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## HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 136

Offered January 11, 2020

*Recognizing that global warming caused by human activity that increases emissions of greenhouse gases has resulted in a climate and ecological emergency.*

Patrons—Guzman, Hope, Keam, Levine, Rasoul and Samirah; Senator: Morrissey

Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, in February 2019, the World Meteorological Organization reported that 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018 were the four hottest years on record and that the 20 warmest years on record have occurred within the past 22 years; and

WHEREAS, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has projected that 2019 will be the second hottest year on record; and

WHEREAS, global atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide, the primary heat-trapping or greenhouse gas, (i) have increased more than 45 percent since pre-industrial times, from 280 parts per million to more than 408 parts per million, primarily due to human activities, including the burning of fossil fuels and deforestation; (ii) are rising at a rate of roughly 2.5 parts per million annually; and (iii) must be reduced to not more than 350 parts per million, and likely lower, "if humanity wishes to preserve a planet similar to that on which civilization developed and to which life on Earth is adapted," according to former National Aeronautics and Space Administration climatologist Dr. James Hansen; and

WHEREAS, global atmospheric concentrations of other, more potent greenhouse gases, including methane, nitrous oxide, and hydrofluorocarbons, have also increased substantially since pre-industrial times primarily due to human activities, including the burning of fossil fuels; and

WHEREAS, in November 2018, the United States Fourth National Climate Assessment was released, detailing the massive threat that climate change due to global warming poses to infrastructure, property, industry, recreation, natural resources, agricultural systems, human health and safety, and quality of life in the United States; and

WHEREAS, the effects of climate change caused by a global rise in temperatures of one degree Celsius above pre-industrial levels is already having dangerous effects on human populations and the environment, including ocean warming, rising seas, ocean acidification, extraordinary biodiversity loss, prodigious floods, droughts, devastating wildfires, and extreme weather; and

WHEREAS, in May 2019, the United Nations Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services found that human-induced climate change is pushing the planet toward the sixth mass species extinction, threatening the food security, water supply, and well-being of billions of people; and

WHEREAS, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has found wide-ranging, acute, and fatal public health consequences from climate change that affect communities across the United States; and

WHEREAS, the consequences of climate change already disproportionately affect frontline communities, indigenous communities, communities of color, and low-income communities and endanger populations made especially vulnerable by existing exposure to extreme weather events, such as children, the elderly, and individuals with pre-existing disabilities or health conditions; and

WHEREAS, in January 2019, the U.S. Department of Defense stated that "the effects of a changing climate are a national security issue with potential impacts to Department of Defense missions, operational plans, and installations"; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Department of Defense has referred to climate change as a "threat multiplier" that has the potential to exacerbate many of the challenges the United States already confronts, including conflicts over scarce resources, conditions conducive to violent extremism, and the spread of infectious diseases, and has the potential to produce new, unforeseeable challenges in the future; and

WHEREAS, real-world observation and current climate science demonstrate that the environment, economies, and communities of Virginia have been affected and will continue to be affected by climate change in the form of (a) rising seas and retreating shores, endangering low-lying coastal towns and areas, such as Poquoson, Tangier, and Hampton Roads; (b) saltwater intrusion caused by rising sea levels, disrupting the ecology and health of freshwater aquifers; (c) increased extreme weather events, exacerbating flooding and threatening vulnerable communities and critical infrastructure; (d) damage to coastal ecosystems in the form of diminishing tidal marshes, disappearing bay beaches, and rising water temperatures, all of which harm marine organisms, bird species, and commercially important fisheries, such as the Chesapeake Bay; (e) longer wildfire season and more frequent droughts, threatening the forest ecosystem and communities of southern Appalachia; and (f) and increased risks of harm to human

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59 health, such as heat stroke and heat-related illnesses; and

60 WHEREAS, the agricultural sector, the single largest industry in Virginia and the provider of more  
61 than 357,000 jobs, is dependent upon favorable climate conditions and grows more vulnerable to the  
62 increasing impacts of climate change, including changing precipitation and temperature patterns and a  
63 higher frequency of drought and flooding; and

64 WHEREAS, in January 2019, the U.S. Department of Defense published a report that identified six  
65 operationally critical military installations in Virginia directly threatened by the effects of climate  
66 change, including recurring flooding, drought, and wildfires; and

