

Dan Rather Reports

Episode Number: 239

Episode Title: Pay Dirt

Description: Some farmers are worried that huge subsidies are a waste. A visit to the backwaters of Burma and taming Louisiana's wetlands.

PAY DIRT:

DAN RATHER (ON CAMERA)

GOOD EVENING FROM NEW YORK. THE OLD SAYING “LIVING IN HIGH COTTON” IS ESPECIALLY APPROPRIATE THIS YEAR FOR MANY OF AMERICA’S FARMERS. THE HIGH PRICE OF CROPS LIKE CORN AND WHEAT MEANS RECORD PROFITS FOR MANY WHO MAKE THEIR LIVING OFF THE LAND. AND CONGRESS IS HARD AT WORK ON A BILL THAT COULD MAKE THE GOOD TIMES EVEN BETTER. LAWMAKERS ARE CURRENTLY DEBATING THE FARM BILL, A NEARLY 300 BILLION DOLLAR PIECE OF LEGISLATION LOADED WITH A LITTLE SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE – ESPECIALLY SUBSIDIES – LOTS OF THEM – FOR FARMERS. EVERY FIVE YEARS WHEN THE FARM BILL COMES UP FOR RENEWAL, PARTISAN POLITICS SUDDENLY TAKE A BACKSEAT TO REGIONAL INTERESTS. BE THEY DEMOCRAT OR REPUBLICAN, BOTH PARTIES UNITE TO ENSURE THEIR FARMERS BACK HOME GET BILLIONS OF DOLLARS IN GOVERNMENT HAND-OUTS. BUT WITH FARM INCOME AT A RECORD HIGH, A NUMBER OF ECONOMISTS, ENVIRONMENTALISTS AND OTHER GROUPS ARE TEAMING UP WITH THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION TO CALL FOR FARM SUBSIDIES TO BE CUT BACK. ADD TO THAT GROUP AT LEAST ONE FARMER WHO GREATLY BENEFITS FROM THE PROGRAM, BUT JUST WISHES IT WOULD GO AWAY.

JOHN PHIPPS, FARMER

My name is John Phipps. And Jan and I are the sixth generation on this farm here in Central Illinois. And our seventh generation, our son, will be returning next year we hope.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

WE MET JOHN AND JAN PHIPPS AS THEY WERE FINISHING HARVESTING 17 HUNDRED ACRES, MUCH OF IT CORN THAT WILL BECOME SOMEBODY’S CORNFLAKES SOMEDAY. JOHN PHIPPS COULD BE THE POSTER CHILD OF THE AMERICAN FAMILY FARMER – HARD-WORKING, INDEPENDENT, PROUD.

PHIPPS

I love being part of a tradition. And part of a business that’s been going on for thousands of years. And in my family for hundreds.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

EXACTLY THE KIND OF PERSON SENATORS LIKE PAT ROBERTS, A REPUBLICAN FROM KANSAS, INVOKE WHEN THEY DEFEND THE FARM SUBSIDIES.

SENATOR PAT ROBERTS, KANSAS

They kept the dream alive. They get up at 5:30 in the morning. They often don't quit until 10 o'clock at night. They are working hard.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

DESPITE SOME MISHAPS --

JOHN PHIPPS

Broke a belt on the truck.

JAN PHIPPS

You what??

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

PHIPPS SAYS HE AND HIS WIFE ARE HAVING A GREAT YEAR.

PHIPPS

The happy thing is right now, it's really hard not to do well when beans are \$10 and corn is pushing four. It's just – it's a real struggle to lose money under these conditions.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THE PHIPPS WILL EARN \$225,000 THIS YEAR, MORE THAN MOST SMALL FARMERS. THEN THERE'S WHAT THEY GET FROM THE GOVERNMENT.

PHIPPS

I just got a check in October for another \$30,000. So, it's just – it just shows up. I get \$25 an acre for having a temperature somewhere close to 98.6. My personal best, or worst if you wanna look at it in this way, I believe it was in 2004, when prices were very low, but the government sent me \$142,000. I was – that's a staggering amount of money. I'm a well educated, middle aged, never been discriminated against, perfectly competent, healthy American. And all the other Americans chipped in and sent me \$140,000.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

PHIPPS GETS MONEY WHEN THE MARKET PRICE OF HIS CROPS DIPS BELOW THE GOVERNMENT'S TARGET. THIS YEAR, CORN'S WELL ABOVE ITS TARGET, BUT HE STILL GOT A CHECK. IT'S CALLED A DIRECT PAYMENT, AN ANNUAL AUTOMATIC ALLOWANCE THAT GOES OUT TO THE BIG FIVE – THAT'S THE WHEAT, RICE, SOYBEAN, COTTON AND CORN FARMERS – NO MATTER WHAT. THE OTHER FARMERS DON'T GET THEM.

PHIPPS

It's not all farmers. It's just out of the 200 crops we grow in America, a handful of us have the political where with all to extort, well that's not far, extract this money directly. And I can get it straight from Kansas City. I have a direct tap into the vein of the US Treasury. And I can extract that money straight to my account. And I do.

KEN COOK, PRESIDENT OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL WORKING GROUP

I think -- in a time when commodity prices are so strong and we have so many other needs, so many pressing budget demands -- for education and health care and all kinds of other purposes, I think it is a rip off to be sending checks to people automatically regardless of whether they need it or not.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

KEN COOK IS PRESIDENT OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL WORKING GROUP, A WASHINGTON DC ADVOCACY ORGANIZATION.

RATHER

This is a banner year for crops is it not?

COOK

Unbelievable, yeah.

RATHER

Corn for example if making \$4.00 a bushel? Well-- why are the direct payments to farmers-- and some of this money goes as direct payments, which cost taxpayers, what about \$5 billion a year?

COOK

Just about \$5 billion, a little more.

RATHER

Why are they necessary?

COOK

Well, that's a good question. That's been a big political issue in this Farm Bill debate. These direct payments are automatic payments. They were put in place ten years ago as a way to wean farmers off of farm subsidy payments-- during the Newt Gingrich Congress. And, what happened was the exact opposite. Farmers got addicted to them. It was sort of like trying to get someone off of heroin and only to find them getting stuck on methadone.

RATHER

What are some of the outrages?

