Women’s Legislative RoundTable Pre-Session and Luncheon

December 6, 2017
at The Credit Union House of Virginia, 108 N. 8th St, Richmond VA

9:00-9:25 Coffee, Meet & Greet, Networking
9:25 Opening by LWV-VA President, Sue Lewis
9:30 Ric Brown, Commonwealth of Virginia Secretary of Finance and Bob Brink, Legislative Advisor to Governor McAuliffe

10:00-12:45 Speakers from numerous Friends of the League, Non-Profits, and Advocacy Groups, sharing overviews for the upcoming 2018 General Assembly Session

1:00 Lunch
Featured Speaker: Megan Rhyne, Exec. Director of the Virginia Coalition for Open Government/Transparency VA and author of “The Virginia General Assembly: The Case for Improved Transparency”

(Box lunch provided by Apple Spice Junction)

Pre-Session Guest Speakers

In addition to Megan Rhyne, the featured speaker at this year's luncheon, the morning Pre-Session features a great line-up of speakers:
- Garry Ellis, Virginia State Board of Elections (SBE.VA.Gov)
- Rev. Kim Bobo, Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy (VICPP.org)
- Brian Cannon, One Virginia2021 (OneVA2021.org)
- Candace Graham, ERA/Women-Matter, Women’s Equality Coalition (WEC.org, Women-Matter.org)
- Andy Goddard, Virginia Center for Public Safety (VACPS.org), Firearm Safety
- Tarina Keene, NARAL (Pro-ChoiceAmerica.org), WEC
- Holly Seibold, BRAWs.org - women’s shelter supplies
- Brian Johns, Virginia Organizing.org
- Lisa Guthrie, Virginia Transit Assn.
- Rhonda Thissen, National Alliance on Mental Illness of Va.
- Amy Woolard, Legal Aid Justice Center, Just Children.org
- Corinna Beall, Sierra Club of VA.org
- Leslie Tourigny, Assoc. of American University Women (AAUW.org)
- Gina Baldwin, Progress VA.org
- Jessica Cowardin, Virginia Dept. of Transportation (VDOT.org)
- Kristie Smith, Virginia Conservation Network (VCN.org)
- Kathie Burcher, Virginia Education Association (VEA.org)
- Quan Williams, NewVirginiaMajority.org
- Kenneth Gilliam, TCI (The Commonwealth Institute.org) and HAV (Healthcare for All Virginians Coalition
- Jill Hanken, HAV and Virginia Poverty Law Center (VPLC.org)

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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>December <em>Virginia Voter</em> LWVNCA Board Meeting</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Requests for drafts of legislation to be prefiled to Legislative Services by 5:00 p.m.</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>LWV-VA Board Meeting</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>LWV Pre-Session</td>
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<td>St. Nicholas' Day</td>
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<td>13-20</td>
<td>Hanukkah</td>
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<td>25</td>
<td>Christmas Day</td>
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<td>26</td>
<td>Boxing Day</td>
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<td>31</td>
<td>Kwanzaa (until Jan.1)</td>
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#### January, 2018

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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>New Year's Day</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>January <em>Voter Express</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>All requests for drafts, redrafts, and corrections of legislation creating or continuing a study to Legislative Services by 5:00 p.m.</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>LWVNCA Board Meeting</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Epiphany (Three Kings Day)</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>All drafts of prefiled legislation will be available by noon</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>First Day of the General Assembly</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Birthday</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>Women's Legislative Roundtable. Richmond, VA</td>
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<td>Women's Legislative Roundtable. Richmond, VA</td>
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### February, 2018

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<td>1</td>
<td>February <em>Virginia Voter</em> African American History Month</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>LWVNCA Board Meeting</td>
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<td>LWV-VA Board Meeting</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>League of Women Voters Day</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Lincoln's Birthday</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Mardi Gras / Shrove Tuesday</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Women's Legislative Roundtable. Richmond, VA</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>Ash Wednesday</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>Presidents' Day and Washington's Birthday</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>Women's Legislative Roundtable. Richmond, VA</td>
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<td>28</td>
<td>Women's Legislative Roundtable. Richmond, VA</td>
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### March, 2018

