

Resilient Virginia Launch Event
Feb. 19, 2015

TALKING POINTS

Presented by Secretary of Public Safety and
Homeland Security Brian Moran

Henrico County Training Center
7701 E. Parham Rd., Richmond, VA

9:30 a.m.

Thank you. I am honored to be here with you to help celebrate the official launching of Resilient Virginia. I feel especially energized knowing that I am in the company of people who feel the same sense of urgency as I do on the extremely critical issue of sea-level rise and flooding.

In his book, “Virginia Climate Fever,” journalist and environmentalist Stephen Nash reports that melting ice adds 50 cubic miles of water to our oceans every year – and that the rate is increasing. The sea level is slowly, steadily rising as greenhouse gas emissions warm our planet, melt huge ice sheets, and expands water as it heats.

For the people who live and work around Hampton Roads waterways, rising sea levels are as real as property-damaging storm surges and increasing insurance premiums. They know it’s real, because they’ve seen it with their own eyes ... and they’re ready to do something about it.

I recently visited the Hague neighborhood of Norfolk where they have experienced several bouts of flooding in recent storms. Such flooding has prompted long-time mayor Paul Fraim to suggest that “retreat zones” in Norfolk may become necessary in the future.

As you know, Governor McAuliffe’s top priority is to improve and grow Virginia’s economy. The issue of sea-level rise and recurrent flooding is major for the Commonwealth, and must be addressed to support the development of a New Virginia Economy.

In 2012, at the request of the Virginia General Assembly, the Virginia Institute of Marine Science conducted a study of recurrent coastal flooding in the Tidewater Region. Based on that study’s findings, the Secure Commonwealth Panel instituted the Recurrent Flooding Sub-Panel. They developed a set of recommendations for how this Administration can proactively respond to this issue.

Both of these studies concurred that we will experience a one-and-a-half foot sea level rise by the year 2050. Governor McAuliffe responded last July by creating the Governor’s Climate Change and Resiliency Update Commission, which I chair along with Secretary of Natural Resources Molly Ward. Its members are creating an action-oriented plan with concrete measures that support Governor Tim Kaine’s Climate Change Action Plan of 2008. One of the recommendations was to identify an appropriate executive leader to oversee resilience efforts

of the Commonwealth. I am honored that the Commission asked me to serve as Virginia's Chief Resilience Officer.

The Commission also is supporting the Administration's effort to obtain funding from HUD's "National Disaster Resilience Competition" grant. As stated in the grant application language, it will "support innovative resilience projects at the local level while encouraging communities to adopt policy changes and activities that plan for the impacts of extreme weather and climate change, and rebuild affected areas to be better prepared for the future."

In our grant application, we have committed to "surface, test and refine the best strategies for building resilient communities across a range of environments by developing the model seaport region that derives its economic vitality from the water. By piloting innovative approaches to managing water, driving economic development and creating cohesive neighborhoods in Hampton Roads, the Commonwealth envisions using best practices from the pilot to assist Virginia communities to better address ... flooding, drought conditions, economic development challenges and neighborhood cohesion."

The Secure Commonwealth Panel also recommended that we establish a Four Year "Flood Resilience Action Plan" with specific, measurable and attainable goals and objectives. I'm pleased to report that the McAuliffe Administration has already taken steps toward this recommendation by ordering an in-season review of the

hurricane preparedness plan for Hampton Roads. The review was conducted collaboratively with Cabinet Secretaries and state agencies responsible for conducting a hurricane evacuation. Working with our local and federal partners, we identified potential short – and long – term improvements to existing plans. As a result, Virginia is adopting a balanced approach to mitigation, preparedness, sheltering, and evacuation planning; and we are using a similar approach as we develop resilience strategies:

- We are using living shorelines and other innovative and environmentally friendly techniques to curb the impact of significant storms and flooding.
- We are promoting policies that encourage the development of micro grids and other energy technologies that make our infrastructure more resilient and more able to function during disruptions.
- We are making state government buildings more efficient in their use of energy and more likely to remain functional during power outages. Energy efficiency is a priority for Governor McAuliffe in both the public and private sectors. We're also exploring increased deployment of solar generation on state facilities through the Public Private Partnership office and through the creation of the solar energy development authority.

As VIMS has recommended in its report, we anticipate a sea level rise of 18 inches ... One and half feet ... by the year 2050. A rise of this magnitude will affect thousands of businesses and homes now located along our waterways, and will in many cases literally change the landscape from what we see today. We must take this seriously, and we must be prepared.

In his book, Mr. Nash points out that the Hampton Roads area has the largest concentration of population of any metropolitan area between New York and Miami, and that they live in a very low-lying area. If the sea level were to rise by two feet, Mr. Nash says, it could inundate 82 square miles of dry land and 660 miles of wetlands. Fifteen miles of Interstate highway would be submerged, along with 52 miles of railway and 35 percent of port acreage.

So, as Resilient Virginia begins its work, what can we do together to protect our quality of life in the coming years? “Resilience” is more than just the latest buzzword. It is, in fact, the embodiment of a comprehensive, holistic and strategic approach to managing risk, both now and in the future.

According to the Rockefeller Foundation, effective resilience includes the following qualities:

Awareness. Awareness means knowing what your strengths and assets are, what liabilities and vulnerabilities you have, and what threats and risks you face.

Adaptability. We must be able to adjust to changing circumstances during disruptions by developing new plans, taking new actions, or modifying behavior so that we can stay the course, particularly when it is not possible or wise to go back to the way things were before.

Integration. We must have the ability to bring together a wide range of thoughts, elements and ideas from individuals and groups into cohesive solutions and actions.

That's where organizations such as Resilient Virginia can be major contributors: You can help us facilitate an integrated approach in the coordination and implementation of resiliency efforts throughout the Commonwealth. I am confident that today marks the first day of what will be a long and fruitful collaboration in pursuit of a common – and critically important – goal.

Thank you for inviting me to speak today, and congratulations.

*Virginia Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security
Brian Moran*

Also appointed Virginia's Chief Resilience Officer