



VIRGINIA'S NEWS LEADER

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'THIS IS A TOTAL DISASTER'

McCarthy ousted as House speaker

He becomes first to be removed from that role in vote

LISA MASCARO AND FARNOUSH AMIRI
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Speaker Kevin McCarthy was voted out of the job Tuesday in an extraordinary

showdown — a first in U.S. history, forced by a contingent of hard-right conservatives and throwing the House and its Republican leadership into chaos.



McCarthy

McCarthy, who repeatedly said he never gives

up, found himself with almost no options. Neither the right-flank Republicans who engineered his ouster nor the Democrats seemed open to negotiating.

McCarthy told lawmakers in the evening that he would not run again for speaker, putting the gavel up for grabs. Next steps are uncertain, as there is no obvious successor to lead the House Re-

publican majority. Action is halted in the House until next week, when Republicans will try to elect a new speaker.

"I may have lost this vote today but, as I walk out of this chamber, I feel fortunate to have served," McCarthy said at a news conference at the Capitol. "I wouldn't change a thing"

McCarthy's chief rival, Rep.

Matt Gaetz of Florida, orchestrated the rare vote on the obscure "motion to vacate" and pushed ahead swiftly into a dramatic afternoon roll call.

Please see MCCARTHY, Page A4

■ **INSIDE:** Seven of Virginia's 11 House members vote to oust Speaker McCarthy. **Page A4**

'I CAN SEE YOU!'



DANIEL SANGJIB MIN, TIMES-DISPATCH

Ramona Robinson, licensed optician of Conexus, helps Iness Kunzi, kindergartener, wear glasses as Zyr Gordon, right, also kindergartener, sits with new glasses at Bellwood Elementary School in Chesterfield County on Tuesday.

Sight set on helping kids

Conexus offers free eye exams, glasses

ANNA BRYSON
Richmond Times-Dispatch

Kindergartener Zyr Gordon's world changed Tuesday morning when he put on a pair of prescription glasses for the first time.

"Wow, I can see something," he said. "I can see something far away!"

He turned to a friend and said, "I can see you!"

Dozens of students at Bellwood Elementary School in Chesterfield County had a similar experience Tuesday.

The local nonprofit Conexus for Healthy Vision operates two

programs: a vision screening program and a mobile vision clinic that provides free eye exams and glasses to area students. The nonprofit is funded in part by the General Assembly because

the law mandates screenings for students in some grades, but it is mostly funded by community donations.

Please see CONEXUS, Page A5



MORE ONLINE: Aim your smartphone camera at this code and tap the link to see a video of kids getting glasses through Conexus for Healthy Vision. **NEWSVU**

SCC approves break on Obamacare premiums

DAVE RESS
Richmond Times-Dispatch

Virginians covered by Affordable Care Act policies will get a break they could have missed because of this year's \$1 billion state

budget impasse.

The double-digit percentage increases for next year that those Virginians had faced are no longer coming, the State Corporation Commission Bureau of Insurance

said in response to a query from the Richmond Times-Dispatch.

The key was language deep in the 758-page budget the House of Delegates and state Senate finally approved last month, more than

six months behind schedule.

It was a formal state commitment to back a program funded by state and federal money to

Please see OBAMACARE, Page A4

HCA HEALTHCARE

Plan for \$234M hospital rejected

State cites lack of need in Hanover

ERIC KOLENICH
Richmond Times-Dispatch

The State Health Commissioner has shot down HCA Healthcare's proposal to build a \$234 million hospital in Hanover County.

Dr. Karen Shelton issued the denial Monday, citing a lack of need for another hospital in the region and the harm it would cause to rival health system Bon Secours, which already operates a hospital nearby.

"HCA has not demonstrated an institutional need for its proposed project," said Vanessa MacLeod, an adjudication officer for the state health department.

HCA can appeal the decision in court, but it's unclear if the health system will.

"While we respect the health commissioner's decision, we are disappointed in the outcome," said Pryor Green, a spokesperson for HCA. HCA's hospitals are "constantly evaluating gaps in access to care and developing approaches to better meet the needs of the community and our partners."

