

What to expect when you elect

Meet the candidates running for delegate and governor in Virginia

OFF-CAMPUS NEWS

BY THE CHAMPION STAFF
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RISË HAYES (D)

PHOTO PROVIDED



What will be your top three priorities if you are elected?

My top priorities are to improve living conditions by increasing the frequency of inspections of rental properties and to hold landlords accountable for properties in poor condition. I will also improve school funding by transitioning us from a facility-based funding system to a student-population-based funding system. This will allow overcrowded schools to receive more money to build larger facilities. Finally, I want to improve workers’ rights by repealing two labor laws: at-will firing and right-to-work. With both of these laws repealed, workers will have more protection from arbitrary firings and an increase in union power to protect people from predatory corporations.

Why should Liberty University students vote for you?

I graduated from Liberty University in 2020 and fell in love with Lynchburg. I have made this city my home. I believe I can be an effective leader who will fight to improve the lives of all citizens in Virginia. I will spend every day in office focused on legislation that will actively better our lives, not just appease donors.

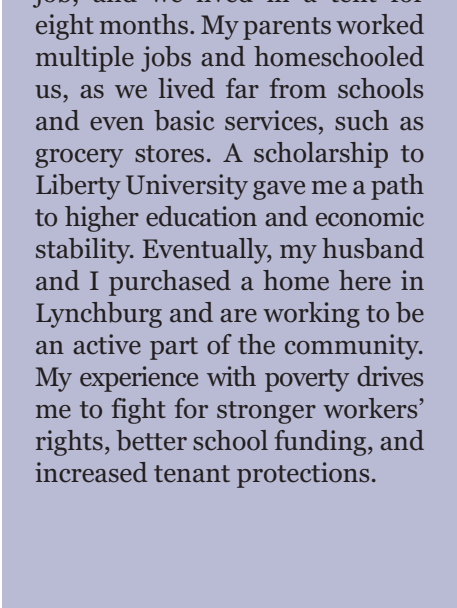
The Virginia General Assembly is set to vote on three constitutional amendments in 2026 regarding abortion rights, same-sex marriage and rights for convicted felons. How do you plan to represent your district when voting on these important issues?

I will vote yes for all three amendments. The government should not control the medical decisions of individuals. That decision should be made between the patient and their provider. Furthermore, the government should not dictate who can marry between consenting adults. Whether someone wants a

The Liberty Champion staff has put together a spread of candidates for the upcoming Virginia election to help give students voting on campus more information before they make their voting decisions. Each Virginia House of Delegates candidate was given identical questions and word counts. Their responses have not been changed or edited.

WENDELL WALKER (R)

PHOTO PROVIDED



What will be your top three priorities if you are elected?

My top priorities will be strengthening public safety, improving education, and growing our economy. That means standing with law enforcement to keep our communities safe and ensuring they have the tools and resources needed to protect our families. It means empowering parents and students in our schools, expanding career and technical education, and preparing the next generation for the jobs of tomorrow. And it means supporting policies that help Virginia businesses thrive like cutting burdensome regulations, lowering taxes, and encouraging investment and job creation. By focusing on safety, education, and economic growth, we can build a Virginia where young people want to stay.

Virginia imports more electricity than any other state, and the demand is only growing. What plans do you have to help meet the energy demands of our community?

The first thing we need to do is stop building more data centers. They consume too much water and electricity, driving up costs for everybody else, and increasing air and noise pollution where they’re built. If we do not manage our energy production now, we risk a statewide energy crisis. The second thing we need to do is hold electric companies accountable for usage rates. We can do this by preventing Dominion and Appalachian Power from donating to political campaigns. They spend millions on campaigns, including the \$50,000 Delegate Wendell Walker has received. Money spent on politicians is money that could have remained in consumers’ pockets. We need someone who will prioritize their constituents, not their donors.

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Why should Liberty University students vote for you?

