



ELECTION 2022

COMMENTARY

A survey for Virginia's proponents of the Big Lie on the 2022 ballot

| ROGER CHESLEY

OCTOBER 13, 2022 12:02 AM



📷 Pro-Trump protesters gather in front of the U.S. Capitol Building on January 6, 2021 in Washington, DC. Trump supporters gathered in the nation's capital to protest the ratification of President-elect Joe Biden's Electoral College victory over President Trump in the 2020 election. A pro-Trump mob later stormed the Capitol, breaking windows and clashing with police officers. (Photo by Brent Stirton/Getty Images)

Eight of the 11 Republican candidates in Virginia running for seats in the U.S. House of Representatives this fall are “election deniers,” [The Washington Post reported last week](#). They are among the nearly 300 GOP nominees nationwide competing for the U.S. House, Senate and major statewide offices who contend Joe Biden didn't win the presidency in 2020.

I suspect the analysis would've uncovered more Republican Party deniers in the commonwealth, but our General Assembly contests aren't this year. Nor are Virginia's two U.S. senators, both Democrats, up for reelection in November.

Biden won 306 electoral votes in the presidential contest against Donald Trump (the magic number is 270). Biden's popular vote totals were 7 million higher than those of his opponent

too. Besides, [numerous courts and state officials](#) ruled in the Democrat's favor after Trump's bogus claims.

Bupkis, the refuseniks say. They swallow ["The Big Lie"](#) that Biden stole the election.

The Post identified election deniers based on "public statements, social media posts and actions taken by the candidates to deny the legitimacy of the last presidential vote." Whether these candidates truly believe this garbage, or instead hew to what's politically expedient, is another story.

It's all based on a huge lie by [an egomaniac who can't stand being a loser](#). Shame on him and his craven enablers around the country. They're betting Democrats and independents won't be as ruthless and unhinged as they are.

"Continuing these lies erodes trust in government," Rebecca Bromley-Trujillo, research director at the nonpartisan Wason Center at Christopher Newport University, told me this week. The center conducts surveys and political analysis.

Officials might change how they operate, she added, if an election doesn't go their party's way, even if they run a supposedly nonpartisan office. They may call for expensive election audits that aren't necessary.

Yet "we have evidence that it has been a trustworthy process," Bromley-Trujillo said.

Virginia's unpersuadables are candidates in safe GOP seats and competitive ones. They include longtime incumbents – who must know better – and would-be congresspeople.

This upside-down world could no longer be dismissed after the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol. The continuing rejection of facts is an attack on democracy, governance and the will of a majority of Americans and the Electoral College.

We could face civil unrest if a duly elected candidate doesn't gain office because of thuggery or political chicanery. The climate for that is even more possible because current nominees who win, as The Post wrote, "will hold some measure of power overseeing American elections."

In short, the United States could devolve into a banana republic. Political upheaval might be continuous. Western democracies abroad will wonder what the hell happened.

That's why I've created this questionnaire for the Addled Eight in Virginia. They're incumbents Rob Wittman, Bob Good, Ben Cline and H. Morgan Griffith, and House candidates Jen Kiggans, Yesli Vega, Leon Benjamin and Hung Cao.

I won't hold my breath waiting for their responses. Unlike them, I'm not delusional:

1. For the incumbents: You say the presidential vote was rigged or stolen by Biden. Why, then, didn't you immediately resign and demand a new contest after you won in 2020?
2. For would-be congresspeople: Shouldn't you welcome do-overs in your nominating contests? Does fraud happen *only* when you lose?
3. For state Sen. Jen Kiggans: You won a seat in Hampton Roads by *less than one percentage point* in 2019. How odd did you feel when your Democratic opponent conceded [within two days of the results](#)? Was she a chump?
4. For all: If injected with truth serum, what would you say about the 2020 presidential contest? Would it jibe with your public pronouncements?
5. Do you take any responsibility for the fact that an overwhelming majority of Republicans nationwide, an average of [64% over the course of nine polls](#) by Monmouth University since the election, say Biden won only due to voter fraud?
6. [Shelly Simonds, a Democrat, lost a 2017 General Assembly contest](#) that came down to picking a canister out of a bowl. Judges had to assess the validity of some ballots cast for the Newport News seat in the House of Delegates. Would you, facing similar circumstances, spend the next two years whining about the result and causing discord – à

la Trump – or instead stay in the background and prepare for a winning campaign later, [as Simonds did?](#)