COOK

Well, I think some of the outrages are farm subsidy payments going to people who live in the middle of the biggest cities in the country who have never set down their rear end on a tractor seat, who have nothing to do with agriculture, who happen to own the right land, and therefore, they get a subsidy payment. Or payments to very wealthy individuals. There's one gentleman who is reputedly worth four or five hundred million dollars. Owns office buildings all over Tampa and Clearwater, he's one of the top farm subsidy recipients in the country because he also owns a lot of farm land.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THAT MAN IS MAURICE WILDER. HE RECEIVED THE MOST OF ANY INDIVIDUAL IN THE COUNTRY-- 3 MILLION DOLLARS BETWEEN 2003 AND 2005. IN A PHONE INTERVIEW, HE SAID HE SHOULD NOT BE GETTING SUBSIDIES WHEN CORN IS FETCHING AS HIGH A PRICE AS IT IS NOW. COOK SAYS THE FARM LOBBY HAS PUSHED HARD TO KEEP THE SUBSIDIES IN PLACE.

COOK

I'm always amazed at how resourceful the subsidy lobby is at hanging on to that money. These farm lobbyists are very good. They're entrenched. They make important campaign contributions. They turn out the vote from the farm – audience that they represent.

RATHER

You mentioned the farm lobby. First of all, as Butch Cassidy said to the Sundance Kid, "Who are these guys?"

COOK

Well, they're-- they're very skilled-- very experienced-- lobbyists for the cotton industry, the corn industry, rice growers, wheat. They all have their lobbyist in town. And, they have a lot of intensity about these programs. They--

RATHER

They also have a lot of money?

COOK

They have a lot of money. They're just very good at their work. And, they're-- very much able to get access to leadership, to the agriculture committees.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

WE SAW FOR OURSELVES THE ACCESS THAT THE FARM LOBBY GETS TO LAWMAKERS. ALL THESE LOBBYISTS GATHERED LATE ONE OCTOBER NIGHT IN THE RUSSELL CAUCUS ROOM, JUST STEPS AWAY FROM WHERE SENATORS ON THE AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE WERE HASHING OUT THE FARM BILL.

MARY KAY THATCHER, , LOBBYIST FOR THE FARM BUREAU

The wheat growers are here, there's rice, there's the dairy folks there's farmers union, some of my colleagues at the Farm Bureau.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

MARY KAY THATCHER IS ONE OF 17 LOBBYISTS WITH THE FARM BUREAU, ONE OF THE OLDEST AND MOST INFLUENTIAL FARMERS GROUPS.

THATCHER

So if you look around the room you can find producers of all kinds of commodities as well as mostly their lobbyists that work here in Washington trying to make sure that the amendments that get offered are good for our organizations.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AMONG HER PRIORITIES, PRESERVING THOSE DIRECT PAYMENTS.

RATHER

True or false, taxpayers will spend five billion dollars in direct payments to farmers?

THATCHER

That's correct. It's five billion dollars a year. We're projecting that farmers and ranchers, through the farm program and the Farm Bill, will get on average about seven billion dollars a year-- over the next five years. It's somewhere in the range of about ten or 11 percent of the total spending of the Farm Bill. It's not a big piece.

RATHER

Boy, seven billion dollars a year would strike some people as a pretty big piece.

THATCHER

If you ask consumers time and time again, they'll tell you, "We think our farmers are hard-working. We think they deserve help. We want to make sure that as much of our produce and products here can be produced locally instead of having to import them. We've lived with the problems of having to rely on foreign oil, we don't want to have foreign food supplies. They're supportive of that.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AS THATCHER WORKED THE ROOM, SENATOR LUGAR A REPUBLICAN FROM INDIANA ATTEMPTED TO CUT BACK THE DIRECT PAYMENTS AND USE THE MONEY TO FUND FOOD STAMP PROGRAMS INSTEAD.

SENATOR LUGAR, INDIANA

This Selective subsidy program which goes only to certain farmers who grow certain crops was never meant to be permanent and I will say it's a likely place for an offset.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

HERE'S HOW HIS COLLEAGUES RESPONDED.

SENATE VOTING ON THE FARM BILL

Mr Coleman? Mr. Coleman –no. Mr. Crapo? Mr. Crapo – no. Mr. Thune? Mr. Thune – no. Mr. Baucus? Mr. Baucus – no.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THE FINAL- VOTE 17-4.

ROBERTS

Thankfully this bill does not cut direct payments. And I know that direct payments may seem like an easy target, or a bank, for some, but to those in the fields, our farmers, the direct payment program helps them produce the safest, most abundant food supply in the world.

PHIPPS

It's about political clout. And we're really good at walking into Washington and we're doing it right now. As we speak, people will,-- are in the process of negotiating and we're telling Congress what we will and won't tolerate. Astonishing. Think of any other industry that has that kind of where-with-all.

RATHER

I'm told that the Farm Bureau and its allies are so strong that, in many cases, they actually write the bills in subcommittee and in committee. They're in there writing the bills that they favor. The Congressman says, "Fine. If the Farm Bureau's for it, I'm for it. Send it through."

THATCHER

I wish that was the case. We're ranked very high. When Forbes does their ratings, we're about the 15th most influential group in the nation. We rank right up there with the Rifle Association and AARP. But, unfortunately, we don't get to write the bills.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

BUT THEY'RE IN A POSITION TO INFLUENCE THE OUTCOME.

THATCHER

We work very closely with the staff members for the committee or the personal staff members to try to say this won't work, or here's a problem, or have you thought about this.

RATHER

Critics say-- this is not news to you-- that this is far too expensive and it's a waste of taxpayer money, that it's a classic case of a giveaway based on heavy lobbying and-- and political imperatives, rather than good policy. To that, you say what?

THATCHER

Well, I say that I think that not everything we do in domestic policy may seem like good policy. But you have to remember that we're very closely tied to a world market. We don't produce just for our people here. In fact, we send somewhere in the range of about a third of our products overseas, depending on which commodity you're talking about. And when you look at other countries, most of them subsidize even more than we do. So we have to do some things in our farm programs to make sure that our farmers can continue to compete with farmers around the world.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THE SUBSIDIES ARE SUPPOSED TO HELP SMALL FARMERS.

COOK

For some small farmers, they're very important. But, for most they don't really constitute a very big factor. What we see is the big farm operators getting most of the money. And as a result they kind of squeeze out the smaller operators.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AND PHIPPS SAYS THE GOVERNMENT PAYMENTS DRIVE UP HIS OPERATING COSTS.

PHIPPS

Seed prices have gone up 20 percent. Fertilizer, seed, chemicals are all shooting through the roof because the sailor's in town and they've got money.

RATHER

So, how did we get to this point? Give me at least a brief history.

COOK

Well, it started back in the 1930's during the Great Depression. It was a terrible period for-- everyone involved in farming. One of the first groups Franklin Roosevelt tried to help to pull the country out of a depression was farmers. We put in programs that would take a little land out of production to try and raise the price of farm commodities. But over time those programs have developed their own deep roots.

