2019 Virginia General Assembly Candidate Questionnaire

The Virginia League of Conservation Voters thanks you for taking time from your schedule to complete this questionnaire. Your responses will be a factor in endorsement and campaign contribution considerations.

As a member of the General Assembly, you will encounter numerous conservation issues across a broad array when making policy, regulatory, and appointment decisions. Many of these issues are represented in the following questionnaire, assembled with input from policy statements and positions from Virginia’s conservation community.

Please circle YES or NO after each question. If you do not answer a question, the interpretation of your response will be left to a screening committee. There are no “trick” questions – all “yes” responses support our positions. If you need further clarification of any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us for additional information. If your response supports our conservation position, we assume that you will use the leadership and influence of your office to support appropriate legislation or administrative action. Feel free to offer a written response using the space below the question or by attaching additional comments. Upon submission of this questionnaire, Virginia LCV reserves the right to publicize candidate responses in an effort to educate voters. We will be making candidate endorsements on a rolling basis. Please return a completed questionnaire to Danielle Simms at dsimms@valcv.org.

Candidate’s Name – Please Print: ____________________________________________

Candidate’s Signature: _______________________________________________________

Office Seeking: ____________________________________________________________

Party Affiliation: __________________________________________________________

Home Address: ____________________________________________________________

Phone Number: ___________________________________________________________

Email Address: ____________________________________________________________

Campaign Office Address: _________________________________________________

Campaign Manager: _________________________________________________________

Manager’s Email Address: _________________________________________________

Manager’s Phone Number: ________________________________________________
**Land Conservation**

Virginia’s voluntary Land Preservation Tax Credit and other conservation programs, such as Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) programs, have been responsible for the protection of hundreds of thousands of acres of open space, working farms and our most treasured natural resources. Over recent years, there have been attempts to both weaken and abolish the tax credit and to limit the Commonwealth’s ability to secure conservation easements. While many of these attacks have been defeated, they are certain to be raised again.

1. Will you oppose attempts to weaken or defund the Land Preservation Tax Credit program and Virginia’s conservation easement programs?  

2. Will you support increased funding for Purchase of Development Rights programs in Virginia, and work to secure a dedicated revenue source for an increase in funding for open space protection?  

Comments on any of the above questions:

**Land Use & Transportation**

**Funding:** Virginia will spend more than $5 billion on transportation this fiscal year. The General Assembly has taken major steps in recent years to increase transportation revenues, prioritize spending, and revamp funding formulas for the future. However, even with an increase in transit capital funding in legislation adopted at times, transit funding remains inadequate despite record ridership.

3. Will you support increased state funding for transit and enabling more localities to enter into regional transit authorities?  

**Infrastructure & Development Priorities:** Changes in demographics and travel preferences have increased use of and public support for rail and transit ridership, walking, and bicycling, and increased public support for greater transportation choices and for walkable/bikeable/transit-oriented communities. These changes present an opportunity to create a more environmentally sound transportation system, promote more efficient growth patterns, better protect rural areas, and preserve natural resilience to the effects of recurrent flooding and other natural disasters.

4. Will you support steps to promote transportation choices, to ensure that cleaner, less destructive transportation alternatives are seriously considered and given a higher priority, to encourage greater transportation and land use coordination, and to target state infrastructure funding to promote more efficient development patterns?  

YES NO
5. Will you oppose legislative efforts to push forward projects that statutorily bypass the SmartScale process?  
   YES  NO

6. Will you support requiring consideration of greenhouse gas emissions, susceptibility to damage from sea-level rise/recurrent flooding and extreme weather, and potential effects on natural environmental resilience in developing transportation proposals and reviewing alternatives, and requiring development of adaptation plans for all new state-owned infrastructure?  
   YES  NO

7. Will you oppose efforts to remove or restrict the authority of the Department of Environmental Quality from adopting regulations to curb carbon pollution from the transportation sector?  
   YES  NO

**Building Codes:** The Virginia Institute of Marine Science predicts sea level rise will increase by at least 1 foot by mid-century, a trend that will only worsen as our planet continues to warm. It’s important for Virginia to be making smart building construction decisions that take into account this growing threat.

8. Will you support efforts to update and strengthen state building codes to take into account the projected rate of sea level rise, including penalties to those whose structures are non-compliant and therefore pose a risk to public safety, as well as legislation requiring disclosure of flood risk to homeowners and renters?  
   YES  NO

**PPTA:** There has been a surge in projects and funding under the Public Private Transportation Act (PPTA) in recent years. Public outcry over the Downtown/Midtown Tunnel and the Route 460 deals in Hampton Roads highlighted problems with this process and led to some reforms. However, additional steps are needed, including making the PPTA process more consistent with established transportation planning processes, preventing limitations on other public improvements, and increasing meaningful public input.

