

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](mailto: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:** Kathy Beery

**Office you are seeking:** Senate District 2

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?**

In 2020, the state established a Council on Environmental Justice and passed legislation ([HB704/SB406](#)). The last minutes online are from January 2023 and the council lacked a quorum to meet. Before adding new legislation into the mix, I want to know what has been done, how it has worked, and what needs to be done differently to make effective policies in this area. It certainly looks like this has been a political football and legislation has been passed on strict party lines. So, priority one is depoliticizing this issue. Without a bipartisan coalition to promote environmental justice policies, not much is going to happen. I think this can be done when we remember that class – which cuts across racial and ethnic identity groups – is a significant factor in environmental injustice.

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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.**

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

Yes, of course. We need to rejoin RGGI.

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.

Yes, and beyond that we need to prohibit publicly regulated utilities from donating to political campaigns or creating PACs to support political candidates.

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.**

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We are at a point of transition – not only in the way we produce energy but in the way it is distributed. It is a mistake to focus only on the production, not the distribution methods. The centralization of production is about monetizing energy for the benefit of a corporation. If that system is replaced with distributed production, we need to be sure that the poor who are unable to invest in producing their own energy are not left depending on a centralized system with skyrocketing rates. So, yes, I support distributing production and I want to make sure we don't cause harm to the most vulnerable as we make that change. This is not going to be easy in the current system where publicly regulated utilities can buy elected leaders with unlimited campaign donations. See above.

**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.**

I will first research what others have been doing and see who can help create a coalition for this.

The other side of this equation is preparing for climate refugees from coastal areas who will be moving to Senate District 2. This requires that we prepare our economy and our infrastructure to absorb population increases in the next 20 years. Part of that involves growing industrial hemp and creating related industries to produce hemp products. Hemp also helps mitigate climate change.

**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.**

Again, I will research what is being done and look to build a coalition to achieve these goals.

**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.**

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It is embarrassing that a state that claims to be the cradle of democracy in this country has a system that is basically pay-to-play. This is a top priority if we are going to address our most pressing issues.

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 of the most interesting experiences on the campaign trail has been discovering that the Chambers of Commerce in SD2 are all putting forward policy agendas that prioritize things like affordable housing, rural public transportation, and childcare. We have a chance to build a coalition between climate activists and our local business communities to address the need for a 21st-century transportation system that includes mitigating climate change. I look forward to facilitating those conversations and connecting the results to policymaking in Richmond.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Please return to [contactcaav@gmail.com](mailto:contactcaav@gmail.com).

### 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](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/iccr/index.php>
2. Multi-sector - <http://www.nrdc.org/health/climate/va.asp>

**Transportation** - [http://www.afdc.energy.gov/laws/state\\_summary?state=VA](http://www.afdc.energy.gov/laws/state_summary?state=VA)

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