As a proud Liberty University alumnus, I understand the values that make Liberty special: faith, freedom, and personal responsibility. I’ve fought to defend religious liberty and expand opportunities for young people, including supporting significant increases in the Virginia Tuition Assistance Grant (VTAG) program that helps Virginia residents afford their college education. Liberty students should know that I’ll continue being a tireless advocate for them and anyone who want to find a good job, raise a family, and build their future here in Virginia.

The Virginia General Assembly is set to vote on three constitutional amendments in 2026 regarding abortion rights, same-sex marriage and rights for convicted felons. How do you plan to represent your district when voting on these important issues?

I’ve already voted against these proposed constitutional amendments

WENDELL WALKER (R)

Delegate Wendell Walker represents the 52nd District, covering Lynchburg and part of Campbell County. First elected in 2019, he’s been a consistent voice for taxpayers, fighting for fiscal responsibility, limited government, and Virginia’s shared values. A Liberty University graduate and lifelong Lynchburg resident, Wendell built a career in small business and workforce development before serving in the House of Delegates, where he sits on the Finance and Health and Human Services Committees. A devoted husband, father, and grandfather, Wendell has been married to his wife, Patsy, for over 40 years and is a longtime member of Thomas Road Baptist Church.

once, and my position has not changed. I’ll continue to vote based on the values and convictions of the people I represent in Central Virginia. I’m proudly pro-life, I believe marriage is a sacred institution, and I support laws that uphold accountability while still allowing second chances for those who have earned them. My votes will always reflect my faith, my principles, and the conservative values of the district I’m honored to serve.

Virginia imports more electricity than any other state, and the demand is only growing. What plans do you have to help meet the energy demands of our community?

Few members of the General Assembly can say they represent a district at the forefront of building the future of American energy, and I’m proud to champion their work in the General Assembly. Companies in our district, like BWX Technologies and Framatome, are leading the way on safe, reliable, and affordable nuclear power that will meet America’s energy needs for generations to come. In Richmond, I’ll keep fighting for investments in small modular reactor (SMR) technology, workforce development, and an all-of-the-above energy strategy that keeps Virginia’s power reliable, affordable, and secure. I will always be a strong advocate for policies that support and expand Virginia’s nuclear energy leadership.

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The Liberty Champion staff reached out to both gubernatorial candidates with questions, but neither campaign responded to our requests. However, as a member of the Virginia Press Association, we were able to utilize information from the Virginia Press Association/Virginia Local News Project - 2025 Voter Guide. The head shots and the Q&As for each gubernatorial candidate were provided from this project and were not edited. We chose questions to include based on space available and what was most applicable to the student population.

ABIGAIL SPANBERGER (D)

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Virginia’s minimum wage is set to rise to \$12.77 on January 1, 2026. Do you support further increasing the minimum wage to \$15 or higher? If so, what timeline would you propose, and how would you ensure the increase balances the needs of workers and small businesses?

As I travel across Virginia, I hear from families who have to choose between paying rent, keeping the lights on, or putting food on the table. Every Virginian who works full time deserves the opportunity to save for their futures and their children’s futures. As bills increase and Virginians are forced to spend more of their pay to keep up, working families need stronger wages to make ends meet — and I will sign into law legislation to finally raise Virginia’s minimum wage to \$15 per hour. As we see attacks on Virginia’s workforce and economy, it’s an important step forward to ensure that Virginians who are working hard in every corner of our commonwealth can get a pay raise and keep up with increasing costs.

Would you support the federal government deploying the Virginia National Guard to enforce federal immigration policy within the state? Why or why not, and under what circumstances, if any, would you consider such cooperation appropriate?

I am a former federal law enforcement officer who worked narcotics cases and CIA case officer who tracked cartels and transnational criminal organizations. Given this experience, I know the incredible value of varied agency coordination, but if making the decision today with the set of facts we see on the ground in Virginia, I would absolutely not deploy the Virginia Guard to enforce federal immigration policy within our commonwealth. That task of detaining individuals on immigration detainees should remain within the purview of federal immigration agents, while the task of arresting those for whom an arrest warrant — for any variety of offenses — has been signed should

fall to local, state, or federal agencies depending upon the charges. Notably, during my time in Congress, the Virginia Guard deployed to Texas on a border security support mission, and I supported that mission as the authorities and purpose of that mission were clear and appropriate given the guard’s training and statute.

