Faith, Environment and the 2019 Election: A Creation Care Voter Reflection Guide

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About Virginia Interfaith Power & Light

We are people of faith collaborating to grow healthy communities and advance climate justice through education, advocacy, and worship. For more information, visit vaipl.org.

VA Interfaith Power and Light (VAIPL) will not tell you which candidate to vote for. We do not ask you to vote only with these issues in mind, but we do ask you to consider the views of candidates on climate change.
Dear Reader,

Faith plays such an important part in our lives. It empowers and gives communities hope and the keys to come together to address concerns and to build more meaningful lives. In the past, the faith community has played an integral role in mobilizing everyday people and spreading moral perspectives on social issues.

Climate change is one of the biggest issues to face humanity and is already affecting communities in every country in a myriad of ways. Impacts on infrastructure, the economy, national security, public health, food security, human mobility and nutrition are just a few of the ways that climate change is disruptive. Climate impacts deeply connect with morality as the people without access to resources are the most vulnerable and will be impacted the most by droughts, extreme storms, shifting agricultural yields, sea level rise, and spreading diseases.

Moral issues are marked by deep questions of what is right and wrong and what society should do. Climate change embodies a moral quandary, especially because of the disproportionate impact of negative consequences on the world’s poor and the fact that rich nations have become wealthy by creating and contributing the most to the problem. In Virginia, this ethical concern encompasses the disproportionate impacts of the climate crisis, impacts of burning fossil fuels and releasing pollutants, and the lack of resources for low
income populations and communities of color to become resilient in the face of climate disruption.

This year we wanted to provide you with some tools to help you think through how you can lift up caring for the planet through civic engagement. We hope you will find the resources below helpful in your discernment on how you will participate during this season.

Sincerely,

Kendyl Crawford, Director
Resources for You

Key Dates

Deadline to register to vote, or update an existing registration: **Tuesday, October 15, 2019**

Deadline to request an absentee ballot to be mailed to you: **Tuesday October 29, 2019 (must be received by your Registrar by 5:00 pm)**

Deadline to vote in-person absentee: **Saturday, November 2, 2019**

**Election Day:** **Tuesday, November 5**

Key Information

Apply to register, check to make sure you are registered to vote and learn your polling place: [https://vote.elections.virginia.gov/VoterInformation](https://vote.elections.virginia.gov/VoterInformation)

Learn who your candidates are: [https://www.vote411.org](https://www.vote411.org)

For information on incumbents’ environmental records, check out the:

- [2019 Sierra Club Virginia Chapter Climate and Clean Energy Scorecard](https://www.sierraclub.org)
- [2019 Virginia League of Conservation Voters Conservation Scorecard](https://www.vlcv.org)

Check out candidates who have taken the pledge to not take money from energy monopolies: [https://www.cleanvirginia.org](https://www.cleanvirginia.org)
Take Action

Voter Commitment Cards

Call Ayesha Noor at 804-908-3404 or email anoor@vaipl.org to request voter cards. This year we are offering two types:

- **Faithful Citizen Voter Card** – This set of voter commitment cards is centered on upholding economic, social, environmental and racial justice.
- **Creation Care Voter Cards** – These voter commitment cards are specifically focused on caring for Creation, the environment and elevating environmental justice.

These cards should be filled in and mailed back to us so we can make sure to follow up with signers on their commitment.

Questions for Candidates

You can use this list of questions to ask the candidates where they stand on priority issues for candidate’s forums or whenever an opportunity arises:

1. What would you do to help Virginia address climate change and reduce dependency on fossil fuels?
2. Low-income Virginians have a high energy burden, meaning they pay a disproportionate share of their income on energy. What would you do to reduce this energy burden?
3. One in seven people deal with food insecurity, which means they don’t know where their next meal is coming from. What are some innovative ways you would work to address food insecurity in the Commonwealth?
4. The Minimum Wage in Virginia has not been raised in over 10 years, the longest such period since the program began in 1938. How do you propose to raise wages for workers across the Commonwealth?

For more sample questions, please visit: [https://www.virginiainterfaithcenter.org/2019-candidate-questionnaire/](https://www.virginiainterfaithcenter.org/2019-candidate-questionnaire/)
Background

As an interfaith organization focused on environmental justice, we believe the 2019 election presents an important opportunity to reflect on our commitment to the common good and to preserve it from the grassroots. We understand that elections are more than partisan divisions, the latest poll numbers, mega corporations and billionaire donors.

Our politicians alone are insufficient to carry out the immense responsibility of addressing the defining moral issues of our time: criminal justice; economic justice, environmental justice, health equity and immigration justice. All of these issues require civic engagement from all of us. At the core, these issues raise moral questions about the kind of nation we want today and for our future generations.

People of faith have always been at the forefront of struggles toward justice as it is faith that breaks down barriers and encourages peaceful and tolerant dialogue. American democracy is championed through a history of faith-based activists who have taken it to the streets, bled and have even sacrificed their lives for voting rights, equality and human dignity.