RATHER

Well, at the time Franklin Roosevelt did this-- some people-- the republican party not confined to the republican party said it was quote, "socialism."

COOK

Of course they did.

RATHER

Big government-- getting in to things. But, we've reached the point now, here in the 21st century, it's republicans as well as democrats support these subsidies. Do they not, or am I wrong about that?

COOK

No, it's-- it's very much a-- a bipartisan structure that supports these programs. And, it may not be socialistic but we still have five year plans. We call them a farm bill. And, every five years you see republicans and democrats from farm country where the subsidy flows are so important to them politically, coming together, putting their other political differences aside and seeing if they can't ram through yet another five year farm bill that will maintain the status quo.

THATCHER

Farmers and ranchers are pretty amazing people. They're very politically active.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THATCHER IS OPTIMISTIC HER LOBBYING ON BEHALF OF FARMERS WILL PAY OFF.

RATHER

Well, now, when it comes to the Farm Bureau, what are your hopes for the 2007 bill? It's already passed the House. We'll see whether it gets through the Senate or not, but the odds are it's gonna get through the Senate.

THATCHER

Our first hope is we get it done and we get the President to sign it.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

BUT PHIPPS SAYS HE HOPES THE PRESIDENT WILL VETO THE BILL IF IT CONTINUES TO GIVE PEOPLE LIKE HIM MONEY. IN FACT, NEXT YEAR HE'S GIVING HIS SUBSIDIES AWAY TO CHARITY.

PHIPPS

Why not a safety net for everybody, why just for me? What is it that makes me so wonderful that I need a safety net that's not available not only to other Americans in different occupations, but other farmers who don't happen to grow one of the five major crops.

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

REFORMING THE FARM BILL HAS BEEN CALLED THE "DOMESTIC VERSION OF THE ARAB ISRAELI PEACE PROCESS." A DIFFICULT AND PERHAPS FUTILE ENDEAVOR. BUT THE BILL ISN'T JUST A DOMESTIC ISSUE. OUR SUBSIDIES CAUSE AN UPROAR ON MARKETS ALL OVER THE WORLD. LAST MONTH, THE WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION RE-AFFIRMED THAT US SUBSIDIES TO COTTON FARMERS BREAK INTERNATIONAL TRADE LAWS, PAVING THE WAY FOR FOREIGN COUNTRIES TO IMPOSE BILLIONS OF DOLLARS IN PENALTIES AGAINST THE UNITED STATES.
NOW, WHEN WE RETURN, WE GO UP THE RIVER INTO BURMA'S BLACK ZONE.

BURMA'S BLACK ZONE:

DAN RATHER (ON CAMERA)

SEVERAL WEEKS AGO, THE WORLD WATCHED IN HORROR AS SOLDIERS IN THE SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATION OF BURMA FIRED ON CIVILIANS AND BUDDHIST MONKS WHO WERE PEACEFULLY PROTESTING A REPRESSIVE DICTATORSHIP. WHEN WORD OF THE SLAUGHTER ON THE STREETS BEGAN LEAKING OUT TO THE WORLD, THE REGIME TRIED TO CUT OFF PRESS ACCESS, EVEN THE INTERNET, TO KEEP THE STORY QUIET. AND FOR THE MOST PART, IT WORKED. SOON THE WORLD'S ATTENTION TURNED ELSEWHERE AND THE LONG-RUNNING CIVIL WAR IN THIS NATION OF 47-MILLION STARTED AGAIN. HOME TO SEVERAL ETHNIC COMMUNITIES, BURMA, ALSO KNOWN AS MYANMAR, HAS BEEN EXPERIENCING A COMPLEX SET OF CONFLICTS BETWEEN ITS MILITARY REGIMES AND ETHNIC MINORITIES - OFF AND ON - FOR NEARLY SIX DECADES. DISPLACED OFF THEIR LANDS AND LONG DENIED EVEN THE MOST BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS, THESE ETHNIC GROUPS HAVE BEEN STRUGGLING TO SURVIVE THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT'S CAMPAIGN OF OPPRESSION. THIS CONFLICT IS BURMA'S FORGOTTEN WAR. PRODUCER MAYANK BUBNA TRAVELED TO THE THAI-BURMESE BORDER TO MEET THE KAREN, ONE SUCH ETHNIC GROUP WHOSE POPULATIONS HAVE BEEN STRUGGLING FROM WAR, NEGLECT AND UNDERDEVELOPMENT WITH NO LASTING PEACE IN SIGHT. AND WHAT WE ARE ABOUT TO SHOW YOU IN HIGH QUALITY, HIGH DEFINITION ARE IMAGES OF A PEOPLE LARGELY MADE REFUGEES IN THEIR OWN COUNTRY.

DAN RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THE SALWEEN RIVER SNAKES SOME 1,500 MILES THROUGH CHINA AND BURMA, AND FOR A SHORT STRETCH, SERVES AS THE FRONTIER BETWEEN BURMA AND THAILAND. IT IS AROUND THAT OVERGROWN 80 MILE STRETCH WHERE ONE OF THE WORLD'S LONGEST RUNNING CIVIL CONFLICTS CONTINUES TO RAGE. THIS IS THE SALWEEN RIVER. IN THESE JUNGLES ALONG THE RIVERS' BANKS, ARMED ETHNIC GROUPS CONTINUE TO WAGE A WAR AGAINST THE BURMESE MILITARY DICTATORSHIP. IT'S A BEAUTIFUL LAND, BUT IT'S NOT A PLACE OF PEACE. A GUN SHOT ECHOES OVERHEAD.

PETER THAY, KAREN SPOKESMAN

This side is Thailand side. Thailand checkpoint. And the other side is Burma Army outpost.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

OUR GUIDE INTO THIS DANGEROUS REGION IS PETER THAY. HE IS A KAREN ONE OF THE PERSECUTED ETHNIC GROUPS THAT HAVE FOUGHT THE BURMESE ARMY FOR DECADES. AND WE ARE HEADING INTO THE JUNGLE TO SEE THE PLIGHT OF HIS PEOPLE FIRSTHAND.

THAY

Burma Army outpost. Small outpost. Around 10 soldiers here. They planted so many landmines up that mountain, those mountains there.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

IN ADDITION TO THE BURMESE ARMY, THE THAI ARMY PATROLS THE SALWEEN RIVER. THAILAND IS ALREADY HOME TO AN ESTIMATED 3 MILLION BURMESE REFUGEES AND THESE CHECKPOINTS ARE TO MAKE SURE THAT BURMA'S VOLATILITY DOESN'T OVERWHELM THAILAND. A FEW HOURS UPRIVER WE ARRIVED AT A KAREN REFUGEE CAMP. IT IS LESS THAN A YEAR OLD. PETER GAVE US A TOUR OF THE CAMP. BUT THE FIRST ORDER OF BUSINESS, DELIVERING SWEETS TO THE CAMP'S CHILDREN. AND IN THE AFTERNOON MONSOON RAINS, HE INTRODUCED US TO SOME OF THE REFUGEES WHO HAVE SUFFERED GREATLY UNDER THE BURMESE MILITARY REGIME.