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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>March <em>Voter Express</em> Women's History Month</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>LWVNCA Board Meeting</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>March 4th and Do Something Day</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Virginia General Assembly Regular Session Adjourns sine die</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Daylight Savings Time Starts!</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Pi Day</td>
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### April, 2018

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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Easter</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>April <em>Voter Express</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>LWVNCA Board Meeting</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>Tax Day</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>Virginia General Assembly Reconvened Session</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>Earth Day</td>
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### May, 2018

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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>May <em>Virginia Voter</em> Town &amp; City Elections</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Cinco de Mayo</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>LWVNCA Annual Convention</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Mother's Day</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>Ramadan (ends on June 15)</td>
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<td>28</td>
<td>Memorial Day</td>
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### June, 2018

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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>June <em>Voter Express</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Virginia Primaries (if held)</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>LWV-VA Board Meeting, Roslyn, VA</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>LWV-VA Council, Roslyn, VA</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>Father's Day</td>
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<tr>
<td>28-30</td>
<td>LWV-US Convention (Chicago); (note: continues until July 1)</td>
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From the President

On to December! After the unexpected and unprecedented election in November, we move to December for one of our favorite events, the Pre-Session Roundtable. And celebrate the new website for LWV-VA, which is much more user-friendly. We also begin to look at the new bills being filed by old and new legislators. And of course, the holidays of Chanukah, Christmas and Kwanzaa.

About the November election: many surprises at the state and local levels, and more concerns about election integrity. The issues of non-counted ballots and ballots issued in error are of much concern to the League, and the potential for recounts in very close races will keep us focused on the election for much longer than usual. An acquaintance of mine, knowing my involvement with the League, asked me the day after the election if I (and we) were pleased with the results. After reiterating our commitment to nonpartisanship in supporting or opposing candidates and parties, my response was to say that once elected, the candidate then becomes our official, and we’re free to support or oppose policies that that person espouses. I do wish the public had a better understanding of this difference!

About the Pre-Session Roundtable: we are still working on final plans, mainly the luncheon speaker, but have our usual good line-up of speakers for the morning. Updates will be posted on the website, and we can take reservation for lunch until Friday, the 1st.

About the pre-filing of legislation: our legislative team headed by Valarie Fillgrove and Mary Crutchfield are following the bills, and you can find out more about the process in this volume of The Virginia Voter.

About January: The General Assembly will convene on January 10, with many new faces! We’ll see new cabinet members, and maybe some new committee chairs. Logically, the committees will be more evenly proportioned and bipartisan agreements may be easier to achieve. This will be an interesting session! Our regular Women’s Legislative Roundtable (WLRT) will resume on Jan. 17, in a new place, the Credit Union Building, and we hope to see many new faces at it as the session progresses.

Enjoy this volume of the Virginia Voter – it is full of great information! And enjoy the holiday season(s) with family and friends!

Sue Lewis

Don’t Forget About Our NEW Facebook Groups!

Get Involved in a Wide Variety of Discussions, from Advocacy and Behavioral Health to Climate Change, Health Care, Women’s Rights, and More.

Check out the full list in the Members Corner of the LWV-VA Website.

http://lwv-va.org/members-corner/facebook-working-groups/

Study Updates From the LWV-VA Program Director

Anne Bradstreet Smith, LWV-VA Program Director

All three League studies are progressing beautifully. The School Choice led by Carol Noggle (Prince William) and the Behavioral Health study led by Linda Rice (Williamsburg) have broad representation and great depth of expertise. Both teams have great enthusiasm for the subject and have developed substantive materials. The Women’s Rights under the Code of Virginia launched on October 25th and is led by Alison Beall (Richmond). The membership is primarily from the Richmond League and the Fredericksburg MAL. There is a wonderful combination of longterm knowledge and new enthusiasm. In a very short time this team has made awesome progress. In addition, a small group took on a side project to develop talking points on the ERA.

It’s such a pleasure to know these Teams and to watch their efforts and their commitment. All three Teams are doing incredibly outstanding work that will inform and benefit every member of the LWV-VA!
Gearing Up for the Legislative Season

Editor's Note: The following article originated as a two-part series of blog articles and is being reprinted, with permission, from Megan Rhyne, the Executive Director of the Virginia Coalition for Open Government. Dr. Rhyne will be the featured speaker at the WLRT Pre-Session Luncheon on December 6th. We thank her for her willingness to share her knowledge and expertise, both in writing and in person, with the League. (MHD).

