

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### Southwest Virginia Energy Research and Development Authority Begins Work to Reshape Region's Energy Future

*~ Sen. Chafin & Del. Kilgore lay out vision; Authority elects Quillen as chair and Westover as vice chair ~*

**WISE COUNTY, VA** – Senator Ben Chafin and Delegate Terry Kilgore today announced that the Southwest Virginia Energy Research and Development Authority (Authority) has begun its work. The Authority was established through [legislation](#) patroned by Chafin and Kilgore that passed during the 2019 General Assembly session.

“Southwest Virginia is a prime location for energy research and development activities that leverage our region’s talent and natural resources,” said **Chafin**. “Our legislative delegation is committed to seeing the region build on its long history of energy generation in order to grow our economy.”

The Authority’s purpose is to promote opportunities for energy development in Southwest Virginia, create jobs and economic activity in the region consistent with the Virginia Energy Plan, and position Southwest Virginia and the Commonwealth as a leader in energy workforce and energy technology research and development.

“The Authority allows us to connect research and economic development in order to drive energy innovation in Southwest Virginia,” said **Kilgore**. “We should take an all-the-above approach to keep Southwest Virginia as the energy capital of the East Coast.”

The Authority met for its inaugural meeting on September 30 and elected Mike Quillen as chair and Dr. Kris Westover as vice chair. Quillen currently serves as chairman of the GO Virginia Region One Council, and Westover is president of Mountain Empire Community College.

“This Authority is going to think outside the box on energy projects that bring together innovative research, workforce development and economic development under one umbrella,” said **Quillen**. “Our team is going to think creatively and strategically on how to pair renewable energy generation with job-creating projects.”

“The Authority’s focus on energy workforce development will help drive economic development opportunities,” said **Westover**. “Partnering with K-12 and higher education

interests in the development of the Southwest Virginia Energy Park will be a game-changer for our region.”

Chafin and Kilgore had the following goals in mind when drafting the legislation creating the Authority:

- Leverage the strength in energy research and workforce development of Virginia's public and private institutions of higher education;
- Support the development of pump storage hydropower in Southwest Virginia and energy storage generally;
- Promote the development of renewable energy generation facilities on brownfield sites, including abandoned mine sites;
- Promote energy workforce development;
- Assist energy technology research and development by promoting the development of a Southwest Virginia Energy Park; and
- Identify and work with the Commonwealth's industries and nonprofit partners in advancing efforts related to energy development in Southwest Virginia.

The Authority's board is made up of 11 members: four members appointed by the Governor, four members appointed by the Speaker of the House of Delegates, and three members appointed by the Senate Committee on Rules.

The governor announced the following board appointments: Dr. Michael Karmis of Blacksburg, Professor and Director, Virginia Center for Coal and Energy Research, Virginia Tech; Brad Kreps of Abingdon, Clinch Valley Program Director, The Nature Conservancy; Lydia Sinemus of Bristol, Corporate Director, Human Resources and Environmental Health and Safety, Strongwell Corporation; and, Dr. Kristen Westover of Dryden, President, Mountain Empire Community College.

The Senate appointments include: Steve Breeding of Lebanon, Vice Chairman, Russell County Board of Supervisors; Travis Hackworth of Cedar Bluff, Chairman, Tazewell County Board of Supervisors; and, Dr. Marcy Hernick of Abingdon, Assistant Dean of Academic Affairs and Assessment, Appalachian College of Pharmacy.

The House of Delegates appointed: Jason Eige of Bristol, Vice President and General Counsel, The United Company; Duane Miller of Duffield, Executive Director, LENOWISCO Planning District Commission; Dan Poteet of Chester; and, Mike Quillen of Bristol.

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