THAY

So they killed her husband. After that they destroyed all her property, burnt down the house. At present, she will stay here. If there is no civil war, she will go back to her own land.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THIS VILLAGER SAYS HE WAS PRESSED INTO SERVICE BY THE BURMESE ARMY.

THAY

They have to travel around the jungles. He must carry bullets, bombs and sometimes they must carry food. Some people could not walk. Some soldiers beat them or kicked them. Prisoner porters if they could not walk, they kill on the spot by the troops.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THE BURMESE REGIME HAS GIVEN ITS ARMY A NAME THAT MASKS ITS BRUTALITY. BELIEVE IT OR NOT IT'S CALLED THE STATE PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL OR SPDC. THIS FATHER OF SIX SAYS HE RAN INTO THE SPDC WHEN HE WAS RETURNING TO HIS VILLAGE.

THAY

He met SPDC troops on the way and shot him.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

HE WAS HIT FOUR TIMES. ONE BULLET STRUCK HIS LEFT EYE.

THAY

So he could not walk very well, but he ran hiding. And he met some of his friends, looking for him also. So they bring him to the village again. So whoever they see in the jungle, they shot. Not only he ... everybody.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THESE ARE JUST A FEW VOICES IN A CHORUS OF HUMAN MISERY.

DEREK MITCHELL, CENTER FOR STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL
STUDIES ASIA EXPERT

There are 300,000 internally displaced Karen. There are 100,000 displaced Karen in Thailand along the border, in the refugee areas.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

DEREK MITCHELL WAS THE PENTAGON'S SENIOR ADVISER ON ASIA AND PACIFIC AFFAIRS DURING THE CLINTON ADMINISTRATION. HE IS NOW A SENIOR FELLOW AT THE CENTER FOR STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES AND HAS WORKED ON DEMOCRACY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS IN BURMA.

RATHER

What's the single most important thing you should know about what's happening in the country that most of the world still refers to as Burma?

MITCHELL

Burma has suffered for decades. In a very resource-rich environment, in a place that should be the rice bowl of Asia, that was a British colony, educated society, spoke English, had all the benefits of colonization from the British in fact in '47, '48, but because of incompetence and brutality of the military over the past 45 years, you have a place that is one of the 10 least-developed countries in the world. It's a tragedy. The people are peaceful, Buddhist, they have a desire for freedom and democracy, they've shown that in the street, and yet the brutality and oppression of the military has kept them down and kept them underdeveloped.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THIS VIDEO WAS TAKEN BY A HUMAN RIGHTS GROUP, CALLED THE FREE BURMA RANGERS. THEY SAY IT SHOWS THE SCORCHED EARTH STRATEGY THE BURMESE ARMY USES TO SUBDUED ETHNIC MINORITIES WHO CHALLENGE THE JUNTA'S AUTHORITY.

RATHER

How brutal has it been?

MITCHELL

It's about as brutal as it can get in Burma. There is no method that they will not inflict upon their people in order to gain control and intimidate. They rule by fear. It is a military dictatorship that rules fundamentally by fear and oppression. When they go in to any of the ethnic areas they will brutalize them, humiliate them, torture them, and otherwise try to undermine their will to resist and to conform to the leadership of this dictatorship.

RATHER

Specifically, what kind of tactics has the military used to put down this movement?

MITCHELL

They've used every bit of brutality. They drive all the people out of the villages. They put them in restricted areas. They take all the food and ransack, and then they put landmines around it and tell people this is a zone that if you go anywhere near, we will shoot you. We will kill you.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

SO TENS OF THOUSANDS OF KAREN HAVE FLED THEIR VILLAGES TO REFUGEE CAMPS LIKE THIS, WHERE THEY WAIT... AND HOPE THEY CAN ONE DAY RETURN HOME. JUNGLE LIVING IS DIFFICULT, BUT VILLAGERS HAVE MANAGED TO CARVE OUT A COMMUNITY FREE FROM THE CONTROL OF THE BURMESE REGIME. AS NIGHT FALLS, LIFE CONTINUES BY CANDLELIGHT. THE RADIO IS A LINK TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD. AND TONIGHT IT BRINGS NEWS OF THE LATEST BLOODY CLASH BETWEEN BURMA'S MILITARY AND ITS PEOPLE. CHILDREN, WHO HAVE NEVER SEEN A DAY OF PEACE IN THEIR LIVES, DOODLE IN SCHOOL BOOKS. THEIR DRAWINGS – OF PEOPLE BEING KILLED AND VILLAGES BEING DESTROYED BY THE BURMESE GOVERNMENT -- ARE STARK REMINDERS OF A PLACE THAT KNOWS NO PEACE. WOMEN PREPARE FOOD FOR THE NEXT DAY – THIS HARVEST FROM A NEIGHBORING FIELD AND FRUITS PLUCKED OFF OF TREES WILL FEED SEVERAL MOUTHS. WITHIN A FEW HOURS THE DENSE FOGS RECEDES, HERALDING A NEW DAY. THE CYCLE OF IDLING CONTINUES. BUT THERE IS A TENSION HERE.

THAY

They use this kind of guns for a long time, since Second World War now. Is it good, is it effective? Yeah, very good one.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

PETER THAY, OUR GUIDE TO THE CAMP, EXPLAINS HOW THE KAREN DEFEND THEMSELVES AGAINST THE BURMESE ARMY.

THAY

Inside security is every man, they have full responsibility to take care of the families. If something's wrong, they strike the bamboo bell - glong, glong, glong, glong, glong. Then everybody will wake up. That means something's wrong in the village.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

OUTSIDE OF THE VILLAGE, SECURITY IS PERFORMED BY KAREN REBEL FORCES. AND THEY'VE BEEN SUCCESSFUL.

THAY

So that's how we just come here, Mae Sem Lep here, this morning. There are you see all the red points are outposts of SPDC. Our camp is here and here. They are just around the camp. White is under the control of Burma Army. Brown is both sides. Burma Army or resistance groups can go. But black side is only resistance group.

RATHER

This area along the Thai border with Burma, where we have our reporting and pictures from, that's a black area?