Virginia General Assembly 101: A User's Guide
Megan Rhyne
Executive Director
Virginia Coalition for Open Government

As the “oldest continuous law-making body in the New World,” the Virginia General Assembly is steeped in history and tradition. That tradition is awe-inspiring on the one hand, while on the other hand, it can seem arcane and cumbersome.

It is a part-time body made up of “citizen legislators” who, at least in theory, have professional lives they put on hold while they gather in Richmond for 60 days in even-numbered years, 45 days in odd-numbered years, to do the state’s business.

Those familiar with the process of making laws in the Commonwealth often take for granted the labyrinthine pathways and breakneck speed a bill travels from its introduction to its final passage or demise. Legislators, staff, lobbyists and reporters somehow manage to stay on top of the thousands of bills and resolutions (2,959 in 2017) that pass through the hallowed halls of Virginia’s State Capitol.

Citizens who are not directly involved in the legislative process are daunted by the rush of the session. Luckily, the dedicated members of the Virginia Capitol Correspondents Association work diligently to inform the public of the most important, noteworthy or controversial measures, but because their numbers have dwindled over the years (the newspapers serving Norfolk/Virginia Beach, Roanoke and Hampton/Newport News do not even have a capitol beat reporter), they cannot possibly cover everything.

Much is left unreported or unpublished. Citizens may be interested in one single bill, or it may be a multitude of bills. Sometimes they want to know about bills on a variety of subjects. How can they possibly keep track?

This post focuses on watching the process: the committees, subcommittees and the floor session of each chamber. A future post will go over how to follow individual bills through the Legislative Information System.

The great equalizer this year is that everyone will be figuring out how to physically navigate the temporary quarters of the General Assembly. Legislator offices and committee rooms have been relocated to the Pocahontas Building, while a new General Assembly Building is constructed.

There is a lot less space for the big meeting rooms of the old building, but the good news is that meetings — at least some of them — will be live streamed. The clerk of the Senate said at an orientation for lobbyists that standing committee and subcommittee meetings will be covered, while the clerk of the House said that a final decision about which subcommittee meetings to cover (there are nearly 100 House subcommittees) had not been made but that meetings of the standing committees would be streamed.

On the House side, the subcommittee is where all the real debate takes place. Bills can be defeated outright in a subcommittee. A bill may be advanced to the full committee (this is called being “reported”). And in some cases, a bill may be carried over until the next meeting.

The Senate uses subcommittees, too, but those committees can only make recommendations to the full committee.

At the subcommittees, the chair will have a docket of bills being considered at that meeting. Legislators will present their own bills, usually on a first come, first served basis, to the subcommittee, saying what the bill does and sometimes saying what the bill doesn’t do. Sometimes the patron (the legislator) brings along someone who can better explain the bill (remember, these are part-time legislators and they often carry bills at the request of individuals, local governments, school districts, businesses and/or advocacy groups).

The subcommittee members will ask questions or raise concerns, then the chair will open up the discussion for those in support of the bill and to those in opposition to the bill. It’s not just lobbyists who speak at this time: it’s advocates, it’s people’s whose businesses or livelihoods will be affected, it’s people who would otherwise be hurt or helped by a bill, and it’s ordinary citizens who just have an interest. The subcommittee members may ask the speakers questions, but if not, at the conclusion of the public comment, the chair will give the patron the final word before deciding the fate of the bill.

The full, standing committees of both the House and the Senate will consider bills in much the same fashion as the subcommittee does and will again either defeat them or report them, this time to the full chamber, House or Senate. Bills may be defeated by a motion to table or a motion to pass by indefinitely, some may not get enough votes to report, and some are left in the subcommittee or committee without any action being taken. A few bills get “rolled” or “incorporated” into other identical or substantially similar bills.

The floor sessions of the full House and the full Senate have been live streamed for several years.

Each day at noon (sometimes earlier), citizens can tune in from their home or office computers or smart phones to watch legislators hash out bills that have made it through the committee system.