In January, HCA proposed a small, 60-bed hospital on Sliding Hill Road with a staff of 300 employees. HCA said it would move 60 beds, staff and equipment from

Please see HCA, Page A6



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N.Y. judge issues limited gag order after Trump's disparaging post **PAGE A12**

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Plenty of sunshine
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Low 57
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Richmond working on nonstop flights to Seattle

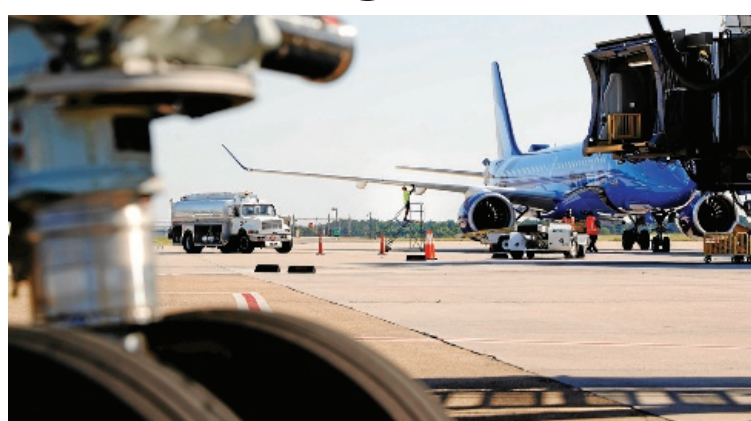
SEAN JONES
Richmond Times-Dispatch

Richmond airline passengers could have an easier time to get to the Pacific Northwest and Alaska courtesy of a \$1 million federal grant.

The grant will specifically help Richmond International Airport develop nonstop service to Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, the third-largest hub on the West Coast. It will also provide connectivity to other areas in the region.

The process for developing a route could take several years, according to an airport spokesperson. A similar grant award for service to Denver took about 2 1/2 years to complete.

"The airport plans to use this significant funding to help obtain nonstop service to Seattle, Washington, which will provide



MARGO WAGNER, TIMES-DISPATCH

An airport worker inspects the wing of a Breeze Airways plane at Richmond International Airport in June. Traffic at the airport surged in the first half of this year.

greater connectivity and access between the people and business of Richmond region and the Pacific Northwest as well as to beyond points in Alaska and west-

ern Canada," said Perry J. Miller, president and CEO of the Capital Region Airport Commission.

The grant was received after a joint letter of support from U.S.

Representatives Jennifer McClellan, Abigail Spanberger and Rob Wittman. It was also submitted alongside the Capital Region Airport Commission, ChamberRVA and the Greater Richmond Partnership and Richmond Region Tourism.

The grant was awarded to the commission, which manages the airport.

"Richmond International Airport is an important hub for travel, tourism, and commerce in Virginia's Fourth District," McClellan said. "This funding will help further enhance their airport operations and support Richmond's growing economy."

RIC has only recently begun adding nonstop service to the West Coast, with direct routes to both San Francisco and Los Angeles. The route to Seattle is a third major city for Richmond

travelers.

RIC set records earlier this year when it had 393,355 passengers in April, the most recorded for that month. Those numbers came after setting a record in March 2023, with 385,000 passengers, higher than any pre-pandemic tally for that month.

The airport is currently in "growth mode," adding routes across the country with a variety of new permanent routes, like the one to Los Angeles plus other destinations like Las Vegas and Phoenix. Long-term plans call for flights to popular vacation routes in the Caribbean, and possibly Europe.

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Conexus

From A1

"Kids sitting in a classroom right now who can't see the board well or their workbooks well because they just can't see well, they're not going to do well in school," said Tim Gresham, the CEO of Conexus. "A lot of those kids don't even know that they don't see well and have poor vision. They know that they're not getting it, but they don't know why they're not getting it. In a lot of cases, it's just because they need a pair of glasses."

Last school year, Conexus provided nearly 6,000 free eye exams to students in Richmond, Petersburg and Chesterfield, Hanover and Cumberland counties. As a result of those exams, the nonprofit provided about 4,500 pairs of glasses to students. More than half of those students had never worn glasses, had an old prescription, or had lost or broken their glasses.

Second grader Fernando Granados, who received his first pair of glasses Tuesday, initially said: "I can see too much things" and that it was "creepy."

