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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 559

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

Patrons—Guzman, Carter, Cole, J.G., Helmer, Hope, Keam, Kory, Levine, Lopez, Murphy, Plum, Samirah, Simon, Simonds, Subramanyam and Tran; Senators: Edwards and Marsden

Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, a study published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Science determined that the "worst-case" climate model of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, known as RCP8.5, was the "most useful choice" for government planning in the period leading up to 2050; and

WHEREAS, the 2020 Atlantic hurricane season was the fifth above-average season in a row for storm activity and was the most volatile hurricane season on record, with 30 named storms, a number that is two-and-a-half times the seasonal average; and

WHEREAS, in January 2020, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Centers for Environmental Information reported that 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019 were the five hottest years on record and that 2019 was the forty-third consecutive year with global land and ocean temperatures above average; and

WHEREAS, in January 2020, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration announced that the 10-year period of 2010 through 2019 was the hottest decade ever recorded; 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 preexisting 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

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

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

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

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

80 WHEREAS, in April 2016, world leaders representing 175 countries recognized the urgent need to
81 combat climate change by signing the Paris Agreement, agreeing to keep global warming "well below"
82 two degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to
83 1.5 degrees Celsius; and

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

88 WHEREAS, the same report found that limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius would require
89 global net human-caused emissions of carbon dioxide to fall by roughly 45 percent from 2010 levels by
90 2030, reaching "net zero" around 2050, in which any remaining emissions would need to be balanced by
91 the removal of carbon dioxide from the air; and

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

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

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

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

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

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

115 WHEREAS, taking swift, bold action to acknowledge, mobilize for, and solve the climate emergency
116 is in full and complete alignment with the language and intent of Article XI, Section 1 of the
117 Constitution of Virginia, which states that "it shall be the Commonwealth's policy to protect its
118 atmosphere, lands, and waters from pollution, impairment, or destruction, for the benefit, enjoyment, and
119 general welfare of the people of the Commonwealth," a part of a document that all elected officers

120 swear or affirm to support; now, therefore, be it

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

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