Recordings of these sessions started being archived earlier this year, so now citizens can watch any past session they couldn’t get to. House sessions are also searchable, meaning you can type in a
keyword or bill number and be taken to just those parts of one or more sessions where that topic is discussed. This can save an enormous amount of time. Senate sessions are not yet searchable.

House floor sessions open with a prayer offered by an invited clergyman and are followed by the “morning hour.” This is the time when legislators can acknowledge guests and visitors sitting in the gallery (the galleries of both chambers are open to the public), make announcements or speak on a “point of personal privilege,” which can be about any topic.

The clerk of the House then calls the calendar (click here for a sample from the 2017 session), which is the agenda for that day. Bills are divided up depending whether it is their first, second or third “constitutional readings,” as well as whether bills are on the “contested” or “uncontested” calendar. The real debate on a bill will take place on its second reading. Bills on their third reading are given a yay or nay vote by the full chamber. (And just to confuse you, bills on third reading are taken up at the beginning of the calendar, while bills on their first reading are towards the end.) After all bills and resolutions on that day’s calendar are heard, the clerk reads out announcements before the body adjourns for the day.

No legislator can speak on the House floor without first being recognized by the Speaker of the House. That includes legislators wanting to ask/answer direct questions of each other. Here’s where all that formality comes in.

The Senate, with plenty of its own formality, is essentially the same, though many of the points of personal privilege are left to the end of the calendar, before the final announcements. Additionally, the real debate on the bill is on the third constitutional reading, not the second. Though both chambers will process bills in a block, the Senate probably does more of that than the House. The Senate is presided over by the Lieutenant Governor, who, during the Senate session is called “Mr. President.”

It is easy to get bogged down in the quirks of both bodies, but after observing a few sessions — at the committee level or the full floor sessions — a certain rhythm develops, making it far easier to follow. Access Point Public Affairs, a lobbying firm, also offers this helpful glossary of additional terms to help sort things out.

Be sure to tune in in 2018 and be in the know!

Tracking legislation at the General Assembly

For my last blog entry I wrote about how you at home can watch the legislative process unfold: how the committee system is structured, how a committee meeting works, how to watch the floor sessions of either the House or Senate, and what to make of all of those tradition-bound terms and phrases.

Today I’m writing about tracking legislation on your own. How do you identify bills you’d like to follow, and how do you know at what stage in the process a bill is in? I’ll also talk about...
how you track individual legislators to see what types of bills they’ve introduced and how they voted on other measures.

The General Assembly’s Legislative Information System (LIS) is really quite packed with data, and all of it pretty well cross-referenced and linked. I’ve not done a comprehensive comparison of other state websites, but I’ve seen self-reported surveys on legislative websites, and Virginia’s site seems to measure among the best. Considering the breakneck speed of the legislative session, it is nothing short of miraculous that the good folks at LIS keep the site both useful and up to date.

Take a look around the LIS landing page to get started. You’ll notice various ways to approach your search, whether you’re looking for bills on specific topics (A), bills by number (B), bills by individual legislator (C), bills in a particular committee (D), or even bills by key word (E). (You’ll notice, after you’ve poked around the site a bit, that there are often multiple ways to get at the same thing.)

Wherever you go on the LIS site, the sidebar on the left remains, meaning you can quickly jump to any one of menu options by clicking on the “QUICK LINKS” drop-down menu or for searching databases.

To look up bills by your area of interest, I recommend going two places first: the bills & resolutions database (A) or the Bills & Resolutions menu option (B).

The database allows you to browse an alphabetical subject index (the link is highlighted below the search box) — from administration of government to workers compensation — or to type in a keyword or key phrase you’re
interested.

Here’s a results page after I typed in the phrase “freedom of information.”

You’ll notice that each bill or resolution is given a prefix (HB, HJR, HR, SB, SJR, SR) followed by a number. Each bill is also given a title that is supposed to be a brief description of what it does, and a summary that is a bit more in depth.

If you want to click on any one of these options, you have the choice to view it in its normal format, or in a format that highlights the keyword or phrase you just searched for.

You can perform the exact same keyword search from the “Bill Summaries” option under the “Searchable Databases” on the left of the page to yield results where your keyword may appear in the summary but not in the title.

You can then browse these results to find bills that you would like to follow through the session.

