

GOVERNOR ABIGAIL SPANBERGER

Inaugural Address 2026



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Mr. Speaker; Madam President Pro Tempore; Madam Lieutenant Governor; Mr. Attorney General; Members of the General Assembly; Justices of the Supreme Court; honored guests;

To my parents Martin and Eileen Davis, my sisters Hilary and Meredith, my husband Adam and my daughters, Claire, Charlotte, Catherine; neighbors, friends, and our fellow Virginians: it is my honor to be with all of you today.

An inauguration ceremony like this one — with all its tradition and pageantry — represents something profound, and in its origins, something uniquely American... the peaceful transfer of power. It is a cornerstone of our American democratic experiment, a tradition and precedent begun by a Virginian, George Washington, and carried forth every time we celebrate an election and the inauguration of new leaders who will be entrusted to govern and serve — for a time.

Every four years, Virginians have the unique responsibility of choosing those leaders, as we all write the next chapter of our Commonwealth's story. And today, that tradition continues.

Adam and I extend our appreciation to you, Governor Youngkin and First Lady Suzanne Youngkin, for the time you have both spent with us during this transition. I thank you for your service, and we wish you and your family the best as you exit this role and begin a new chapter.

And to Lieutenant Governor Earle-Sears — herself a trailblazer, to Attorney General Miyares, and to those who served in the Youngkin Administration, thank you for your service to the Commonwealth we all love.

To the former Governors in attendance today, I am grateful that you are here. I thank you for your outreach, your offers of support and help, and for your continued commitment to Virginia.

As I begin my service as Governor, I want to thank the men and women of our armed forces — the Virginians serving overseas and those who serve at military installations across our Commonwealth. Thank you for your defense of our freedom.

I thank the members of the Virginia National Guard — those serving far from home or right here today. I thank our Commonwealth's law enforcement officers, firefighters, and first responders — for your tireless commitment to our fellow Virginians.

75 times. 75 times in Virginia's storied history, we have witnessed this transfer from one Governor to the next. 75 times, a Governor has taken this oath, and so many of those times, it's been right here, on these steps that those words have been spoken.

It is the honor of my life to stand before you and take the oath today. The history and the gravity of this moment are not lost on me — I maintain an abiding sense of gratitude to those who worked generation after generation to ensure women could be among those casting ballots, but who could only dream of a day like today.

I stand before those who made it possible for a woman to also participate in that peaceful transfer of power and take that oath...

And it is with a profound sense of duty to all Virginians that I assume the Governorship and pledge myself to work tirelessly on behalf of our Commonwealth.

This year marks the 250th anniversary of two milestones in American democracy: the first is the signing of our Declaration of Independence — drafted by Thomas Jefferson — Virginia's second Governor and the man who designed the very building behind us today. And the second milestone we remember this year is the inauguration of Patrick Henry as Virginia's first Governor.

Governor Henry is best known for his call against tyranny at St. John's Church, just up the road — words that helped launch the American Revolution. But in his final public speech, delivered in Virginia years later in 1799, he made an appeal to his fellow citizens, warning against the divisions that were threatening our young country.

His appeal remains timeless. He said:

"United we stand, divided we fall. Let us not split into factions which must destroy that union upon which our existence hangs."

I'll say that again. "Let us not split into factions..." which would "destroy that union upon which our existence hangs."

That was the challenge Governor Henry put to Virginia at the close of the 18th Century. And it is the charge we must answer again today. I know that the work of perfecting our democracy has never been finished.

But I am heartened by the fact that so much of that work has been done right here, on these very steps and across this city — where Virginia's history, and America's history, has so often been written.

This square has been the scene of remarkable dramas of equality and justice. It has been the site of great struggles and hard-won triumphs, whose consequences have been heard across America.

On these steps, Virginia's suffragists brought their cause to the General Assembly session after session, decade after decade. And though these brave women were voted down, time and time again, they refused to give up.

And while the 19th amendment gave women the right to vote in 1920, it would not be until 1952 that Virginia finally ratified it. And yet for so many women, the right to vote was not truly secured until the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

And in 1960, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. addressed a crowd of more than 2,500 here in Richmond. He implored the then-Governor to comply with the Brown v. Board of Education ruling.

