



TO: INTERESTED PARTIES

FROM: LORI WEIGEL/PARTNER

RE: VIRGINIANS' SUPPORT FOR A STRONG STATE PLAN TO REDUCE
WATER POLLUTION AFFECTING THE CHESAPEAKE BAY

DATE: OCTOBER 26, 2010

Public Opinion Strategies recently conducted a survey of voters throughout Virginia which examined public perceptions of the Virginia plan to comply with the EPA goals for reductions in pollution affecting the Chesapeake Bay.¹ **The results of the survey show Virginians overwhelmingly believe that we can protect water quality and have a strong economy; majorities of all geographic and demographic sub-groups recognize the economic importance of the Bay; and by nearly three-to-one margins they agree more with a viewpoint that details why Virginia should develop a strong plan that seriously addresses this issue over a viewpoint detailing concerns about how such a plan could harm the state economy.**

By a 26% preference margin, voters say they prefer Virginia establish its own plan to address the problem of polluted run-off flowing into rivers, creeks and Bay rather than the EPA setting requirements Virginia would need to meet. Voters believe that Virginia setting its own plan would be more flexible, more cost effective and better for the state as a whole than if the EPA set mandates for the state. The desire to take action is rooted in the deep concern voters have regarding water quality and their increasing perception of the Chesapeake Bay as a national treasure.

The specific key findings from the survey include...

- **Virginia voters strongly feel that the state can both protect water quality *and* have a strong economy with good jobs for Virginians.** Prior to any discussion of the specifics of the current plan, we asked voters generically which statement comes closer to their own view. As the following graph illustrates, state voters reject the idea that environmental protections can only come at the expense of the economy:

¹ **Methodology:** From October 20-21, 2010, Public Opinion Strategies completed 500 telephone interviews with registered voters throughout Virginia. The margin of sampling error for the full statewide sample is +/- 4.38%; margins of error for subgroups within the sample will be larger. Interviews were distributed proportionally throughout the state and are representative of active voters.

We can protect the water quality in rivers, creeks, and the Chesapeake Bay and have a strong economy with good jobs for Virginians, without having to choose one over the other.

80%

Sometimes protections for water quality and having a strong economy are in conflict and we must choose one over the other.

17%

- **State voters overwhelmingly recognize the importance of the Chesapeake Bay to Virginia's economy.** A ubiquitous 92% of the electorate says that "important for Virginia's economy" is a phrase that describes the Chesapeake Bay well, with 64% saying it describes the Bay very well. Moreover, many voters describe the economic importance of the Bay in quite personal terms. For example, a younger woman in Norfolk told us that:

"A clean Bay means greater tourism; it means a better environment; it means a better future for the commonwealth of Virginia. Personally, I feel our watermen have not gotten a fair shake for probably more than, I would say, close to a century they've been having to deal with all this runoff. For which nobody's paid any attention to. It's a vital part of our economy so I think you really should pay attention to what's happening in the Bay. Our family, we've always been impacted by how healthy the water has been, how good we've had seafood. For a lot of people in my family, they all left that industry because it became too difficult to raise their family."

- **The recognition of the economic importance of the Chesapeake Bay is evident across the state and with all demographic sub-groups, including...**
 - 69% of residents in the Norfolk area (say "important for Virginia's economy" describes the Bay very well), Richmond (67%), Roanoke (67%), Northern Virginia (56%), and even areas outside the Bay watershed (67%);
 - 66% of those dependent on farming for their livelihood, and 63% of those who are not;
 - 64% of Republicans, 62% of Independents, and 70% of Democrats;
 - 63% of men and 65% of women;
 - 63% of voters with a college degree and 66% of voters without a college degree;
 - 65% of rural voters, 64% of those in small towns, 61% of suburbanites and 69% in urban areas; and
 - 65% of hunters and fishermen and 64% of those who have not had a hunting or fishing license in the last three years.
- **By nearly a two-to-one margin, Virginia voters say that they prefer Virginia to establish its own plan to reduce pollution in the state's rivers, creeks and the Bay, rather than the EPA doing so for them.** Respondents were provided with a brief neutral description of the situation drawn from AP and local newspaper coverage of recent events: "Twenty years ago, six mid-Atlantic states and the District of Columbia agreed to develop plans to reduce the amount of pollution that goes into rivers and streams and eventually flows into the Chesapeake Bay... Virginia was one of the states

that agreed to meet these pollution reduction goals and while progress has been made, no state has completely met its goal. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, or EPA, is legally bound to ensure each state meets their goal. They recently announced that Virginia's updated plan was not strong enough, nor specific enough in detailing how it would ensure less pollution flows into rivers, creeks and the Bay. Virginia has to submit a revised, stronger plan by the end of next month, or else the EPA is required to come up with one for them."

