

Climate Action Alliance of the Valley
2023 Virginia General Assembly Candidates Questionnaire

INTRODUCTION

The Climate Action Alliance of the Valley (CAAV) is a volunteer, grassroots nonprofit organization, headquartered in Harrisonburg, with over 540 members.

CAAV's mission is to limit the impact of humans on Earth's climate, thereby providing for the common good by protecting the future of Earth and its inhabitants. CAAV's goal is to have legislators who are familiar with the best scientific understanding of climate change so that they will consider the climatic implications, including risks, of any decisions they make. By so doing we hope to bring about the systemic change required to protect Earth's climate and its associated benefits for current and future generations.

As you are a candidate in the November 2023 election for a General Assembly seat representing a district in the CAAV area, we request your completion and return of this questionnaire by e-mail to: contactcaav@gmail.com. We have also attached the questionnaire in Word format in case you prefer to use it rather than replying directly in this email. Upon receipt, your reply will be converted without modification or editing into pdf format and posted on our website (<https://climateactionallianceofthevalley.org/>). The pdf version will also be sent to all CAAV members via our email list. **Please return the completed questionnaire to us by September 30, 2023.**

Name: Esther Nizer

Office you are seeking: House of Delegates District 34

1. The Shenandoah Valley is experiencing more frequent and more severe extreme weather events as a likely result of climate change, including heat waves and unhealthy levels of air pollution, and we are at increased risk of flooding events. These events negatively affect all of us, but disproportionately impact historically disadvantaged and low-income communities. These communities suffer the negative impacts of local industry, such as pollution, but too often do not receive any of the benefits of the wealth generated by these industries. Legislation has been introduced in other states to address the cumulative impacts of pollution in permitting decisions and expand the types of legal actions available to individuals whose health and well-being have been impacted by pollution.

What legislation will you introduce or support to address environmental justice concerns?

I would support requiring health impact assessments for projects with potential health implications in historically disadvantaged and low-income communities.

Creating legislation that would strengthen community right-to-know laws to ensure that residents are informed about nearby environmental hazards, emissions, and pollutants. Transparency is important and this would allow communities to protect themselves.

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2. The **Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI)** is a cooperative effort among the states of Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Virginia to cap and reduce CO2 emissions from the power sector. Through July 2023, more than \$500 million in RGGI auction proceeds have already been invested in Virginia businesses through energy efficiency, clean and renewable energy, greenhouse gas abatement, and direct bill assistance programs. RGGI is a major tool that can help low-income Virginia's reduce their energy bills and stay in their homes. It is also a very effective way to enable communities to improve their flood resilience and preparedness. Currently there is no clear plan for replacing the RGGI funds should Virginia cease its participation in the program.

Will you introduce or support legislation supporting Virginia's continued participation in the RGGI coalition? Yes No Please explain your position.

I am most interested in reducing carbon dioxide emissions, which contribute to climate change. Reducing emissions can help improve air quality and public health outcomes. The Shenandoah Valley provides a variety of opportunities for its citizens go be outdoors. It is important that the air they breathe is clean.

If not, will you introduce or support legislation to replace the funding streams that RGGI has provided? Yes No Please explain your position.

3. Will you introduce or support legislation that further restores the authority of the State Corporation Commission to set fair rates and charges for ratepayers? Yes No If yes, please describe the legislation you will introduce or would support. If no, please explain your position.

I would first want to talk to the experts in the field before presenting legislation. I am most concerned about rates, especially in rural areas where I live. Regulatory oversight can be critical to ensuring that residents have access to essential services. Without this oversight, utility companies may be less inclined to invest in these areas. I would certainly support legislation that would restore the authority to set fair rates.

4. Beyond the Virginia Clean Economy Act, Virginia has the option of supporting the increased use of **renewable energy**, principally solar and wind sources, and to increase **energy efficiency**.

Will you introduce or support legislation that encourages or incentivizes the adoption of more renewable energy and improved energy efficiency? Yes No If yes, will you include individual and small scale distributed solar in such legislation? If not, please explain your position.

Absolutely, we must be willing to work with everyone from individual to small scale to handle distribution.

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5. **The risks and costs of the climate crisis** are already being detected and are projected to increase in Virginia. Virginia's coastal zone is the second most vulnerable region in the U.S.—surpassed only by the area surrounding New Orleans—to the predicted impacts of climate change, including sea level rise. Additional impacts across all of Virginia will include increasing incidents of extreme heat, drought, flooding, extreme weather, and infectious diseases beyond what we have already experienced.

What legislation will you introduce or support to help Virginia mitigate and adapt to climate change impacts? If none, please explain your position.

There are several areas that are of interest to me:
Public transportation especially in rural areas. Possibly using electric vehicles. I would also support investing in walking and biking infrastructure.
Energy efficiency can range from energy-efficient appliances to building codes.

6. According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration's Annual CO2 Inventory for the Commonwealth of Virginia, 51% of our carbon emissions are coming from the **transportation sector**.

What legislation, such as a Low Carbon Fuel Standard, tax incentives for EVs, electric bike incentives, increased availability of light rail passenger service, requirements for more rural transit/microtransit options, will you introduce or support to help reduce carbon emissions from Virginia's transportation sector? If none, please explain your position.

Legislation related to funding for rural transit agencies to address transportation in rural areas.
Incentives for electric bikes such as rebates or tax credits.
I would welcome a discussion on light rail expansion, especially between small towns.

7. Virginia has some of the weakest campaign finance laws in the country. **Will you pledge to support campaign finance reforms to limit the amount any one person or organization can give to a candidate and require more transparency in disclosures? Yes X No ___ Please explain your position.**

The amount of funds spent on campaigns is out of line. There need to be limits on the amount of money spent. I would support campaign limits of no more than double the salary paid for the position. In the case of the House of Delegates, the limit would not exceed \$35,000.

9. Please describe any **other actions** you would take in the General Assembly to help Virginia reduce its greenhouse gas emissions, support the adoption of renewable energy and increased energy efficiency, and mitigate the impacts of climate change.

One action that I would take would be to have more public education opportunities available to the citizens. Having experts in the area explain the benefits of greenhouse reduction can go a long way in getting people to fully understand the impact of climate change.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Please return to contactcaav@gmail.com.

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Appendix

Web-sourced references:

Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative - <http://www.rggi.org/>

Electric Utility Regulation

Renewable Energy

1. http://apps1.eere.energy.gov/states/state_home.cfm/state=VA
2. <http://www.nrdc.org/energy/renewables/virginia.asp>
3. <http://www.acore.org/files/pdfs/states/Virginia.pdf>
4. <http://www.seia.org/state-solar-policy/virginia-solar>

Climate Change Impacts

1. Coastal - <http://www.vims.edu/research/units/programs/icccr/index.php>
2. Multi-sector - <http://www.nrdc.org/health/climate/va.asp>

Transportation - http://www.afdc.energy.gov/laws/state_summary?state=VA