



ENERGY + ENVIRONMENT

COMMENTARY

Dr. Petrolove or: How I learned to stop worrying and love fossil fuels

A parody of Virginia's EV resistance (apologies to Stanley Kubrick)

| BOB LEWIS

SEPTEMBER 26, 2022 12:03 AM



📷 Electric vehicles charging near Union Station in Washington, D.C. (Drew Angerer / Getty Images)

We always knew it would come to this.

That it would start ... *out there*. Out on the Left Coast where all the loonies live: California, the land of surfboards and wildfires; of Google, Apple and Microsoft; of swimming pools and movie stars. And godless liberals.

That's the sort of place where wild-eyed, un-American ideas get seeded by some radical who dares to think beyond this decade and where it would take root and, before you knew it, creep across the purple mountain majesties and the fruited plain like kudzu.

Sure 'nuff, it happened: a sneak attack. OK ... a sneak attack with 13 years' notice, but that's no time at all when you're talking about ending the sale of new gasoline-powered cars.

Youngkin's my name. Glenn Youngkin. I command this conservative outpost called Virginia, and if those granola-munching, tree-hugging, Birkenstock-wearing lefties are spoiling to go toe-to-toe over our precious petroleum fluids, well ... hold my Chardonnay.

A slick-haired, tan-from-a-can dandy named Gavin Newsom, my counterpart in California, started this dust-up. And I aim to finish it. It was his doing and that of the lefty legislature out in the so-called Golden State that flat-out dictated that come 2035, there would be no more brand-new cars sold that rely on internal combustion of petroleum distillates for locomotion. If you buy it new off a dealer's lot or order it online factory-fresh, it'll run off hydrogen fuel like some spaceship or you'll have to plug it in like some lowly vacuum cleaner or washing machine.

That's pretty rich, ain't it? A state that barely a week ago was warning of rolling blackouts on account of a freak heat wave draining its power grid is going to force folks to buy cars that run off the very electricity that they already can't make enough of.

Not that it's any skin off ol' Glenn's hind parts if Californians won't have the privilege of paying upwards of seven frogskins a gallon for regular gas – nearly nine bucks for high-test – as they did several weeks ago. What slaps my chaps is that what Newsom did means I'd have to do the same thing across the country here in god-fearin', carbon-lovin' Virginia, too.

Like *hell* I will.



📷 The Biden administration's goal to have half of all U.S. vehicles be electric by 2030, will require increased production of minerals such as lithium, nickel and cobalt used in batteries. (Sarah Vogelsong/Virginia Mercury)

I'm pulling Virginia out of this Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative and I'm asking the General Assembly to repeal this perfidious state law [the Democrats passed in 2021](#) that requires us to follow California's lead on emissions policy. [Seventeen other states](#) are part of this same devil's deal, but I can only strike a blow for the good of our fossil fuels here in Virginia (unless I strike it lucky in the 2024 presidential primaries, but that's another tale).

Here comes Lionel Mandrake, my somewhat uptight, British-born environmental policy wonk, walking into my office. Right on time.

“Mandrake, have a seat,” I said, motioning to the chair opposite my desk.

“Good evening, sir. Do I understand correctly that we’re threatening to leave the multi-state vehicle emissions compact and that you’ve placed the House of Delegates on *Condition Red*?” Mandrake said. “Good idea. Keep the lads on their toes.”

“I’m afraid this isn’t a drill, Mandrake,” I replied.

“Oh dear. Is California involved?”

“Looks like it. Could get pretty hairy.”

I took a sip of my preferred cocktail, an oaky Pinot Grigio and rainwater. “Mandrake, I can no longer sit back and allow leftist infiltration, leftist indoctrination, leftist subversion and the international leftist conspiracy to sap and impurify our precious petrochemical fluids!”

“But sir, might we be acting a bit ... *rashly*? I mean, the whole bloody point will likely be moot by 2035 whether we act or not. The mass conversion to electric vehicles is well under way. Detroit and the world’s other automakers are retooling and switching entire model lines pell-mell from internal combustion engines to electric motors. Why, there’s even a [new start-up](#) right here in Virginia that’s in business converting big-rig tractors from diesel engines to electrical. Our own transportation department just announced plans for a [major expansion of electrical charging stations](#) along interstates across Virginia. And our friends at Dominion are ever so keen on the idea of vehicles that use electricity,” Mandrake said.

