



2021 General Assembly Candidate Questionnaire

Clean Virginia is a non-partisan, not-for-profit organization with an associated Political Action Committee, Clean Virginia Fund, that strives to advance clean government and clean energy in Virginia politics.

This questionnaire highlights Clean Virginia's priority issues and, along with past voting records and public statements, is used in our 2021 endorsement process for candidates for Virginia's General Assembly. We ask that all candidates complete the entire questionnaire. Further information about the issues raised in the following questions can be found on the Clean Virginia website, www.cleanvirginia.org.

Please email your responses to this questionnaire, or any questions you may have, to endorsements@cleanvirginia.org. You are welcome to attach additional pages if you feel further specifics are needed to answer any of the questions. Your answers to this questionnaire may be released to the public.

SECTION I - Candidate Information

Candidate Name:

Office Sought:

Party:

Name of Campaign Committee:

Address:

City/State/Zip:

Website:

Phone:

Email:

Campaign Manager:

Phone:

Email:

SECTION II

Regulated Utility Monopolies and Campaign Contributions

Public service utilities are unique from other corporations in that (a) they are supposed to balance the public interest with their own profit motive and (b) they are given monopolies by the state. In lieu of market forces, public service utilities are then responsible for regulating the prices they charge consumers.

Inherent in this unique structure lies a conflict of interest for elected officials who take campaign contributions from publicly-regulated utility monopolies, because of the officials' increased regulatory and oversight responsibility. As such, 25 states have bans on campaign contributions from utilities, 22 of which have gone as far as to prohibit campaign contributions from all corporations. Not only is such a ban important for public trust in governing institutions, but it also protects customers who otherwise indirectly fund the campaign contributions and who are unable to "walk away" from their utility if they object to that utility's political practices. By removing any appearance of a conflict of interest, utility companies and lawmakers can share information without undermining the public interest in properly regulating monopolies as well as public trust in our government.

1. Do you accept campaign contributions from Virginia utility monopolies (e.g., Dominion Energy, Appalachian Power) or their employed lobbyists?

Yes

No

Comments:

2. Do you own any personal stocks, bonds, or investments in regulated Virginia utility monopolies (e.g., Dominion Energy, Appalachian Power)?

Yes

No

Comments:

SECTION III

Utility Regulation

The current regulatory structure for Virginia's electric utilities stifles innovation, keeps energy bills high, and incentivizes utilities to invest in costly new infrastructure regardless of whether it benefits customers or not. Virginia needs policy reforms to create a modern, 21st century utility system that fixes the broken incentive structure for Virginia's utility monopolies, lowers prices and increases choices for customers, while improving the environment and maintaining grid reliability. Advanced technologies have already created an opportunity to modernize the electric power grid, but our monopoly-friendly laws prevent Virginia from taking advantage.

Perhaps the most acute consequence of our Commonwealth's broken regulatory system is Dominion Energy's consistent overcharging of its Virginia customers. In 2015, the General Assembly passed a "rate freeze" law that kept Dominion's electricity rates at artificially high levels until 2022. Suspending the authority of the State Corporation Commission (SCC) to conduct rate cases undermined its ability to ensure that Virginians pay fair bills during this time. As a result, Dominion has overcharged Virginia families and businesses by more than \$500 million since 2017, none of which has been refunded to date.

In the past two years, a broad, bipartisan coalition of legislators and advocates have pursued legislation to restore consumer protections and empower the SCC to make decisions that fairly balance the interests of both utilities and customers. In 2020, the Fair Energy Bills Act (HB1132) sought to restore SCC authority to examine utility monopoly's earnings, order rate reductions, and issue refunds when utilities overcharge customers. However, the bill died by just one vote in the Senate Commerce and Labor (C&L) Committee. This year, a suite of bills aimed at reforming recent pro-monopoly and anti-consumer provisions of Virginia's code received broad support in the House of Delegates, but also died in the Senate C&L Committee.

