

Gov. Northam visit to Israel deepens Virginia's human rights and trade deficit

RICHMOND, VA, Nov. 19, 2019 /PRNewswire/ [The Virginia Coalition for Human Rights](#) (VCHR) protests Governor Ralph Northam's November 16 trade delegation to Israel. The visit ignores Israel's growing human rights abuses and runs counter to the Commonwealth's International Trade Strategic Plan to expand trade output by 50 percent over the next 15 years.

Past Virginia trade delegations have led to state subsidies to Israeli companies that have undermined Virginia's economy. In 2008 [Virginia's imports from Israel](#) were \$250 million. Over the next decade imports more than doubled to \$550 million. During the same period, [Virginia's exports to Israel](#) declined by 6.6% to \$113 million. As a result Virginia's trade deficit with Israel grew until it stood at \$437 million in 2018.

Virginia's trade deficit with Israel, correlates with the way economic development is divided in the Commonwealth. Grants and loans to Israeli companies are arranged by the [Virginia Israel Advisory Board](#) (VIAB). Since 2018, VIAB's Executive Director no longer reports to the Governor.

Since 2013, VIAB has arranged for an Israeli fish farm company, Aquamaof, to receive guarantees of \$1.5 million in grants from the Tobacco Region Opportunity Fund, and \$10 million in loans from the Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority. [These taxpayer-funded grants and loans](#) could put an employee-owned Virginia company, Blue Ridge Aquaculture, at a competitive disadvantage.

VIAB has helped Sun Tribe Solar LLC negotiate contracts with public schools, colleges, universities, and state government facilities to install solar panels. In the negotiations VIAB and Sun Tribe have failed to disclose that the ultimate beneficial owners [are Alony Hetz and Energix](#)—two Israeli companies with operations in Palestinian and Syrian territories that Israel illegally occupies.

[Sun Tribe Solar's contracts](#) (often sole source) allow the Israeli owners to sell up to 75% of the energy output to electric utilities over three decades. Sun Tribe arrays are installed on valuable public land and rooftops acquired for as little as \$1 per year. In return, Sun Tribe Solar's customers receive insignificant discounts on electricity, offset by added costs to provide security to the solar sites.

VIAB board members have engaged in years of [self-dealing](#) through personal ownership stakes in the companies they promote as "Virginia job creators." When past VIAB deals have gone bankrupt, state economic development budgets suffered the losses.

For more information, contact Jim Metz at 804-285-8632 or jdjmetz@yahoo.com.