“Friends? *Dominion*?” I said, giving Mandrake the stink-eye.

“Dreadfully sorry. Habit from the not-too-distant past,” he said.

“Mandrake, do you realize that EV dominance is the most monstrously conceived, leftist/environmentalist plot we’ve ever faced?”

“Nevertheless, sir, carmakers are going where the money and incentives are, and if a market the size of Cali goes EV, so shall they. Were California its own country, it would be the world’s [fifth-largest economy](#) right behind Germany and just ahead of the United Kingdom – God save the king. California’s almost \$3 trillion annual GDP accounts for nearly 15% of the entire American economy,” he continued in a pleading tone.

“And sir,” Mandrake continued, “General Motors has [already announced](#) it will bring 30 new EV models to market in just the next three years and manufacture EVs exclusively by 2035. Ford has invested [\\$22 billion into electric vehicles](#), and 40% of all that it produces will be all-electric by 2030. Besides, sir, this shan’t affect the sale of pre-owned petrol-powered cars by one tuppence.”

“Sit down and chill, Mandrake. I’ve already gotten the ball rolling with Todd Gilbert and our boys in the House. There’s no stopping it now,” I said.

“I beg of you, Glenn – politics aside – have you considered the climatological implications? It brings us incrementally closer to ... the *Doomsday Machine*,” he said ominously. “It’s getting worse every year, sir: triple-digit temperatures in Portland, Oregon, and even Scotland, for goodness sake; a full-blown *hurricane* now forecast to blast the Canadian coast near Newfoundland; estuaries and reservoirs drying up in the American Southwest; hundred-year floods happening every year.”



The Doomsday Machine is real and terrifying, but completely credible and easy to understand.

“The libs have been using that global warming hooey to try to scare the bejeebers out of us for decades now. Every study the petroleum industry pays for proves the same thing: science can’t be trusted,” I replied.

“But you don’t have to believe me, Mandrake,” I continued, buzzing my receptionist. “Can you send in Dr. Petrolove?”

“*Petrolove* sir?” Mandrake asked. “Wasn’t he ...”

“Yeah. I put him on retainer after he made parole for his part in that Enron nastiness back in the 2000s. Knows every dirty secret in the oil and gas biz and some they haven’t even thought up yet. If your ‘Doomsday Machine’ exists, Petro will know about it.”

“Sup, chief?” Petrolove called out in his Texas twang as he strutted into my office.

“Petro, Mandrake here tells me there’s the risk of some ‘Doomsday Machine’ that could plunge humanity into environmental oblivion if we keep standing up for our friends in the carbon-energy sector,” I said. “Go ahead and tell him how full of malarkey he is.”

“Um ...,” Petro said, shuffling his cowboy boots, unable to look at me.

“Go ahead, Doc. School Mandrake for me.”

“Well, *el jefe*,” Petrolove said, haltingly clearing his throat, “the Doomsday Machine is real and terrifying, but completely credible and easy to understand. If we don’t decrease the carbon that we’re pumping into the atmosphere, it will create a doomsday shroud around the planet.”

Chills ran down my back. I swallowed hard. Suddenly I understood. Why hadn’t I seen the devastating truth of this all along? Why had I clung to naïve beliefs in the face of clear evidence? It was, indeed, an inconvenient truth, but it was high time I accepted it ... and spoke it.

“Damn shame the libs got to you, too, Petro. You’re fired.”



GET THE MORNING HEADLINES DELIVERED TO YOUR INBOX

SUBSCRIBE

REPUBLISH



Our stories may be republished online or in print under Creative Commons license CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. We ask that you edit only for style or to shorten, provide proper attribution and link to our web site. Please see our republishing guidelines for use of photos and graphics.



BOB LEWIS 

Bob Lewis covered Virginia government and politics for 20 years for The Associated Press. Now retired from a public relations career at McGuireWoods, he is a columnist for the Virginia Mercury. He can be reached at blewis@virginiamercury.com.