7. [Former President Trump is a serial liar](#); he spouted more than 30,000 falsehoods while in office. He’s been the subject of lawsuits [dating back decades](#) alleging various illegal or unethical business practices. Family-run and other businesses have said Trump or his companies [stiffed contractors for work](#) they had done, sometimes leading to the demise of their firms. Why then do you trust Trump’s claims about 2020 – or any of his assertions?
8. If you cannot discern fact from fiction given the mountain of evidence that Biden won fair and square, why should you be entrusted to analyze issues, pass legislation and impact the lives of millions of Americans?
9. What’s more important: democracy or being in power?
10. What will you say to Americans if your continued baseless support of the Big Lie leads to violence, murder and anarchy around the United States?

As I noted earlier, these GOP candidates won’t reply to my survey.

You, however, should demand answers.



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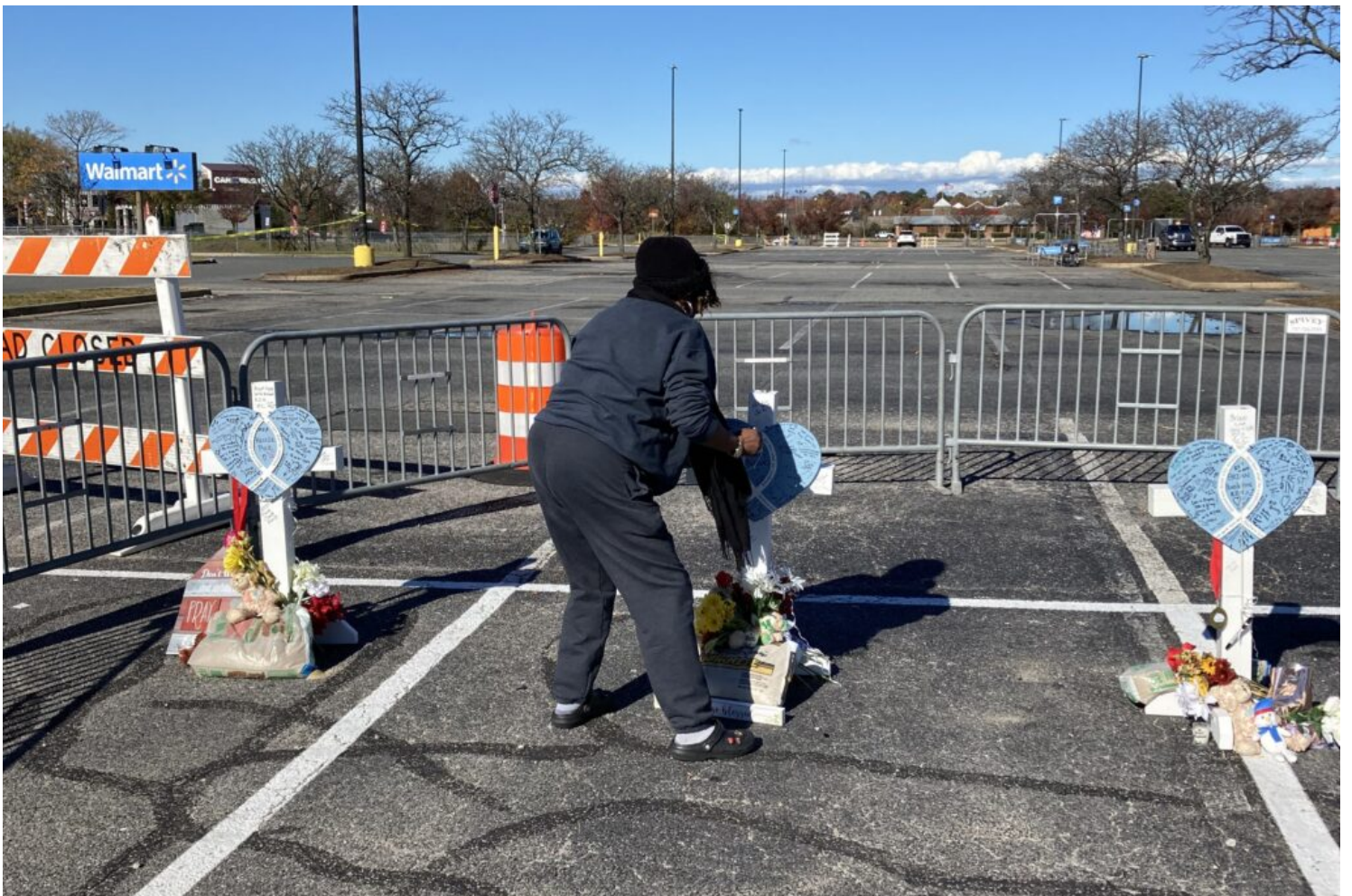


