

The Fairfax County Democratic Committee Endorses Bold Policies to Fight Climate Change

Background

Man-made green house gas emissions from fossil fuels such as *coal, oil, and natural gas*, are the chief cause of climate change, according to the overwhelming majority of climate scientists. Scientists also agree that climate change is accelerating at an unprecedented rate and that we are running out of time to avert catastrophic consequences to our planet. Because green house gases from fossil fuels, primarily carbon dioxide and methane, stay in the atmosphere for up to thousands of years, the decisions we make today will impact humanity for many centuries to come.

Climate change is already here. In the history of weather record-keeping, 2014 was the hottest year recorded, and Earth's 20 warmest years have occurred since 1981 according to The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). Without bold action to fight climate change, increased temperatures will impact labor productivity and energy demand; summer heat, especially when combined with increased drought will decrease crop yields across the U.S., and it has already increased the incidence of wildfires. The Risky Business Project on climate change determined that in the Southeast, increasing temperatures would translate into 11,000 to 35,000 additional deaths annually over the present century.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control report on global warming consequences states that, "The health effects of these disruptions include increased respiratory and cardiovascular disease, injuries and premature deaths related to extreme weather events, changes in the prevalence and geographical distribution of food- and water-borne illnesses and other infectious diseases, and threats to mental health."

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the poorest countries and regions world-wide are the most vulnerable to climate change. In the U.S., climate change will disproportionately impact minority and other disadvantaged populations and escalate income inequality. Food insecurity, freshwater scarcity, and soil degradation will lead to migration and populations pressures that will increase conflict worldwide, threatening both human and national security.

As a consequence of climate change, sea levels are already rising globally at an increasing rate, and catastrophic storms have become more frequent. According to the National Climate Assessment by the US Global Change Research Program, Virginia is highly vulnerable to storm surges and sea level rise due to climate change; specifically, Virginia Beach is cited among the top 5 most vulnerable cities in the southeastern U.S. The Risky Business Project on Climate Change reported that within the next 15 years, the average cost of coastal storms and increased hurricane activity along the Eastern Seaboard and the Gulf of Mexico is estimated to increase as much as \$7.3 billion annually up to a total of \$35 billion per year.

Fighting global warming requires steep reductions in fossil fuel consumption within the next two decades and increased investment in energy efficiency and renewable energy. The United States leads the world in per capita global warming pollution from fossil fuels, yet we still lack mandatory reductions in fossil fuel emissions in many sectors.

Fossil Fuel electrical power plants are responsible for nearly 40% of U.S. carbon dioxide pollution, representing our nation's single largest source of global warming pollution. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)'s proposed Clean Power Plan would reduce carbon pollution from existing power plants 30% by 2030, relative to 2005. One of the side benefits will be a decrease in other pollutants emitted by coal and other fossil fuels that contribute to respiratory and cardiovascular disease. EPA estimates that the Clean Power Plan will *prevent* 2,700 to 6,600 premature deaths and 140,000 to 150,000 hearts attacks per year.

President Obama has launched a national Climate Action Plan that sets a goal of 20% renewables by 2020, cuts carbon emissions from new power plants, raises car efficiency standards to 35 miles per gallon with a goal of 54.5 miles per gallon in 2025, and tasks the EPA with setting standards to cut methane emissions from the oil and gas sector by 40 to 45 percent from 2012 levels by 2025.

These measures are a good start, but they are not enough to fight the dire social, economic and health consequences of climate change. Climate change champions are needed in Congress to help protect these measures from continued attack by industry and climate change deniers in Congress, and to pass legislation to implement additional measures that will accelerate our transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy solutions such as wind and solar and to reduce energy waste through energy efficiency.

Action

The Fairfax County Democratic Committee:

I. Urges:

A. The Democratic federal Virginia delegation to:

1. Establish fighting climate change as a top legislative priority;
2. Support a Progressive Carbon Tax that protects workers by returning revenue to working families through tax credits and funding investment in job-creating renewable energy industries;
3. Champion increased funding in the renewable and energy efficiency sectors through legislation making permanent the Production Tax Credit and the Investment Tax Credit (ITC) for solar and other emissions-free renewable energy sources, including an offshore wind ITC;
4. Champion energy efficiency legislation and funding for research and development aimed at reducing costs, increasing efficiencies of renewable energy and electric power storage technologies and generating high-paying green manufacturing, construction and service jobs;
5. Vote and advocate against new fossil fuel projects such as drilling for oil off the Atlantic and Gulf coasts, the TransCanada Keystone XL Pipeline, and drilling for natural gas on public lands (for example, Virginia's George Washington National Forest), etc.;
6. Take the lead in initiating legislation to eliminate corporate tax loopholes and subsidies for the natural resource extractive industries, e.g. oil, coal, and natural gas.

B. President Obama to expand EPA's task to set national standards for methane emissions that include both existing sources and new and modified sources, and to task the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to set mandatory national standards for oil and gas methane emissions on public lands.

II. Commends:

A. President Obama's Climate Action Plan for setting a goal of 20% renewables by 2020, cutting carbon emissions from new power plants, raising car efficiency standards to 35 miles per gallon with a goal of 54.5 miles per gallon in 2025 and tasking the EPA with setting standards to cut methane emissions from the oil and gas sector by 40 to 45 percent from 2012 levels by 2025;

B. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for its achievements to date and for proposing its first mandatory standards to reduce carbon pollution from existing power plants 30% by 2030, compared to 2005;

C. The US-China Joint Announcement on Climate Change setting carbon pollution reduction targets for the world's top two polluters.

D. The U.S. pledge to contribute \$3 billion to the United Nations Green Climate Fund to help developing economies grow more sustainably by promoting investments in clean energy and environmental protection.

E. President Obama for stating his intention to veto legislation approving the TransCanada Keystone XL Pipeline;

F. Senator Tim Kaine for opposing the TransCanada Keystone XL Pipeline and his trenchant explanation, "Approving Keystone XL is a market signal to expand production of dirty tar sands oil. I believe energy should be getting cleaner every day. That's why I'm voting no;"

G. Congressmen Gerry Connolly and Don Beyer for voting against the TransCanada Keystone XL Pipeline;

H. Congressman Gerry Connolly for co-chairing the House Sustainable Energy and Environment Coalition (SEEC) and for his track record of opposing Atlantic Coast offshore drilling and subsidies to the oil industry, protecting the Department of the Interior's ability to reduce methane emissions and supporting higher fuel efficiency standards for cars and trucks;

I. Congressman Don Beyer for his campaign promise to take action on climate change through supporting alternative energy and a progressive carbon tax.