settlements in America and together, with the vision of tomorrow's community leaders, we can restore this magnificent ecosystem.

Again, I want to welcome those who have traveled to our nation's capitol to participate in this most important hearing. I am now pleased to recognize the gentleman from New Jersey, the Ranking Democratic Member of the Subcommittee, Congressman Frank Pallone.