Jim Cason, the GOP mayor of Coral Gables, Florida, wants us to talk about climate change:

“‘We’re looking to a future where we’re going to be underwater, a great portion of South Florida,'” Cason said. ‘For all of us down here, this is really not a partisan issue. We see it. We see the octopus in the room, not the elephant.'” (E&E News)

An octopus in the room? It’s a striking image. If you’re wondering what prompted that unusual metaphor, Rob Verchick and I discussed the background in a recent op. ed. in the Miami Herald:

“Last month, the Herald reported that a live octopus had been found in a flooded parking garage at Miami’s Mirador 1000 condominium complex, along with a number of fish. This was, to say the least, a surprise. . .

“What was an octopus doing in a parking garage? Well, these luxury condos are near the ocean, as is the parking facility and all of its drainage pipes. Those pipes, which feed runoff into the ocean, used to be well above the water’s surface. But sea level is rising, and so the pipes are flooding more during very high tides. No one thought to install an octopus screen on the drain’s opening.”

Mayor Cason’s view of climate change is especially noteworthy because he’s not just your average local official. Before he became a mayor, he served as ambassador to Paraguay under President George W. Bush. But he’s not alone. As Rob and I reported in our op. ed., local officials in South Florida of both parties are banding together to discuss how to adopt to rising seas. And in many cases, they’re also calling for cuts in carbon emissions. And research show that conservatives are more open to considering adaptation than mitigation, so this is a good way to open the conversation.

As Mayor Cason realized, “the octopus” is an especially apt image for talking about sea level rise, because it’s easy to imagine the rising seas converting your living room into an aquarium. But, to continue the metaphor, the octopus of climate change has many arms, not just sea level rise. There’s also drought, flooding, and heatwaves, for example.

The octopus is also an apt image because of the weirdness of finding an octopus swimming around a parking garage. And freak events — many of them a lot more serious than this — are going to increase with climate change. We’re going to see a

lot more record-breaking droughts, heatwaves, and floods., Not to mention animals and plants unexpectedly showing up in new places. Some of those, like disease-carrying mosquitoes, won’t be nearly as innocuous or funny as the parking garage octopus.

So forget about that tired old elephant. Let’s talk about the octopus in the room, before it gets out of the parking garage and gets to your living room.