

ELECTION 2025

# 7 TAKEAWAYS



NEXSTAR PHOTOS, THE RICHMOND TIMES-DISPATCH

Democrat Abigail Spanberger, left, and Republican Lt. Gov. Winsome Earle-Sears, right, shake hands during a civil moment of a largely fractious gubernatorial debate at Norfolk State University, Thursday, Oct. 9, 2025.

## What we learned from Virginia’s one and only gubernatorial debate

ANDREW CAIN  
Richmond Times-Dispatch

Democrat Abigail Spanberger and Republican Lt. Gov. Winsome Earle-Sears faced off last Thursday night at Norfolk State University in their only debate for governor.

Here are seven things to know from the debate.

### Jay Jones is on his own

Spanberger, a former representative for Virginia’s 7th Congressional District, did not defend Jones, the Democratic nominee for attorney general, six days after the National Review reported on 2022 text messages in which Jones fantasized about shooting then-Virginia House Speaker Todd Gilbert, R-Shenandoah, and about harm coming to his children.

“I’m saying as of now, it’s up to every voter to make their own individual decision,” Spanberger said.



Democratic nominee for Virginia attorney general Jay Jones whispers into the ear of Abigail Spanberger, nominee for governor, during a rally on Tuesday, June 24, 2025, at Eastwood Farm & Winery south of Charlottesville.

CAL TOBIAS, THE DAILY PROGRESS

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## FIRE

# Alarming revelation

House smoke alarms ‘not functioning’ before Keswick house fire that orphaned girls

HAWES SPENCER  
The Daily Progress

The house had smoke alarms, but they didn’t work.

That grim new detail has emerged after the Oct. 5 blaze that orphaned two Albemarle County girls after it killed their parents, Stephen and Ashley Williams, both 37.

“Multiple hardwired smoke alarms with battery backups on the second floor of the residence were found to be not functioning at the time of the fire,” county spokeswoman Reagan Samuels told The Daily Progress.

The finding gives a cruel twist to a story already suffused with heartbreak. The blaze on Starry Sky Lane in the east Albemarle village of Keswick killed not just the parents but also the family dog and left both daughters injured.

“Of the two children injured in the incident, one has been released from the hospital and is now in the care of family

members as of Monday evening,” said Samuels. “The second child remains hospitalized at the VCU Burn Center, where they are continuing to receive treatment.”

Friends and well-wishers have identified the children as 8-year-old Emma and the more severely injured 3-year-old Lilly.

The couple’s surviving relatives, one of whom was until recently the chief at a volunteer fire company serving the Keswick area, have issued a plea to the public: Inspect and test your alarms.



COURTESY PHOTO

Please see **ALARMS**, Page A2      The Williams family