COMMENTARY

Guns, not mental illness, at heart of America's terror

| ROGER CHESLEY

NOVEMBER 30, 2022 12:02 AM



📷 Lezeria Marsh of Chesapeake leaves a message on one of the memorial crosses in the Walmart parking lot Monday in Chesapeake after a store manager shot and killed six other employees before killing himself. "It's just so unbelievable," Marsh said. (Roger Chesley / Virginia Mercury)

Researchers and policymakers know the ways to reduce gun violence and needless murders across the country. They include [disarming domestic abusers](#), banning so-called “[weapons of war](#)” that allow attackers to keep firing without reloading and requiring background checks [for all gun sales](#).

Studies and reporting from The Washington Post, the Center for American Progress and think tanks provide these directives.

Will our politicians answer, in the wake of the ghastly execution [of six Walmart workers in Chesapeake](#) by an angry colleague last week, before he killed himself? Or will the people in power continue to do nothing?

I live roughly five miles from that Chesapeake store. Besides those killed, other workers were wounded.

As I toured the parking lot memorial to the slain employees, interviewed people paying respects and attended a Monday night vigil featuring Gov. Glenn Youngkin, I became part of an all-too-familiar, depressing loop:

Mass shooting occurs. Journalists descend. People who knew the suspect weigh in, sometimes expressing shock. Relatives of the victims grieve. Progressives demand restrictions on gun access. Conservatives answer with some variable of “now is not the time” to discuss guns (see [Youngkin’s response](#) last week, as if from a script).

Virtually nothing changes.

And repeat ... with another mass shooting elsewhere in America only days later. That doesn’t include the daily carnage that claims one or two lives at a time.

Aren’t we weary of this? Why is the status quo acceptable when no other [industrialized, wealthy nation](#) shares such constant bloodshed?

Resolve must replace our collective shock. [Congress passed](#) compromise firearm legislation this year after 21 elementary school students and teachers were killed in Uvalde, Texas. More can and should be done.



Part of the memorial in the Walmart parking lot in Chesapeake has white crosses, flowers, balloons and the names of the six employees shot dead by a disgruntled store manager. (Roger Chesley / Virginia Mercury)

Youngkin comforted hundreds gathered at Chesapeake City Park on Monday evening, combining words from Scriptures with messages of hope for the future. His appearance, in that regard, was welcome.

“We must mend our wounds of grief,” the governor said, “with an unyielding determination to change the conditions of our society that have increasingly bred a culture of despair, of disillusion and a lack of respect for human life.”

Youngkin, however, wouldn’t even use the words “guns,” “firearms” or “large-capacity magazines” in explaining why he journeyed from Richmond to the commonwealth’s second-largest city. What happened in Chesapeake wasn’t an accident; it was gun-fueled murder.

Yet the Republican gov readily cited mental illness as a contributing factor, as if it were divorced from the tool that had left families in mourning. “I’m not alone,” he said, “in concluding that we have a mental health and a behavioral health crisis in the United States and in Virginia.”

That's a cop-out. "Mental illness" has become the default GOP explanation when a mass shooting happens – even though it was associated with just [5% of gun-related homicides between 2001 and 2010](#), according to a 2015 study.