Having heard this description, respondents were asked which approach they would agree with more, and by a 26 point difference, voters prefer the State of Virginia develop its own plan rather than the EPA:

62% Having Virginia establish its own plan to reduce polluted run-off through stronger requirements and incentives so that farms, sewage treatment plants and others meet the new pollution reduction standards

36% Having the EPA set federal government mandates so that farms, sewage treatment plants and others meet new pollution reduction standards

- **The preference for Virginia developing its own plan to address pollution in the Chesapeake Bay cuts across most major demographic subgroups of Virginia voters, including:**

- 63% of men and 60% of women;
- 59% of voters under age 55 and 65% of those 55 and older
- 65% of voters with a college degree and 58% of voters without a college degree;
- 69% of rural voters, 65% of those in small towns, 59% of suburbanites and 60% in urban areas;
- 80% of Republicans and 68% of Independents;
- 62% of hunters and fishermen and 61% of those who have not had a hunting or fishing license in the last three years; and
- 70% of voters in the Norfolk media market area, 61% in the Richmond areas, 56% in the Roanoke area, and 58% in Northern Virginia.

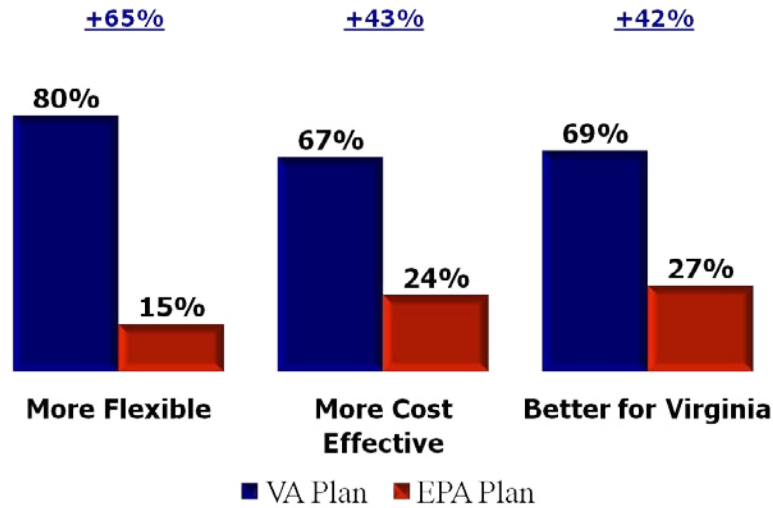
It is worth pointing out that the preference for Virginia developing its own plan rather than the EPA is just as strong among those whose livelihoods are at least somewhat dependent on the farm economy as those who are divorced from this segment of Virginia's economy:

Approach Agree With More to Reduce Pollution in the Bay

Family Income Reliance on Farming	VA Plan	EPA Plan	Difference
Dependent on farm economy	62%	35%	+27%
Not dependent on farm economy	62%	36%	+26%

- **Voters perceive a state plan as more flexible, more cost effective, and better for Virginia than the EPA setting federal government mandates.** By wide margins,

voters overwhelmingly say that they believe Virginia setting its own plan would provide benefits for the state as seen in the following graph:



- Once voters hear viewpoints on both sides of the issue, they continue to strongly prefer Virginia developing its own plan.** Simulating some of the debate taking place, we drew from news articles and web sites that addressed both benefits and criticisms of Virginia developing a plan to seriously address pollution in the Chesapeake Bay. Due to the variation in arguments against the state plan, we split the sample in representative halves, with one-half hearing arguments voiced on the Virginia Farm Bureau web site and the other half hearing arguments voiced in recent press coverage to assess if this made a significant difference in how voters responded. In fact, the results were nearly identical with voters strongly agreeing more with those who support Virginia developing a plan to reduce pollution in the Bay:

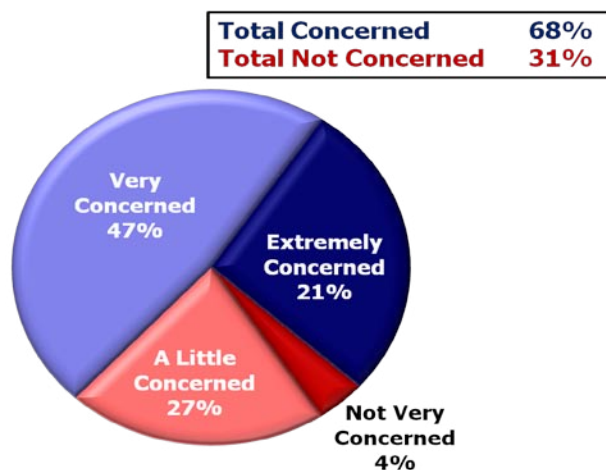
- 72%** Some people say that Virginia **SHOULD** develop a strong plan that seriously addresses how it will reduce pollution, because it will provide greater flexibility than one size fits all mandates. Besides, this plan will protect the quality of our drinking water, the health of our fish and wildlife, and the thousands of jobs that rely on the Bay, including fishermen, crabbers, and our tourism economy.
- 21%** Other people say that Virginia should **NOT** develop its own plan, because more statewide regulations will hurt our economy. It will put thousands of family farmers out of business, and hurt rural communities. These regulations do not take into account the voluntary actions many have already taken. Since it took decades for changes to occur in the Bay, we should allow decades for improvements to happen.

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- 25%** Other people say that Virginia should NOT develop its own plan, because the programs Virginia already has in place are on track to restore the Bay if we give them time. We should not establish more regulations that could hurt our economy at this already difficult time.

