



Transcript of Video Interview with Congresswoman Lois Capps, recorded 2010.

This interview is part of Earth Alert's Heroes of the Coast video archive, featuring interviews with leading California coastal activists, past and present California Coastal Commissioners and Coastal Commission staff. For more information, visit www.earthalert.org.

This interview with Rep. Lois Capps was recorded for use in the *Stories of the Spill* documentary.

Janet Bridgers: Okay, Representative Capps, could you just for the front of the tape for I.D. purposes tell us your name and your position.

Lois Capps: Yes, Lois Capps and I represent the 23rd Congressional District in the United States House of Representatives.

Janet Bridgers: In 1969 what was your occupation?

Lois Capps: I was a young mother living in the community and raising my family, had moved to this area from, graduate school studies of my husband, he was a new young professor at UC Santa Barbara and I was, we were living in Golia. We saw the ocean as an important part of our family life because it was the focus of our recreation.

Janet Bridgers: Do you remember what you were doing when you first heard about the spill?

Lois Capps: I don't remember it specifically, because it was a major news item, but the effects of it took just a little bit of time to be absorbed by most of us. Those who were right on the shore immediately reacted and knew, though none of us knew how permanent and long lasting and devastating the impact would be, that unfolded over time. It seemed to be like a nightmare that never stopped.

Janet Bridgers: How did it make you feel?

Lois Capps: Violated. It's a very powerful experience to be at the frontline of an environmental disaster. I can only think with great feeling about those who are living in the area that experienced the earthquake in Japan, it is, it's earth shaking, an accident of such significance or an event of such significant magnitude.

Janet Bridgers: And over the first couple of months, you know, the initial first couple of months, were you involved in any way? In the activities?

Lois Capps: Yes, not formally, you know I, we, I wasn't a part of the movement then that grew very rapidly, first responders, if you will, that seized upon every mechanism they could find, straw, all of that. We would go down and help a little bit with that part of it, but it was more observing it, it was more seeing the effect of it, that made such an impression upon me.

Janet Bridgers: And over a longer period of time, would, how did you become involved over a longer period of time with coastal activities?

Lois Capps: Yes, but not formally again, just as a community member who watched to see that, and noticed that there was a strong reaction throughout the country really, to this event. You now, the Coastal Commission was created as a result. So many things happened as a result of that act, of that event, just the following year, Senator Gaylord Nelson visited the area to see and was so struck by how much the impact was still being felt, that the phrase "Earth Day" and the significant, he said, we can never forget this, so they invented, or set aside a day, calling it Earth day, which we celebrate, and celebrated this year again.

Janet Bridgers: And what, in the longer term now, is where we come forward in to the present day, how would you, if you were addressing your constituents with regard to the protection of the coast, what recommendations would you make to them, as to what they can do to protect the coast?

Lois Capps: Maybe I'll just rephrase some of what I said at this year's Earth Day Celebration, to which about 38,000 people came again. It's a lot of people, because this is a movement that has not died off, it's, I believe, only gotten stronger over time.

Lois Capps: We have seen other disasters unfold, other events take place which threaten our way of life, our health and our livelihood, because of what the impacts are to our environment. As I reminded those folks in this very celebratory the gathering that we see the demonstrations of how much progress has been made in clean cars and buildings and people are celebrating.

Lois Capps: I always want them to make, to focus their energies as well, on making sure that policies are implemented and stay strong to put teeth into the movement, to give voice to, in legislative ways, to, to their enthusiasm about protecting the environment.

Lois Capps: And I reminded them of, that what we see today in the United States House of Representatives, fortunately not in the Senate as yet, is a strong reaction against the very protections that were put into place because of this bill in 1969.

Lois Capps: 1969 was terrific catalyst in to a whole set of regulations, we had none before then. The Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, NEPA, the National Environmental Policy Act, Act, and the Environmental Protection Agency that was created. You know we had the Love Canal, and Cuyahoga River, that were burning.

Lois Capps: We had so many events at that time, that gave strong reason for us to take legislative action, but now you know, the, we, we see a sort of a, a resurgence of a pushback against those, those actions, and I'm working in a climate that is very difficult in terms of protecting our environment.

Janet Bridgers: Uh, let me phrase it this way, when you have the opportunity to speak with the President, about how, what needs to be done, the single or the highest priorities in terms of protecting the coast, what, what will you say to him?

Lois Capps: Well, I have said this, and I, I, take great pride in the fact that this is a President who said and acted and urged us in Congress at the beginning of his administration, that this is going to be, this is the century of energy, to focus on energy as an economic driver for our entire country throughout this century.

Lois Capps: That if we will see that there's terrific competition in the area of energy. We will see that that the goals of being energy self sufficient, which has to do with our environment because that's the way we switch from being so dependent on fossil fuels and foreign countries that produce oil, which we use as our basis for energy now, that that is destructive not only to our environment but also to our national security, and since we only produce about 2% of the world's oil and consume about a quarter of it, we'll never get to that point of self sufficiency until we shift to clean energy.

Lois Capps: And that is the appropriate response to the spill in 1969, it is an appropriate response to where we want to be now, but we had this horrible event last year in the Gulf of Mexico and, we don't have the same outcry in terms of legislative needs today in fact what we've seen and, and the President isn't in favor of this, but the Congress, but the House of Representatives is now busy undoing those protections that were put into place now, then.

Lois Capps: In 1969 and in the 70s, so what we need today and what the President knows, is we need a restart of environmental protections, that will prevent future sp, uh, that will help us prevent future oil spills, and, and we need to go in a different direction.

Janet Bridgers: That, that's the questions...

