

Margaret Davidson

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4 **London: I am speaking with Margaret Davidson; she is director of NOAA**
5 **Coastal Services Center. She is located here in Charleston, SC. Thank you**
6 **for joining us this afternoon.**

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8 **Davidson:** Donna, it's my pleasure to be with you.
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10 **London: What is your vision for South Carolina over the next decade?**

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12 **Davidson:** My vision would be that SC more thoughtfully insures the economic
13 and environmental security of its citizens.
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15 **London: How would we go about making that happen?**

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17 **Davidson:** I think first, we first we would have to understand the complete
18 relationship between the fact that our economic well-being in our state
19 throughout its history has been predicated upon the use of natural resources and
20 that continues even until this day through all parts of SC. A more thoughtful
21 strategy around natural resources, development, exploitation and conservation
22 would in turn support our economic security.
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24 **London: Do you think that the general public in South Carolina**
25 **understands the close tie between natural resources and the economy?**

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27 **Davidson:** I think that's the great question because often what you hear in
28 popular press is that these are concepts that are not mutually dependent upon
29 one another. I think the general public is keenly aware of the richness of the
30 natural resources in SC but I don't think that they understand that our economy is
31 actually based on those very same resources that we enjoy on a personal basis
32 quite easily.
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34 **London: Are there specific issues that we need to be addressing to ensure**
35 **that we reach that understanding?**

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37 **Davidson:** Well, one of the things that I find most interesting is that if you look at
38 some of the information that is already available to us. For instance, there are
39 some geeky kind of folks who drill holes in trees to better understand the climate
40 record of those trees and down in the coastal plain we have cypress trees from
41 which we could get a 1,000 year climate record hot, cold, wet, dry. By doing so
42 we can understand the nature of SC. The fascinating thing is that record of wet
43 and dry, the wettest period of that 1,000 years was the period from the 50s to
44 80s, which was also a period of rapid development throughout South Carolina
45 both in the upstate and the low country. So, first of all I would submit that the
46 tremendous explosion and population growth over the last 20 to 30 years has

1 been predicated upon a presumption of the availability of water resources that
2 may never be met again.

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4 **London: What are the ramifications of this?**

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6 **Davidson:** Well, you put a large population that is very dependent upon water
7 as everything that has life is, in a setting in which we all probably are at the very
8 beginning of a relatively prolonged drought. So there are environmental
9 consequences to that drought. What happens to birds, bugs, bunnies, not to
10 mention the deer or the ducks, but what also happens to agriculture and
11 municipal water supplies in those drought situations? I think we should look over
12 at Georgia and what's taking place with regard to the drought and the Atlanta
13 drinking water situation and recognize that folks in Atlanta are not only concerned
14 but so are folks downstream in Apalachicola Bay, Florida. We should also not
15 only be aware of this situation because Atlanta wants a lot of the water from the
16 upstate of South Carolina but we are experiencing a drought as well in South
17 Carolina. I am at the coast and we are at the bottom of the watershed and you
18 may be dry in the upstate, but if you are dry in the upstate then we are going to
19 be really dry on the coast and that does have economic as well as environmental
20 consequences for all of us.

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22 **London: We're talking about quantity but what about quality of water and**
23 **what this means?**

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25 **Davidson:** Well if you have a diminished quantity then the likelihood of a
26 diminished quality of water is very high. I think that is a very important
27 consideration for us. The availability and the quantity of water is an issue of real
28 concern to SC and the Southeast. What precipitates from the sky is an issue that
29 we all need to be much more aware of.

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31 **London: Not to be an alarmist, but we hear some outstanding population**
32 **growth numbers coming our way, what does that mean and what should we**
33 **be doing to accommodate that growth?**

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35 **Davidson:** Well, I think we will see a resurgence of growth in SC and the
36 Southeast although in the last 20 years some of the population growth in the SE
37 has fallen off because most of the growth in the country has taken place in the
38 dry Southwest. The dry Southwest is in an incredibly deep drought and
39 demographers believe that a good bit of that population pressure will again begin
40 to shift back to the Southeast where there is a common presumption of the
41 availability of water resources so I think we will see another surge of population
42 growth in SC over the next two decades. At the same time, scientists believe not
43 only will we see a deepening of the drought, we will also see a greater frequency
44 and severity of not only droughts but floods and tropical storms like hurricanes.
45 So we will have more extreme events - wet, dry, hot, cold - and that has
46 economic ramifications for all of us in addition to which since I am in the deep of

1 the low country we need to be increasingly aware of the potential for an
2 acceleration and the rate of sea over rise and its implications for our physical as
3 well as our green infrastructure in South Carolina.