MITCHELL

That's a black area. That's an area where troops go back and forth, where there's cross border fighting historically, this is where in the jungles where folks don't retreat. Where they don't give up because they feel they can get along in the jungle. This is the need to be pacified area in their view.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

BURMA'S "BLACK ZONE" DOES NOT EXIST ON ANY OFFICIAL MAP, BUT ITS BOUNDARIES AND THE DANGERS OF CROSSING THEM ARE WELL KNOWN.

THAY

SPDC planted landmines around the area. We Karen also, with concerns of security purposes, we planted landmines around the camp. That means now quite dangerous area.

RATHER

Now the ethnic-based rebels, they use landmines as part of their operations, do they not?

MITCHELL

Yes.

RATHER

Has it worked or has it been counterproductive?

MITCHELL

I'm sure they've worked in certain ways. But you know, once you lay a landmine, you got to find it. And if you put it in a place where you need to go back or need to develop your society, develop that land. That's a problem.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AND MITCHELL ALSO SAYS THAT THE KAREN HAVE BEEN HURT BY THEIR OWN LANDMINES.

MITCHELL

There have been documented cases where the Burmese regime, in order to make sure their core troops are safe, they cashier people from villages and put them at the front, go into areas where there are landmines, and clear them. By-- in that way, so people get blown up. That's their way of both brutalizing, pacifying, and taking care of their own interests.

RATHER

How can they do that to their own people?

MITCHELL

This is a regime that doesn't care about individual human life. This is a regime that's hardened to violence and hardened to brutality. So, I don't think they have any problem with shoot-to-kill. They don't have a connection to the people at large. They feel they are doing something for the greater good, in their view of stability of the country, and also maintain their power, and therefore they will do whatever it takes.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THE FOLLOWING DAY, WE WENT UPRIVER ALONG WITH A KAREN MEDICAL TEAM TO DELIVER MEDICAL SUPPLIES TO ANOTHER CAMP. AS WE CROSSED RIVERS AND THICK FORESTS TO TREK DEEPER INTO BURMA, WE CAME ACROSS WRENCHING FRESH EVIDENCE OF THE FEAR AND DESPERATION BURMA RULING JUNTA HAS WROUGHT ON ITS ETHNIC MINORITIES. IN A SMALL CLEARING, YOUNG KAREN CHILDREN EMERGED FROM THE JUNGLE. THEY WERE FOLLOWED SOON BY ADULTS ON THE SAME PURPOSEFUL MARCH TO THE NEAREST REFUGEE CAMP. FURTHER INTO THE JUNGLE, WE ARRIVED AT A KAREN CONTROLLED SITE THAT HAD BEEN SET UP SPECIFICALLY FOR NEWLY DISPLACED PEOPLE.

THAY

62 families. 392 people here already.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

PETER SHOWED US A FIELD CLINIC THAT HAD BEEN SET UP TO PROVIDE BASIC MEDICAL CARE FOR THESE NEW REFUGEES. THERE'S A SCHOOL WITH A MAKESHIFT PLAYGROUND, THOUGH ABLE-BODIED ADULTS AND CHILDREN SPEND MUCH OF THE DAY GATHERING FOOD AND FIREWOOD FROM THE SURROUNDING HILLS. WE SPOKE TO SOME OF THE KAREN REFUGEES WHO ARRIVED AT THIS CAMP. THEY SAID IT TOOK A MONTH TO GET HERE.

THAY

When did you arrive at this camp? So they arrived here on Thursday evening. 4 days ago. 65 people, 30 children. So the SPDC troops, they blocked that road. They cut off that road. Whenever they see people in the jungle, they shot. They could not stay in that area. No more food. They have very hard to stay there, in that area. At the moment they stay here.

MITCHELL

We're dealing with a regime that's fundamentally paranoid, fundamentally distrustful of the outside world, has all the weapons, has all the means of sustaining its power. The people simply don't have that. So, what we need to do ideally is to keep a light shone on it.

RATHER

In your personal opinion, which is all you can give me, is this a moral question for the people of the United States?

MITCHELL

It is, in fact it's an easy moral question. There's no easier - in some respects - easier moral question than Burma. In a world where things are really very grey and difficult to decipher, good and bad and who's right and wrong. On the one hand you have Burmese Buddhist monks in the streets stepping out, knowing that they may be oppressed - a non-political entity saying enough is enough for the people that we serve, the spirituality that we represent. And on the other hand you have a junta that is uneducated, that does not know the world, that is isolated, that is paranoid, and that uses brutality to instill fear in order to rule. It's very, very easy. The longer term issue of how to make Burma whole and secure and developed and reconciled, that's a more complicated issue. But I think the Burmese people are ready for that, and I think they can do it, and I think Americans, who we are says "Give them a chance."

THAY

You know we're human being. Nobody will come here, or like to come here. Because they have their own property, they have their land. They would like to stay happily, even if they were poor. They don't care much, then poorness. But now they're not allowed to stand in their own lands. You can imagine. These kinds of governments I think, nobody wants anymore

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THESE SCHOOL CHILDREN ARE SINGING A KAREN NATIONAL SONG. IT'S AN EXPRESSION OF HOPE, BECAUSE ALL THEY KNOW IS THE SAD, FRIGHTENING, TRANSIENT LIFE OF AN EXILE. THE FUTURE OF THE KAREN AND BURMA'S OTHER ETHNIC MINORITIES IS UNCLEAR. MORE THAN A HALF MILLION HAVE BEEN DISPLACED. AND MANY OF THOSE ARE CHILDREN. AS WE DEPARTED FROM THE CAMP, WE LOOKED BACK AT THE SOLEMN FACES OF A PEOPLE MADE REFUGEES IN THEIR OWN HOMELAND.

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

IN THE WAKE OF THE RECENT PUBLIC CRACKDOWN BY THE BURMESE DICTATORSHIP AGAINST DEMOCRATIC PROTESTS, THERE HAS BEEN SOME MODEST NEW DIPLOMATIC AND ECONOMIC PRESSURE ON THE COUNTRY. CHINA, LONG ONE OF BURMA'S STRONGEST ALLIES, HAS REPORTEDLY BEEN WORKING BEHIND THE SCENES TRYING TO PRESSURE THE JUNTA TO MOVE TOWARDS SOME DEMOCRATIC REFORMS. MEANWHILE A UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS INVESTIGATOR VISITED BURMA AND WILL SOON ISSUE A REPORT. ONE OF BURMA'S BIGGEST EXPORTS HAS BEEN GEMS, BUT AFTER THE RECENT CRACKDOWN, MAJOR INTERNATIONAL JEWELERS LIKE TIFFANY AND CARTIER HAVE TOLD SUPPLIERS THEY WILL NO LONGER BUY FROM BURMA. WHEN WE RETURN, LOUISIANA'S DISAPPEARING WETLANDS...AND LESSONS FROM A DISTANT COUNTRY ON HOW TO SAVE THEM.

