

4.4.2018 VMI Environment Virginia Symposium Remarks

Good morning. What a privilege to be with you today and thanks to all of you for inviting me to speak today. Thank you also for your hard work on behalf of Virginians and our environment.

This symposium is a wonderful opportunity for environmental leaders and experts from across the Commonwealth to share ideas.

Special thanks to General Peay and VMI for hosting this event. It is always a pleasure to be back at the Institute that instilled in me honor, duty, discipline and stewardship, and provided a moral compass that has served me well over the years.

Protection of our environment and natural resources, particularly the Chesapeake Bay, is one of the main reasons I decided to run for the State Senate in 2007, and it's a top priority for me as governor.

Having grown up on the Eastern Shore, I know firsthand the importance of responsible conservation policies to protect our natural resources.

I understand the negative impacts of environmental degradation on our economy and quality of life.

We have a lot of work to do. A growing population, climate change, and other factors continue to put stress on our natural systems.

But I'm optimistic about what we can do together for one reason: the people in this room and across our Commonwealth who are committed to leaving the places we live in better shape than we found them.

You are fostering a new environmental consciousness that rejects old ways of thinking about the relationship between economic development and environmental protection.

You know that these two goals are not mutually exclusive – they are mutually reinforcing.

Through responsible public policy and creative thinking in the private sector, we're starting to show that sustainable economic development does not constrain our economy. It energizes it.

As Governor, I am committed to growing Virginia's economy and ensuring that people have the ability to find well-paying jobs to support their families. But I fundamentally reject the idea

that to do that, we must reverse our progress toward giving those families healthy places to live, work, and play.

In support of that overarching goal, my administration will focus on six priority areas that reinforce our efforts to build a stronger, more vibrant economy in the Commonwealth: clean water, clean air, clean energy, resilience to climate change, environmental justice, and sustainable resource use and access.

I was blessed to grow up on Virginia's Eastern Shore, a place whose culture and character has been shaped by the water.

I spent hours crabbing and fishing on the Chesapeake Bay. In college I ferried a workboat to Tangier Island in the summer months.

As I grew older, however, I witnessed the demise of the Bay. From oysters to rockfish to blue crabs, the resources that made the Bay great and supported the livelihoods of so many watermen were fading away because of poor water quality and overharvesting.

And while the multi-state Chesapeake Bay cleanup effort began in 1983, we didn't begin to see real progress until President Obama's executive order to increase EPA oversight of the Bay Program.

Since then, we've made remarkable progress in cleaning up the Bay. I applaud the efforts of governors before me, of both parties, and of stakeholders from local government, business, agriculture, and conservation organizations.

We still have much work to do in the coming months to reach the goal of a restored Chesapeake Bay by the 2025 deadline.

Our DEQ experts tell us that at our current Bay restoration pace, we will fall millions of pounds short of our goals to reduce nitrogen and phosphorus.

So my Administration is committed to preparing a new cleanup plan that incorporates input from local decision makers, prioritizes nature-based solutions, and tackles the impact of climate change on our clean water goals.

We have a number of pressing water quality issues in addition to the Bay.

There's no easy answer for what to do with coal ash. In this General Assembly session, my team worked with legislators on a bipartisan bill that will get us some answers so we can solve this problem, not just kick the can down the road.

The bill extends the moratorium on issuing permits for capping these coal ash ponds so we can study whether or not there is a better way to protect water quality.

It also requires Dominion Energy to issue a detailed request for proposals that we hope will give us a more accurate picture of both the feasibility and the cost of recycling coal ash for beneficial use.

The potential construction of two natural gas pipelines in Virginia also has major water quality implications.

As I said during the campaign, I am committed to a thorough, site-specific review of the proposed pipeline routes and any potential impacts to wetlands, streams, and rivers.

DEQ is evaluating every foot of the proposed routes and every specification of proposed plans for managing stormwater, erosion and sediment, and sensitive karst features.