The Chesapeake massacre occurred less than two weeks after authorities said [a University of Virginia student fatally shot](#) three football players in Charlottesville and wounded two others.

On Monday, Carol Kegg was among those paying respects at the Walmart parking lot in Chesapeake. "It's just heartbreaking," the 68-year-old mother and grandmother told me.

Kegg, like others I interviewed, was especially saddened by the death of employee Fernando Chavez-Barron, a 16-year-old who was the youngest murder victim.

At the vigil, a Chesapeake city councilman said Fernando had been a good student who loved to read. The teen had started working to "lessen the burden for his family."

A Walmart employee who narrowly escaped injury filed a lawsuit Tuesday against the company, saying Walmart ignored her complaints about the shooter's alarming behavior, [The Virginian-Pilot reported](#). Andre Bing, the 31-year-old shooter, had asked the plaintiff whether she liked guns and told store employees and managers if he was fired he would retaliate, according to the suit.

I wrote previously Virginia has taken some steps to fight back. For example, the General Assembly passed [a red-flag law](#) to temporarily seize guns from people believed to pose a threat to themselves or others, and it restarted a limit on buying one handgun a month.

Many of the changes occurred when Democrats controlled both chambers and held the governor's seat. That's not the case now.

It's obvious state and federal leaders could do more. The recommended steps won't eliminate gun crimes and slayings, especially when [Americans own an estimated 400 million firearms](#). Any measurable drop in deaths and injuries, though, would be a plus because more people – and their loved ones – would be spared.

The prescriptions (many of them national) are multifaceted. Of the ones I didn't mention earlier, they include holding gun dealers more accountable for the firearms they sell; implementing waiting periods for purchases, which seem to lower suicides; and supporting local [violence intervention programs](#).

We could also do what the [Czech Republic has done](#): It forces residents to show their competence before they can own a gun, as The Washington Post reported. They must pass a multiple-choice test and demonstrate they can handle a weapon safely and shoot accurately.

I know that's not likely to fly in this independent-minded nation. How dare I suggest training before picking up a tool designed to kill or maim.

We should be open, however, to altering mindsets. Too many people have lost too much.

[More than 45,000 people died](#) by gunfire last year, the bulk of them suicides. That's about equal to every man, woman and child in Blacksburg.

When the numbers are added up for 2022, they'll include the employees who died at Walmart just days before Thanksgiving.

Do right by them – and thousands of others. Let's end this madness.



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COMMENTARY

National approach is more urgent than stopgap funding for Tangier Island

| ROGER CHESLEY

SEPTEMBER 15, 2022 12:02 AM



 Tangier Island, Virginia crab shanties where fishermen make a living selling from the Chesapeake Bay. The crab shanties, where fishermen gather soft-shell crabs, are built on pilings in Tangier's only harbor. The island, one of the most isolated communities in America, is disappearing as a result of climate change. Estimates are that the island will be uninhabitable 50 years from now. (Getty Images / EyeJoy)

A so-called “doomsday glacier” in Antarctica that could raise sea levels several feet is disintegrating faster than previously predicted, [according to a new study](#).

And an [analysis](#) by Climate Central, an independent science and communications group, found that because of sea level rise, local governments will face steep cuts in revenues as taxable land is subject to flooding, my colleague [Sarah Vogelsong reported this week](#).

Against this dire backdrop, Virginia's two senators, Tim Kaine and Mark Warner, recently secured \$25 million in a budget proposal for imperiled Tangier Island, the place [once explored by John Smith and colonized by the English](#) centuries ago.

The money would fund a pilot project to repurpose dredging material on Tangier, [The Washington Post reported](#). The funding still has several legislative steps to clear before becoming law. Tangier residents can't afford to pay for such projects themselves.

The disconnect between dire climate reality and rose-colored optimism is stark.

Nor does the dredging proposal take into account similarly jeopardized communities around the United States. They will beg for their own federal lifeline. Most are bigger and have thousands more people than the 1.2-square-mile island in the Chesapeake Bay with a population of about 450 people.

The adage remains true: Size matters.

Yet I wasn't surprised by the sanguine statements Kaine and Warner, both Democrats, issued about bolstering Tangier. They're representing their constituents, after all.

