Congress threatens Shenandoah, our waters

Over the past year, with the public’s attention focused on the economy, anti-environmental extremists in Congress have quietly launched an all-out attack on the laws that could clear the air at Shenandoah and protect our waters, from the Chesapeake Bay to the James River.

It’s the most radical, reckless attack on our environment in our lifetimes—and it’s happening under the radar, through provisions slipped into massive budget bills.

191 anti-environment votes

In the U.S. House alone, lawmakers cast an incredible 191 roll call votes in 2011 on measures that would block the Environmental Protection Agency from keeping our waters clean, making our air safer to breathe, or enforcing other environmental protections.

In February, the House rammed through a budget bill that took aim at our rivers and streams, our air, and funding for national parks. In August, the U.S. House passed a bill containing 39 separate environmental attacks.

So far, we’ve blocked the attacks

So far, none of these attacks have become law, with Environment Virginia’s research, advocacy and grassroots action helping to hold the line.

In 2011, we released five research reports, including one entitled “Virginia’s Biggest Mercury Polluters,” that helped spotlight the consequences of lowering our guard against pollution.

We’ve personally made our case to members of our congressional delegation and their aides in both Virginia and Washington, D.C. Thousands of our members have called, emailed or petitioned their lawmakers to reject any bills that threaten our state’s air and water.

With the Senate rejecting four of the worst proposals this fall, the tide might be starting to turn. We’ll keep you informed, so you can let your lawmakers know where you stand. To sign up for alerts, visit our new website at www.EnvironmentVirginia.org.

How are they voting?

We’ve scored each member of Virginia’s congressional delegation on how well they’ve voted to protect the environment. To see how your senators and representative are voting, visit www.EnvironmentAmerica.org/scorecard and select Virginia.
To our members

In the long run, prosperity depends on a healthy environment. It’s hard to imagine feeling very prosperous, after all, without clean air to breathe, clean water to drink, and healthy food to eat.

Yet some industries, politicians and even just plain, ordinary folks persist in claiming that we have to choose between a clean environment and a sound economy. Well, call me crazy, but I choose a clean environment. Because clean air, clean water and open spaces matter to me. Because it turns out, time after time, the economic benefits of environmental protection outweigh the short-term costs. And because, in the long run, it’s a no-brainer.

With the support of people like you, we’ll keep standing up against shortsighted industries and politicians.

Thanks for being with us.

Anna Aurilio
Federal Legislative Director

Recent action

54.5-mpg standard nears finish line

In November, the Obama administration officially proposed new clean car standards that represent the biggest step the U.S. has ever taken to get off oil and tackle global warming.

The standards would require cars and light trucks in model years 2017 to 2025 to meet a fleet-wide average fuel efficiency and global warming pollution standard equivalent to 54.5 miles per gallon by 2025.

The environmental benefits of such a standard are enormous. By 2030, we could save more oil than we imported from Saudi Arabia last year, and slash global warming pollution by an amount equivalent to shutting down 70 coal-fired power plants. Environment Virginia joined our national federation in supporting the standard, which is based on similar standards adopted in 14 states.

No toxic mining in Virginia

For the past 30 years, a moratorium on uranium mining in Virginia has kept our commonwealth safe from toxic mining, which can foul groundwater and scar priceless scenery. Now, a Canadian company is urging the General Assembly to allow this toxic mining—and Gov. Bob McDonnell has signaled his support.

Environment Virginia, together with allies around the state, has worked tirelessly to fend off legislation to lift the moratorium on uranium mining. We were pleased this winter when Gov. McDonnell urged the General Assembly to hold off on legislation lifting our mining ban, for lack of public support. But troublingly, he maintains strong support for mining, with plans to overturn the ban next year.

In the weeks and months ahead, Environment Virginia will redouble efforts to keep uranium mining out of Virginia, reaching out to lawmakers and citizens across the state.
The U.S. set a new record for weather disasters in 2011. Tornadoes, wildfires and blistering heat waves were among the 12 disasters costing more than a billion dollars each. This extreme weather has provided a daily reminder of what scientists warn could be “the new normal” as fossil fuel pollution warms our world.