While, the United States has come a long way in terms of civil rights and respecting the fundamental dignity of each person, there is still a long road ahead of us. Inspired by our history and united as a people of faith and moral conscience, we turn our attention to the Virginia 2019 election not as partisans, but as faithful citizens committed to justice, compassion, responsibility and community.

The need of our time – as His Holiness Mirza Masroor Ahmad, the worldwide Caliph of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community reminded us during his recent visit to France – is justice and compassion. The Caliph said:

Let it be that our future generations come to remember us with love and affection, rather than with hate and resentment. May every person and every nation come to fulfil the rights of one another and may justice and compassion prevail over all forms of injustice and conflict. Amen
At a time when some vilify immigrants, Muslims and people of color, while others capitalize on economic insecurity, downplay climate change, and divide people merely for their own political gain, most Virginians are looking for responsible leaders who unite our communities around justice, equity and compassion and who can truly be public servants.

The 2019 Virginia election should be a statewide examination of conscience. At VAIPL, we have been at the forefront of the intersection of faith and environmental justice. This reflection guide provides a framework to think about environmental issues, especially climate disruption, heading into the election.
Voter Reflection Guide

**Climate Change: A Threat to Creation and Our Children’s Future**

As people of faith and conscience, we believe that it is our moral challenge and responsibility to respond to the urgent threat of climate change that is already increasing suffering around the world and right here in Virginia. Our stewardship of this Earth calls for caring for our home and loving our neighbors.

Heavy industrialization, primarily the burning of fossil fuels for energy, has thrown nature out of balance, polluted the air, raised sea levels, made thousands of creatures extinct, and has threatened the lives and livelihoods of our brothers and sisters living in developing and underdeveloped countries. In short, humans have become destroyers rather than sustainers of the very planet with which we were entrusted with. We must return to our appropriate relationship to all living beings and systems because climate change is moving us farther from the divine will. By acting to protect Creation, we rise up to our responsibility to restore harmony.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama's Message to Delegates to the UN Climate Conference in December last year is crucial for all of us. He says:

> Climate change is not the concern of just one or two nations. It is an issue that affects the whole of humanity and every living being on this earth. This beautiful planet is our only home. If, due to global warming or other environmental problems, the earth cannot sustain itself, there is no other planet to which we can move. We have to take serious action now to protect our environment and find constructive solutions to global warming.

Some political leaders ignore, deny or downplay the overwhelming scientific evidence that human behavior is intensifying global warming. We can no longer afford apathy. We understand and can see all around us that global warming is disrupting the natural balance. The climate change crisis disproportionately impacts those who have contributed the least to the problem: the poor and vulnerable. While Virginia has started to make some progress on reducing carbon emissions, vulnerable populations continue to be at an increased risk to the impacts of climate change, fossil fuel production and toxic pollution.
Hundreds of faith communities across Virginia are greening their facilities, teaching and preaching about global warming as a moral issue, and mobilizing for policy change. Virginia is one of the few states in the south moving forward on climate change. We must embrace our state’s role as a leader—ending our use of fossil fuels and transitioning to renewable energy, like solar and wind. We recognize that Virginians are on the frontlines of climate disruption whether facing sea level rise in Hampton Roads or facing a transition from the past’s coal centered economy in the southwest. As a wealthy state located in the close proximity of the nation’s capital, Virginia has a unique responsibility to show moral and political leadership by:

1. **Codifying an environmental justice council.** This statewide body should be tasked with oversight on environmental justice issues to most effectively prevent disproportionate burden.

2. **Operationalize environmental justice within the state government by:**
   - Creating an inter-agency working group,
   - Establishing an Office of Environmental Justice, and appointing an environmental justice,
   - Establishing additional environmental justice staff within the Department of Environmental Quality, Department of Conservation and Recreation, and the Virginia Department of Health;
   - Ensuring training for state agency staff in environmental justice techniques.

3. **Pursuing policy reform on environmental justice including:**
   - Adopting the U.S. EPA's definition of environmental justice in the Code;
   - Requiring an environmental justice analysis for new energy, industrial and infrastructure projects;
   - Weighing health impacts in environmental justice as a factor in all siting, rule-making, and permitting decisions.
In the recent past, Governor Ralph Northam has made some key progress towards a greener Virginia. The recent announcement of four new solar projects as well as Executive Order 43 which promises access to clean energy and growing clean energy jobs are vital steps towards 100% clean energy, but it is imperative that these steps towards a renewable energy economy are implemented in a just manner and as close to the timeline laid out by the scientific community as possible.

This election is the time for all Virginian to think about the environment before casting their vote. As people of conscience, we know that we live out our faith through the actions that we take. We invite you to reflect on how through your personal actions and civic engagement you can help right this wrong of climate change. Please check out the resources on page 6 and 7 and share them with others as we work together inspiring one another to build a world rooted in love and justice.

VAIPL encourages you to think green as you consider candidates to support this November.

Endorsements

Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy