The Threat of Carbon Pollution: Virginia

We have a moral obligation to leave our children a planet that's not polluted or damaged, and by taking an all-of-the-above approach to develop homegrown energy and steady, responsible steps to cut carbon pollution, we can protect our kids' health and begin to slow the effects of climate change so we leave a cleaner, more stable environment for future generations. Climate change impacts including severe weather, asthma attacks, prolonged allergy seasons, and sea-level rise are affecting our security, our economy, and our communities. In 2012 alone, the cost of weather disasters exceeded $110 billion in the United States, and climate change will only increase the frequency and intensity of these events. Today, we already set limits for arsenic, mercury and lead, but we impose no limits on how much carbon pollution our power plants release. Carbon pollution is contributing to a higher risk of asthma attacks and more frequent and severe storms, floods, heat waves, and wildfires, driving up food prices and threatening our communities. The President's plan is a comprehensive approach to cutting the pollution that causes climate change and threatens public health, setting us on a path to make our communities healthier, safer, and more resilient.

THE IMPACT OF POLLUTION AND EXTREME WEATHER IN VIRGINIA

In 2011, power plants and major industrial facilities in Virginia emitted nearly 45 million metric tons of carbon pollution—that's equal to the yearly pollution from more than 9.2 million cars.

Recent incidents provide a reminder of the impacts to our public health and costs due to extreme weather in Virginia. Although we cannot say that climate change is responsible for any individual event, climate change is already increasing our risks from these events.

- Over 25 disasters amounting to $1 billion in damages have impacted Virginia since 1980.
- In recent years, the state has been crippled by a series of damaging ice storms, windstorms, and other extreme events. Virginia declared a state of emergency in 2011 and 2012 due to damage from Hurricane Sandy and Hurricane Irene.
- Temperature and precipitation patterns can affect the life cycle and distribution of insects, many of which transmit disease that already pose problems to public health in Virginia. In 2010, there were 911 cases of Lyme disease in the state.

ANTICIPATED CLIMATE-RELATED RISKS IN THE SOUTHEAST

Sea level rise, dangerous storm surges and intense hurricanes already pose serious threats to coastal cities in the Southeast, and climate change will intensify these impacts. The Southeast experienced two billion-dollar extreme weather events in 2012. Decreased water availability is very likely to affect the region's economy as well as its natural systems. By the end of this century, much of the Southeast will experience more than 100 days above 90°F, which in the absence of adaptive actions is expected to lead to more heat-stress related illness and deaths, decreased agricultural production, and negative impacts on fish and wildlife. Warmer temperatures accelerate formation of smog in urban areas, exacerbating respiratory problems such as asthma.

CUTTING CARBON POLLUTION AND INCREASING RESILIENCE IN VIRGINIA

Climate change is a long-term problem, but we can make substantial progress through a series of steady and responsible steps. The President's plan builds from progress already underway to work with states, local communities, and the private sector to reduce carbon pollution and to prepare our Nation for the impacts that cannot be avoided. Since 2009, President Obama has taken a number of common sense measures to combat carbon pollution, including:

- ***Investing in Clean Energy***: During the President's first term, the United States more than doubled its use of renewable energy from wind, solar, and geothermal sources. Since 2009, the Administration has supported tens of thousands of renewable energy projects throughout the country, including nearly 90 in Virginia, generating enough energy to power more than 2,000 homes and helping Virginia meet its own goal of generating 15 percent of its electricity from renewable energy sources by 2025.

- ***Improving Efficiency***: Using less energy to power our homes, businesses and vehicles is critical to building a clean and secure energy future. President Obama has made essential investments in research and development for energy efficiency advances, and set new standards to make the things we use every day – from cars to microwaves – more efficient.

    - President Obama established the toughest fuel economy standards for passenger vehicles in U.S. history. These standards will double the fuel efficiency of our cars and trucks by 2025, saving the average driver more than $8,000 over the lifetime of a 2025 vehicle and cutting carbon pollution.

    - Since October 2009, the Department of Energy and the Department of Housing and Urban Development have jointly completed energy upgrades in more than one million homes across the country, saving many families more than $400 on their heating and cooling bills in the first year alone.

    - As part of the President's Better Buildings Challenge, Rochester, the Arlington County and the city of Roanoke both committed to reduce their energy intensity 20 percent by 2020 in a combined 3.06 million square feet of public buildings.

- ***Preparing Communities for the Consequences of Climate Change***: The Obama Administration has worked since its earliest days to strengthen the Nation's resilience to climate change impacts, including investing in critical science and tools, developing the first-ever Federal agency climate adaptation plans, and directly partnering with communities. For example, through NOAA's SeaGrant program, researchers are working with Virginia communities to help them understand the effects of and prepare for sea level rise impacts.