

The cleanup of the Chesapeake Bay has been lauded recently, as Gov. Bob McDonnell announced last month that Virginia was "exceeding its commitments" under the Chesapeake Bay Program and was recognized by the Environmental Protection Agency as achieving the greatest reduction of nitrogen pollution in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. This earned Virginia the distinction by the EPA of the "Biggest Loser." With a strong commitment to cleanup from Bay stakeholders in recent years, the progress continues to be positive, with oyster, crab and other animal and fish populations starting to rebound. But there is still much work ahead.

A clean Bay helps ensure the ecosystem is healthy. But for Virginia, a healthy Bay is more than a treasured natural resource; it is an economic driver for communities and industries across the commonwealth. A clean, productive Bay helps revive a stressed economy. The value of the Bay must not be underestimated: It has been assessed at over \$1 trillion related to fishing, tourism, property values and shipping activities. In the commercial seafood industry, the Bay contributes about \$2 billion a year in sales, \$1 billion in income and more than 41,000 jobs in Virginia and Maryland. In 2009, recreational fishing contributed 5,200 jobs and \$580 million in economic impact.

As a representative of this area at the federal level, one of my highest priorities is ensuring the government doesn't impede job creation and promotes an environment for economic growth. The top issue on the minds of so many Virginians is the economy. That's why I co-chair the Congressional Chesapeake Bay Watershed Caucus, which brings together members of Congress from the Chesapeake Bay watershed region to discuss issues related to the Bay and Bay cleanup. And that's why I am pushing for a coordinated, streamlined and transparent effort at the federal level to promote a healthier Chesapeake Bay. As a life-long Virginian, and one who grew up in and around the waters of the Chesapeake Bay, I want to see a cleaner, more prosperous Bay for many reasons. But as the numbers show, our economy cannot thrive without action on this important issue.

The U.S. House of Representatives recently passed my legislation to increase accountability and improve reporting of Chesapeake Bay restoration activities. This bill brings together multiple agencies and groups that share concerns about the Bay that could work together more efficiently to this end. It would create a Chesapeake Bay Program Independent Evaluator to review and report to Congress on restoration activities in the watershed. The Chesapeake Bay partnership includes 10 federal agencies, six states and the District of Columbia, more than 1,000 localities and multiple nongovernmental organizations. To date, the complexity of the participants has resulted in a mixed-result effort.

The Chesapeake Bay Accountability and Recovery Act would fully implement two cutting-edge management techniques, crosscut budgeting and adaptive management. These efforts enhance coordination, flexibility and efficiency of restoration. These techniques have been used successfully in other complex environmental restoration efforts; however, they have not been fully implemented in Bay cleanup efforts, where results have lagged behind the billions of dollars spent.

We have a national treasure in our backyard: a cultural and economic beacon upon which many of our local communities depend for their very existence and way of life. I applaud the efforts of the commonwealth and look forward to hearing more good news as the effort continues at the state level.

But the federal government must also do its part to be more efficient with precious taxpayer resources, especially as we look to reduce the federal debt and deficit. The next step for the Chesapeake Bay is passage of my bill in the United States Senate. In 2011, companion legislation was introduced in the Senate by Virginia Sens. Mark Warner and Jim Webb. It is time for the Senate to act on this important piece of legislation. Our region's identity and economy depend on restoring the Chesapeake Bay. This is too important to wait.

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