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Public Affairs & News Bureau, Old Dominion University

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ODU's Toll Appointed to Governor's Climate Change Commission



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Ray Toll

Ray Toll, a faculty member with the Old Dominion University Center for Coastal Physical Oceanography (CCPO), has been appointed by Virginia Gov. Terry McAuliffe to the Governor's Climate Change and Resiliency Update Commission. The appointment was announced by the governor during an appearance July 1 at First Landing State Park in Virginia Beach.

Just last month, Toll assumed a leadership role in a Hampton Roads pilot project suggested by the White House that will enlist experts from all branches of government in the study of rising waters and coastal resiliency.

Former Gov. Tim Kaine launched a Governor's Commission on Climate Change in 2007 and members issued an initial report the next year. McAuliffe announced during the spring that he would make the commission a high priority, and he changed the name via Executive Order 19 to reflect his hopes that the new commission will build on the work of the original one.

The new commission is made up of leaders from around the state including local elected officials, members of the General Assembly, business leaders, environmental advocates, faith leaders and industry representatives.

"We need to prepare Virginia's coastal communities to deal with the growing threat of climate change, which is why I've reconvened the Climate Commission," McAuliffe said. "Virginia has the opportunity not only to be a leader in finding creative ways to mitigate climate change, but also to adapt to the effects of climate change that we have already begun to see here in the Commonwealth."

McAuliffe appointed Secretary of Natural Resources Molly Ward and Secretary of Public Safety Brian Moran to co-chair the 35-member commission. Secretary of Commerce and Trade Maurice Jones, former publisher of The Virginian-Pilot newspaper, and Kenneth Wright, mayor of Portsmouth and an ODU alumnus, are among the members.

This commission will evaluate the recommendations made by then-Governor Kaine's Climate Commission, determine what actions were taken on those recommendations, and issue an updated final report. The executive order gives the commission one year to complete its work.

Toll, who joined ODU last year, is a retired Navy captain who served as an oceanographer in the military. He received a bachelor's degree in meteorology from the University of Utah in 1978 and a master's in meteorology and oceanography from the Naval Postgraduate School in 1986. For almost a decade before joining ODU, Toll worked in private industry, including a stint with SAIC, a technology and engineering company that has 13,000 employees worldwide. He served as an account manager for SAIC working closely with the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

At ODU, Toll serves as a senior project scientist at CCPO and as a liaison between the university and various entities currently responding to sea level rise, including the Navy, NOAA and the cities of Norfolk and Virginia Beach. He has been active in ODU's Climate Change and Sea Level Rise Initiative and Mitigation and Adaptation Research Institute (MARI).

Toll was a main organizer of a first-of-its-kind conference on the resiliency of coastal areas to the threats of climate change that brought planners from industry and all levels of government to ODU in early June.

The meeting, called "TechSurge - Technical Support for Coastal Resiliency," launched a comprehensive pilot project to be headquartered at ODU and led by Toll that will bring together all levels of government, industry and conservation organizations to formulate a response to increased flooding. This project is designed to be a model for other coastal urban areas in the nation.

Toll also was a panelist in a half-day sea level rise forum at ODU earlier this week organized by Kaine, who is now a U.S. senator. Called "Rising to the Challenge," this forum also included appearances by U.S. Representatives Scott Rigell, Bobby Scott and Rob Wittman, all from eastern Virginia, as well as Norfolk Mayor Paul Fraim, and Virginia Beach Mayor Will Sessoms. These politicians, three of whom are Democrats and three Republicans, are promoting a bipartisan and all-levels-of-government response to sea level rise.

In 2012, Toll chaired "OCEANS '12, Harnessing the Power of the Ocean," a conference that drew an international contingent of 2,500 engineers, scientists and public policy experts to Virginia Beach. That conference, for which ODU was the academic host, focused attention on the leadership of the NOAA in integrated ocean observing, climate change and sea level rise.

As a CCPO scientist, Toll currently manages the Quality Assurance/Quality Control of Real Time Ocean Data project of NOAA's Integrated Ocean Observing System. He serves as a board member of the Marine Technology Society and a member of the American Meteorological Society. He is also on the board of trustees of the Virginia Aquarium and Marine Science Center.

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