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**Virginians Recognize Importance of Earth Day and Climate Change Advocacy
Let's Address the Role of Dark Money Coming from the Fossil Fuel Industry.**

RICHMOND, Va. — As another “Earth Day” comes and goes in Virginia, citizens in the Tidewater area highlighted their concern about the role of climate change in coastal flooding. Local leaders count more than [200 places of worship](#) in the region [that are at risk for flooding](#). They are not alone in their concern about the adverse impacts of climate change. Most Americans, and increasing numbers of business leaders, recognize that climate change is an existential threat and there is increasing support for initiatives to reduce the impacts of increased flooding, more variable weather patterns, and higher temperatures.

The exception seems to be the energy/natural resource sector. According to Open Secrets, since 1990 the energy/natural resource sector has poured nearly [\\$1.4 billion](#) into legislators’ pockets. The express intent of these donations is to forestall legislation that, in the interest of saving the planet, would affect their bottom line. Of considerable concern is the growing amount of “outside spending” -- spending not directly coordinated with legislative campaigns. Out of the \$223 million in contributions from the energy sector in the 2020 election, a record \$76 million, or 33%, was moved through SuperPACs and dark money groups. This compares to nearly nothing in 2008, the election year before the infamous *Citizen’s United* Supreme Court ruling. *Citizen’s United* opened the flood gates for money supplied by special interests that now influences our elections.

One of the major fossil fuel donors to U.S. legislators is Koch Industries. It is noteworthy that nearly two dozen U.S. lawmakers received a total of roughly [\\$110,000 in campaign contributions](#) from Koch Industries in the weeks leading up to Vladimir Putin’s attack on Ukraine. This was clearly a case where dark money groups wanted to curtail legislation that would favor climate change action, and worse they prioritized their own bottom line over our national security.

Small businesses in Virginia acknowledge the need for campaign finance reform in the context of climate change, including an amendment to the U.S. Constitution which would allow Congress and the states to regulate election spending. As the owner of a small architectural firm in Alexandria, Theresa DeNinno, highlights in this [short video](#), that money from industries linked to fossil fuel interests “inhibits the creative development of renewable building technology” in our state. Businesses are well aware that dark money in politics impedes innovation in technology needed to adapt to climate change.

Our public policies at both the federal and state levels must serve the best interests of the Commonwealth’s citizens. We need the U.S. Congress to pass investment packages for climate and environmental protection solutions. At the same time, we need to get big money out of national politics through a U.S. constitutional amendment. And we need our Virginia legislators to pass common sense campaign finance reform including a ban on campaign donations from corporations that are overseen by the General Assembly. This includes companies like Dominion Energy which is the largest single

corporate donor to Virginian legislators, transferring nearly [\\$20 million into election campaigns since 1996](#). With federal and state campaign finance reforms, we can be better prepared for current and future challenges.

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