

April 27, 2017

The Honorable Terry McAuliffe
Governor of Virginia
Patrick Henry Building, 3rd Floor
1111 East Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23219

Dear Gov. McAuliffe:

Psalm 24 tells us, “The earth is the Lord’s, and all it holds, the world, and those who live there.” We are but stewards, called to protect our planet—*our common home*, as Pope Francis continually reminds us—and all its people, especially the most vulnerable. I urge you to do all in your power to implement policies for our Commonwealth that will protect both current and future generations from catastrophic climate change.

You have taken important steps toward meeting this challenge. I applaud you for promptly initiating work on an implementation plan to meet the carbon standards in the 2015 federal Clean Power Plan, and for convening a work group to study ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The work group is scheduled to complete its work by the end of April and provide a report to you by the end of May.

As you know, the landmark Paris climate agreement signed in December 2015 went into effect last November. In that agreement, the nations of the world committed themselves to “nationally determined contributions” to keep global warming in check. Yet it is widely understood that those measures are insufficient to achieve the goals of the agreement. Significantly greater efforts will be required to protect humanity—indeed, all life on the planet—from the worst effects of climate change.

Consequently, I entreat you to go well beyond proposals that would meet only the minimum requirements of the 2015 federal regulations (which are presently under review) while disregarding the moral imperative to act decisively. For example, merely shifting energy generation from coal to natural gas, applying emissions limits only to existing plants, and allowing for a whole new complement of fossil fuel-burning power plants will not protect us from climate change.

Increased pollution from carbon and other greenhouse gases will hurt us. It will continue adding to the problem of more extreme weather that climate change brings. Additional emissions from gas wells, pipelines, and fossil fuel-burning power plants will accumulate in the atmosphere and contribute to sea level rise, ocean acidification, drought, and floods, which in turn can lead to famine and mass migration.

Instead of walking down that path, I sincerely ask you to pursue a path that will lead to a clean, safe future. Measures that are already on the table can help get us there, like a mass-based plan that covers both existing and new power plants; energy conservation measures for homes, businesses, and public buildings; and robust measures to promote clean energy.

Our parish is doing its part. Over the last few years, we have implemented efficiency measures that have reduced our electricity usage by 28 percent and our carbon emissions by 29 percent, and we are looking for ways to do more. I urge you to do more as well, and to adopt policies that will make Virginia a leader in the transition to a clean energy future. In light of the President's recent executive order, it appears that we will no longer be able to look to Washington for support on this crucial issue. If we are to safeguard our common home, states will have to take the initiative. I pray we in Virginia will rise to the challenge.

Sincerely yours,

Rev. Joseph T. Brennan, OSFS
Pastor

cc: Molly Ward, Secretary of Natural Resources
Maurice Jones, Secretary of Commerce and Trade
David Paylor, Director of the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality
John Warren, Director of the Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals, and Energy
John Daniel, Deputy Attorney General for Commerce, Environment and Technology