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5 **London: We have been hearing about climate change for numerous years**
6 **from scientists, why do you think it has taken us so long to finally get to**
7 **the point that we hear of it in mainstream conversations.**

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9 **Davidson:** Well, first let's understand the process by which we come to a
10 scientific consensus is itself a long, deliberative and thoughtful process and
11 anytime you try to get thousands of scientists to agree, that in itself is a complex
12 undertaking. The second part I would attribute to an old axiom--*everyone wants*
13 *to go to heaven, no one wants to die.* So, while there has been general
14 awareness in the scientific community about changes in historical climate
15 patterns, the changes in historical climate patterns have still been on a longer
16 time scale than changes in political patterns. I have yet to see a politician be
17 elected to office who stands up and says we have a real problem and we need to
18 raise taxes in order to address that problem.

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20 **London: How do you think that we should position ourselves to take**
21 **advantage of the opportunities presented by the new global economy and**
22 **still maintain our assets and our quality of life?**

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24 **Davidson:** Well as we started this center, Charleston, SC was recently
25 recognized by *Conde Nast Travel Magazine* as the #3 travel destination in the
26 US behind New York City and San Francisco. That's really quite remarkable if
27 you think about the population basis of both of those areas as compared to
28 coastal SC and that was domestic as well as international travel. So the travel
29 business, SC as a travel destination, SC as a recreation and tourism destination
30 is not a matter of projection. We do already know, the Strom Thurmond Institute
31 at Clemson University can tell us that the recreation and tourism industry is a
32 main support of the SC economy and it is predicated upon an availability and a
33 quality of natural resources. Folks come from all over the country and the world
34 and they have an expectation of what that landscape is going to provide them in
35 terms of visual and physical stimulation. That is money in the bank for us and we
36 need to recognize that and we need to protect it because it is indeed money in
37 the bank for SC. Every county in SC derives money from the tourism tax even if
38 nobody goes to their courthouse.

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40 **London: Do you believe that the next generation of South Carolinians will**
41 **be better off or worse off than current generations?**

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43 **Davidson:** Well, let's define what we mean by better off. If we are talking a
44 strict economic metric like annual income, well I think that remains to be seen. I
45 do note with some interest that Gizele Bundchen who is the world's foremost
46 supermodel recently stated that she was no longer going to take her money in

1 US dollars, that she wants it in Euros. I'm not sure what that indicates and
2 maybe it means nothing, but when supermodels and Warren Buffet start putting
3 their money into Euros and pulling them out of the US dollar, I think that it means
4 that we might want to envision a different image of America in the world economy
5 and SC, given our relative role in the US economy, needs to be much more
6 aware of what's happening with the US dollar as compared to other world
7 currencies.

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9 **London: What are the responsibilities of SC leaders to future generations?**

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11 **Davidson:** Well I think that I would like to see SC leaders recognize that
12 economic development it's not just old school economic development like
13 manufacturing although that still remains of some importance in SC, but there are
14 also new school economic opportunities. Environmental technologies have a lot
15 to offer SC. Distributive communications technologies, the World Wide Web and
16 some of the new virtual capabilities that are so increasingly accessible offer us a
17 way to reconfigure how we think about economic opportunities in SC, not just in
18 the population centers but perhaps distributed beyond the **I-shaped** corridor that
19 we currently associate with economic development in SC.

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21 **London: Do you think that we have the political will here in SC to**
22 **accomplish the ideas that you have noted today?**

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24 **Davidson:** I think the political will has never been the strongest attribute of SC
25 although we have been first to protest on many occasions. We have not been at
26 the head of the line in new strategies and new alternatives. Nonetheless, I do
27 think one of fascinating things about the shift is one of the population
28 demographics, of folks coming in from off and a change in the average age
29 suggests that we may be increasingly open to new ideas in SC. I think that is
30 promising. Many folks younger than me have a much more intrinsic sense of the
31 relationship between economic and environmental values than folks my age and
32 older.

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34 **London: Other ideas and concerns particularly important to you...on**
35 **which you would like to expand?**

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37 **Davidson:** We touched briefly on how much the climate is changing and what
38 are its impacts. One of the metaphors I often use with community and business
39 groups is one of the things we know for sure about life is that change is constant.
40 I believe that you have two ways of approaching change. You can embrace it or
41 you can resist it. But since I am a coastal person, I like to use the metaphor of
42 the surfer. If you are embrace change then you will get out and ride in front of
43 that wave and I will submit that is a far more enjoyable position to be in than to
44 be rolled by that wave. So for SC, I would like to think that the future is such that
45 we would be willing to embrace it and get ahead of the inevitable because I think
46 that's where our economic and environmental and indeed spiritual growth lies.