

*350 Central Virginia • Allegheny-Blue Ridge Alliance (ABRA) • Appalachian Voices
Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League • Center for Biological Diversity (Norfolk)
Chesapeake Climate Action Network • Robert Dilday, Baptist News Global • The Rev. Weston Mathews, Richmond
Friends of Nelson • Potomac Riverkeeper Network • Protect Our Water, Heritage, Rights (POWHR)
Virginia Interfaith Power and Light • Virginia Organizing • Virginia Student Environmental Coalition • Wild Virginia
and 45 other undersigned groups*

A New Vision for Energy Justice, Democratic Renewal, and Healthy Communities in Virginia

An open letter to Governor Terry McAuliffe and the people of the Commonwealth

June 15, 2016

We speak today with a unified voice dedicated to energy justice, democratic renewal, and healthy communities in Virginia. We believe it's within our grasp to achieve clean and affordable energy for all Virginians, without leaving anyone behind. We believe in the basic moral right to clean water, clean air, healthy communities, and safe ecosystems for all living things. We believe there is no contradiction between keeping the lights on and preserving swimmable rivers, pristine shorelines, protected mountains, prosperous farms, livable cities, and a stable climate.

We envision a state where energy development means prosperity and health for everyone, without pain and harm for sacrificed regions, without property rights denied and whole regions left behind. We reject the notion that energy choices should be made by the powerful few, far removed from affected communities. We believe that local citizens can and should determine their own energy destiny – and that given a full and democratic process, communities can and will choose a path that is clean over dirty, safe over dangerous, transparent over secretive.

We believe that 21st century energy is better derived from the sun and from ocean winds. We believe in energy efficiency and innovative grid technology that is distributed, locally driven, and resilient.

And yet, today, this vision of democracy and sustainability is under siege in Virginia. From our western and southwestern mountains all the way to the sea, from Northern Virginia all the way to the James and New Rivers, we face unprecedented challenges. Offshore drilling for oil could one day ruin our beaches. Massive pipelines and compressor stations for fracked gas could rip a thousand-mile swath across our state. Toxic coal ash waste is being dumped into our rivers while regulators and utility companies cut corners and reject safer disposal methods required by neighboring states. And even as solar power investments outpace fossil fuels in parts of America, and as the rest of the world commits to dramatic reductions in climate pollution, energy companies in Virginia – led by the state's largest, Dominion Virginia Power, along with companies like EQT/NextEra – are pushing massive new fossil fuel plans that would lock in rising pollution.

These energy projects, and the top-down power dynamics that sustain them, must stop. Our vision is for something better, where people and natural systems matter. **We are unified today because we know that positive social change comes from people standing together, speaking up and taking action.**

We are **farmers and landowners** who believe property should not be confiscated – with eminent domain for private gain – from families and used for dangerous and unnecessary gas pipelines or other harmful fossil fuel energy infrastructure. We believe in the inherent right of communities to say no to protect their air, water, heritage, rights, and children.

We are **students** who believe that energy policies directly intersect with key issues of race, poverty, and exclusion. We believe that transitioning away from fossil fuels must involve transitioning towards justice.

We are **faith leaders** who are called to care for our neighbors and for all Creation. We seek love and energy justice for all – and the protection of our world’s sacred gifts. We have an ethical duty, as stewards of the common good, to power our faith sanctuaries with clean energy and to move our Commonwealth away from the dirty energy that harms our neighborhoods, our farms, our mountains, and our climate. Energy issues are moral issues.

We are **climate advocates** who believe the recent Paris Accord and the moral appeal of Pope Francis mean that greenhouse gas pollution in our state must go down, not keep going up as per the business models of companies like Dominion and EQT/NextEra.

We are **river advocates** who believe in fishable, drinkable, swimmable waters where fossil fuel waste is never permitted to poison our waterways or drinking water supplies, and polluters pay to clean up their messes using the safest and best available technology.

We are **conservationists** who recognize that Virginia’s 2 million-plus acres of public forests – national and state – comprise the largest terrestrial carbon storage function in the state. These forests actively mitigate climate change and its effects on soils, water, wildlife and urban areas. These amenities simply cannot be replicated on private lands. Proposed gas pipelines or any other extraction-related fragmentation or harm to these forests are not in the public interest.

Finally, we are **social justice groups** who believe that economic, social and environmental policies should be developed with maximum input from the communities they are meant to serve. We believe energy injustice *anywhere* in Virginia is energy injustice *everywhere* – and that the continued treatment of people and the environment as disposable commodities must end. We dedicate ourselves to acknowledging and reversing the environmental racism and energy racism that have for centuries harmed indigenous nations and people of color all across Virginia.

We acknowledge that many institutions share responsibility for our current situation, including our General Assembly, the U.S. Congress, multiple federal agencies, and utility companies.

But most immediately, we appeal to our Governor, Terry McAuliffe, who has the power to shape every major energy fight now before us. The Governor has taken much-appreciated small steps toward funding flood resiliency in Hampton Roads, and increasing energy efficiency and the use of solar power, while opposing some subsidies for dirty energy. **But on the biggest, most polluting issues of our time, the Governor simply has not shown he has heard the voices of affected communities or joined the growing statewide call for justice.**

Along the Virginia coast, our communities have asked for permanent protection from offshore oil drilling – and won a five-year reprieve from the U.S. Department of the Interior. We cannot afford a BP-type spill here or the greenhouse gas equivalent of 24 million new cars added to our roads annually if our Atlantic oil and gas is extracted and burned. We cannot afford more sea-level rise. We’ve asked the **Governor to discontinue his support for offshore oil drilling, and defend our coast**, but our voices have not been heard.