Despite setbacks, the legislature has had fruitful results from other efforts to balance utility and customer interests. In 2020, HB528 restored SCC authority to determine the cost recovery period associated with the early retirement of coal generation facilities. This bill prevented Dominion from using an accounting trick in its 2021 rate case that has previously allowed utilities to dodge rate decreases and refunds. Furthermore, this year both chambers rejected SB1380, a bill that would have allowed Dominion to expand its monopoly to yet another industry, electric school buses. Blocking this measure prevented Virginians from paying staggering costs for electric school buses to increase corporate profit, when Virginia could instead opt for cheaper, more equitable options.

1. Do you support legislative efforts, like the Fair Energy Bills Act, to restore the basic principle that energy bills should be reflective of the cost to produce and distribute electricity, plus a fair - but not unlimited - profit, and that when utilities overcharge customers, that money should be refunded to them and not kept by the utility?

Yes

No

Comments:

2. Do you support efforts to enact best-practice electricity rate design principles in Virginia that would incentivize cleaner energy and financially benefit customers, not monopolies?

Yes

No

Comments:

3. Do you believe that customers, not utility monopolies, should own and have easy access to their own electricity use data?

Yes

No

Comments:

4. Do you support efforts to create better incentive structures for Virginia's utility monopolies so that they are financially rewarded based on performance outcomes, not how much they spend?

Yes

No

Comments:

5. Virginia's consumer protections fall behind those of other states, which is a critical concern when dealing with utility monopolies and their captive consumers. How would you use the power of the office you seek to protect Virginia's consumers? Please be specific. *[Max 250 words]*

6. Do you believe an energy utility's monopoly should be limited to the generation, distribution, and/or transmission of energy? If not, what do you view as the appropriate scope of these monopolies? *[Max 250 words]*

Yes

No

Comments:

SECTION IV

Environmental Justice

As the Center for Racial Justice Innovation explains: “The persistence of deep racial disparities and divisions across society is evidence of institutional racism—the routine, often invisible and unintentional, production of inequitable social opportunities and outcomes. When racial equity is not consciously addressed, racial inequality is often unconsciously replicated.”

Institutional racism has historically been endemic in the energy sector. The burden of harmful environmental and economic impacts of utility and energy projects has been inordinately borne by marginalized communities. This inequity has always been prevalent in Virginia. For example, until recently, Black communities like Union Hill were forced to accept dangerous and unnecessary fossil fuel infrastructure components of the Atlantic Coast Pipeline. Civil rights leader Rev. William Barber called this a “reckless, racist, rip-off.”

Similarly, unnecessarily high energy costs inordinately affect marginalized communities and communities of color. On average, Virginia households experience a higher energy burden — the percentage of income spent on energy costs — than the national average. Over 75% of Virginia households have an unaffordable energy burden, spending more than 6% of monthly income on utility bills. Communities of color report paying more in monthly utility bills and are more likely to have difficulty paying bills—three times as many Black households and two times as many Latino households report making serious sacrifices to afford their utility bills compared to non-minority households.

As Virginia begins to decarbonize its energy economy in earnest, thanks to the Virginia Clean Economy Act, it is important to ensure that this transition is just and equitable. The clean energy transition should not overload families already burdened with high energy bills. Frontline communities and the regions with resources that fueled our previous energy economy should benefit, from the investment and with jobs, of our new clean energy economy.

1. Do you support the prioritization of environmental and economic justice concerns into all aspects of energy and regulatory policy in order to avoid disproportionately adverse effects, including health, social and economic effects, on minority populations and low-income populations?

Yes

No

Comments:

2. Civilian oversight over government actions is critical to ensuring a just transition of our energy economy. How would you strengthen civilian oversight and participation in the office you seek to ensure equitable outcomes and government accountability (e.g. civilian review boards, consumer advocates, public engagement, etc.)? [Max 250 words]

3. As Virginia transitions to a clean energy economy, how would you support efforts to lower energy bills so that Virginia customers are paying prices that reflect the falling cost of renewable energy nationwide? And how would you support efforts to transition our economy in a way that leaves no Virginia communities behind? [Max 250 words]

4. What are other specific ways Virginia could improve its commitment to racial and environmental justice in the energy sector? *[Max 250 words]*

SECTION V

Distributed Clean Energy

Thoughtful statewide distribution of renewable energy should strengthen Virginia's economy, lower energy bills, and reduce our carbon footprint. The landmark Virginia Clean Economy Act (VCEA) made Virginia the first state in the south with a codified transition to a carbon-zero economy and will allow for substantial progress in lowering emissions and transitioning to renewable resources. Unfortunately, Dominion Energy has repeatedly demonstrated a preference for investments in both fossil fuel infrastructure and utility-owned energy resources over the decentralized, distributed energy generation, energy efficiency and storage technologies of the future.