DAN RATHER (ON CAMERA)

OUR NEXT STORY TAKES YOU TO THE COAST OF LOUISIANA. THE DISTINCTIVE MARSH LANDS ALONG THE COAST ARE AS MUCH A PART OF THE BAYOU STATE AS JAZZ AND CRAWFISH. BUT THE WETLANDS, AS THEY ARE CALLED ARE DISAPPEARING RIGHT BEFORE OUR EYES. AND IF SCIENTISTS PROJECTIONS ARE CORRECT, LOUISIANA'S COASTLINE WILL MOVE INLAND BY MORE THAN 30 MILES IN SOME AREAS BY 2040. LOUISIANA'S WETLANDS ARE DISAPPEARING – SOME SCIENTISTS SAY AT THE STAGGERING RATE OF ONE FOOTBALL FIELD EVERY HALF HOUR. WHAT NATURE BUILT AND THE MISSISSIPPI MAINTAINED FOR MILLENNIA, MAN HAS DECIMATED IN A MATTER OF DECADES. AND WHEN HURRICANE KATRINA CAUSED TEN YEARS WORTH OF DAMAGE IN JUST ONE DAY, STRIPPING THE COAST OF EVEN MORE OF ITS NATURAL DEFENSES AGAINST ONCOMING STORMS, IT BECAME CLEAR THAT THE GULF'S VANISHING WETLANDS ARE A MATTER OF LIFE OR DEATH. NOW, THE U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS IS ABOUT TO UNVEIL WHAT THEY SAY IS A QUOTE “COMPREHENSIVE PLAN” TO SAVE THE COAST, BUT THEIR TRACK RECORD OVER THE LAST CENTURY HELPED CREATE THE PROBLEM IN THE FIRST PLACE. TONIGHT WE'RE GOING TO TAKE YOU TO THE FRONTLINES WHERE THE GULF WATERS ARE SLOWLY SWALLOWING THE LOUISIANA DELTA AND WE WILL GO TO A DISTANT COUNTRY THAT EXPERIENCED ITS OWN KATRINA MORE THAN 50 YEARS AGO. THEY LEARNED MAN COULDN'T CONQUER NATURE. IT'S AN OPEN QUESTION WHETHER THE GULF STATES WILL LEARN THAT LESSON.

MARK DAVIS, DIRECTOR OF THE INSTITUTE ON WATER RESOURCES LAW & POLICY, TULANE UNIVERSITY LAW SCHOOL

Louisiana has a very curious relationship with the environment. There are very few places where the community and the culture is as intertwined with that natural landscape. And there are very few places with the legacy of such ineffective stewardship

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

MARK DAVIS IS TULANE UNIVERSITY LAW SCHOOL'S DIRECTOR OF THE INSTITUTE ON WATER RESOURCES LAW & POLICY.

DAVIS

All the things that happened in Hurricane Katrina and Rita and collapse of our coast, it's really a function of how we manage water, or don't. And-- and that gets translated into laws so, for the most part, in order to save this place, it's not just science, it's not just engineering, it's really about law and policy.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THESE GRASSY MARSHES, OR WETLANDS, COVER THOUSANDS OF ACRES ALONG THE LOUISIANA COAST. SEDIMENT AND FRESH RIVER WATER FROM THE MISSISSIPPI MIXED WITH SALT WATER FROM THE GULF OF MEXICO COMBINE TO CREATE THIS VULNERABLE, YET VITAL ECO-SYSTEM. NOT UNTIL HURRICANE KATRINA DID THE LARGER PUBLIC REALIZE THE ROLE THAT COASTAL WETLANDS PLAY IN THE SAFETY OF SOUTHERN LOUISIANA. AND THAT THE CONSEQUENCE OF HAVING LOST 2,000 SQUARE MILES OF WETLANDS IN THE PAST CENTURY IS UTTER DEVASTATION. WITHOUT THE WETLANDS PROVIDING A BUFFER, HURRICANES NOW CAN BLAZE A STEADY PATH UP FROM THE GULF TO THE COAST WITH NOTHING TO SLOW THEM DOWN.

DAVIS

I think there's substantial agreement between the state, even the Corps and the science community on the elements of what you need to do. It's a question of what you, in fact, decide to do.

LANCE NACIO, LOUISIANA RESIDENT

We have this property that's been in my family for over 100 years.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

LANCE NACIO IS A LIFELONG SOUTHERN LOUISIANA RESIDENT.

NACIO

It's a shame to see what I saw in my lifetime. This was all land when I was you know, 20 years ago and now, you can see it's just open water. It's sinking. And we have areas where it used to have trees and hard land you could walk with tennis shoes. And now it's just duck ponds. It's open water and it's happening all over.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THE WETLANDS ARE SINKING AND HAVE BEEN FOR 10,000 YEARS. SEDIMENT LEFT BEHIND BY ANNUAL MISSISSIPPI FLOODS USED TO REPLENISH THE WETLANDS AND OFFSET THEIR SINKING. THAT FLOODING BENEFITED THE DELTA, BUT MADE LIVING HERE HAZARDOUS, IF NOT DEADLY. WITH THE 1928 FLOOD CONTROL ACT, THE U.S. GOVERNMENT TOOK CHARGE OF LEVEE CONSTRUCTION AND SEALED THE GREAT RIVER INTO HER BANKS, UNINTENTIONALLY CUTTING OFF THE NATURAL SEDIMENT AND NUTRIENT SUPPLY TO THE WETLANDS, STARVING THEM. BUT IT'S STILL ONLY PART OF THE PROBLEM.

NACIO

You'll see the cancer that's going on here in South Louisiana and it has a lot to do with all these manmade canals allowing the saltwater to go further and further into these estuaries.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

LEVEES STARVED THE WETLANDS, BUT MAN-MADE CANALS GUTTED THEM. ALONG THE GULF COAST, CANALS PLAY AN ESSENTIAL ROLE IN LOUISIANA'S ECONOMY. NAVIGATING THESE CANALS MAKES LIFE EASY FOR BOATERS, BUT IT ALSO MAKES IT EASY FOR SALT WATER TO CREEP UP FROM GULF OF MEXICO AND INFILTRATE THE NORMALLY BRACKISH WATERS OF THE WETLAND ESTUARIES. THE CHANGE IN THE WATER'S SALT CONTENT CAUSES A CHANGE IN THE KIND OF SPECIES THAT CAN SURVIVE IN THE NEW, SALTIER WATER.

