

The Free Lance-Star



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Back to old map, Dems hope for win

MICHAEL MARTZ
Richmond Times-Dispatch

Virginia Democrats are back to where they started before an audacious bid to redraw the state's congressional maps that the Virginia Supreme Court nipped in the bud on Friday.

The Supreme Court ruling represented an unprecedented decision to overturn the result

of a public referendum just two weeks earlier to ratify a proposed constitutional amendment that would have allowed the Democratic-controlled General Assembly to impose new congressional maps this year instead of waiting for an independent redistricting commission to act after the next U.S. Census in 2030.

Instead of a likely 10-1 partisan

advantage in midterm elections in November, Democrats still look to take advantage of President Donald Trump's unpopularity in Virginia to potentially pick up two seats in competitive congressional districts under the old map, while fighting longer odds in two other Republican strongholds as part of a national push to regain control of the U.S. House of Representatives.

"It's a serious blow for Virginia Democrats," said Larry Sabato, director of the Center for Politics at the University of Virginia. "It's a serious blow to the national party effort to take the House, but it's not a fatal blow."

Currently, Democrats hold a 6-5 advantage in the state's congressional delegation, which they hope to expand by flipping

Republican-held districts in the Hampton Roads area, parts of the Richmond suburbs and the eastern Tidewater. Their odds are much longer to win seats in Southside and Western Virginia, which they had hoped to paint much bluer under the maps that the court blocked on Friday.

Please see **OLD MAP**, Page A3

TheBrightSide



PETER CIHELKA PHOTOS, THE FREE LANCE-STAR

Members of the class of 2026 file into Ball Circle to collect their degrees during the school's 115th commencement.

North Anna to Bristers update set

SCOTT SHENK
The Free Lance-Star

A meeting is scheduled for an update on a proposed power line project that caused consternation in Stafford County late last year.

Survey results on what Stafford residents think of the proposal were also released this week.

The meeting, a scheduled update on the North Anna to Bristers 500-kilovolt electric transmission project, is scheduled for Monday at the Hampton Inn & Conference Center, 2965 Richmond Highway (U.S. 1).

The meeting, which will be open to the public from 3:30 to 7:30 p.m., is one of several community updates set up by Dominion Energy.

Dominion Energy is working on various expansion projects in Virginia to increase the capacity of the state's electrical grid. One of those proposed expansions is the North Anna to Bristers project, originally known as the Kraken, which runs through Stafford and Spotsylvania counties.

Please see **POWER LINE**, Page A5

UMW sends off new graduates

Speakers urge students to seek purpose and keep community

PILAR DAVIS
The Free Lance-Star

A milestone moment filled with exuberance, a little bit of nerves, and a ton of hard work. Under clear skies, the next group of college graduates filed past the towering trees and brick-paved walking paths to march toward their graduation from the University of Mary Washington, while the sound of Pomp and

Circumstance echoed in the background.

"It's the culmination of everything we do here," Dr. Paino, president of UMW, said while watching the graduates file past, headed to their seats. "This is the greatest day of the year for those of us in academia. All the work that goes in. The faculty, the staff, and of course the amazing graduates. It's a celebration of our mission and what's possible for students ahead."

Dr. Tim O'Donnell, UMW provost, echoed the president's reflection.

"It's the best day of the year," O'Donnell said. "It's the time that we have an opportunity to

celebrate all the hard work of our graduates and to send them off with hearty congratulations."

The massive body of students lined up around Jackson Square, waiting to take their last steps across campus toward Ball Circle, where the ceremony was held. Tears, laughter, nerves and a surplus of emotions filled the graduates' faces as they waited to be told it was time to march.

Dr. Rita Dunston, associate provost and university registrar, talked with colleagues and encouraged students as they made their way to Ball Circle. "The energy is wonderful. It's exciting to see those students who came in four years ago and

see the success that they have made. I am proud of all of them."

Graduating with a Bachelor of Arts in psychology, Eric Undeland was in high spirits. On his way to graduate school, he reflected on what the time at UMW had meant for him.

The Bright Side highlights uplifting moments across our community. Visit our website to read more and share your ideas.

The Bright Side: Where good news lives.

Please see **GRADUATES**, Page A3

Graffiti threat probed at Stafford High

KEITH EPPS
The Free Lance-Star

The Stafford County Sheriff's Office is investigating racist and threatening bathroom scribbling that was discovered at a county high school this week.

The writing found at Stafford High School listed the date "5/20/26" and read, "Columbin (sic) 2.0 here Don't go unless your (sic) a Jew or not white."

The writing also included a crude swastika, words that appeared to be in another language and the words "[Expletive] Jews."

Stafford Sheriff's spokesman Jackson Arnold said: "We take this very seriously and will conduct a very thorough investigation." As of Friday, the culprit had not been identified.

Please see **GRAFFITI**, Page A5



UMW President Dr. Troy Paino (lower left) claps as the class of 2026 heads to Ball Circle for commencement at the school's Fredericksburg campus on Saturday.



Members of the audience greet UMW grads as they file into Ball Circle for commencement.

VIEW: Love funnies? Subscribers can find more comics, puzzles and columns at go.fredericksburg.com/comics. NEWSVU

Weather
Turning cloudy, warmer
High 85 • Low 56
Forecast • B6

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