[MORE FROM AUTHOR](#)

RELATED NEWS



COMMENTARY

Appreciation: Congressman A. Donald McEachin

| BOB LEWIS

NOVEMBER 30, 2022 12:01 AM



📷 U.S. Rep. Don McEachin speaks outside the Virginia Capitol. (Photo by Ned Oliver/Virginia Mercury)

The elevator doors were closing one hot July morning in 1994 and I was about to ascend 13 floors to my office when a large man in the lobby doubled his pace to catch the elevator. I stuck an arm against the door to hold it open a few more seconds.

“Thanks,” he said, extending his large right hand to me as the doors shut. “Hi. I’m Don.”

That was the first welcome I had been extended after my move here by a Richmonder other than my new colleagues at The Associated Press, where I had just started work as the Virginia news editor, and the realtor who was helping me find a house.

I will never forget that introduction. Don was Aston Donald McEachin, who would later become a member of the Virginia House of Delegates, the Democratic nominee for state attorney general, a state senator and a member of Congress. To me, he would always be just Don, a sweet man with a friendly smile, a warm handshake and an innate likeability.

Then only 33, he was a named partner in the McEachin & Gee law firm one floor directly beneath AP's main Virginia bureau. There would be many elevator mornings, some shared lunches and discussions about government, the law, society and politics. He was candid about his desire to hold public office and make a qualitative difference. Two years later, in 1996, he won his first term as a delegate.

I am about 6 feet, 2 inches tall, but Don towered over me. His most impressive trait, however, was his gentleness, his remarkable intellect, his thoughtfulness and his ability to listen, a quality essential to good lawyering, good politics and good friendships. In a conversation, Don focused on the person before him, and it was clear he was drinking in everything he was told.

When I heard of Don's passing Monday at the age of 61 after a long and very public battle with colorectal cancer, it was like a fist to the solar plexus. Beside the shock and the tears clouding my vision, my immediate thought was, "You deserved better, Don."

Don had the skills to ascend much higher in public office than a seat in Congress. He had served almost six years in the House of Delegates when his party nominated him in hopes he would become Virginia's first African American attorney general. Timing and luck had something to do with holding him back.

In the 2001 campaign, he seemed the odd man out in a Democratic ticket led by gubernatorial candidate Mark Warner with Tim Kaine running for lieutenant governor. Warner and Kaine won; Don lost.

No difference between the candidates was clearer than Don's disdain for Warner's cozy relations with the National Rifle Association and his promise not to seek new gun restrictions in a state that had voted reflexively Republican for years, depriving Democrats of every lever of statewide political power.

Don voiced his displeasure at Warner's closeness to the NRA in a state Capitol news conference with former Gov. L. Douglas Wilder, the nation's first elected Black governor. Going public with such a rift within a ticket would have been enormously damaging but for an ominous quirk of history: It happened as terrorists crashed American Airlines Flight 77 into the Pentagon on Sept. 11, 2001. The explosive presser went unreported.

Don was a loyal Democrat, but he never let partisan leanings supersede friendships.

"This one hurts. This one really hurts," said Bea Gonzales, a state Republican Party staffer before she embarked on a career as a well-regarded Richmond lobbyist. She had forged a friendship with Don and his wife, Colette – Richmond's commonwealth's attorney – that became even closer with the birth of Bea's son, Sebi, and the interest the congressman took in the child. She marked his passing with a Facebook post of a photo of the McEachins holding her infant, now 8, during a dinner years earlier.

"I called him a bad-ass teddy bear," she said. "People think of him as this huge person, (so) he must be mean, he must be angry, and he wasn't at all. Even as sick as he was, if I had called him and said, 'I need this for Sebi,' he would do it. He just would, and so would Colette."

What clearly brought Don fulfillment was identifying promising public servants and helping them embark on promising careers. One such person was Del. Jeff Bourne, D-Richmond, a young lawyer with a desire to serve in elective office as Don had. He remembers him as "a larger-than-life man, but he was *just Don*."

"Didn't matter if he was winning multi-million-dollar judgments, whether it was Senator McEachin or Delegate McEachin or Congressman McEachin. It was just Don," Bourne said.

"To me, the thing that made him special was the encouragement he always gave to young, aspiring African American community leaders, political leaders, folks who thought they might want to be elected," he said.