If we want to avoid the worst consequences of global warming, we must dramatically reduce the carbon pollution that we pump into the atmosphere—and soon. Yet Washington is not doing enough, stalled by the influence of Big Oil and the coal industry, and short-term partisan politics in Congress.

“Humanity is running out of time to stop the most dangerous impacts of global warming,” said Anna Aurilio, federal legislative director for Environment Virginia. “With Congress unable to forge agreement on this pressing crisis, it’s more important than ever for states like Virginia to take matters into their own hands.”

**Congress is not the only way**

Fortunately, despite the lack of action in Congress, victories in cities, states and towns across the country are beginning to turn the tide. According to a report we released this fall, we can dramatically reduce global warming emissions through continued state and local action.

The report, “The Way Forward on Global Warming,” shows that policies at the local, state and federal levels can cut the nation’s carbon pollution by 20 percent by 2020 and 34 percent by 2030 from 2008 levels.

Furthermore, according to our study, many policies, including ones that we have championed here in Virginia, have already yielded a reduction of more than 539 million tons of carbon pollution—equivalent to 7 percent of U.S. global warming pollution in 2007.

Thanks to such forward-looking policies, America’s global warming emissions in 2009 were the lowest they have been since 1995.

**Success begets success**

As we’ve seen in Virginia, once clean energy takes root, it becomes even more popular. Homeowners are enjoying the comfort and cost-savings of cleaner, more efficient energy systems. Communities are being revitalized as new clean energy industries prosper. Jobs in clean energy are on the rise. As a result, the stranglehold that fossil fuel industries once had over our political system is starting to loosen.

Across America, our national federation is waging campaigns that tap into broad public support for clean energy. For example, our sister groups are promoting increases in solar energy, similar to the ones we’ve achieved here, in Arizona, Massachusetts, New York, Minnesota, California, Colorado, New Mexico and North Carolina.

**Interview:**

**EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson**

The EPA has recently worked on several clean air standards including the Mercury and Air Toxics Standard and the Cross-State Air Pollution Rule. Can you explain what these standards mean for the average family?

These new Clean Air Act standards mean cleaner, healthier air for American families. The Mercury and Air Toxics Standard and the Cross-State Air Pollution Rule are part of a series of common sense steps under the Clean Air Act to reduce emissions of mercury, acid gas, particulate matter, arsenic and other harmful chemicals from some of the biggest polluters in the nation.

These reasonable steps will provide dramatic protections to our children and loved ones—they will save tens of thousands of lives and prevent hundreds of thousands of asthma and heart attacks.

What’s the best way for our supporters to express their opinions on these issues?

Unfortunately, we are at a point where we have to remind some leaders in Washington to put the health of their constituents above the wish lists of special interests. Speaking directly to those who want to undermine common-sense environmental protections is one of the best ways to stand up for your right to clean air and clean water.

For more from Lisa Jackson, visit www.EnvironmentVirginia.org/page/VAE/Lisa-Jackson-Interview

As the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency works with Virginia and nearby states to restore the Chesapeake Bay, Environment Virginia is continuing our work to ensure the promise of this new effort is achieved—not squandered.

The greatest source of pollution in the Bay is runoff from urban and suburban developments—from farmland and golf courses, to enormous chicken factories. To finally win real change for the Chesapeake Bay, Gov. Bob McDonnell must implement his EPA-approved cleanup plan in its entirety—and enforce policies that address runoff pollution from all sources, even as industry lobbyists urge him to back down.

“The rules include straightforward, reasonable steps to minimize pollution, including runoff from giant chicken farms,” said Caroline Kory, state associate for Environment Virginia. “Now, we need to make sure the rules will survive in strong enough form to make a difference.”

take action

A fish kill in the Chesapeake Bay.

Visit our website to find out more, and urge Gov. Bob McDonnell to enforce new rules to clean the Bay.

www.EnvironmentVirginia.org