Perhaps the most visible and destructive symbols of the Virginian energy sector's broken incentive structure are the Atlantic Coast and Mountain Valley Pipelines. There has never been a demonstrated need for either of these two recent pipeline projects to meet energy demand. Furthermore, both are rendered impractical by the passage of the VCEA.

In recognition of strong legal challenges and shifting economics, Dominion Energy recently cancelled the Atlantic Coast Pipeline, but the Mountain Valley Pipeline project continues to move forward. While the General Assembly has no direct role in approval of pipeline projects, many Senators and Delegates have used their platforms to successfully advocate against both pipelines and demand stronger oversight from regulatory agencies.

1. Do you support statewide efforts to combat the environmental, economic, and social impacts of climate change in Virginia?

Yes

No

Comments:

2. Do you support the continued construction of the Mountain Valley Pipeline in Virginia?

Yes

No

Comments:

3. Do you oppose unnecessary expansions of fossil fuel facilities and instead support policies and investments that would make the grid resilient and capable of supporting renewable resources? *[Max 250 words]*

4. How would you use the office you seek to build on the progress made by the VCEA, specifically prioritizing cost-saving and carbon-reducing energy efficiency programs? *[Max 250 words]*

5. While the VCEA made great progress in decarbonizing Virginia's energy generation, transportation remains a large source of our Commonwealth's carbon footprint. Decarbonizing Virginia's transportation sector will be a difficult task that will require the government to weigh different priorities-- from who will pay for the transition (customers or taxpayers?) to what type of transportation will be prioritized. Within the scope of the office you seek, how would you balance these priorities? *[Max 250 words]*

SECTION VI

Campaign Finance and Ethics Reform

The Commonwealth lags behind the rest of the country in ending legalized corruption and safeguarding the democratic process, particularly with regards to campaign finance laws. Currently, Virginia is one of only five states that allows unlimited contributions to political campaigns, and is virtually the only state in the country that does not ban the personal use of campaign funds. Campaign finance reports are not required, which means Virginia's system allows for the legal donation of unlimited dollars for the personal use of politicians, a practice outlawed as bribery in most states. It is one of the reasons Virginia scored 46th out of 50 states in the [S.W.A.M.P. report](#), which measures anti-corruption measures across the nation.

Much of the millions of dollars that pour into Virginia elections each year come from corporations, including lobbyists and political action committees (PACs) that operate on the corporation's behalf. While corporations have a right to represent their interests, 84% of Americans believe that corporate political spending drowns out the voices of average Americans. Another 83% believe that corporations and corporate CEOs have too much political power and influence in government. Twenty-two states prohibit corporate donations, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. Another 22 states impose limits. Virginia is among five states with no limitations on corporate donations.

These shortfalls leave much work to be done to stem the erosion of Virginians' trust in government, but also present a unique opportunity to build an ethical political system from scratch. The following questions provide you the opportunity to share your ideas and beliefs on good governance reform.

1. Do you support legislative efforts to establish reasonable and effective limits to campaign contributions from individuals, state parties, PACs, corporations, and/or unions?

Yes

No

Comments:

2. Do you support legislative efforts to ban campaign contributions by regulated utility monopolies?

Yes

No

Comments:

3. Do you support efforts to require greater oversight and transparency for lobbyists, as well as their political giving and gifts to elected officials?

Yes

No

Comments:

4. How important is ethics reform in state government? What are some specific ways you think Virginia could improve its ethical governance? *[Max 250 words]*

5. Would you pursue specific policies or actions in office to reduce the influence of corporations in Virginia's government? If yes, please specify *[Max 250 words]*

Authorization

This signature attests that the above information accurately represents the views of the candidate.

Candidate signature:

Date: