

Journal of the Senate

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 21, 2026

The Senate was called to order by the President.

Devotional Exercises

Devotional exercises were conducted by the Reverend Peter Plagge of Waterbury.

Joint Resolution Referred

J.R.S. 37.

Joint Senate resolution of the following title was offered, read the first time and is as follows:

Offered by Senators Morley and Baruth,

J.R.S. 37. Joint resolution supporting, in solidarity with national and international ski organizations and numerous skiers across the globe, the introduction of long-overdue gender equality in Nordic combined Olympic competition.

Whereas, Nordic combined is a challenging winter sport, requiring competitors to prove their skills as both Nordic skiers and alpine ski jumpers, and

Whereas, the first documented Nordic combined competition occurred in Oslo, Norway, in 1892, 32 years before the inaugural Winter Olympics was held in France in 1924, at which Nordic combined was one of the featured events, and

Whereas, the proud century of Nordic combined competition in the Winter Olympics has been tarnished due to its exclusion of women, and

Whereas, women have exhibited outstanding Nordic combined performances in non-Olympic competition, and among the premier women's Nordic combined competitors is Vermonter Tara Geraghty-Moats, who has earned national and international recognition, and

Whereas, unfortunately for this sport, the exclusion of women from Olympic Nordic combined competition persuaded Tara Geraghty-Moats to pursue her Winter Olympic dreams as a biathlon athlete, and

Whereas, ironically, although the International Olympic Committee (IOC) recently “welcomed the Political Declaration adopted unanimously by the 69th session of the [United Nations] Commission on the Status of Women... reaffirming the importance of sport as a vehicle for gender equality,” it continued this exclusionary policy for the 2026 Winter Olympics, and

Whereas, beyond 2026, Nordic combined Winter Olympic competition may be imperiled, as the IOC may decide to eliminate the sport entirely as a way to end this embarrassing gender exclusion controversy, and

Whereas, the International Ski and Snowboard Federation (FIS), Nordic Combined USA, and male and female Nordic combined skiers from different nations are strongly advocating for the IOC to continue this fabled sport in Winter Olympic competition but with gender equality, *now therefore be it*

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives:

That the General Assembly supports, in solidarity with national and international ski organizations and numerous skiers across the globe, the introduction of long-overdue gender equality in Nordic combined Olympic competition, *and be it further*

Resolved: That the Secretary of State be directed to send a copy of this resolution to FIS, Nordic Combined USA, U.S. Ski & Snowboard, and the IOC.

Thereupon, the President, in his discretion, treated the joint resolution as a bill and referred it to the Committee on Economic Development, Housing and General Affairs.

Bills Introduced

Senate bills of the following titles were introduced, read the first time and referred:

S. 278.

By Senators Ram Hinsdale, Clarkson, Gulick, Vyhovsky, Westman and White,

An act relating to cannabis.

To the Committee on Economic Development, Housing and General Affairs.

S. 279.

By Senators Ram Hinsdale, Brennan, Weeks and Westman,

An act relating to caterer's licenses and the distribution of malt beverages by licensed manufacturers.

To the Committee on Economic Development, Housing and General Affairs.

S. 280.

By Senators Gulick, Vyhovsky, Hardy, Watson and White,

An act relating to an increased education property tax rate for certain residential properties.

To the Committee on Finance.

S. 281.

By Senators Weeks, Beck, Bongartz, Chittenden, Collamore and Norris,

An act relating to the Zero-Carbon Nuclear Feasibility Study for Vermont.

To the Committee on Natural Resources and Energy.

S. 282.

By Senators Vyhovsky, Clarkson, Major, Watson and White,

An act relating to increasing taxes on higher income earners and creating the School Construction Aid Special Fund.

To the Committee on Finance.

S. 283.

By Senators Clarkson, Gulick, Major and White,

An act relating to school districts pursuing school construction projects during the moratorium on State aid.

To the Committee on Education.

S. 284.

By Senator Vyhovsky,

An act relating to possessing and dispensing regulated drugs.

To the Committee on Judiciary.

S. 285.

By Senators Vyhovsky and Gulick,

An act relating to the adoption of policies to allow Vermont State Police officers and correctional officers to wear religious head coverings.

To the Committee on Judiciary.

S. 286.

By Senators Gulick and Vyhovsky,

An act relating to a meals and rooms tax surcharge for school construction aid.

To the Committee on Finance.

S. 287.

By Senators Weeks, Baruth, Brock, Chittenden, Collamore, Gulick, Heffernan, Major, Ram Hinsdale and Williams,

An act relating to studying the construction of a self-funding limited access highway replacing Route 22A and linking Burlington, Vergennes, Middlebury, and Rutland to Interstate 87.

To the Committee on Transportation.

S. 288.

By Senator Brennan,

An act relating to hunting or fishing license fees for nonresident students enrolled in Vermont schools.

To the Committee on Natural Resources and Energy.

S. 289.

By Senator Brennan,

An act relating to reimbursing the Department of Fish and Wildlife for lost license fee revenue.

To the Committee on Natural Resources and Energy.

Bill Referred

House bill of the following title was read and referred:

H. 649.

An act relating to captive insurance companies.

To the Committee on Finance.

House Proposal of Amendment Concurred In with Further Proposal of Amendment

S. 23.

House proposal of amendment to Senate bill entitled:

An act relating to the use of synthetic media in elections.

Was taken up.

The House proposes to the Senate to amend the bill by striking out all after the enacting clause and inserting in lieu thereof the following:

Sec. 1. 17 V.S.A. chapter 35, subchapter 4 is added to read:

Subchapter 4. Use of Synthetic Media in Elections

§ 2031. DEFINITIONS

As used in this subchapter:

(1) “Deceptive and fraudulent synthetic media” means synthetic media that appears to a reasonable person to be an authentic representation of a political candidate and that injures the reputation of the candidate or attempts to unduly influence the outcome of an election.

(2) “Synthetic media” means an image, an audio recording, or a video recording of a political candidate’s appearance, speech, or conduct that has been created or intentionally manipulated with the use of digital technology, including artificial intelligence, without the consent of the candidate.

§ 2032. DISCLOSURE OF A DECEPTIVE AND FRAUDULENT

SYNTHETIC MEDIA

(a) Disclosure. A person shall not, within 90 days before an election in Vermont, publish, communicate, or otherwise distribute synthetic media that the person knows is deceptive and fraudulent synthetic media unless the person includes a disclosure in the synthetic media stating: “This media has been created or intentionally manipulated by digital technology or artificial intelligence.”

(1) For deceptive and fraudulent synthetic media consisting of images and video recordings, the text of the disclosure shall appear in a size that is easily readable by the average viewer. For video recordings, the disclosure shall appear for the full duration of the video recording.

(2) For deceptive and fraudulent synthetic media consisting of audio recordings only, the disclosure shall be read in a clearly spoken manner and in a pitch and pace that can be easily heard by the average listener, at the beginning of the audio recording, at the end of the audio recording, and, if the audio is greater than two minutes in length, interspersed within the audio recording at intervals of not greater than two minutes each.

(b) Exceptions. Subsection (a) of this section shall not apply to:

(1) a radio or television broadcasting station, including a cable or satellite television operator, programmer, or producer, or to a website, streaming platform, or mobile application, that:

(A) broadcasts deceptive and fraudulent synthetic media as part of a bona fide newscast, news interview, news documentary, commentary of general interest, or on-the-spot coverage of bona fide news events, so long as the broadcast clearly acknowledges through content or a disclosure, in a manner that can be easily heard or read by the average listener or viewer, that there are questions about the authenticity of the deceptive and fraudulent synthetic media;

(B) is paid to broadcast deceptive and fraudulent synthetic media; or

(C) is required by federal law to broadcast advertisements from legally qualified candidates;

(2) a website or a regularly published newspaper, magazine, or other periodical of general circulation, including an internet or electronic publication, that routinely carries news and commentary of general interest, and that publishes deceptive and fraudulent synthetic media, if the publication clearly states that the deceptive and fraudulent synthetic media does not accurately represent the speech or conduct of the represented individual;

(3) a person that produces or distributes deceptive and fraudulent synthetic media constituting satire or parody;

(4) a provider of a telecommunications service or information service, as those terms are defined in the Communications Act of 1934, 47 U.S.C. § 153, for content provided by another person; or

(5) a provider of an interactive computer service, as defined in 47 U.S.C. § 230, for content provided by another person.

§ 2033. PENALTIES

(a) A person that knowingly and intentionally violates a provision of this subchapter shall be fined not more than \$1,000.00, unless:

(1) the person commits the violation with the intent to cause violence or bodily harm, in which case the fine shall be not more than \$5,000.00;

(2) the person commits the violation within five years after one or more prior violations under this section, in which case the fine shall be not more than \$10,000.00; or

(3) the person commits the violation with the intent to cause violence or bodily harm and the person commits the violation within five years after one or more prior violations under this section, in which case the fine shall be not more than \$15,000.00.

(b) A candidate whose appearance, speech, conduct, or environment is misrepresented through the use of deceptive and fraudulent synthetic media in

violation of section 2032 of this title may seek injunctive or other equitable relief prohibiting the publication, communication, or other distribution of such deceptive and fraudulent synthetic media.

Sec. 2. 17 V.S.A. chapter 35, subchapter 5 is added to read:

Subchapter 5. Enforcement and Investigation

§ 2041. ENFORCEMENT

In addition to the other remedies provided in this chapter, a State's Attorney or the Attorney General may institute any appropriate action, injunction, or other proceeding to prevent, restrain, correct, or abate any violation of this chapter.

§ 2042. CIVIL INVESTIGATIONS

(a)(1) The Attorney General or a State's Attorney, whenever there is reason to believe any person to be or to have been in violation of this chapter, may examine or cause to be examined by any designated agent or representative any books, records, papers, memoranda, or physical objects of any nature bearing upon each alleged violation and may demand written responses under oath to questions bearing upon each alleged violation.

(2) The Attorney General or a State's Attorney may require the attendance of such person or of any other person having knowledge in the premises in the county where such person resides or has a place of business or in Washington County if such person is a nonresident or has no place of business within the State and may take testimony and require proof material for that person's information and may administer oaths or take acknowledgment in respect of any book, record, paper, or memorandum.

(3) The Attorney General or a State's Attorney shall serve notice of the time, place, and cause of such examination or attendance or notice of the cause of the demand for written responses personally or by certified mail upon such person at that person's principal place of business or, if such place is not known, to that person's known address. Such notice shall include a statement that a knowing and intentional violation of this chapter is subject to criminal prosecution.

(4) Any book, record, paper, memorandum, or other information produced by any person pursuant to this section shall not, unless otherwise ordered by a court of this State for good cause shown, be disclosed to any person other than the authorized agent or representative of the Attorney General or a State's Attorney or another law enforcement officer engaged in legitimate law enforcement activities unless with the consent of the person producing the same, except that any transcript of oral testimony, written

responses, documents, or other information produced pursuant to this section may be used in the enforcement of this chapter, including in connection with any civil action brought under this subchapter or subsection (c) of this section.

(5) Nothing in this subsection is intended to prevent the Attorney General or a State's Attorney from disclosing the results of an investigation conducted under this section, including the grounds for the decision as to whether to bring an enforcement action alleging a violation of this chapter or of any rule made pursuant to this chapter.

(6) This subsection shall not be applicable to any criminal investigation or prosecution brought under the laws of this or any state.

(b)(1) A person upon whom a notice is served pursuant to the provisions of this section shall comply with its terms unless otherwise provided by the order of a court of this State.

(2) Any person who, with intent to avoid, evade, or prevent compliance, in whole or in part, with any civil investigation under this section, removes from any place; conceals, withholds, or destroys; or mutilates, alters, or by any other means falsifies any documentary material in the possession, custody, or control of any person subject to such notice or mistakes or conceals any information shall be fined not more than \$5,000.00.