If you already know the number (name) of the bill you’re interested in, you want to click on the “Bills & Resolutions” option (B). You will then see a page with a search box (I) where you can type the bill number in (no need for capitalization or for spaces between letters and numbers).

There are a couple of other useful links both for finding bills and for analyzing them. If you’re interested in a particular topic, you may want to view all bills by committee (III) or again by subject matter. You may want to know about all the bills your legislator (or someone else you’re following) has filed (II). It’s even interesting to see the bills as the are filed day-by-day (IV). You’ll see many different ways to view the bills by what stage they are in the process, including those that have failed.
So, say I want to look up HB1876 from my list of bill number results (granted, I could have clicked on that bill from the results page -- see what I mean about lots of ways to get to the same place?). This is the page I get, and here's where the real meat and potatoes of the bill is.

You’ll see the bill number and title (1) and its summary (2). You’ll also see the name of the bill’s patron, the legislator who is carrying the bill (3). There is a link to the full text of the bill when it was introduced (4). At the start of the session, this is the only link, but as the session progresses, you will see links added to amended or substituted versions of the bill, as well as — in this case — the final version that was passed by the House and Senate (5) and signed by the governor (6).

Clicking on the first link under the "FULL TEXT" heading will give you the bill in its online, HTML format, which in turn gives you options for viewing just the condensed history, a PDF version of the bill or a "hilite" version, which shows new language highlighted in yellow, and language that is being struck from existing law highlighted and struck through in red.

A PDF version is helpful for debates about specific wording of a bill. Someone may say, “on page one, line 40 where it says ‘parent,’ should we insert the word ‘grandparent’?” and everyone listening knows exactly where in the bill to look.

Going back to the bill’s landing page, you’ll also see its history (7); a new entry for every committee assignment and vote from the time it was introduced until the bill’s final disposition, whether that is to pass and enact it or whether it is to defeat it at some point.

You can click on any highlighted entry to get further details, like who voted yes and who voted no (8).

Each bill’s landing page will follow this format in the LIS system. There’s no nuance here — you can’t know what was said or why a bill seems stalled in committee — but it is extremely useful for tracking the overall progress of the session.

If you’re interested in statistical work, you can go to the Committees page and click on the statistics for the House or Senate.

And if you want to know how your legislator (or anyone else) has voted on particular matters (i.e., they’re voting
2017 SESSION
MEMBERS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Member information includes political party affiliation, district represented, office address and telephone, committee assignments, and a linked list of bills and resolutions sponsored. View legislation that counts toward the House member's or Senate member's bill limit. See How my delegate or senator voted on the floor, committee or subcommittee. Who's My Legislator?

HOUSE MEMBERS
Les R. Adams
Lashrecse D. Aird
David B. Albo
Richard L. Anderson
Terry L. Austin
Lamont Bagby
John J. Bell
Richard P. Bell
Robert B. Bell
Robert S. Bloxom, Jr.
Jeffrey M. Bourne
Jennifer B. Boysko
David L. Bulova
Kathy J. Byron
Jeffrey L. Campbell
Gretchen Carr
Benjamin L. Cline
Mark L. Cole
Christopher E. Collins
M. Kirkland Cox
Glenn R. Davis
L. Mark Dudenhefer
James E. Edmunds, II
C. Matthew Fariss
Peter F. Farrell

SENATE MEMBERS
George L. Barker
Richard H. Black
Charles W. Carrico, Sr.
A. Benton "Ben" Chaffin
Amanda F. Chase
John A. Cosgrove, Jr.
Rosalyn R. Dance
R. Craig Deeds
Bill R. DeSteph, Jr.
Siebban S. Dunnavant
Adam P. Ebbin
John S. Edwards
Barbara A. Favola
Esmett W. Hanger, Jr.
Janel D. Howell
Lynwood W. Lewis, Jr.
Mamie L. Locke
L. Louise Lucas
David W. Marsden
T. Montgomery "Monty" Mason
Jennifer L. McClellan
Ryan T. McDougle
Jeremy S. McPike
Stephen D. Newman
Thomas K. Norment, Jr.

Election Watch

Virginia is now a Bluer shade of Purple.