Building upon a message he had issued one year prior when he wrote: "Today is a day for great men, great ideas, great movements..." and in his urgent appeals for progress, he wrote, "As Virginia goes, so goes the South, perhaps America, and the world."

In 1960, following his impassioned words at the Pilgrimage of Prayer, they marched here to these steps.

In the generations since Governor Henry's plea, as rights have been won and progress has been made, our Commonwealth and our country have faced hurdles, hardships, divisions, and bitterness.

And yet, along the way, what has been necessary is leaders who clearly see and willingly confront challenges. And even more importantly, what has always been essential is for people, everyday people — we Virginians — to do the same.

And so it was in 1970, as our Commonwealth once again faced deep divisions, that Virginia's 61st Governor didn't shy away from the challenges before him. Governor Linwood Holton stared them down.

On these steps, he proclaimed — and I'm quoting again:

"No longer can we be divided into opposing camps of political philosophy."

He said, "The time for partisan politics is over. It is time now for leadership, for action, for progress through unity."

He went on to issue a challenge: "I turn today to all Virginians, whatever their political persuasion, and say: Let us act together."

And just 20 years later, on these steps, Virginia inaugurated our 66th Governor and our nation's first elected African American Governor.

Governor L. Douglas Wilder changed what so many of our fellow citizens believed was even possible. And today, on your 95th Birthday, I thank you Governor, for being here to celebrate this Virginia tradition as we continue to write our Commonwealth's story.

It was by design that we are a Commonwealth. In Virginia's first constitution, written 250 years ago, they designated us as such. Virginia — no longer a colony, and not simply a state in our fledgling nation, but a Commonwealth.

What's the difference? Kids, pay attention, because eventually someone may ask you!

There's no difference in how we operate or function as a state. The difference lies in the intention of our forefathers and the choice to indicate that here our government should serve the common good — that the voices of everyday Virginians — not kings or aristocrats or oligarchs — should drive us forward, and that our prosperity depends upon that union.

That our leaders and our fellow Virginians should join in common cause, find common ground, and pursue common purpose — this is the concept at the heart of what it means to be a Commonwealth.

This is what it means to be united for Virginia's future.

And while I have spoken at length about our history, today must be about our future and the story we will write together.

I know many of you are worried about the recklessness coming out of Washington. You are worried about policies that are hurting our communities — cutting healthcare access, imperiling rural hospitals, and driving up costs. You are worried about Washington policies that are closing off markets, hurting innovation and private industry, and attacking those who have devoted their lives to public service.

You are worried about an administration that is gilding buildings while schools crumble, breaking the social safety net, and sowing fear across our communities — betraying the values of who we are as Americans, the very values we celebrate here on these steps.

And across the Commonwealth, everything keeps getting more expensive — groceries, medicine, daycare, the electricity bill, rent, and the mortgage. Families are strained, kids are stressed, and so much just seems to be getting harder and harder.

Growing up, my parents always taught me that when faced with something unacceptable, you must speak up. You must take action, right what you believe is wrong, and fix what isn't working.

I know that some who are here today or watching from home may disagree with the litany of challenges and hardships I laid out. Your perspective may differ from mine, but that does not preclude us working together where we may find common cause. My priorities for the people of Virginia are drawn from my own background and experience.

I grew up in a family where my parents modeled a commitment to service and community — my father in law enforcement and my mother in nursing.

My middle class upbringing was a result of their struggle, their hard work, and programs like the GI Bill that sent my dad to college and strong community colleges that allowed my mom to put herself through nursing school as she worked more than fulltime.

I followed my father's footsteps into law enforcement. At my academy graduation, he handed me my badge and credentials, and I entered a world where I had to get it right every time and do right by everyone I encountered — victims, witnesses, fellow agents, and even the person whose name was on an arrest warrant.

Then, as a CIA officer, I worked to combat the greatest threats facing America. I worked to keep our nation safe at home and abroad, and I saw firsthand that the world is safer when the United States shows our mighty strength through the lives we save, the diseases we eradicate, the technologies we create, and the leadership we show on a global stage.

