

Prominent Virginia Climate Scientists Call on General Assembly to Pass Clean Economy Act (HB1526 & SB851)

February 4, 2020

From:

Concerned Virginia Climate Scientists

To:

Delegates and Senators Virginia General Assembly

Dear legislators,

We are Virginia-based scientists reaching out to you because our state and our planet are in the midst of a full-blown climate crisis. A consensus of top climate scientists worldwide now holds that only a swift transition to carbon-free energy will stave off a planet-wide catastrophe. As such, we urge you to support the Clean Economy Act (HB1526 & SB851) to put our state on the path to 100% carbon-free electricity as quickly as possible. Successive scientific reports have recently provided evermore documentation of harmful climate trends already underway. Continued growth in emissions of carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping gases will lead to longer heat waves in Virginia as well as more intense storms, longer droughts, and greater sea-level rise across our coastal regions.

Here's the hopeful message: The worst effects of climate change can still be avoided by very rapid reductions in emissions of greenhouse gases over the next thirty years. A September 2019 report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change showed that we can still avoid dangerous levels of warming, but only by reducing global carbon dioxide emissions to a net of zero by no later than 2050. For example, if emissions continue to grow, we could face an increase of four feet of sea level rise worldwide during this century, and more than ten feet in the next century. Yet if reductions are sufficient to meet the goals of the 2015 Paris climate agreement, we can protect our state which includes some of the nation's most vulnerable cities in terms of sea level rise¹. However, the current federal administration has aggressively sought to roll back requirements to reduce emissions from power plants and vehicles, and to plug natural gas leaks. The administration is promoting increased production of coal and oil from public lands and offshore waters. Nationally, greenhouse gas emissions rose 2.7% in 2018². Until there are more rational federal policies it is up to states, local governments, businesses, and institutions to rapidly reduce their emissions. Fortunately, many states are taking action to do just that. Ten states, including Maryland, New York, and California, have passed 100% carbon-free electricity legislation -- and Virginia must be next.

¹ https://sealevel.climatecentral.org/surgingseas/place/cities/VA/Virginia_Beach#show=cities&surge=10

² <https://rhg.com/research/final-us-emissions-estimates-for-2018/>

Governor Northam's September executive order calls for state institutions to reach a 100% carbon-free electricity by 2050. That's a good start but we need an economy-wide 100% clean electricity standard that forces energy monopoly Dominion Energy to move away from coal and fracked-gas combustion forever.

The Clean Economy Act (HB1526 & SB851) is a giant step forward in Virginia's path to a completely 100% carbon-free future. The bill will diversify the clean energy sector in Virginia and, most importantly, will benefit Virginians in tangible ways. The bill will invest heavily in efficiency gains for low-income families and prioritizes efficiency benefits for persons with disabilities and veterans. A key feature of the bill that prioritizes local labor to build and maintain future offshore wind projects will also lead to well-paying careers that industry and help make Virginia a hub for offshore wind. If our state meets the 100% carbon-free deadline by 2050, The Clean Economy Act (HB1526 & SB851) will save the average Virginia family \$3,500 over 30 years³. These savings are crucial as 75% of Virginia's households have an unaffordable energy burden (6% or higher as defined by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services).

In addition to the financial benefit to households across the state, the bill will invest tens of millions in flooding resilience projects across Virginia. Communities like Norfolk and Virginia Beach face the threat of rising sea levels on a daily basis and Virginia's inland communities are facing record flooding: this investment is needed now.

Virginia must continue its leadership by protecting the commonwealth's health and future. Please support and pass the Clean Economy Act (HB1526 & SB851) this year.

Signed,

Randy Chambers, Director, Keck Environmental Field Lab

Dan Cristol

Iris Anderson, Professor of Marine Science, Virginia Institute of Marine Science

Jeffrey Shields, Moses D. Nunnally Distinguished Professor, Virginia Institute of Marine Science

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The views expressed are the personal views of the signatories and do not represent the views of their respective employers or affiliated institutions.

³ <https://blog.aee.net/virginia-clean-economy-act-offers-growth-jobs-and-savings>