Olga Hernandez

The General election of November 7, 2017 has had unexpected results. The Gubernatorial election was supposed to be close, with Lt. Governor Ralph Northam barely leading Republican Ed Gillespie on pre-election polls. It was not close, Dr. Northam won by 9 percentage points and he apparently had long coattails which no one predicted. In the Lt. Governor’s election, Justin Fairfax easily won though he had never served in elected office, and the sitting Attorney General Mark Herring won another term, his previous election was won in a close race that went to a recount in 2013.

Statewide the election was also for the entire 100 members of the House of Delegate, in 2015 no incumbent lost, it was a sleeper, having the Republicans remain in power with a lopsided majority. In 2017 the Democrats were energized especially women. Many ran a won their races, many candidates that had never run for office. The minority party was expected to gain 4 or 5 seats especially open seats in some more swing districts in and around urban areas. As of this writing the Democratic party flipped 15 seats coming within 1 seat of par with the Republicans. As of now at least three races are looking to ask for a recount.

Several important issues have been revealed as the results have been scrutinized by the Boards of Elections in the various localities. In the 28th HofD district it was found that 55 Absentee ballots may have been sitting at the Post Office and were not delivered until the next day. The issue is being blamed on the postal service, budget cuts and the processing of mail on weekends. Several General Registrars (GR) are recommending that the deadline to request a mail-in ballot be reviewed in light of this problem. Virginia law states the ballots need to be physically at the Office of Election by 7 pm on election day. The Democratic Party went to court to have them counted, the judge ruled they did not meet the

Megan Rhyne has worked for the Virginia Coalition for Open Government since 1998 and became its executive director in 2008. Before that, she served as an opinions editor for Texas Lawyer in Dallas, as a freelance writer for Androvett Legal Media in Dallas and the National Law Journal, and as an adjunct professor of media law at Hampton University's journalism school. Her law degree is from the University of Colorado-Boulder, and she was a radio, television and motion pictures major at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill.
standard in the law, they have not been counted. But in the same jurisdiction it has been discovered the 384 voters were erroneously assigned to the wrong precinct and thus 147 people were given the incorrect ballot. The GR who managed that office passed away in April. No one really knows how the these voters got assigned to the wrong HofD District. Was there enough oversite of the process to assign individual addresses to a delegate jurisdiction? Did the local Electoral Board review the work?

In a lawsuit heard on an emergency bases in federal court the judge dismissed the effort to stop the certification of the election in the 28th and 88th Districts. He stated that the state process needs to continue and there may be grounds later to hold a special election or do-over, but not now.

In the 28th the Republican candidate Robert M. "Bob" Thomas, Jr. is ahead in the count by 82 votes. Though it is unknowable how those 147 people voted it is possible to swing the election and by the way the control of the HofD. The results were certified on November 27, 20 days after the election.

The other two elections that have indicated they will ask for a recount is the 94th in which the Republican incumbent is up by 10 votes. In the 40th District the incumbent, part of the leadership in the HofD, is up by 106 votes. As of this writing it is not known if they have or will actually file for a recount. They have ten days after certification to file for a recount.

Virginia has a history of very close elections. In 2005 the Attorney General’s election was won by Bob McDonnell by 360 votes after a recount. In 2013 Attorney General’s race, Senator Mark Obenshain asked for a recount when the election was separated by 165 votes, after the statewide recount Senator Mark Herring (now Attorney General) had won by 907 votes. Things can change once everything is reexamined. The lawyers will be busy in the coming weeks. As it stands now almost half the HofD members (47) will have less than 4 years experience, and only 16 will have over 15 years. Young voters showed up and got elected. The General Assembly convenes on Wednesday, January 10th.

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Transportation Updates

The Importance of the Metro

Karen Finucan Clarkson, Communications & Outreach Mng. for NVTC

Imagine allowing a $40 billion asset – one that not only provides more than 2.6 million rides annually but generates $600 million in sales and income taxes here in Virginia – to decline. Without increased funding from a dedicated source, Metro will be unable to provide the type of safe and dependable service needed to sustain the region’s economy and quality of life.

Metro’s general manager has indicated that his transit agency needs $15.5 billion over the next 10 years to ensure passenger safety and service reliability. Strained municipal budgets and a looming state transit funding cliff pose unprecedented challenges to Virginia’s ability to afford the drastic increases that Metro anticipates in future years.