I believe that science should dictate whether the pipelines can be built safely and in an environmentally sound manner, and I have directed DEQ to not approve construction activities until these standards are met.

After many rounds of revisions and improvements to its plans, the Mountain Valley Pipeline met those standards last week. So far, the Atlantic Coast Pipeline has not.

In addition to these reviews, which are the most stringent of any ever conducted by the Commonwealth for any pipeline project, I have directed DEQ to implement a comprehensive program to monitor any construction that is approved to ensure the protection of water quality and take strong enforcement action if violations occur.

Furthermore, I just signed into law a bill from Senator Creigh Deeds that will enable DEQ to issue a stop work order on land-disturbing activities for pipeline construction if DEQ determines those activities will cause a substantial adverse impact to water quality.

This will ensure that if the pipelines move forward, the developers will be required to comply with Virginia's rigorous regulatory requirements to protect water resources.

Our water quality is of paramount importance to our health and our economy, and I will do everything I can to protect it as long as I am Governor.

It is also worth mentioning a few other clean water pledges I am committed to keeping during my term:

- I will continue to oppose lifting the 35-year ban on uranium mining.
- I support the ability of localities to regulate or oppose fracking, and oppose fracking in the Taylorsville Basin.
- And of course I will fight to prevent offshore drilling in the waters off our coast.

Freedom to breathe clean air is a right, not a privilege. With the Trump EPA rolling back air quality standards, we must step up at the state level.

We'll start by addressing the carbon pollution that is causing global warming and climate change. The consequences are known, and they're being felt right now in communities across this state.

Our coastal areas are seeing sea level rise and increased flooding. Virginia has already seen a 33 percent increase in heavy rainstorms and snowstorms in the last sixty years, as well as an 11 percent increase in precipitation from the largest storms.

Later this year my Administration will finalize a rule to establish the Commonwealth's first limits on carbon pollution from power plants.

This rule will enable Virginia to link to the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI), which is a proven and successful carbon market established by a bipartisan group of states.

We will also take a hard look at reducing emissions from the transportation sector, which is the largest source of carbon pollution in the state. The Metro funding agreement that we were able to negotiate with the General Assembly is a critical piece of this puzzle.

The combined \$500 million annual investment from Virginia, Maryland, and the District of Columbia will provide faster, more affordable, and more reliable commuter rail service and will take thousands of cars off the roads.

Electric vehicles also hold enormous potential, and we need to ensure that we have the necessary infrastructure in place to support their growth.

Using money Virginia received from the Volkswagen settlement, we can expand our electric vehicle charging infrastructure on major interstate highway corridors, and invest in charging stations in high density areas.

Of course, the long-term solution to fighting climate change is a zero-emissions economy.

Clean energy technologies like solar and wind can drive significant economic and job growth in the Commonwealth while also producing emissions-free electricity. My administration will focus on driving more investment in these industries.

We are already making great strides in that direction. We currently have more than 3,000 megawatts of solar energy either in service or under development.

Just a few weeks ago, we announced that Microsoft is investing in a 315 megawatt solar facility in Spotsylvania County, the largest corporate solar agreement in the United States.

To see more of these projects, we need significant policy and legislative changes. That's why I recently signed a bill that will pave the way for transformational investments in clean energy and grid modernization.

The legislation, which ends the freeze on base electric rates charged by utilities and requires utilities to invest in energy efficient projects, will make Virginia a leader in clean energy and energy efficiency. The bill requires utilities to invest more than one billion dollars in energy efficiency programs, and it

deems 5,000 megawatts of solar and wind to be in the public interest.

This legislation is just a first step in transforming Virginia's energy grid. We need to create more opportunities for financing clean energy projects, and remove barriers to investments in clean energy. I hope to see our solar industry grow from hundreds of megawatts to thousands of megawatts, and to see the installation of both our first onshore and offshore wind turbines. In the coming months, we will work with stakeholders to develop a new Energy Plan to chart a course for the future of clean energy in the Commonwealth.

