

Issue: VA Sea-Level Rise

Talking Points - Virginia Underwater

The Hard Truth about Sea-Level Rise in Virginia

Virginia is experiencing the highest rate of sea-level rise on the East Coast and one of the highest rates in the U.S. overall. Scientific forecasts of this phenomenon, which is caused predominantly by climate change, vary widely, with the highest range topping 11 feet of rise by the year 2100. Sea-level rise will cause permanent flooding, amplified storm surge, shoreline erosion, and saltwater intrusion. By 2100, flooding will harm the state of Virginia in a multitude of economic and humanitarian ways, putting 115,000 residences worth \$31 billion in harm's way, risking displacement of 258,000 people, threatening 3,000 businesses worth \$3 billion, sacrificing revenues from businesses and property taxes, eroding infrastructure, and putting public health and safety at risk.

Scientists agree that reducing greenhouse gas emissions is the best way to protect coastal communities from future sea-level rise. Adhering to the emission reduction levels of the Paris climate agreement alone would spare up to 30 of the 38 Virginia communities at risk from chronic flooding, averting disaster for up to 79 percent of those at risk.

What Are Republicans Doing About it?

Republicans have repeatedly defeated bills designed to slow climate change, and instead have introduced bills to actively obstruct efforts to limit fossil fuel emissions. They have defeated all legislation calling for Virginia to join the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI), a group of nine East Coast states that participate in a cap-and-trade program to reduce carbon emissions. From 2008 to 2017, RGGI states have reduced carbon emissions by 40%, reaped a net economic gain of \$4.3 billion, and generated 44,570 job-years of employment. The economic value of the health and productivity benefits alone from reduced levels of toxic pollutants has been estimated at \$5.7 billion from 2009 to 2014.

What Are Democrats Trying to Do?

With both houses of the Virginia General Assembly controlled by Republicans, the Democratic executive branch has had to initiate action addressing climate change with measures such as the 2016 Clean Energy Virginia Plan (modeled after the federal Clean Power Plan) and executive orders aimed at reducing carbon emissions and developing clean energy. A bit of bipartisan progress has been made since the 2017 election changed the composition of the House of Delegates from 66 Republicans and 34 Democrats to an almost even split of 51-49. In 2018, legislation was passed providing for investment in clean energy, and a new cabinet-level position was created (Special Assistant to the Governor for Coastal Adaptation and Protection) to develop a statewide coastal flooding and adaptation strategy. Imagine what more could be done with a Democratic-controlled legislature.