In Virginia, unlike in Maryland and the District of Columbia, it is local governments that receive the bill for Metrorail and Metrobus. In Arlington and Fairfax counties and the cities of Alexandria, Fairfax, and Falls Church, the transit agency competes for funding with necessities such as schools and law enforcement. Loudoun County will face the same funding competition when Silver Line Phase 2 stations open in 2020.

While there are some state funds available to help Virginia jurisdictions meet their Metro obligations, city and county taxpayers are ultimately on the hook when Metro’s bills come due. Municipal budgeting for those payments is complicated by fluctuating levels of funding from outside sources. Revenue from Northern Virginia’s 2.1 percent gas tax, much of which is earmarked for Metro, is anything but stable. Over the last three years, as fuel prices plummeted and revenues dropped, local governments scrambled to make up millions to fill the gap. In fiscal year 2017, the jurisdictions lost $13 million, which could have been used to fund Metro, due to the lack of a floor on the regional gas tax.

Local jurisdictions are poised to take a hard hit when transit funds from state transportation revenue bonds dry up in fiscal 2019. The loss of funds for transit capital – estimated at $110 million per year – will be devastating to Northern Virginia, which relies on the revenue to support its transit systems, including Metro. It’s up to the General Assembly to fill the transit funding gap when it convenes in January. At its disposal is an August 2017 report by a legislatively mandated panel that puts forward several packages to close the gap.

Closing the gap, however, will not be enough to meet Metro’s future needs. Virginia and its jurisdictions – in collaboration with Maryland and D.C. – are working with the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments to identify permanent and sustainable funding options that are bondable.

A potential loss of funds from the federal Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008 further exacerbates the situation. Metro stands to lose $300 million a year beginning in fiscal 2020. Replacing such a significant amount is beyond the means of Northern Virginia jurisdictions. With infrastructure a stated priority of the Trump administration and Metro a major mover of federal workers – in Virginia, 37 percent of Metrorail riders are federal employees – Congress must be part of the funding solution.

The League of Women Voters has long been a champion for mass transit. This summer, the League of Women Voters of the National Capital Area (LWV-NCA) joined Fund It—Fix It, a coalition of more than 20 non-profits, to call for dedicated funding for Metro. In October, LWV-NCA co-sponsored a forum with Coalition on Smarter Growth to educate and motivate the public. More information on the Fund It—Fix It coalition can be found on the LWV-NCA website. LWV-NCA will continue to educate and advocate on this critical issue.

The Virginia Voter December, 2017 10
What Is Happening on I-66 Inside the Beltway?

By Sherry Zachry LWV-FA

Drivers accustomed to taking Interstate 66 inside the Beltway are going to have to learn about using an E-ZPass in order to use the highway during rush hours. As of December 4, 2017, all of I-66 from I-495 to Route 29 in Rosslyn will become “HOT” (high-occupancy toll) lanes during rush hours, Monday through Friday. Weekday rush hours will be to 5:30 to 9:30 a.m. eastbound and 3 to 7 p.m. westbound. The lanes will remain free to all users during the off-peak hours and weekends. Also, hybrid cars will no longer be exempt; solo drivers in a hybrid will have to pay during rush hours. After the tolling begins, only motorcycles can travel free.

Whereas prior to the tolling, HOV-2 restrictions applied during rush hours, now one can travel solo during rush hours but will have to pay for the privilege with an E-ZPass. Cars with two people will not have to pay the toll during rush hours, but only if they have an E-ZPass “Flex” which keeps the charge from occurring if the “carpool switch” is turned on. However, if you have an E-ZPass without the “Flex” button, you will be charged as if you are driving solo. A non-Flex E-ZPass can be traded in for a Flex version; for information about how to get an E-ZPass transponder and how it works, go to www.ezpassva.com.

There will be no tollbooths or cash payments; tolls will be collected electronically. When drivers pass under overhead gantries, their E-ZPass account will be debited in the amount of the trip. Drivers without an E-ZPass device will receive a bill on the mail, including a penalty for not having an E-ZPass. The toll will vary depending on traffic. VDOT says the requirement is to maintain a minimum average speed of 45 mph. The price will vary to control congestion to achieve that goal. There is no cap on the toll pricing, which means the toll will increase as congestion rises and decrease as congestion lessens.