Don turned up this month at a screening of “Black Panther: Wakanda Forever” in Richmond to persuade the mostly Black audience to get checked for colon cancer, the disease that killed “Black Panther” actor Chadwick Boseman and would take his own life less than two weeks later. [He spoke bluntly](#) of the disease that had reduced the strapping hulk of a man I met 28 years ago into a gaunt, gray but still determined public servant.

“Don’t y’all fool around. Don’t do my journey. Go see a doctor,” he said.

It’s not an eloquent epitaph, but it’s powerful, plain, lifesaving counsel given freely to help others. It fits Don perfectly.



GET THE MORNING HEADLINES DELIVERED TO YOUR INBOX

SUBSCRIBE

REPUBLICH

Our stories may be republished online or in print under Creative Commons license CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. We ask that you edit only for style or to shorten, provide proper attribution and link to our web site. Please see our republishing guidelines for use of photos and graphics.



BOB LEWIS

Bob Lewis covered Virginia government and politics for 20 years for The Associated Press. Now retired from a public relations career at McGuireWoods, he is a columnist for the Virginia Mercury. He can be reached at blewis@virginiamercury.com.

MORE FROM AUTHOR

RELATED NEWS



Across cultural lines, home schooling has boomed since...

BY JEFF SOUTH

January 3, 2022



Virginia Republicans are using ranked-choice voting again....

BY GRAHAM MOOMAW

December 14, 2022

A NEW LOOK AT THE OLD DOMINION

DEMOCRACY TOOLKIT






COMMENTARY

2022 exposed the dysfunctions of Virginia's agrarian, part-time legislative model. Again.

| BOB LEWIS

JUNE 27, 2022 12:02 AM



 The Virginia Capitol earlier this year. The "part-time" legislative model isn't working anymore and everyone knows it, Bob Lewis argues. (Virginia Mercury file photo by Graham Moomaw)

You hear it regularly on Capitol Square in Virginia: Ours is a “part-time” legislature.

Not really.

Not for years and years now, either in fact or by definition. But it sure evokes wistful nostalgia in presentations loaded with gauzy clichés about “the Virginia way.”

Look no further than this year’s long-running session in which the General Assembly came 13 days from being without a new budget in time for the start of Fiscal Year 2023 on Friday. That

was extraordinary, even for legislators accustomed to extra innings.

The biennial task of cobbling together from scratch a two-year spending blueprint for state government remained unfinished when time ran out in March on the regular General Assembly session limited by the state Constitution to no more than 60 days.

Building the budget is a Herculean assignment and attempting it in just two winter months beggars the expertise and endurance of accomplished professional staffs and legislative laymen.

So again, as it has done for the past five years in a row, the legislature called a special session in 2022 to finish business left over from a mid-winter legislative work period – a timetable designed for Virginia as it was a century ago, when tobacco was king, most every town had a passenger train depot and everything west of Arlington and south of Alexandria, was for farming or hunting.

The business of legislating this year didn't necessarily end when the House of Delegates and Senate completed work on Gov. Glenn Youngkin's amendments to the state budget on June 17. Instead of adjourning *sine die*, the General Assembly recessed a session that will extend into September – effectively eight months of the year.

Pardon the comparison, but doesn't that sound a little like ... *Congress*?

The time has come for a state as dynamic, wealthy and essential to national commerce and American global leadership as Virginia to part with an anachronistic model for enacting policy. Virginia deserves a longer-running, better compensated, less time-stressed legislative model.

None of this is a knock on our legislators. And it's not really a knock on a system that served the commonwealth pretty well until the latter years of the 20th century. If anything, it's a knock on Virginia's notorious resistance to change, even when that change is necessary to provide our elected leaders the time to fully grasp the issues besetting our state and get policymaking right.

It's impossible to precisely compare how many days the 50 U.S. legislatures are in session each year and definitively rank them because not all states prescribe specific dates or numbers of days, according to [information compiled by Ballotpedia](#). Virginia's regular session, however, is among the briefest.

The National Conference of State Legislatures [classifies Virginia](#) as one of 26 states with a "hybrid" legislature, a murky middle ground between the 14 part-time legislatures with low pay and small staffs and the 10 full-time assemblies with greater pay and smaller staffs. But the NCSL also notes that [salaries for Virginia lawmakers](#) are among the lowest nationally at \$18,000 for senators and \$17,460 for delegates, not counting \$211 per diem for each legislative day. West Virginia, with one-fifth of Virginia's population, [pays its legislators a \\$20,000](#) annual stipend.