NACIO

We used to have what is called bull tongue grass. It was native here and it's the one with the pretty white flowers you see scattered throughout. The land was covered with this bull tongue grass, and you know, in the past twenty years, it's changed from a bull tongue grass to this short grass called pifine.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

IT TOOK A NUMBER OF YEARS FOR THE SPECIES TO CROSS OVER FROM ONE TO THE OTHER AND IN THAT TIME, THE SOIL THAT LANCE'S BULL TONGUE GRASS HELD TOGETHER WASHED AWAY. THESE AERIAL PHOTOS DEMONSTRATE THE DRAMATIC LOSS SOME OF THE WETLANDS HAVE EXPERIENCED FROM 1952 TO 1976 TO 2001.

EDMOND RUSSO, PROJECT MANAGER FOR THE LOUISIANA COASTAL PROTECTION AND RESTORATION PLAN

The sustainability and the longevity of the wetlands have a very close relationship to the inhabitability of this area.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

EDMOND RUSSO IS AN ENGINEER WITH THE ARMY CORPS.

RUSSO

We're soliciting from the public what they believe would be important for us to investigate, put together in a coast wide comprehensive plan. And go back to them and show them how those work.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THIS IS A NEW WAY OF THINKING FOR THE CORPS – A SORT OF PUBLIC FORUM APPROACH TO SOLVING THE PROBLEM WITH WHICH THEY ARE FACED: HOW TO PREVENT THE CATASTROPHIC EVENTS FOLLOWING HURRICANE KATRINA FROM EVER HAPPENING AGAIN. ACTUAL PLANS WILL NOT BE REVEALED UNTIL THE END OF THIS YEAR, BUT THE CORPS HOPES TO FIND WAYS NOT ONLY TO PROTECT, BUT RESTORE THE LOUISIANA COAST.

IN ADDITION TO CONSULTING SCIENTISTS AND ENGINEERS WITHIN THE STATES, THE ARMY CORPS IS LOOKING ACROSS THE ATLANTIC TO THE UNDISPUTED MASTERS OF WATER MANAGEMENT – THE DUTCH. RICHARD JORISSEN IS THE FORMER DIRECTOR OF COASTAL AND MARINE MANAGEMENT FOR RIJKSWATERSTAAT, THE DUTCH EQUIVALENT OF THE US ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS.

RICHARD JORISSEN, FORMER DIRECTOR OF COASTAL AND MARINE
MANAGEMENT FOR RIJKSWATERSTAAT

There are a lot of similarities between our country and the Louisiana situation. It's a low lying country with some specific urban development, densely populated. Threatened by flooding from the river, from the sea, heavy rainfall.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THERE'S AN OLD DUTCH SAYING: "GOD CREATED THE WORLD, BUT THE DUTCH CREATED HOLLAND." IN THIS TINY COUNTRY, ONLY SLIGHTLY LARGER THAN THE STATE OF MARYLAND, 2/3RDS OF THE LAND IS AT OR BELOW SEA LEVEL. SO THE DUTCH WORK HARD TO MAXIMIZE THE AMOUNT OF LAND THAT IS AVAILABLE TO THEM. FOR GENERATIONS, PEOPLE HAVE CREATED THEIR OWN LAND BY RECLAIMING IT FROM ITS WATERY SURROUNDINGS – ERECTING BARRIERS AROUND A PLACE AND LIVING ON WHAT WAS ONCE SEA OR RIVER-BED. WHILE THIS LIFESTYLE WAS ALWAYS PRONE TO SOME FLOODING, 54 YEARS AGO, THEY LEARNED HOW TRULY DANGEROUS THIS PRACTICE COULD BE.

RIA GELUK, 1953 FLOOD SURVIVOR

The water came in so quickly. It was the first of February. It was cold. It was wet. It was rainy.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

RIA GELUK WAS ONE OF THE LUCKY SURVIVORS OF THE WORST DISASTER IN MODERN DUTCH HISTORY. IN THE WINTER OF 1953, HUGE STORMS COUPLED WITH HIGH TIDES DESTROYED MANY OF THE DIKES IN THE SOUTHWESTERN PART OF THE COUNTRY OVERNIGHT.

GELUK

We were warned, but nobody really left houses because nobody really knew what was going to happen. We hadn't had a flood in hundreds of years. So people – the only thing they did was climb upstairs and wait. Our barn, big barn, all of it destroyed, all the cattle drowned. We had cows, we had horses, we had chicken, the dog, everything was drowned. We were just lucky that the house was strong enough, the roof was good enough to keep us all. So that's how we survived.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

RECENTLY, RIA WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN OPENING A MUSEUM TO COMMEMORATE THE 1953 FLOOD IN ONE OF THE CEMENT CAISSONS USED, DECADES AGO, TO CLOSE THE LAST BREACH IN THE DIKE. DESPITE THE FLOOD AFFECTING MOSTLY RURAL REGIONS, THE WATER SPREAD SO FAR AND WIDE THAT IT CLAIMED MORE THAN 1,800 LIVES. IF RIA'S STORY SEEMS EERILY FAMILIAR, THERE'S A REASON. THE 1953 CATASTROPHE WAS TO THE DUTCH WHAT KATRINA IS TO US TODAY. THE DELTAWORKS INITIATIVE WAS THE DUTCH GOVERNMENT'S REACTION TO THE 1953 FLOOD, JUST AS THE US CORPS' COASTAL RESTORATION AND PROTECTION PLAN PROMISES TO BE A RE-THINKING OF WATER MANAGEMENT IN LOUISIANA. WITH THE DELTAWORKS PLAN, THE NETHERLANDS ESTABLISHED A STANDARD UPON WHICH ALL THE DIKES WERE MEASURED, COUNTRY WIDE. ADDITIONALLY, THEY CHOSE TO SEAL OFF THEIR COAST IN A CONNECT-THE-DOTS FASHION, PRECISELY IN THE AREA THAT HAD FLOODED IN 1953. IN ESSENCE, THEY FABRICATED AN ARTIFICIAL COASTLINE THAT WOULD, IN TURN, PROTECT THE ACTUAL COASTLINE BEHIND IT.

JEAN-MARIE STAM, PROGRAM MANAGER FOR RIJKSWATERSTAAT

This is the area where the main part of the Deltaworks is constructed.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

JEAN-MARIE STAM MANAGES THE EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION BETWEEN THE DUTCH AND THE U.S.

