

THE NEWS VIRGINIAN

Wednesday, April 1, 2026

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GENERAL ASSEMBLY

SO MANY BILLS, SO LITTLE TIME



ALLYSE PULLIAM, TIMES-DISPATCH

Gov. Spanberger signs her first bills into law at the Capitol in Richmond on Friday, Feb. 6, 2026.

Legislative work now shifts to Spanberger

MICHAEL MARTZ
Richmond Times-Dispatch

More than 750 bills and resolutions adopted by the Virginia General Assembly this year have landed on Gov. Abigail Spanberger's desk, with about 400 yet to arrive for the governor's review and action in just over two weeks.

Some of the most consequential legislation adopted in the 60-day assembly session has yet to be formally delivered to the governor's office for Spanberger's signature, recommended amendments or vetoes, as the laborious work of governance has shifted from the legislative to the executive branch with a looming deadline for action by midnight on April 13.

In the final days of the session, before the assembly adjourned on March 14, the legislature adopted compromises on major policy proposals, including the establishment of a legal marketplace for recreational cannabis, paid family medical



Surovell

"I feel like we're trying to push a lot of water through a straw," said state Senate Majority Leader Scott Surovell, D-Fairfax, in an interview Friday.

The increasing complexity and volume of legislation handled by the assembly — with more than 3,600 bills and resolutions introduced — prompted legislative leaders to contract with the National Conference of State Legislatures last year to study the General Assembly's rules, processes and deadlines to recommend ways to improve them.

A five-person study team monitored the legislative session this year and sent

leave, controls on federal immigration enforcement, regulation of skill games, a potential casino in Fairfax County, electric utility regulation and the cost of serving energy-hungry data centers.



Schaar

questionnaires to legislators and staff. Team members also met with staff at the Division of Legislative Services, which drafts legislation; the Division of Automated Legislative Systems, which operates the critical information technology to run assembly operations; and the House Appropriations and Senate Finance & Appropriations committees, which produce the budget.

"The money committees are slammed," said Senate Clerk Susan Clarke Schaar, who has worked in the Senate for more than 50 years, including more than 30 as clerk.

Schaar said the assembly underwent a similar review about 20 years ago and implemented some changes to improve

Please see **SPANBERGER**, Page A2

PRISONS

Virginia prison guard fired after death of inmate at Wallens Ridge

SAMUEL B. PARKER
Richmond Times-Dispatch

A Virginia Department of Corrections officer has been dismissed in connection with the June death of an inmate at Wallens Ridge State Prison, according to a source with knowledge of the situation.

Jason Cope, a 13-year department veteran who most recently held the rank of sergeant at the supermax facility in Wise County, was "placed on pre-disciplinary leave" in October, the source said — four months after Aubrey McKay was found in his cell with a fractured Adam's apple, black eyes and bruises on his arms and ankles, his mother told WVTF.

On Jan. 12, Cope was "served to begin due

process," the source said, meaning officials began the process of terminating him in compliance with his rights under state code. Officials fired Cope roughly a month later.

In response to questions, Department of Corrections spokesperson Kyle Gibson confirmed that Cope was no longer an employee of the department as of Feb. 10, but declined to provide details on the nature of his departure.

"The VADOC does not routinely comment on personnel matters," Gibson wrote in an email.

Gibson also would not answer questions about whether Cope had been involved in any other reported incidents during his tenure, which



ROANOKE TIMES FILE PHOTO

A correctional officer looks out from a gun turret at Wallens Ridge State Prison in Big Stone Gap before dedication ceremonies at the prison's 1999 opening.

Please see **GUARD**, Page A2