

DAILY PRESS

OPINION

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WE MARCH FOR THE CHILDREN

As a lifelong resident of Hampton Roads, the home of four grown children and five grand-children all living in the area — not to mention a family history in Virginia dating back to before the Civil War — I know that clean air cannot be taken for granted. The progress we have made cleaning up our state's air in the last half century shows that strong environmental safeguards against pollution work. And they work for all of us, but the job is far from done. Sensible safeguards are needed to protect the health of our children across generations.

Now, even with decades of science to support the importance of regulations, President Donald Trump wants to decimate funding for federal environmental protections. Trump has proposed slashing the budget of the Environmental Protection Agency — the agency tasked with protecting Americans' health from pollution — by nearly a third. The end result would be a loss of support for local efforts to

monitor drinking water, clean up toxic waste and reduce smog. Polluting companies would be free to line their pockets at the expense of our kids' health. It's not just air pollution where President Trump and his administration are failing. They are burying their heads in the sand when it comes to climate change, too. In Virginia, we know that climate change is no hoax. It's real. And it's damaging our communities and threatening our way of life. Global sea levels have risen 8 to 8 inches since 1920. In the United States, only New Orleans is more vulnerable to rising seas.

As a community advocate, I have seen the effects of climate change in Virginia. I've seen the rising sea level and more destructive storms such as Hurricane Matthew destroy homes and displace families. And as sea levels continue to rise, 400,000 Virginia homes will be at risk from storm surges, most of which

are here in Hampton Roads. Let me put a fiercer point on it: the EPA addresses both pollution and climate change through programs, acts and plans including the Clean Power Plan and the Chesapeake Bay Restoration Program — the fate of which hangs in the balance. The CPP stands out for it provides an opportunity to address existing inequality. Reductions in pollution from dirty coal plants will benefit the very front-line communities I serve. A Virginia Clean Power Plan can create economic opportunity through new energy efficiency, offshore wind energy and solar jobs, increased investment in renewable energy for low income communities, job training opportunities, and transition assistance for the southwestern part of our state. What's more, President Trump has proposed to zero the Chesapeake Bay Restoration program, which also directly benefits and helps to protect our community as well as hundreds of other communities; the cost of keeping it would amount to one less fighter jet.

As a black woman, working with environmental justice communities across the state, these threats have added meaning for me. The impacts of toxic pollutant exposure on the residents I work with are especially worrying in light of high rates of respiratory disease in the community. The various industrial developments, port facilities and highways operating within our community put us at an increased and unacceptable risk.

Crippling the EPA only cripples us. Instead of working to protect American families, President Trump is putting polluters' profits over the interests of people. When we breathe clean air and good health, every American gets a raw deal. That's why I am leading the coordination efforts for a bus to the People's Climate March on April 29 to raise my voice and the voice of the front-line communities.

In addition to Saturday's marches in Washington, D.C., and other places across the country, we need to drive Virginia's elected officials to action. Virginia's representatives in Congress must stand up to the president's dirty energy agenda and champion our health, safety and economic well-being. Reps. Bobby Scott, Donald McEachin and Scott Taylor and Sens. Tim Kaine and Mark Warner represent us. They must stop the rollback of public health protections and fight for our children and families. Together, we will defend the environmental protections upon which our future rests. We must not return to the days when smog filled our air and pollution sullied our water. We must refuse to endanger our children's health in order to line the pockets of fossil fuel executives. We don't want pollution. We don't want climate change to shallow our shores. We need action. We need the EPA. For the love of children, we march for all these reasons.

Harris, a Newport News Southeast Community resident, is founder of All From One and Coalition Coordinator for the Southeast CARE Coalition and a member of Moms Clean Air Force.

WAS TRUMP AN O'REILLY FACTOR?

Fans of Bill O'Reilly are predictably upset that Fox News has pulled the plug on his popular show, "The O'Reilly Factor." But take heart, folks. Bill O'Reilly isn't really gone. You can hear his spirit in the Oval Office.

"Personally, I think he shouldn't have settled," said President Donald Trump of O'Reilly after new allegations of sexual harassment were reported and before the Fox News anchor was let go. "I don't think Bill did anything wrong."

Nothing wrong? O'Reilly would follow his friend, founding Fox News chairman Roger Ailes, out the exits last week under similar charges — which both men have denied. Both were accused of repeatedly using their positions to sexually harass and abuse women in the Fox News workplace.

Fox News and its parent company, 21st Century Fox, had finally

fully stood by O'Reilly since sexual harassment allegations first surfaced in 2004. But it took the recent disclosure by The New York Times of a series of sexual harassment allegations against him — plus an internal investigation that turned up more than 100 questions among those of us who wonder what these scandals mean for other gender-related inequities and dysfunctions in the workplace.

Allegations of sexual harassment toppled two of the most powerful men in the cable TV news industry yet could not stop the election of President Trump.

Trump's sexist rhetoric haunted his campaign, although he seemed to revel in it more than he was daunted by it. He called for women who have abortions to be punished, then backtracked. He bragged in an

"Access Hollywood" video about grabbing women by their privates. Allegations of sexual assault dogged his campaign. Yet his poll landed 45 percent of college-educated white women and 65 percent of noncollege white women voted for Trump, helping to put him over the top.

As one reader wrote to the New York Times after O'Reilly's departure, "Have the standards for the office of the president fallen lower than those for a television host?"

One wonders. Women who voted for Trump either shrugged off his foul language as gay talk — or "locker room talk" as he rationalized it — or they decided that his promises to create jobs and "secure the borders" were more urgent.

Those are the kind of voters to whom O'Reilly, among others at Fox News, had a special appeal. When Ailes, a former Republican campaign adviser, launched the

news channel in 1996, he envisioned its target audience as conservative middle Americans who felt sidelined, overlooked and forgotten by the "liberal mainstream media."

Blending his news gathering skills from his earlier career in traditional broadcast journalism with an almost evangelical populism as a "culture warrior" who is "looking out for you," O'Reilly became a cable news superstar. His program became the No. 1 ratings magnet in all of cable TV news, averaging 4 million viewers and becoming a programming "tent pole" boosting the ratings of Fox's entire evening lineup.

But in the end it was not lost viewers who brought O'Reilly down. Quite the opposite, the recent controversy actually boosted ratings — in the spirit of the old show biz adage: All publicity is good publicity.

No, what brought him down was not viewers but sponsors who feared viewer backlash. After the controversy was announced, O'Reilly's show lost at least 50 brands — half its sponsors — in a week, according to ad trackers. Other programs, the controversy led to an investigation and a decision by owner Rupert Murdoch and other family members to drop O'Reilly with a reported \$25 million severance.

And President Trump is still in the White House. Could bitter feelings left over from his campaign actually have spurred more backlash against O'Reilly's sponsors? Either way, O'Reilly's fall serves as an important signal that sexual harassment charges need to be taken seriously in every workplace.

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