Virginia is the nation's 12th most-populous state. Six of the 11 larger states have full-time legislatures as do four smaller ones, according to the NCSL. There are larger states, however, even more mired in the past. Texas legislators convene every other year and receive only \$7,200 annually.



📷 A hallway in the Capitol crowded with citizen and corporate lobbyists during the legislature's 2019 session. (Ned Oliver/Virginia Mercury)

Mark Rozell, dean of George Mason University's Schar School of Government and Politics who focuses on Virginia, noted in a [Washington Post op-ed](#) in March that Virginia's rapid, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural population explosion in recent decades in addition to the increased speed at which business is transacted and information moves has made governing Virginia more complicated than anyone could have imagined 50 years ago.

"We need to get past the fiction that a very part-time legislative body working with a lame-duck governor can get the job done on time," Rozell said in an interview last week, aptly observing that the problem is compounded in Virginia because it is the only state that prohibits back-to-back terms for its governors.

"How many more years consecutively can we see a legislature going into multiple special sessions before we acknowledge that it's not working as it used to?" he said.

A look at the [General Assembly's Legislative Information System](#) website shows that it has called special sessions to finish its work in 15 of the 23 legislative years since 2000. In four of them, including last year, it required more than one special session. Those figures alone demonstrate the need for a more expansive, dedicated and better resourced legislative system.

In this year's regular legislative session, the House and Senate punted 47 bills into the current special session, including two budget bills – one that wraps up the current fiscal year that ends on Thursday and a \$165 billion budget that begins when the clock strikes midnight. Of those bills, 21 won final passage on June 17, according to the LIS.

Most years, extra sessions are necessitated by the budget, the single most important piece of legislation enacted in any year. Not only does the budget direct scores of billions of dollars in state spending, its provisions supersede other statutes. That's why Youngkin attempted to insert budget amendments that would establish a three-month gasoline tax holiday, create new felonies for demonstrations targeted at judges and deny state aid to help poor women pay for abortions when incapacitating fetal disabilities are diagnosed.

Despite their importance, budgets are the driest legislation of any session. For years, the task fell to me to keep an eye on the dozen or so senators and delegates sequestered in stuffy Capitol Square office suites dickering over differences between House and Senate versions of the budget. Many nights, they dickered into the wee hours, and I stuck it out with them.

Sometimes they'd shake hands on a deal just hours away from final adjournment. A remarkable cadre of sleep-starved staff accountants and analysts was left to pull an all-nighter transcribing their compromise into written amendments, preparing summaries called "half-sheets" to be placed on the desks of all 140 legislators, and briefing them on the changes by noon.

It's a testament to the money committee staffs' stamina and skill that there were no serious math or drafting errors in final printed documents nearly two inches thick. But while the spirit is willing, humans have limitations and sooner or later, the run of good fortune will expire as both the astonishing sums of money and the complexity of allocating them compounds with each succeeding biennium.

"The system as it exists made sense in an earlier time with a smaller, less diverse population, an agrarian economy and a political ethic that the less government does, the better," Rozell said. "Any constitutional scholar (who is) asked to design a governmental system for such a state (as modern Virginia) would never say, 'I have a great idea: let's do a very part-time legislature with a lame-duck governor!'"

"You can't imagine that they would pick the system that we have today," he said.



[REPUBLISH](#)

Our stories may be republished online or in print under Creative Commons license CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. We ask that you edit only for style or to shorten, provide proper attribution and link to our web site. Please see our republishing guidelines for use of photos and graphics.



BOB LEWIS 

Bob Lewis covered Virginia government and politics for 20 years for The Associated Press. Now retired from a public relations career at McGuireWoods, he is a columnist for the Virginia Mercury. He can be reached at blewis@virginiamercury.com.

[MORE FROM AUTHOR](#)

RELATED NEWS



After months of wrangling, Virginia has a budget deal...

BY **GRAHAM MOOMAW**

June 1, 2022



Across cultural lines, home schooling has boomed since...

BY **JEFF SOUTH**

January 3, 2022

A NEW LOOK AT THE OLD DOMINION

DEMOCRACY TOOLKIT

