

CULPEPER STAR-EXPONENT

Larry Green is new vice chair of 7th District Republicans

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Tuesday, February 24, 2026

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STRATA CLEAN ENERGY

Solar developer listens, cuts project in half

Reimagined plan calls for panels on 291 acres along Raccoon Ford Road

ALLISON BROPHY CHAMPION
Culpeper Star-Exponent

Three years after withdrawing a solar project local officials and citizens felt was too large, a

North Carolina solar developer has returned with a scaled-back proposal for a timber tract in Stevensburg.

The Culpeper County Planning held a recent work session with Durham-based Strata Clean Energy on its request for a conditional use permit to build the Maroon Solar project on Raccoon Ford Road.

The request in 2023 was to place

solar panels, a substation and associated infrastructure on 671 acres on a 1,427-acre site previously used for logging, zoned for agricultural use.

The submission this time cuts that in half and then some, requesting the project be built on 291 fenced-in acres—within the county's 300-acre solar policy limit.

The scaled-back proposal would

generate a 65-megawatt project compared to 149 megawatts in the original iteration, and located 2,400 feet from the closest house, according to the developer.

Nearly 60% of the site, including streams and wetlands, will remain undisturbed, according to the application.

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DATA CENTER TAX REFORM PASSES STATEHOUSE



PHOTO BY DON HAIGHT

Local officials say the first of two Amazon data center buildings is nearing completion along Route 3 in Stevensburg. The secure government facility along Route 3 is seen here at sunrise in early December.

BY ALEXA BARNES
Capital News Service

RICHMOND — Two pieces of legislation introduced by Del. Rip Sullivan, D-Fairfax, to update the state's sales tax were heard in the House and met with different outcomes.

House Bill 897 and House Bill 900, both patroned by Sullivan, looked to adjust Virginia's sales and use taxes.

"Our sales and use tax structure is badly outdated in Virginia," Sullivan said. "It's been way too long since we've taken any real action to update it."

HB 897 requires data centers to use non-carbon-emitting generators and backup sources, and to demonstrate a commitment to clean energy, in order to qualify for existing data center sales and use tax exemptions.

"HB 897 is built on a very simple premise — that if the data centers here in Virginia want this tax exemption, this enormously

valuable tax exemption, they have to make good on their supposed commitment to us," Sullivan said.

Virginia has incentivized data center development. The state gave \$5.2 billion in tax incentives and grants between fiscal years 2015 and 2024, according to a 2025 report by the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee. During this period, data center and use tax exemptions totaled \$2.7 billion, accounting for more than half of the state's total incentive spending.

Freedom Virginia is a nonpartisan advocacy organization focused on affordability and financial stability for families across the commonwealth. Co-Executive Director Ryan O'Toole emphasized the importance of bills like HB 897 and holding data centers accountable.

"That's nearly \$2 billion the state did not make, that it could have otherwise used

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"Our sales and use tax structure is badly outdated in Virginia. It's been way too long since we've taken any real action to update it."

Del. Rip Sullivan, D-Fairfax

STATE OF UNION

Spanberger will respond to Trump

National Dems tap former 7th D rep, new governor to deliver party response

MICHAEL MARTZ
Richmond Times-Dispatch

Gov. Abigail Spanberger will deliver the Democratic response to President Donald Trump's State of the Union address on Tuesday night, marking her arrival as a national party leader after her 15-point victory over then-Lt. Gov. Winsome Earle-Sears to become Virginia's first female governor in November.

Spanberger, a three-term congresswoman from Henrico County, campaigned in part on the damage that she said Trump's policies had done to Virginians and the state's economy since his return to the White House last year.

She also faulted Earle-Sears, a conservative Republican who never received Trump's endorsement of her campaign, and then-Gov. Glenn Youngkin for not opposing the president's ongoing assault on the federal workforce and spending that undergird the state's economy, especially in Northern Virginia and Hampton Roads.

"For sure, party leaders see Spanberger as a potential national figure in the Democratic Party," said Mark Rozell, dean of the Schar School of Policy and Government at George Mason University.

The danger, he said, is that another newly elected Virginia governor — like many before her, including Youngkin — is shadowed by speculation of a national political future in her single four-year term.

"We do have a history in Virginia of governors barely in the job, and they start looking at the national political scene for themselves," Rozell said.

House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, D-NY, and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-NY, announced on Thursday that Spanberger will deliver the Democratic response on national television after Trump's address to a joint session of Congress on Tuesday night.

"In her historic 2018 victory, she ousted a Republican incumbent to help deliver a Democratic House majority to serve as a check and balance on Trump's first term," Jeffries said. "As the 75th Governor of Virginia and first woman ever elected to lead the Commonwealth, Abigail is a champion for lowering the high cost of living, saving healthcare from the relentless far-right assault and protecting the federal workforce so they can serve the American people without political interference."

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Jason Arias and Emerson Hodgson in this week's Academic Spotlight PAGE A3

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