Along vast stretches of our Appalachian Mountains, our communities have asked for protection from companies who want to build unprecedented pipelines for fracked gas from West Virginia. These pipelines would trigger erosion, deforestation, and direct harm to drinking water as they cross 500-plus

rivers, lakes, and wetlands. We have asked the **Governor to reconsider his blanket support for the Atlantic Coast Pipeline and Mountain Valley Pipeline, and to use his legal authority to closely review and challenge water permits under the Clean Water Act.** We have warned him that these pipelines and the fracking wells they support could trigger nearly DOUBLE the total greenhouse gas pollution currently emitted by all existing Virginia power plants combined. But our voices have not been heard.

Our communities along the Potomac, James, and New Rivers and their tributaries have asked the **Governor to immediately stop the plans of Dominion and other companies to dump millions of additional tons of toxic coal ash liquid into our rivers or to otherwise improperly store the ash.** The Governor should support a federal investigation into potentially illegal dumping last May by Dominion. To permanently protect our drinking water, we've asked that the coal ash be properly isolated and stored in a way that does not harm any communities via contaminated drinking wells and the leaching of toxins into our rivers for decades to come. Instead Governor McAuliffe supports Dominion's dangerous coal ash plans. Again, our voices have not been heard.

Finally, our communities across the Commonwealth witness strong new evidence of extreme weather and a climate spiraling out of control. Some of our most vulnerable frontline communities suffer from rising seas in Hampton Roads, where flooding routinely forces schools to close and makes hospitals inaccessible. We have asked the **Governor to support strong policy solutions to combat coastal flooding while capping carbon pollution,** but our voices have not been heard. We have asked the Governor, under the federal Clean Power Plan, to immediately **commit to a "mass-based" state plan that would create thousands of new renewable energy jobs and lower greenhouse gas pollution** from all existing and future power plants. But our voices have not been heard.

As the seas and the stakes rise higher and the clock runs short, our commitment to a rational, fair, democratic, and abundant energy future is undaunted. If our voices have gone unheard from our separate regions of the state, we have a duty to bring those voices together until we *are* heard. If the governor has difficulty hearing our specific concerns and our even more specific proposed solutions, we will help him hear them by bringing our voices directly to him.

In the great tradition of social change movements across our nation, **our groups will come together this summer, on July 23, in Richmond to proudly display our collective strength,** and our multi-generational, multi-racial, multi-regional coalition for change. We will bring our friends, our families, and our colleagues to the Governor's Mansion to peacefully elevate our needs and concerns. **Most of all, we invite you, Governor McAuliffe, to join us in embracing an energy future that respects human health and our invaluable natural heritage.**

And we invite all people who share our vital concerns, to join us. For too long, the powerful few have made energy decisions that adversely affect the vulnerable many. Now the historic moment is before us – and the duty is ours – to change that forever.

Sincerely,

Initiating Groups and Leaders

Allegheny-Blue Ridge Alliance (ABRA)

Appalachian Voices

Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League

Center for Biological Diversity (Norfolk office)

Chesapeake Climate Action Network

Robert Dilday, Baptist News Global

The Rev. Weston Mathews, Richmond
Potomac Riverkeeper Network
Protect Our Water, Heritage, Rights (POWHR)
Virginia Interfaith Power and Light
Virginia Organizing
Virginia Student Environmental Coalition
Wild Virginia

Local, State & Regional Groups

350 Central Virginia
350 Loudoun
Appalachian Mountain Advocates
Augusta County Alliance
Casa Alma
Climate Action Alliance of the Valley
Dominion Pipeline Monitoring Coalition
Earth Allies
EcoVillage Charlottesville
eNRG - Energizing Renewable Growth in Holston Valley
Free Nelson
Friends of Augusta
Friends of Buckingham
Friends of Nelson
Friends of the Middle River
Green Grannies of Charlottesville
Knitting Nannas of Virginia
Moms Clean Air Force Va.
Mothers Out Front, Hampton Roads
Mountain Lakes Preservation Alliance
New River Conservancy
No ACP
Pipeline Education Group
Pipe Up Virginia
POW! (Protect Our Water)
Preserve Bent Mountain
Preserve Floyd
Preserve Franklin
Preserve Montgomery County, Va.
Preserve Roanoke
Preserve the New River Valley
Sustainable Loudoun
Transition Charlottesville Albemarle

Unitarian Universalist Church of Loudoun
Virginia Native Plant Society
Voices from Bath
Waterkeepers Chesapeake
Yogaville Environmental Solutions (YES)

National Groups

350.org
Bold Alliance
Center for Health, Environment and Justice
Environmental Action
Global Alliance Interfaith Networks
Oil Change International

Individuals & Businesses

Callahan Vineyard Properties LLC
The Rev. Marion E. Kanour, Nelson County, Va.
RER Energy Group, LLC
Solarfour LLC