9. Will you support PPTA reform to address these shortcomings?  
   YES  NO

**Land Use Authority:** Most important land use decisions in Virginia are made at the local level. The General Assembly has frequently been asked to intervene and override traditionally local decisions or curb control over land use by Virginia’s counties, cities and towns.

10. Will you oppose legislation that erodes current local land use authority?  
    YES  NO

11. Will you support efforts to expand localities’ ability to accept and negotiate proffers and support enabling localities to use impact fees to improve local infrastructure such as schools, roads, and other government services?  
    YES  NO

Comments on any of the above questions:
**Water Quality**

**Chesapeake Bay:** The Chesapeake Bay is one of the Commonwealth’s most cherished resources both culturally and economically. Although we have made great strides toward reaching our goals for cleaning up the Bay, and we have seen consistent funding to assist with best management practices in recent years, there is still much to be done. Additionally, studies have shown that the Chesapeake Bay and its shoreline have a significantly high concentration of plastic pollution.

12. Will you support a budget that increases the appropriation of funds to meet the goals for cleaning up our streams, rivers and the Chesapeake Bay and creates a dedicated funding source that is not dependent on year-end surpluses to fund Chesapeake Bay restoration? [YES  NO]

13. Will you support level or additional funding to assist farmers who adopt agricultural best management practices (BMPs)? [YES  NO]

14. Will you support Virginia’s continued participation in a strong Chesapeake Bay Agreement among Bay states that recognizes the threats toxics and climate change pose to the quality and sustainability of the Chesapeake Bay? [YES  NO]

15. Will you support efforts to tax or ban plastic pollution such as plastic bags, paper bags, and polystyrene (Styrofoam) products? [YES  NO]

**Toxics:** Efforts to update Virginia’s laws and regulations surrounding toxics or hazardous waste have stalled in recent sessions. The Commonwealth has unfortunately witnessed many spills both within our borders and in neighboring states. Penalizing negligent toxics management and equipping our agencies with the best tools available to prevent future incidents and to quickly remediate those that may occur are crucially important to protecting our environment and public health.

16. Will you support efforts to increase fines to entities responsible for hazardous spills into our waters and support strengthening Virginia’s reporting requirements when hazardous spills occur? [YES  NO]

17. Will you support strengthening Virginia’s lead testing requirements in schools and daycare facilities? [YES  NO]

**Modern Fracking:** Currently over 84,000 acres are leased for drilling for natural gas using modern fracking (a highly water-intensive process used to break shale formations deep beneath the land’s surface) in Virginia’s Taylorsville Basin, which includes Caroline, Essex, King George, King & Queen, and Westmoreland Counties. Boards of Supervisors in these counties are quickly preparing for the impacts to their communities should proposals for fracking be granted permits by the Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy.

18. Will you oppose legislation to restrict the decision-making authority held by localities to properly address the impacts of modern fracking AND support legislation implementing a ban on fracking in the Eastern Virginia Groundwater Management Area? [YES  NO]

**Natural Gas Pipelines:** The 42-inch, interstate natural gas pipelines proposed for Virginia pose serious environmental risks and present significant impacts to our water resources, but are moving forward without any proven need for the gas they will be carrying through Virginia. There have been several efforts to establish better oversight of the construction process, but more work clearly needs to be done.
Uranium Mining: Virginia has in place a more than 30-year-old moratorium on the mining and milling of uranium. Recent legislative efforts to lift this ban were defeated, yet the threat of such legislation could again present itself during your term, and the issue is awaiting final ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court.

21. Will you oppose efforts to lift Virginia’s moratorium on uranium mining AND support efforts to strengthen regulations surrounding exploratory uranium drilling in Virginia?

Comments on any of the above questions:

Climate Change & Energy

Clean Energy & Energy Efficiency: The last few General Assembly sessions yielded victories for clean energy. More specifically, during the 2017 session consensus legislation around community solar passed with overwhelming support and the 2018 legislative session brought the passage of grid modernization bill that leads a path for Virginia towards the largest expansion of renewable energy and energy efficiency seen in the state (including a ten-fold increase in solar and wind capacity). Still, many barriers exist to maximizing renewable energy and energy efficiency in Virginia in a way that best benefits Virginians and our environment.

22. Will you support efforts to grow Virginia’s clean energy industry through mandatory energy diversification and a mandatory energy efficiency resource standard (EERS)?

23. Will you support efforts to expand distributed renewable energy such as residential community solar, removing barriers to consumers ability to net-meter, supporting efforts to expand and protect customer access to competitively offered renewable energy options, and providing more equitable access to clean energy?