Today, I am a mother to three daughters who are my everything. There is nothing more important to me than their safety, their health, their education, and their future. And I know that far too many parents work hard to make ends meet, but still worry how they'll put food on the table, take their sick child to the doctor, or keep the lights on. When today is so uncertain, it's hard to dream big for tomorrow.

Today, I stand before you on these steps not only as Virginia's 75th Governor, but as someone who believes it is our duty to write the next chapter of our Commonwealth's story. It is our duty to demonstrate for the generations to come that when faced with hardships, challenges, divisions, and even bitterness, we too forged a path forward and pursued progress.

And as we write this next chapter, we will work relentlessly to make life more affordable for our fellow Virginians.

We will tackle the high cost of housing — whether you're renting, buying, or trying to stay in your home. We'll work to cut red tape, increase housing supply, and help communities keep housing affordable.

We will work to lower energy costs by producing more energy and by ensuring that high energy users pay their fair share.

And we will contend with an impending healthcare crisis by protecting healthcare access, cracking down on the middlemen who are driving up drug prices, and making sure Virginians aren't going into spiraling medical debt because of a single emergency.

And as we write this next chapter, we will make Virginia's public schools the best in the nation.

We will work to ensure every child in the Commonwealth receives a world-class education at every level — providing them a solid foundation in reading and math, and preparing our kids for a prosperous future.

And we will invest in the schools and educators that are essential to this goal.

And as we write this next chapter, we will grow Virginia's economy in every corner of the Commonwealth.

We will invest in the apprenticeships and job training of the future. We will bring capital investment into every region of our Commonwealth. We will stand up for Virginia's workers — including our federal workforce. And we will expand opportunities for Virginia agriculture — our farmers, producers, agribusinesses, and farm families.

And as we write this next chapter, we will focus on the security and safety of all of our neighbors.

And we will take action to prevent gun violence, to support Virginians struggling with addiction, and to address the mental health crisis impacting our kids and neighbors. And in Virginia, our hardworking, law-abiding immigrant neighbors will know that when we say — we'll focus on the security and safety of all of our neighbors, we mean them too.

We will write this next chapter together, because throughout our history, no leader has ever made progress alone.

To my friends in the General Assembly — on both sides of the aisle — I look forward to working with you. I know what it means to represent your constituents, to work hard for your district, and to pursue policies you believe in.

We will not agree on everything, but I speak from personal experience when I say that we do not have to see eye-to-eye on every issue in order to stand shoulder-to-shoulder on others.

Because Virginia has always been a place where we confront challenges, where we build coalitions, and where we prove that democracy still works.

To Lieutenant Governor Hashmi and Attorney General Jones, I look forward to working together with you both as we serve our fellow Virginians over the next four years.

And most importantly, to the people of Virginia: we are beginning a new chapter in our Commonwealth's story. We need you to help us write it.

As we mark 250 years since the dawn of American freedom: What will our children, grandchildren, and their descendants write about this time in our Commonwealth's history — this chapter — 50, 100, and 250 years from now?

Will they say that we let divisions fester or challenges overwhelm us? Or will they say that we stood up for what is right, fixed what is broken, and served the common good here in Virginia?

Today, we're hearing the call to connect more deeply to our American Experiment — to understand our shared history, not as a single point in time, but as a lesson for how we

create our more prosperous future. And so I ask — what will you do to help us author this next chapter?

As your Governor, I pledge to you that I will work tirelessly for you and for our Commonwealth.

Today, I find myself thinking about Dr. King's Pilgrimage of Prayer... Such a powerful phrase.

And it gives me cause to reflect on what our path forward must be... not a Pilgrimage of Politics, certainly not a Pilgrimage of Partisanship... but rather a Pilgrimage of Promise, Progress, and Prosperity.

My fellow Virginians, as we set an example for the country, the world, and most importantly, our children, let us:

Choose to stand united. Choose to serve one another. Choose to act together.

As we continue forward, let us be united for Virginia's future.

Thank you all very much! May God Bless the Commonwealth of Virginia. And may God Bless the United States of America.

