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We're in trouble

Our would-be governors are short on environmental plans

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Here's yet another chapter in the tale of the gubernatorial candidates who are challenged in the platform department.

Republican Jerry Kilgore would seek help from the federal government in funding Chesapeake Bay cleanup.

Democrat Tim Kaine says he hopes to find money for the state's share (estimated at \$1.8 billion) through existing sources.

Let us translate those statements for you: They do not have a plan.

The likelihood of Congress coming up with money to clean up the bay and its tributaries is negligible, given its own financial dilemmas with the soaring deficit, war in Iraq, homeland security, Medicare and Social Security. One could also argue, if one were of a philosophical bent, why the tab should be picked up at the national level when the polluting is being carried out at the state and local levels.

Why, one could even ask, should Virginia and its citizens not get serious about cleaning up what they dirtied?

Good question. One neither Kilgore nor Kaine answers.

Their vague, ineffectual answers suggest that they think Virginia voters are (you choose): a) dumb, b) so bored by this campaign they're not listening or c) unconcerned about the environment.

If the money for environmental cleanup could have been found from existing sources, all the committees, task forces and blue ribbon panels that have searched for it for so many years would have found it. If the feds were going to help out, they would have done so when the budget was in the black and environmentalists had access to it.

Virginia trails the nation in spending on natural resources. For the men who want to lead the state to balk - for that's what they're doing - at what would be responsible levels of spending to protect the environment amounts to failure, pure and simple.

Kilgore has other non-answers to environmental issues. He would go after the worst polluters. Now there's a notion: law enforcement. The man who served for the last three-plus years as attorney general should explain

to Virginians to what extent he implemented this strategy when he occupied the office in which he had the ability to execute it. And to elaborate, with specifics, on where and how Virginia's enforcement of pollution laws and regulations has been inadequate, as he implies.

And while Operation Spruce-Up, Adopt-A-Stream and Adopt-A-Highway, cited in Kilgore's campaign material as elements of his approach to environmental cleanup, are all very nice, they suggest a failure to grasp the necessity for a substantive environmental protection strategy.

As for Kaine, he offers little on the big problems - smokestack emissions, the pervasive impairment of the state's waterways - and takes refuge in safer issues like drinking water and solid waste.

They're long on "we're committed to clean air and water" and short - way short - on specifics.

Of course there's a third candidate for governor, state Sen. Russ Potts, who's running as an independent Republican. And while he's saying smart things about transportation and spending, there's precious little indication that the environment is a priority for him.

Where does that leave Virginians as Labor Day approaches and the campaigns will intensify? Well, if the environment is at the top of your list of concerns, it would appear that you're going to be ignored.

www.VirginiaForever.org/OneVoice

Paid for and authorized by The Chesapeake Bay Foundation, The Nature Conservancy, and The Trust for Public Land, nonpartisan organizations who do not support or oppose any candidates for public office.