24. Will you see through the implementation of the 2018 Grid Transformation and Security Act in a way that protects ratepayers and increases renewable energy and energy efficiency investment?
Climate Change: The evidence is abundantly clear that climate change is real and that human activity is largely responsible. The resulting sea level rise poses an enormous threat to the Hampton Roads region’s economy and public safety. The region is ranked as the second most vulnerable to the effects of climate change by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, countries must take “unprecedented” actions to cut carbon emissions over the next decade in order to hold global warming at a moderate level. As of 2018, emissions appeared to still be rising, not yet showing the clear peak that would need to occur before any decline. There have been meaningful steps taken to plan for and adapt to future recurrent flooding; however, a lack of reliable funding remains a significant hurdle. Efforts to provide funding for adaptation efforts have stalled in the General Assembly. Most recently, a regulation is moving forward at the administration level allowing for a market-based, multi-state carbon-trading program in Virginia to help mitigate climate change and bolster the clean energy economy.

Offshore Drilling: Recent discussions at the federal level propose to re-open the Atlantic Coast to offshore drilling for oil and natural gas. Drilling off Virginia’s coast puts Virginia’s coastal communities greatly at risk, from the Eastern Shore to Hampton Roads. These regions are home to our robust fishing, tourism and military industries, which are essential to Virginia’s economy and heritage, as well as a unique ecosystem that would be jeopardized from drilling off our coast.

25. Will you support deployment of 100 percent clean energy by 2050 and the establishment of a mandatory renewable portfolio standard of 50 percent?

26. Do you support allowing local governments to install solar facilities of up to 5 MW on government-owned property and using the electricity for nearby government-owned buildings?

27. Do you support equitable workforce development and training for the advanced energy economy?

28. Will you support efforts to join the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) to curb greenhouse gas emissions and supply funding for mitigating and adapting to climate change impacts, such as creating and executing resiliency plans, clean energy programs, and job training programs for coal mining communities?

29. Will you oppose efforts to restrict the Commonwealth’s ability to acknowledge and address manmade climate change?

30. Will you support efforts to protect Virginia’s coast from drilling for oil and natural gas?

Comments on any of the above questions:
Environmental Justice

While it is the Commonwealth’s policy to “protect its atmosphere, lands, and waters from pollution, impairment, or destruction, for the benefit, enjoyment, and general welfare of the people of the Commonwealth,” oftentimes, environmental impacts disproportionately affect lower-income neighborhoods and/or communities of color.

31. Will you support requiring environmental, energy, and transportation regulatory agencies to incorporate environmental justice in their considerations on new initiatives?  
   YES  NO

32. Will you support the establishment of an Advisory Body on Environmental Justice, and ensure it receives proper funding?  
   YES  NO

Coal Dust: Across the Commonwealth, uncovered trains carry coal dust en route to port terminals in Hampton Roads. In many cases, communities near these routes see coal dust on rooftops, awnings, siding, cars, on windows, and in air filters, therefore threatening human health. Coal dust is linked to low birth rate, premature births, neuro-developmental delays in children, lung cancer, pneumonia, emphysema, bronchitis, asthma attacks, black lung, heart disease, strokes, and premature death. Lamberts Point in Norfolk has been historically and continues to be a community largely populated by African-American, working class families. Residents of Lamberts Point are heavily impacted and harmed by coal dust.

33. Will you support the implementation of covered coal train cars to manage coal dust?  
   YES  NO

Comments on any of the above questions:
Good Government

While much of Virginia LCV’s work is dedicated to ensuring strong environmental policy that protects clean air, clean water, and open space for all Virginians, we are equally dedicated to ensuring a healthy democracy in the commonwealth.

Redistricting: Of the 100 seats up for election in the 2013 General Election, 38 of those races were uncontested; largely due to partisan gerrymandering and the lack of competitive nature of the districts. Attempts have been made every session to establish a nonpartisan redistricting process. In 2019, the legislature passed resolutions to establish a nonpartisan redistricting commission. In the 2020 General Assembly session, the newly elected legislature must again pass the same resolution (line by line) before it can be approved to be on the 2020 General Election ballot so that voters' voices can be heard on the issue.

34. Will you support enabling legislation that accompanies the constitutional amendment (HJ 615 and SJ 306) to ensure people of color are represented in the nonpartisan redistricting process? YES NO

Polluter Money in Politics: Over the years, Dominion Energy has been the top political donor to campaigns across the state, leveraging its political capital to influence how the state regulates monopoly electric utilities and how lawmakers vote on energy and environmental policy that impacts their bottom line. An increase in opposing Dominion’s support occurred in 2017 as several candidates, now Delegates, signed pledges refusing to take Dominion political donations.

35. Will you refuse to accept campaign contributions from monopoly electric utilities and their political action committees? YES NO

Comments on any of the above questions:
Personal Commitment

A. If elected, what three conservation issues will be your top priorities?

1) 

2) 

3) 

B. What leadership initiatives will you undertake to advance the issues you listed above?

C. What examples of environmental leadership can you cite from your past? Please include legislative, business or organizational examples of your work.

D. If elected, how will you specifically involve the conservation community in your work?

Thank you again for your participation in Virginia LCV's endorsement process.