He soon became enamored with his Nike glasses, saying everything looked much bigger and that he wanted to keep the glasses forever,



DANIEL SANGJIB MIN, TIMES-DISPATCH

Ramona Robinson, licensed optician of Conexus, helps Zyr Gordon, kindergartener, wear glasses at Bellwood Elementary School in Chesterfield County on Tuesday.

even when he grows big.

Of the approximately 84,300 children in 49 school divisions across the state that Conexus had screened last school year, the nonprofit referred about 30,400 for further eye care, a rate of about 36%. The national average referral rate for students is about 25%.

In Richmond and Petersburg, the referral rate for children who need further eye care is much higher at 47% in Petersburg and 41% in Richmond.

Vision screening is mandated by Virginia state code for students in kindergarten, third, seventh and

10th grade. For students who by law have to be screened, the state pays for about 70% of the cost of the screenings. But the state does not cover screenings for students who are not in those grades, and it does not cover the cost of glasses.

The majority of the nonprofit's \$1.2 million annual operating budget comes from community donations.

"Like every nonprofit, we're limited by the donations that we receive," Gresham said. "Even though we're doing such a great job, and we're serving so many kids even just in Greater Richmond, we're

probably at 30% of the need. We're not (yet working in) Hopewell or Colonial Heights. There's a ton of kids who need our service from the mobile clinic who we can't see yet."

Students who have untreated vision impairments struggle to learn to read because they can't identify letters. Children with uncorrected visual acuity less than 20/20 are three times more likely to fail a grade in school, according to the Essilor Foundation.

Kimberly Bird, the reading specialist at Bellwood Elementary School, said that for students in kindergarten and first grade who are struggling to read, it's important to know if they have a vision impairment before questioning if they have a learning disability.

"You have students who are farsighted who can't see close up for book reading. Then you have students who are nearsighted who can't see far away, which would affect classroom work on the smartboard (a digital chalkboard) and on the whiteboard," Bird said.

"Students who struggle to read are typically frustrated. The longer we wait to get them the help that they need, whether it is with getting glasses or giving them additional reading support, the older that they get, the more frustrated they become," Bird said. "It's su-

per important to foster that love of reading, and it's really difficult as students get older because the older they get, they can start to get a little resentful and then they don't like to read because it's hard."

After a struggling student with a vision impairment receives a pair of glasses, their improvement in reading is typically very quick, she said.

"In the course of a month, we can screen a child, identify that child is having an issue, come back with our mobile clinic and they see a doctor free of charge for the family. They get to pick up their own glasses with hundreds of styles to choose from. We then return in a couple of weeks with the glasses," Gresham said.

"Over the course of a month we've identified a problem, and we have solved that problem. We have now made it so that that child can succeed in school. The hunger and all these other things that that child may be facing are bigger issues, but we know vision is no longer a barrier for that child and that's such a huge accomplishment."

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Wills vs. Trusts?

It's Not About the Documents . . . It's About the Results

This is truly an educational session. Join us for a thought-provoking presentation of the basics of estate planning and discover which plan is right for you and your loved ones.

YOU should attend if:

- You want to learn about the Federal Estate and Gift Tax law changes.
- You want to learn about Virginia's new Power of Attorney and Advance Medical Directive Laws.
- You want to protect the inheritance you leave behind FOR YOUR FAMILY'S use only.
- You wish to learn more about PROBATE and how to avoid it.
- You have a Will that is more than 3 YEARS OLD or it was created IN ANOTHER STATE.

What we will discuss:

- How the SECURE Act impacts your estate plan.
- The change to Virginia's Power of Attorney and Health Care Laws (Advance Medical Directive) and their impact on you and your family.
- How Probate and unnecessary delays and costs can be avoided.
- How to provide for your own care and well-being, and that of your loved ones even if you become mentally incapacitated.
- Maximizing total control of your property, your assets and your privacy during life.
- The pitfalls of joint ownership, especially with family members.
- How you can protect your children's inheritance from predators, greedy non-family members, and bad marriages.

WILLS VS. TRUSTS

In-person

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Saturday, October 28, 2023 • 10:30 a.m.

Tuckahoe Library

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Webinar

Tuesday, October, 17, 2023 • 12:00 p.m.

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presented by

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