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## SIERRA CLUB APPLAUDS GOVERNOR WARNER FOR VETOING BILL THAT WOULD THREATEN VIRGINIA'S COASTS

Richmond, Virginia - Virginia's Governor Mark Warner today vetoed a controversial bill that would have been a step toward lifting the federal moratorium for oil and gas drilling off the Virginia coast.

The controversial bill, SB 1054, slid through the state's General Assembly in the flurry of activity as the session ended and there was very little opportunity for public comment. Now that Governor Warner has vetoed the legislation, the General Assembly will vote to sustain or override his veto during the reconvened session beginning April 6.

"Today the Governor sent a clear message: 'Virginia is not for drillers,' said Michael Town, Sierra Club Virginia Chapter Director. "But the coast is not completely clear. Virginia's coast - indeed all of America's coasts - will not be free from destructive drilling until a permanent moratorium is in place, and we urge the Governor to push for permanent protection."

SB 1054, co-sponsored by Senator Frank Wagner and Virginia Beach Delegate Harry "Bob" Purkey, directs the Governor's staff to work with Virginia's Congressional delegation in support of legislation that would allow drilling for natural gas and oil off Virginia's coast. A federal moratorium has been in place for over 20 years that protects Virginia's coast, and in fact the entire Atlantic seaboard, the Pacific coast, and part of the eastern coast of the Gulf of Mexico from oil and gas drilling. Big energy companies and some members of Congress have made numerous attempts to open our coasts to drilling for years, with no success.

"This is an especially egregious threat to Virginia Beach, a city whose economy is fueled by tourism. Our shoreline is our economic lifeline," said Town. "Are we to hand over our coasts to oil and gas interests and run the risk of spoiled beaches and a ruined economy?"

Some 3 million people visit Virginia Beach each year. Tourism - which generates some \$700 million dollars for the city annually - fuels the economy and employs more than 10,000 people.

The push to open up Virginia's long-protected coasts is part of a much broader agenda where no place is off-limits to the oil and gas industry. A

new national plan proposed by a Member of Congress, Richard Pombo (R-CA), and promoted by big oil and gas companies would dismantle these coastal protections. Sen. Wagner and Del. Purkey's proposal to drill off Virginia's coast is part of this new plan and would support Rep. Pombo's legislation, which allows drilling for both oil and gas and does not restrict where drilling can occur. Companies will want to drill where oil or gas is found - even if just off our beaches. There are incentives in Pombo's legislation to drill closer to the beach. The seismic activity involved with exploring for gas and oil, construction of the facilities, the actual drilling, and the production processes would leave our coasts, their natural wonders and recreational economies at the mercy of the oil and gas industry.

"No matter how much of our natural heritage we sacrifice, we can't drill our way to energy independence," said Town. "A few months supply of oil or gas does nothing to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels or to lower prices at the gas pump. We can only achieve energy freedom for our nation and Virginia by promoting energy efficiency, renewable energy, and making cars go farther on a gallon of gas."

"The push to drill off America's coasts has met with failure in virtually every case because overwhelming numbers of citizens, business interests, and legislators have been firm in their resolve to protect our fragile coasts and coastal economies," said Town. "We're glad that Virginia was able to hold the line and reject this attempt to industrialize our fragile coast."

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