00:08:49.13] Toby: Uh, you know what? There's only one other, and if you'd I, I'd, there's nothing that I could ask that would improve on what you already said, honestly.

Lois Capps: Well...

Toby: Except I do want the answer to the question addressed from Janet, and that is, what, in your opinion is the most ominous threat to the California coast, as we speak?

Lois Capps: Let me think for a minute how to phrase this. There is not one specific, well, let me talk for a second, I want to say actually it's climate change in many respects. So it's a combination of, and I haven't talked about this either...

Unnamed Lois Capps: There actually was a and maybe you and I know the reference in Ormond Beach Task Force yesterday that there's a new report out that the amount of sea level rise is gonna be higher, based on you know, their new modeling that they've done, I don't know if...

Lois Capps: Yes! I, uh, well, okay, say it again because then, and I'll answer it to you.

Toby: What, in your opinion is the most ominous threat to the California coastline?

Lois Capps: The most ominous threat to the California coastline is the threat and the real

presence and the existence of changes to our climate that have come about by us. That have, over the years, of our not paying attention to how we use energy and the fact that the way we use it has been destructive, of the climate, of the ozone layer. We are now beginning to see and are seeing it in dramatic ways throughout nature but how I'm so concerned, one of the ways I'm so concerned is the impact it's having on our ocean. The acidification of the ocean, the changing of the make up of the ocean, in the way that it can support the habitat there, which we are so dependent upon.

Lois Capps: We are dependent upon the ocean for our very lives, and we are really in a dangerous position when we allow the effects on the climate to continue, unmitigated and the, and and we're seeing the ocean rise. It's impacting parts of the world in very dramatic ways but it will impact the California coast line. There's no question.

Lois Capps: And we have a chance, we still have that window of opportunity through our behavior and through our, the laws that we use to guide our behavior, to lessen that impact and to allow, to allow the globe, this fragile globe that we inhabit, to heal itself the best it can, and with our help it can.

Lois Capps: But we are really at such a significant crossroads now and those of us who live on the coast have, I believe, a unique opportunity and a responsibility and it starts in the classroom that our we need to see this resource as the valuable part of our life that it is. The integral part of our very being as so important and we also need to see that we have such an important role in making sure that it is not damaged beyond repair.

Janet Bridgers: Toby:: Janet, did you ask, that was very nicely put. Did you ask the students in the gymnasium question?

Janet Bridgers: I changed it to the constituents.

Toby: May I?

Janet Bridgers: Sure.

Toby: One more.

Lois Capps: Oh yeah!

Toby: because you brought it up in your last...

Lois Capps: And actually I'd like to do something that touches on a classroom if that's what you're thinking.

Toby: Yes, that's where it's going to be, so imagine you're standing in front of a, in a gymnasium, in front of 500 high school students headed for college, and there was one or several pieces of advice, whether it's about activism or environmental concerns that you could give them, what would you say to that audience?

Lois Capps: Imagining my self addressing a, a several hundred high school students getting ready to go to college is a delightful thought because I used to work as a, in the schools as a school nurse. And I miss very much the energy that comes around being, that comes from being around young people. So I can hear myself saying to, I'm gonna start this over because I don't like the way it sounded.

Toby: Yeah.

Lois Capps: The image of being able to stand in front of about five or six hundred high school students is a delightful one for me, since I spent many years of my life in the school, in the schools, as a nurse, as a public health nurse, and miss very much the energy that young people have about life and I am so interested in they're being the future leaders which they will be and as they step away from the high school life and go on with their lives and see themselves in going on to school hopefully and continuing their education in some way, I want them to know that we are dependent on them to be the kind of leaders in their world.

Lois Capps: Where they see the value and the importance of the ocean in their lives and in our lives together and that they dedicate themselves in some way, whether it is through their occupation or their future lives in protecting that resource. And know that they have a very vital role to play and all the way from the occupation that they choose to engage in, which could be affected that way, but just in the way that they appreciate and value and work with the environment to protect it.

Toby: Perfect.

Lois Capps: Thank you.

Toby: Do you think I could ask just as a favor for Janet, because she's put so much work into this, may I take a photograph of the two of you?

Lois Capps: Oh sure.

Lois Capps: Do you think this'll be useful for your documentary? This is so fun for me.

Janet Bridgers: It is, of course it is.

Lois Capps: And how many interviews are you doing?

Toby: We're doing, including her, okay...

Janet Bridgers: And plus we had some from the previous documentary which was called Sand Sun Oil and Gas, and we had Linda Crop, Bob Sollen, Naomi Schwartz.

Lois Capps: Oh good!

Lois Capps: Oh these are the giants of this movement.

Janet Bridgers: Ellen Stern Harris? Did you know Ellen? She was from Beverly Hills and was called the mother of the Coastal Act. She went back to the very active from the late sixties on, to get passage of Prop 20.

Lois Capps: Oh, okay. Well, Sara Wan is in that generation as well. And Bob Sollen, oh yes, these were people, and the one person, Naomi Schwartz, she's a role model for me. Wonderful person and was on the first Coastal Commission. And she was a real leader in the movement in 1969. And then the whole group that started Goo.

Janet Bridgers: Yeah, we talked to them this week, and wonderful!

Lois Capps: Aren't they?

Janet Bridgers: Abe, Abe Powell--incredibly eloquent.

Lois Capps: Yes.

Janet Bridgers: And also Charlie Ekberg. Astoundingly eloquent.

Lois Capps: So good you got the real thing. And this is I guess maybe off the record, but, you know if you represent this district, this area in Congress...

[end of tape]