



## **2021 Statewide 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 Governor, Lieutenant Governor and Attorney General. 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](http://www.cleanvirginia.org).

Please email your responses to this questionnaire, or any questions you may have, to our Political Director, Lizzie Hylton at [lizzie@cleanvirginia.org](mailto:lizzie@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, which in lieu of market forces is 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, twenty-five states have bans on campaign contributions from utilities, twenty-two 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 their governing institutions, but it also protects ratepayers who otherwise indirectly fund the campaign contributions and who are unable to "walk away" from their utility if they object to their 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 actually benefits customers or not. Policy reforms are needed 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 ratepayers, and improves the environment, all while maintaining reliability. Advanced technologies have already created an opportunity to modernize the electric power grid, but our monopoly-friendly laws are preventing Virginia from taking advantage of this opportunity.

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 froze Dominion’s electricity rates at artificially high levels until 2022, suspending the authority of the State Corporation Commission (SCC) to conduct rate cases to ensure the bills Virginians pay are fair during this time. In just the first three years of this freeze, Dominion overcharged Virginia families and businesses by more than \$1.3 billion, none of which has been refunded to date.

A bill introduced in the 2020 General Assembly session, HB1132 - the Fair Energy Bills Act, sought to restore the traditional regulatory authority of the SCC by fully empowering the agency to examine Dominion Energy’s earnings, set its allowed profit level, and direct the monopoly to lower rates and issue refunds if the SCC determined it had overcharged customers. While the bill died by just one vote in the Senate Commerce and Labor Committee, if it had passed, the State Corporation Commission estimated that the typical Virginia household would have saved nearly \$10 a month on their electricity bills, based on the amount Dominion Energy overcharged customers in recent years.

**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 ratepayers, that money should be refunded to them and not kept by the utility company?**

Yes

No

**Comments:**

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

Yes                      No

**Comments:**

**3. Do you support efforts to structurally reform Virginia’s utility system that allows for greater competition and independent oversight of electrical grid operations?**

Yes                      No

**Comments:**

**4. Do you believe that ratepayers, not utility monopolies, should own and have easy access to their own data around their electricity use?**

Yes                      No

**Comments:**

**5. 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 just how much they spend?**

Yes                      No

**Comments:**

**6. Virginia's consumer protections fall behind those of other states, which is a particularly important concern when dealing with utility monopolies and their captive consumers. How would you use the power of the office you are seeking to protect Virginia's consumers (please be specific)? *[Max 250 words]***

## 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, where the burden of harmful environmental and economic impacts of utility and energy projects has been inordinately borne by marginalized communities. This inequity continues in Virginia today, where, for example, Black communities like Union Hill are forced to accept dangerous and unnecessary fossil fuel infrastructure components of the Atlantic Coast Pipeline, which civil rights leader Rev. William Barber called 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’s households have an unaffordable energy burden, defined as higher than 6% of monthly income spent on utility bills. Communities of color report paying more in monthly utility bills and are more likely to report 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 VCEA, it is important to ensure that this transition is a just one, and that communities already burdened with high energy bills do not become overloaded and that front-line communities and the communities whose resources fueled our previous energy economy stand to benefit from the investment and jobs of our new one.

**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 are seeking 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

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. However, 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 symbol of both the Virginian energy sector's broken incentive structure and Dominion Energy's over-reliance on harmful fossil fuels is the Atlantic Coast Pipeline project, for which there has never been a demonstrated need to meet energy demand and which has been further rendered impractical by the passage of the VCEA. While Governors have relevant authorities under the Clean Water Act to deny necessary permits to pipeline projects, this authority has not been used to halt either the Atlantic Coast Pipeline or Mountain Valley Pipeline.

### **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 Atlantic Coast Pipeline and Mountain Valley Pipeline in Virginia? If not, how would you use the authorities of the office you are seeking to prevent the projects.**

Yes

No

**Comments:**

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

**4. 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 (ratepayers or taxpayers?) to what type of transportation will be prioritized. Within the scope of the office you are seeking, how would you balance these priorities? *[Max 250 words]***

## SECTION VI

### Campaign Finance and Ethics Reform

Our 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 the only state in the country that has no ban on the personal use of campaign funds. Meanwhile, 84% of Americans believe that corporate political spending drowns out the voices of average Americans, and 83% believe that corporations and corporate CEOs have too much political power and influence in government.

**1. Do you support 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 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:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Niko Popo". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line at the end.

Date: