

Virginia Politics

McAuliffe helps launches broader weatherization program for the needy





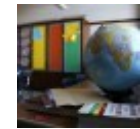
Virginia State Sen. Dick Saslaw talks with Elmore and Bessie Jenkins of Annandale, who are participating in a Dominion Virginia Power energy-efficiency program to retrofit their home. (Patricia Sullivan/THE WASHINGTON POST)

By **Patricia Sullivan** July 30

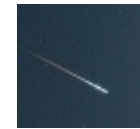
The temperature topped 90 degrees and the humidity clung like a drenched shirt on Thursday as Virginia Gov. Terry McAuliffe announced a major expansion of a statewide home-weatherization program that promises to find and plug energy leaks for elderly, disabled or low-income residents and for

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military veterans.

McAuliffe (D), standing on the sidewalk in front of the 75-year-old Annandale home owned by Elmore and Bessie Jenkins, called Dominion Virginia Power's \$57 million commitment over the next four years "a huge win . . . to make Virginia a leader in energy efficiency."

The company will expand its 30-year-old EnergyShare program to help ratepayers identify and fix uninsulated attics, install low-flow shower heads, wrap plumbing pipes with insulation and replace old light bulbs.

The Jenkinses, who have lived in their 600-square-foot home since the 1970s, are getting the program's help in replacing a cranky oil furnace and weatherproofing the house so cool air stays inside in the summer and warm air doesn't escape in the winter.

"I would sit and watch TV, and I could feel air coming through the windowsill," said Elmore Jenkins, 68, a Vietnam War veteran who later worked for a moving company. "Sometimes, rain would come through the kitchen vents."

Dominion workers and contractors who swarmed over the yard of the home eagerly demonstrated how they sealed the front door with a special fan that depressurizes the house, a technique that helps them spot where outside air is

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coming in.

When McAuliffe arrived, Dominion workers took him into the basement to show him how leaky air ducts had already been sealed.

“We have to do a better job of reducing carbon emissions into the air. One of the best ways to do that is energy efficiency,” McAuliffe said. “We’ll do about 1,200 homes during the pilot project, then I’m going to call Elmore up in a couple weeks and see if it’s a lot cooler in his house after we’ve spackled up and closed the gaps in his ducts.”

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The expansion of the program was triggered in part by controversial legislation passed by the Virginia General Assembly that froze Dominion’s base rates but also put on hold independent financial reviews that in the past have led to customer refunds or reduced rates.

In signing the legislation, McAuliffe issued an executive order to encourage large utilities to help low-income customers with energy assistance and weatherization of homes.

Sharon Bulova (D), chairman of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, said the effort is critical, particularly for older homes built before energy efficiency

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and insulation were emphasized.

State Sen. Richard L. Saslaw (D-Fairfax) said Dominion’s program will have a ripple effect throughout the economy as more people start improving their homes.

McAuliffe emphasized the importance of Virginia improving its energy efficiency — not just through the weatherization program, but through other avenues as well.

On Holyoke Drive, where the Jenkinses live, several new homes have been built in recent years by high school students enrolled in an alternative-education program that focuses on building energy-efficient residences.

“We’re all in this game trying to figure out how do we make ourselves more energy-independent? How do we make ourselves more efficient?” McAuliffe said. “This is a new day for the Commonwealth.”



Patricia Sullivan covers government, politics and other regional issues in Arlington County and Alexandria. She worked in Illinois, Florida, Montana and California before joining the Post in November 2001.

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