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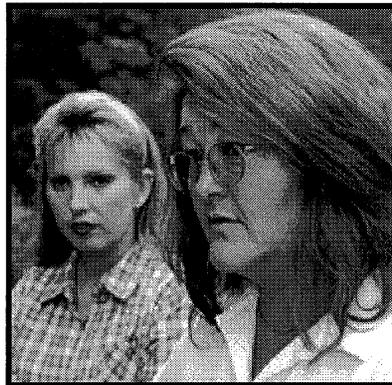
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Candidate Warner outlines comprehensive water plan for Virginia

By *AMY GATLEY*

SOUTH MOUNTAIN - Democratic gubernatorial candidate Mark Warner put his back into a campaign promise Friday, helping install a new water line for a Pound resident while unveiling his plan to bring clean drinking water to Virginians.



South Mountain residents Cindy Dingus and Christen Branham are looking forward to the new water line. Terry Ketron

Warner's five-point plan hinges on developing a comprehensive statewide water policy and streamlining funding for water projects so that communities are no longer forced to compete against one another for funds.

Warner chose the South Mountain home of Kenneth Mullins to hold the press conference, spending the night in the nearby home of Wise County Supervisor Doug Mullins.

The supervisor's home is one of 47 that are part of the South Mountain self-help water project, which will eventually provide clean drinking water to the residents. All of the homes depend on well water, which is often of low quantity and quality.



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Delegate Clarence E. "Bud" Phillips said Warner's stay at the Mullins home met his challenge to gubernatorial candidates to spend the night in a home in Southwest Virginia without clean drinking water.

"One of the most important things to a family in Southwest Virginia is clean drinking water..." said Phillips "People across the state take water for granted because they can get up every morning and take a shower and wash their clothes and water the lawn. ... There are more than \$100 million in water needs. What it takes is more money and more streamlining for the projects."

Christen Branham knows firsthand what it's like to worry about water on a daily basis. With her five kids, Branham said she often ran out of water, or the water was of such poor quality it was undrinkable. Several of her neighbors got sick from drinking their well water.

At a fish fry four years ago, Branham ran into U.S. Rep. Rick Boucher and asked him how she could bring water to her community.

"He told me where to go and put me in touch with some people..." Branham said. "It's been four years, and I would get disheartened sometimes. We had a lot of setbacks, but it's been our primary goal. ... We're thrilled now because if you don't have water, you don't have anything."

The South Mountain community was recently awarded a \$350,000 grant that requires residents to volunteer the majority of the labor to install the water lines. The project should be completed by the end of this year.

Warner touted the South Mountain self-help program as a model that should be multiplied throughout Virginia.

"One of the most basic rights is access to good, clean drinking water, but 46,000 Virginia households are without access to water," Warner said.

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Warner's plan would:

- Develop a comprehensive statewide water policy that would address quality, quantity and delivery of water to homes. Warner said the plan would utilize state and local resources to find water instead of forcing communities to fight each other for funds.
- Streamline funding for water projects by simplifying the grant process. Warner said a streamlined process is essential to ensure that projects can be funded and built in a timely manner.
- Dedicate more state money for water needs.
- Secure all available federal drinking water dollars. Warner said he will create a full-time position that will work solely with water issues on the state and federal level.
- Expand self-help projects such as South Mountain by broadening eligibility guidelines. Warner's plan also challenges the private sector to help provide voluntary help or in-kind services to speed the installation of water supply lines.

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