Majorities of voters across the political spectrum, across regions of the state, and types of communities choose the viewpoint that Virginia should develop its own plan to seriously address how it will reduce pollution. Significantly, by more than a two-to-one margin, even those who are dependent on the farm economy for their own livelihood agree more with the statement in support of the state moving forward with a plan: 70% choose Virginia should develop its own plan, while just 28% say more regulations will hurt the economy, put thousands of farmers out of business and hurt rural communities.

- **Support for Virginia having a plan that seriously addresses water pollution is rooted in the strong concern voiced by the electorate for the Chesapeake Bay.** Across multiple questions, Virginia residents express concern over conditions in the Bay. When asked about some phrases that may or may not describe the Chesapeake Bay, over three-quarters (77%) say that “requires urgent attention” is a phrase that describes the Chesapeake Bay well. Moreover, 88% indicate that “improving, but still needs help” accurately describes the Bay, and a nearly equal 87% say the Bay “should be a priority in Virginia.”

Moreover, over two-thirds (66%) say they are “extremely” or “very concerned about the issue of reducing pollution in the Bay. An additional 27% say they are a little concerned. In fact solid majorities of all key sub-groups – including those whose livelihoods are depending on the farming economy – insist that they are extremely or very concerned about this issue and how it will affect their state.



- **There is an increasing perception of the Chesapeake Bay as a “national treasure” by state residents.** A stunning 90% of Virginia voters characterize the Chesapeake Bay as a national treasure, up ten points from 2005 when we last asked the state’s electorate about this characterization of the Bay.
- **In conclusion, Virginia voters across the political spectrum advise the Governor to “uphold that commitment” to cleaning up the Chesapeake Bay and water quality.** There is a general consensus that having clean water is a basic need and therefore important for state government. Fully 79% strongly agree that “Ensuring Virginia has clean water is an important role of state government, and the Governor and state leaders need to work together to help meet this basic need of all Virginians” (98% agree overall).

Therefore, voters would advise the Governor to “come up with a better plan” for the Bay (verbatim quotes are in response to being asked “what advice or comment would you offer Governor McDonnell about the Chesapeake Bay, the plan to reduce pollution, and how this impacts you as a resident of Virginia”).

“I think you can come up with something that would not only clean up the Bay, but would create new companies and new jobs to do it. It really benefits the economy, as well as the Bay... I think we could have an economy where jobs and whole industries are based on. I think we can do that and I think he is the man to do it.” – Fairfax county Republican woman

“My comment would be how important it is for Chesapeake Bay and how it supports jobs for Richmond, Virginia. It should be a priority to every Virginian in Richmond. To make sure that the natural landmark should be preserved... and a lot of people from all kinds of different states come to actually visit it. So it should actually be treasured.” – Henrico county Democrat man

“I grew up on the Potomac River and I live directly across from Maryland Shore where the industrial chicken farms are. I am aware of their fertilizer runoff that is unmonitored and it goes directly into the river and the Bay. I am aware of the dead zone in the Chesapeake Bay where nothing can live. I think if Maryland or Virginia cannot even begin to start cleaning this environmental crisis up, I think the EPA should step in and make a federal mandate or even make this a Superfund site. I believe our fishing economy on the beach has vanished.” – Westmoreland county Republican man

“Stop worrying about the politics of it all and actually come up with an effective plan. The basic problem I’ve seen with coming up with good environmental policies has always been that it gets bogged down in wants and needs of the politicians’ constituents and doesn’t really look at the true need of the state as whole. This is plaguing the whole United States, but you can especially see it in the environmental policy that Virginia came up with. The whole reason the EPA said that their plan is not good enough and threatening them with mandates if they don’t come up with one is the policies they came up with is catering to just their constituents and not the whole state.” – Fairfax county Independent man

“I would say that he needs to set up a little committee. On that committee, needs to be representatives from the farm community, the environmental community and probably the manufacturing community, and they need to sit down and come up with a commonsense

*goal of cleaning up the Chesapeake Bay and all the other waterways in Virginia.” –
Pittsylvania Independent man*

“I would say they need to stop wasting our money and do something; stop talking about it. I live off of Elizabeth River, which goes into Chesapeake Bay, and it's disgusting. It's a shame because once it's gone you can't get it back.” Virginia Beach Republican woman

“Virginia made a commitment to the Chesapeake Bay. We need to uphold that commitment. I would rather have the state take care of it, but if they cannot and it's not a priority for (the Governor), we will have to deal with the federal government stepping in.” – Fairfax county Democrat woman

In summary, Virginia voters express strong concern about the condition of the Chesapeake Bay. They recognize its economic importance to the state, and increasingly view it as a national treasure worth protecting. Across, geographic, demographic, and economic sub-groups, they overwhelmingly view a state plan to address pollution in the Bay as preferable to the EPA setting mandates for pollution in the state. Moreover, they believe a state plan will provide greater flexibility, be more cost effective, and better for Virginia as a whole. They also reject arguments that criticize Virginia developing a stronger plan, and instead believe that protecting the state's water quality can be done without sacrificing the economy.