While we work to reduce the impact we have on our climate, we must also redouble our efforts to adapt to the impacts a changing climate has on us. I am committed to ensuring Virginia does its part to help avoid the worst consequences of global warming, but past emissions have already made some changes inevitable.

Just last month, researchers at the Virginia Institute of Marine Science projected a sea level rise of 6.7 inches by 2025 and 19.3 inches by 2050.

This will have major implications for Hampton Roads, the second most vulnerable region in the nation to the impacts of sea level rise, with tens of billions of dollars of infrastructure and hundreds of thousands of homes at risk.

It is critical that we continue to partner with Hampton Roads localities to enhance coastal resilience and strengthen essential infrastructure like our transportation system, our port, and our military installations, and support innovative solutions.

We must also consider green infrastructure solutions and managed retreat, which will save money and protect coastal habitats. And we must remember that climate resilience isn't just Hampton Roads' problem.

I was glad to see the General Assembly approved legislation to create a Special Assistant to the Governor for Coastal Adaptation and Protection, to coordinate this work.

As part of this effort, we will develop a coastal flooding adaptation strategy, advance measures to safeguard strategic national assets threatened by sea level rise, and pursue federal, state, and local funding opportunities for adaptation initiatives. Being flood ready will help us to avoid the catastrophic costs of flood events and, more importantly, it will save lives.

Some communities in the Commonwealth suffer disproportionately from climate change and other environmental harms created by human activity. Often these are communities of color, or urban or rural communities that lack the resources to

defend themselves from actions that degrade the places they live.

To address these impacts, we need meaningful involvement of those individuals and communities most impacted and vulnerable.

Through the work of the Advisory Council on Environmental Justice, we are seeking ways to ensure transparent and authentic engagement in decision-making and to better incorporate environmental justice concerns as we shape policy.

The environment belongs to all of us – it is our birthright as Virginians and Americans, no matter the color of our skin or the size of our pocketbooks.

The same resources that one person values for recreation, another may depend upon for his or her livelihood.

That makes responsible, science-based management of our fisheries and wildlife, and the landscapes that define the beauty of the Commonwealth, an economic and moral imperative.

From the Appalachian Mountains to the Atlantic Ocean, Virginia boasts some of the most diverse, productive, and spectacular natural communities in the country.

We want to protect these lands, while also benefitting from economic opportunities in nature-based tourism. A recent study by the federal Bureau of Economic Analysis showed that outdoor recreation is responsible for \$373 billion, or two percent of U.S. GDP.

To attract more of that economic activity to Virginia, we can protect land that has high conservation value and also gives the public access to the outdoor experiences we have to offer.

During my term, I will take a strategic view of land conservation by focusing on areas with multiple important characteristics that reinforce our broader conservation goals.

Addressing the challenges I have outlined today will take time, effort, and resources. Virginia spends only 0.6 percent of the general fund on environment and natural resources. Given this inadequate level of funding, our conservation agencies do an amazing job, but imagine what they could do with more.

I pledge to work with the General Assembly to increase conservation spending to at least two percent of the general fund.

These investments in our natural capital will drive sustainable economic development and improve Virginians' quality of life for generations to come.

In the near term, though, we must continue doing the best we can with the resources we have. For that reason, I signed an executive order this morning directing DEQ, in consultation with my Secretary of Natural Resources, to develop a plan to revitalize the agency. This will include updating outdated regulations, strengthening enforcement of our environmental standards, identifying the causes of permitting delays, and improving transparency.

This order is the first step in the process of rebuilding a critically important state agency that has seen its staff cut by 30 percent and its budget cut by nearly \$60 million over the past decade. A strong, responsive, transparent DEQ is the essential foundation of my conservation agenda, and I look forward to working with all of you to support the agency and come up with ideas for how to improve it.

In closing, I would like to thank VMI again for hosting this event, the event sponsors, and all of you for your commitment to Virginia's environment.