(c)(1) Whenever any person fails to comply with any notice served upon that person under this section or whenever satisfactory copying or reproduction of any such material cannot be done and the person refuses to surrender the material, the Attorney General or a State's Attorney may file, in the Superior Court in the county in which the person resides or of that person's principal place of business or in Washington County if the person is a nonresident or has no principal place of business in this State, and serve upon the person a petition for an order of the court for the enforcement of this section.

(2) Whenever any petition is filed under this section, the court shall have jurisdiction to hear and determine the matter so presented and to enter any order or orders as may be required to carry into effect the provisions of this section. Any disobedience of any order entered under this section by any court shall be punished as a contempt of the court.

(d) Any person aggrieved by a civil investigation conducted under this section may seek relief from Washington Superior Court or the Superior Court in the county in which the aggrieved person resides. Except for cases the court considers to be of greater importance, proceedings before Superior Court as authorized by this section shall take precedence on the docket over all other cases.

Sec. 3. EFFECTIVE DATE

This act shall take effect on passage.

Senator Collamore, for the Committee on Government Operations to which the bill was recommitted reported recommending that the Senate concur in the House proposal of amendment with further proposal of amendment as follows.

First: In Sec. 1, 17 V.S.A. chapter 35, subchapter 4, in section 2031, by striking out subdivisions (1) and (2) in their entireties and inserting in lieu thereof new subdivisions (1) and (2) to read as follows:

(1) “Deceptive and fraudulent synthetic media” means synthetic media that appears to a reasonable person to be a realistic representation of an individual that does any of the following:

(A) injures the reputation of a political candidate; or

(B) attempts to unduly influence the outcome of an election, including a public question, by providing materially false information to voters.

(2) “Synthetic media” means an image, an audio recording, or a video recording of an individual’s appearance, speech, or conduct that has been created or intentionally manipulated with the use of digital technology, including artificial intelligence.

Second: In Sec. 1, 17 V.S.A. chapter 35, subchapter 4, in section 2032, in subsection (a), by striking out subdivisions (1) and (2) in their entireties and inserting in lieu thereof new subdivisions (1) and (2) to read as follows:

(1) For deceptive and fraudulent synthetic media consisting of images and video recordings, the text of the disclosure shall appear in a size that is easily readable by the average viewer and inclusive to the greatest extent possible of individuals with disabilities. For video recordings, the disclosure shall appear for the full duration of the video recording.

(2) For deceptive and fraudulent synthetic media consisting of audio recordings only, the disclosure shall be read in a clearly spoken manner and in a pitch and pace that can be easily heard by the average listener and inclusive to the greatest extent possible of individuals with disabilities, at the beginning of the audio recording, at the end of the audio recording, and, if the audio is greater than two minutes in length, interspersed within the audio recording at intervals of not greater than two minutes each.

Thereupon, pending the question, Shall the Senate concur in the House proposal of amendment with further proposal of amendment?, Senator Baruth

moved to amend the further proposal of amendment by adding a third instance of amendment to read:

In Sec. 1, 17 V.S.A. chapter 35, subchapter 4, in section 2032, in subsection (a), in the last sentence, by striking out the words “created or”.

Which was agreed to.

Thereupon, the question, Shall the Senate concur in the House proposal of amendment with further proposal of amendment, as amended?, was decided in the affirmative.

Joint Senate Resolutions Adopted on the Part of the Senate

Joint Senate resolutions entitled:

J.R.S. 35. Joint resolution providing for a Joint Assembly for the election of an Adjutant and Inspector General, and two legislative Trustees of the Vermont State Colleges Corporation.

J.R.S. 36. Joint resolution establishing a procedure for the conduct of the election of two legislative trustees of the Vermont State Colleges Corporation by plurality vote by the General Assembly in 2026.

Having been placed on the Calendar for action, were taken up and severally adopted on the part of the Senate.

Adjournment

On motion of Senator Baruth, the Senate adjourned until one o'clock in the afternoon on Thursday, January 22, 2026.