According to The Washington Post in an October 7, 2017 article titled “Virginia’s latest experiment with toll lanes to test thousands of commuters on I-66,” adjusting to the new requirements and rules may be the biggest challenge for commuters. This will be the first rush-hour-only, peak-period toll system of its kind in the United States.

“Driving in HOT lanes is about the most complicated thing we ask local commuters to do,” said Robert Thomson, who wrote extensively about the I-66 toll plans in his former role as The Washington Post’s Dr. Gridlock. “You need to have an E-ZPass — the right kind of E-ZPass — and you need to know the hours the HOT rules are in effect and you need to be aware of how ‘dynamic tolling’ works, meaning the toll can vary from time to time and day-to-day with no upper limit.”

If the toll plan works as intended, he said, the end result should be better traffic flow even when the lanes open up to solo drivers. Success depends heavily on multiple factors, including on persuading today’s drivers to move to carpooling and bus alternatives.

As part of the effort to expand capacity, an eastbound lane will be added next year from the Dulles Toll Road to Ballston. That expansion is expected to alleviate the biggest chokepoint for Washington-bound traffic, at the toll road where about 70 percent of traffic merges moving into the District and Arlington. After that is completed, the occupant capacity will go to HOV-3. On I-66 outside the Beltway, a $2.3 billion expansion will add toll lanes by 2022. That project spans 22.5 miles from the Beltway to University Boulevard in Gainesville in Prince William County.

More information on this project can be found at http://www.66expresslanes.org/, and www.novatransit.org/i66com/muterchoice.

Sources:
Here’s What you Need to Know About the New I-66 Toll Lanes (Washington Post, 10/7/2017)
Virginia’s Latest Experiment With Toll Lanes to Test Thousands of Commuters on I-66, (Washington Post, 10/7/2017)
http://www.66expresslanes.org/

Innovation & The League

Registering High School Seniors in Pajamas

Merry Jennings LWV-Washington County

During Homecoming Week, on Pajama Day, seniors in pajamas registered to vote. Nine seniors who had been trained to register voters helped many of the 235 seniors at Abingdon High School to link to the Inspire website. During their Government class, students went to the library to log in to a teacher-made webpage which linked students directly to the registration application or to a virtual pledge card on the Inspire website. Students had been reminded to bring their Social Security numbers to help the process go smoothly.

Twenty students who would be 18 by the November election registered to vote. Students who were not old enough to register to vote this fall will receive a reminder to register when they reach 18 if they signed online pledge cards that they will register.

Inspire provided registration materials including tee shirts for the trained registers and stickers. Last year the Governor’s Challenge in High School Registration officially kicked off
on National Voter Registration Day and concluded the last week of April 2017, which is Virginia’s High School Student Registration Week. Morgan O’Toole of Inspire Virginia (morgan.otoole@inspire-usa.org) said recently, “We are very optimistic that there will be a governor's award. Regardless, Inspire is still doing voter registration and trying to get 65% of eligible seniors registered at high schools all across the state. Once the new governor is in office, we will know more about the Challenge and I will be sure to pass along all of the information.” Using the Inspire website to register allows students to be counted for the Governor’s recognition.

The National Voter Registration Day (which was September 26) also provided posters.

The LWV-Washington County provided contacts and advice, but the credit for everything going smoothly should go to Social Studies chair and Government teacher Mary Beverly. Derek Lyall, the Washington County Director of Elections and Registrar, trained the students who helped register students. Last year, Abingdon High School signed up for the 2016-2017 Governor’s Voter Registration Challenge, but had problems with paper registration forms and access to computers in the Spring because they were being used for SOL testing.

While this year the inspiration was registering at National Voter Registration Day, but in general early April (before SOLs) is a better time to register seniors. If students register using the Department of Elections website, it is unlikely that they will forget to check boxes that will cause their applications to be delayed.

Mary Beverly plans to do a followup registration in April. The LWV-WC hopes to recruit other Washington County High Schools to register students in the Spring.

Read the Virginia Voter & the Voter Express and Stay Informed.

Coming in the Next Issue of the Virginia Voter...

--Understanding Advocacy
--What to Do With an Action Alert
--League Day @ the General Assembly
--Designing a League Game Night
--Elections and Redistricting
--Updates from the Legislative Coordinator