STAM

It includes a series of compartmentalization dams, a series of closure dams and storm surge barriers.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THIS AMBITIOUS PLAN TOOK NEARLY 50 YEARS, AND APPROXIMATELY 15 BILLION DOLLARS TO COMPLETE AND INCLUDES SOME OF THE MOST SOPHISTICATED WATER MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES IN THE WORLD. BUT BUILDING SOLID WALLS ACROSS A COAST IS NOT ALWAYS THE BEST OPTION. ROTTERDAM, EUROPE'S LARGEST SHIPPING PORT, NEEDED OPEN ACCESS TO AND FROM THE SEA. SO THE FINAL PROJECT OF THE DELTAWORKS, AND BY FAR THE MOST ADVANCED, WAS THE MAESLANT BARRIER. RICHARD JORISSEN EXPLAINS HOW THIS MASSIVE CONSTRUCTION, CONSISTING OF TWO GATES EACH THE SIZE OF THE EIFFEL TOWER, OPERATES.

JORISSEN

The way it works is that in case of a threatening storm surge, the barrier is closed before by floating these two rotating doors into the river and lower them and rest on the river bed. And therefore it prevents the flood from entering the estuary, reducing the affect of a storm surge in the river system.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THE DELTAWORKS PRIMARY CONCERN WAS THE SEA, BUT IN THE MID-1990'S IT WAS WATER FROM THE RIVER THAT RAISED CAUSE FOR CONCERN WHEN IT CLIMBED TO A DANGEROUSLY HIGH LEVEL AND SPILLED OVER THE TOP OF THE DIKES. SO AGAIN, THE DUTCH GOVERNMENT TOOK ACTION. BUT THIS TIME, THEIR APPROACH WAS MUCH DIFFERENT. INSTEAD OF CONTROLLING WATER LEVELS BY BUILDING HIGHER OR FORTIFIED MAN-MADE STRUCTURES AS THEY HAD IN THE PAST, THE DUTCH DECIDED TO RELINQUISH SOME OF THEIR HARD FOUGHT LAND TO THE WATER. ASTRID STOKMAN, WHO SITS ON THE BOARD OF RIJKSWATERSTAAT'S "ROOM FOR THE RIVER" PROGRAM COMMITTEE EXPLAINS.

ASTRID STOKMAN

For centuries we were very fixed on controlling nature, we build our land, for a large part. And we did that. And we got very far in forcing the water into where we wanted it to be. We got to the limit. We have to move more along with nature, instead of against nature.

STAM

I think what people are trying to convey here is that flood protection, flood management, is not only setting up a couple of levies and storm surge barriers, but also where necessary measures like re-construction of wetlands and also a whole institutional framework of acts and laws. So that has taken us 50 years to get that in place. It's the whole thing, not only just a couple of storm surge barriers.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

BUT BACK IN LOUISIANA, LONGTIME WATCHERS OF THE DISAPPEARING WETLANDS WORRY THAT THE LESSONS MAY NOT TURN INTO LAW FOR THEM.

DAVIS

That's what people have to understand. That there is no stand-pat option. You either choose one path and you hope it's the one to a better future, or you're on the path to essentially losing it all.

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

IN ADDITION TO STORMS, FLOODS, LEVEES, AND CANALS, THERE IS ANOTHER LOOMING THREAT TO LOUISIANA'S WETLANDS: RISING WATERS IN THE GULF OF MEXICO. BUT THE CAUSE FOR THIS IS NOT LOCAL, IT'S GLOBAL. WE HAVE REPORTED EXTENSIVELY ON THIS PROGRAM ABOUT THE MELTING GLACIERS OF GREENLAND, AND THE DISAPPEARING POLAR ICE CAP THAT HAS OPENED UP THE NORTHWEST PASSAGE. WHERE ONCE THERE HAD BEEN ICE ON THIS CHANNEL BETWEEN THE PACIFIC AND ATLANTIC, NOW THERE IS OPEN WATER. THERE HAS BEEN FIERCE DEBATES, ESPECIALLY IN THE UNITED STATES, ABOUT HOW MUCH HUMAN ACTIVITY IS RESPONSIBLE FOR RISING TEMPERATURES. BUT NOW A FINAL REPORT BY THE UNITED NATIONS INTERGOVERNMENTAL PANEL ON CLIMATE CHANGE, A GROUP OF THOUSANDS OF SCIENTISTS FROM 130 COUNTRIES, HAS PUT THE STAKES IN SHARP RELIEF.

THE PANEL, WHICH SHARED THE NOBEL PEACE PRIZE WITH AL GORE, WARNS OF RISING SEA WATERS AND MASS EXTINCTIONS. AND IT SAYS THE WORLD MUST ACT IMMEDIATELY TO STAVE OFF A WORST CASE SCENARIO. IF GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS ARE NOT SIGNIFICANTLY CUT BY 2015, IT SAYS THE RESULTS ON THE CLIMATE WOULD LIKELY BE CATASTROPHIC. THE NORMALLY CIRCUMSPECT U.N. SECRETARY GENERAL BAN KI-MOON GREETED THE REPORT WITH STRONG STATEMENTS OF HIS OWN. CLIMATE CHANGE, HE SAID, WAS QUOTE "THE DEFINING CHALLENGE OF OUR AGE". AND HE CALLED OUT THE UNITED STATES AND CHINA TO DO MORE. TO CONFRONT THIS CHALLENGE WILL REQUIRE A MAJOR RETHINK IN HOW WE AS A NATION AND AS A WORLD VIEW ENERGY. ONE TARGET WILL HAVE TO BE AUTOMOBILE EMISSIONS, AND THIS LEADS TO AN INTERESTING POLITICAL CONUNDRUM. POLITICIANS, ESPECIALLY THOSE RUNNING FOR PRESIDENT, HAVE DECRIED HIGH GASOLINE PRICES. YET, ESPECIALLY ON THE DEMOCRATIC SIDE, THEY ALSO HAVE SPOKEN ON THE NEED FOR THE UNITED STATES TO TAKE THE LEAD IN CUTTING GREENHOUSE GASSES. HOWEVER, IT HAS BEEN HIGH GAS PRICES THAT HAVE LED AMERICANS TO BUY MORE FUEL EFFICIENT VEHICLES. HOW SHOULD ENERGY BE PRICED? AND WHAT RESPONSIBILITY WILL WE AS INDIVIDUALS, AS A NATION, AND AS WORLD CITIZENS BE WILLING TO TAKE? QUESTIONS, THAT ACCORDING TO SOME OF THE BEST SCIENTIFIC MINDS AROUND THE GLOBE, WE WILL HAVE TO ANSWER...AND ANSWER SOON. FOR HDNET, DAN RATHER REPORTING. GOOD NIGHT.