New Report Lays Out Tools for Communities Needing
to Reach Higher Ground in the Face of Climate Change

As the reality of human-driven climate change continues to unfold, communities across the United States will face a daunting challenge: the need to relocate to higher, safer, more secure areas less vulnerable to rising sea levels, storm surges, subsiding land, and thawing permafrost. A new report from the Center for Progressive Reform, *Reaching Higher Ground: Avenues to Secure and Manage New Land for Communities Displaced by Climate Change*, lays out strategies for adapting property law to support climate-induced relocation.

"We're already seeing communities displaced by climate impacts," said Robert Verchick, President of the Center for Progressive Reform and a co-author of the report. "The people of Newtok, Alaska and Isle de Jean Charles, Louisiana are facing the leading edge of the storm. Inevitably, many other U.S. villages, towns, and cities are going to have to relocate to avoid extreme flooding, sinking homes and businesses, deadly storm surges, and more."

Indeed, millions of Americans are in danger of being displaced by sea level rise before the end of the century. And while communities of all kinds face flood risks and worse, most of the people now dealing with climate change-induced relocation are Native Americans and Alaska Natives living close to coastal resources. As they plan for and undertake their moves, these communities are at the cutting edge of challenging legal and policy issues, particularly those involving land acquisition, governance, rights to evacuated property, and funding. The CPR report highlights tools uniquely available to Native communities in the United States, as well as those that all communities can access and use.

"Community displacements due to climate change are about so much more than moving possessions and finding new homes," said Maxine Burkett, a Member Scholar at CPR and a report co-author. "They uproot entire communities and tear at the fabric of life while threatening cohesiveness and culture, as well as doing harm to individuals, families, and businesses However, migrations and relocations don't have to be chaotic if communities have the funding and other resources needed to take advantage of tools for acquiring new land and reestablishing their communities in safer, more secure areas."

Because of the scale of community relocations and the nationwide scope of climate change impacts, federal leadership on adaptation and relocation efforts is imperative. Unfortunately, political will on the federal level dried up during the presidential transition period.

"Though the federal government must be a partner for long-term success in relocation and adaptation efforts, the current Congress and presidential administration show no signs of leadership in this area," said David Flores, Climate Adaptation Policy Analyst at CPR and a co-author of the report. "We've already seen high-level climate adaptation staffers reassigned to different responsibilities at the Environmental Protection Agency, an executive order rolling back crucial climate adaptation planning at federal agencies, and a proposed budget that will gut adaptation activities at the federal level. While the federal government turns its back on vulnerable American communities, other levels of government will need to fill the gaps to protect their residents, adapting property and land use laws to the reality of climate change and the need for adaptation and relocation of Native and non-native coastal communities."

The full text of the report is available at
http://www.progressivereform.org/ReachingHigherGround.cfm.

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