With the rising cost of essentials such as groceries, utilities, childcare, and transportation, many Virginians report difficulty making ends meet—even with full-time employment. As governor, what specific policies would you propose to ease the cost-of-living burden for low- and middle-income residents? How would you ensure these efforts are targeted, sustainable, and effective across both urban and rural communities?

As I’ve talked to families across Virginia, I hear from families who are working harder and harder, yet finding it more difficult to get by, which is why I’ve rolled out my Affordable Virginia Plan to lower healthcare, housing, and energy costs for Virginia families. As governor, I’ll lower prescription drug costs and protect access to affordable healthcare coverage. Additionally, I want Virginia to be the nationwide leader in addressing the housing affordability and supply crisis. And I want to see Virginia become more energy independent and become a global leader in developing the energy technologies of the future — all while saving Virginia consumers money along the way. At a time when Republicans in Washington — backed by Winsome Earle-Sears — are trying to make life more expensive for everyday Virginians, I want to work with both parties in Richmond to make sure every Virginian can afford to call the commonwealth their home.

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WINSOME EARLE-SEARS (R)

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Virginia’s minimum wage is set to rise to \$12.77 on January 1, 2026. Do you support further increasing the minimum wage to \$15 or higher? If so, what timeline would you propose, and how would you ensure the increase balances the needs of workers and small businesses?

Virginia’s minimum wage is already set to rise to \$12.77 on January 1, 2026, and I support those responsible, inflation-based adjustments because they help workers while giving small businesses the ability to plan ahead. But I do not support rushing to \$15 or higher just because that’s what California did. We’ve all seen the results there, higher prices, fewer entry-level opportunities, and businesses cutting hours or closing altogether. That is not the future I want for Virginia.

I believe the real way to raise wages is by raising value. That’s why, as lieutenant governor, I fought to raise salaries for teachers and support staff, and it’s why I’ll keep focusing on creating better-paying jobs through economic growth, career training, and workforce development. Mandates and one-size-fits-all policies hurt more than they help. Virginians deserve opportunity and prosperity, not California-style economic damage.

Would you support the federal government deploying the Virginia National Guard to enforce federal immigration policy within the state? Why or why not, and under what circumstances, if any, would you consider such cooperation appropriate?

As a Marine, I believe in law and order, and that means securing our borders and enforcing immigration laws. I would absolutely support cooperation with the federal government, including deploying the Virginia National Guard if necessary, to stop illegal immigration and protect Virginians.

When Washington brings resources to the table, we should take advantage of them to strengthen enforcement and keep our communities safe. If the mission is to stop illegal crossings, crack

down on drug and human trafficking, and keep violent criminals out of our communities, then I will make sure Virginia is a partner.

Protecting Virginians comes first, and I won’t hesitate to work with the federal government when it means enforcing the law and keeping our commonwealth safe.

With the rising cost of essentials such as groceries, utilities, childcare, and transportation, many Virginians report difficulty making ends meet—even with full-time employment. As governor, what specific policies would you propose to ease the cost-of-living burden for low- and middle-income residents? How would you ensure these efforts are targeted, sustainable, and effective across both urban and rural communities?

Everywhere I go, Virginians tell me the same thing: it’s getting harder to make ends meet. Groceries, childcare, utilities, and transportation are eating up more and more of family budgets, and too many hardworking people feel like they’re falling behind even with full-time jobs.

As governor, I will tackle the cost-of-living crisis head-on. That means cutting taxes on essentials so families keep more of what they earn, reining in utility costs by pursuing an all-of-the-above energy strategy for affordable and reliable power, and expanding access to childcare through public-private partnerships that increase availability without driving up prices. I will also invest in better roads and transit options so Virginians spend less time and money getting to work.

My focus will be on targeted, sustainable relief policies that work for both urban and rural communities, not one-size-fits-all mandates from Washington. At the end of the day, it comes down to common sense: lower costs, more opportunity, and a government that puts families first.

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