The island "boasts a thriving tourism industry, a rich history, and a delicate natural ecosystem that boasts the Chesapeake Bay's signature blue crabs," Warner, through a spokesperson, said Tuesday. "Most importantly, Tangier is home to hundreds of Virginians – many of them watermen who have driven Virginia's seafood industry for many generations. The truth is, we can't afford to give up on such a quintessential part of Virginia."

Kaine noted through a spokesperson: "Tangier is a cultural and historic gem that is treasured by people from all over America, as well as a crucial piece of the Chesapeake Bay's fishing and crabbing economy. I'm fighting for this funding because Virginians and all Americans stand to lose a great deal if this island becomes uninhabitable."

He and Rep. Elaine Luria, a fellow Democrat, recently toured the island with local officials.

The initiative by the two senators is well-meaning, but dubious. Enormous sums of taxpayer dollars would be needed to fight against nature. It could be a fruitless task.

The proposed funding is a fraction of an estimated [\\$250 million to \\$350 million](#) needed to fully restore and protect Tangier Island, David Schulte, a marine biologist with the Army Corps of Engineers in Norfolk, told me this week. He's been visiting the island since 2002, and he co-wrote research with his son last year about the island's current situation and long-term outlook.

Schulte's dim assessment, if there's no large-scale intervention: The town could be abandoned by 2053.

"I personally would like to save the island," Schulte noted. "Their culture is very unique."

Federal funding to Tangier, however, would delay the tough – though necessary – discussion about whether to relocate the dwindling number of residents on the island 12 miles from the Eastern Shore. A comprehensive, national approach is needed for similarly jeopardized communities.

The Tangier dredging initiative is a stop-gap effort, at best. Schulte noted officials would still need to raise homes on the island and do lots more work.

The Climate Central analysis found that almost 650,000 individual parcels of property, across up to 4.4 million acres, are projected to fall below changing tidal boundaries by 2050. You can be sure states will be asking the feds to help.

They'll make their cases for populations much bigger than Tangier's.

The island has gained lots of media attention since then-President Donald Trump reached out to Mayor James "Ooker" Eskridge in 2017, after the mayor told CNN he loved Trump "as much as any family member I got." Trump assured Eskridge the island would be around for hundreds of years to come, and that he believed – like many islanders – rising seas aren't a threat.

So much for science.

Islanders are right, though, to be upset that government promises of help often went on the back burner. For example, a jetty project finally was completed two years ago with state and federal money, but it had been delayed about two decades.

Then there's the aid nearby communities received. As The Post noted: "(Tangier) residents had watched with frustration as the federal government funded projects to protect a National Wildlife Refuge and residents on nearby Smith Island and to restore a wildlife habitat on Poplar Island, where no people live – using the same method on Poplar of repurposing dredge material."

By the way, I take no joy in revisiting the issue of Tangier's fate.

I wrote [a column in 2014 headlined](#), "Spending to keep Tangier above water makes no cents." In it, I opined it's smarter to use limited public funding to relocate folks than to pay more money to fight "a battle that Mother Nature seems destined – and determined – to win" by reclaiming the island.

Judging by some responses, you would've thought I'd disparaged the way of life on Tangier, including its unique dialect and economy.

"You would never suggest relocation for the people of, say, New Orleans!" one fumed. Well, more than 375,000 people live in the Big Easy – and that's *post*-Katrina. Moving residents there would be a more herculean, expensive task.

"There's history on Tangier that goes back to the era of Jamestown!" OK. But given many of my detractors no longer lived on the island, they'd already voted with their feet. They were wistful for a place that was disappearing.

Then, as now, I wanted to save the lives of Tangier's residents and use federal dollars wisely. The per-person expenditure to save Tangier is enormous. Other places around the country would say, fairly, "Why not us too?"

Relocation from Tangier isn't cheap either, Schulte said. The cost, including decommissioning or abandonment, could be from \$100 million to \$200 million. That's still less than the expense of "saving" Tangier.

"What are we as a society going to do about people facing this situation?" Schulte asked.

That's a vital question. It's one lawmakers must address nationwide – not just for Tangier.

Only then can they make smart choices.



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