67 WHEREAS, the same report identifies the Navy operations in the greater Hampton Roads area, home  
68 of Naval Station Norfolk, the world's largest naval station, as "very vulnerable to flooding caused by  
69 rising sea levels and land subsidence," challenging the readiness of Navy personnel and operations; and

70 WHEREAS, in April 2016, world leaders representing 175 countries recognized the urgent need to  
71 combat climate change by signing the Paris Agreement, agreeing to keep global warming "well below"  
72 two degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to  
73 1.5 degrees Celsius; and

74 WHEREAS, in October 2018, the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change  
75 projected that the Earth could warm 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels as early as 2030,  
76 resulting in irreversible, catastrophic changes to public health, livelihoods, quality of life, food security,  
77 water supplies, human security, and economic growth; and

78 WHEREAS, the same report found that limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius would require  
79 global net human-caused emissions of carbon dioxide to fall by roughly 45 percent from 2010 levels by  
80 2030, reaching "net zero" around 2050, in which any remaining emissions would need to be balanced by  
81 the removal of carbon dioxide from the air; and

82 WHEREAS, in November 2019, the United Nations Environment Programme Gap Emissions Report  
83 found that countries have collectively failed to stop the growth in global greenhouse gas emissions since  
84 the signing of the Paris Agreement in 2016; at the current rate of emissions, temperatures are expected  
85 to rise 3.2 degrees Celsius by the year 2100; and "incremental changes will not be enough and there is a  
86 need for rapid and transformational action," underscoring the need for immediate climate emergency  
87 action at all levels of government; and

88 WHEREAS, in the absence of significant accountability, acknowledgment, action, and leadership at a  
89 federal level regarding the climate crisis, it is the obligation of Virginia to mobilize at emergency speed  
90 to restore a safe climate and environment for the health, lives, environments, and economies of rural,  
91 urban, and suburban communities across Virginia; and

92 WHEREAS, emergency mobilization would require massive, comprehensive, and immediate  
93 governmental action on a scale not seen since World War II to attain the level of zero greenhouse gas  
94 emissions across all sectors in response to the severe existing and projected environmental, economic,  
95 social, public health, and security threats posed by the climate crisis; and

96 WHEREAS, justice requires that frontline and marginalized communities, which have historically  
97 borne the brunt of the effects of climate change, participate actively in the planning and implementation  
98 of this mobilization effort; and

99 WHEREAS, the massive scope and scale of action necessary to stabilize the climate will require  
100 unprecedented levels of public awareness, engagement, and deliberation to develop and implement  
101 effective, just, and equitable policies to address the climate crisis; and

102 WHEREAS, more than 1,200 local jurisdictions and governments in 26 countries representing more  
103 than 798 million people, including the governments of New York City, Los Angeles, the United  
104 Kingdom, Canada, and the European Union, have already declared a climate emergency; and

105 WHEREAS, taking swift, bold action to acknowledge, mobilize for, and solve the climate emergency  
106 is in full and complete alignment with the language and intent of Article XI, Section 1 of the  
107 Constitution of Virginia, which states that "it shall be the Commonwealth's policy to protect its  
108 atmosphere, lands, and waters from pollution, impairment, or destruction, for the benefit, enjoyment, and  
109 general welfare of the people of the Commonwealth," a part of a document that all elected officers  
110 swear or affirm to support; now, therefore, be it

111 RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly recognize  
112 that global warming caused by human activity that increases emissions of greenhouse gases has resulted  
113 in a climate and ecological emergency. Such global warming severely and urgently affects the  
114 environment, economy, and security of Virginia, and the social well-being, health, and safety of  
115 Virginians, and demands an immediate social, technological, and economic mobilization of the resources  
116 and labor of Virginia at a massive scale to halt, mitigate, reverse, and prepare for the consequences of  
117 the climate emergency and to restore the climate for future generations; and, be it

118 RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates transmit copies of this resolution  
119 to the Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, the President of the United States Senate,  
120 and the members of the Virginia Congressional Delegation so that they may be apprised of the sense of

**121** the General Assembly of Virginia in this matter during their deliberations.

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