

Journal of the Senate

FRIDAY, MARCH 13, 2026

The Senate was called to order by the President.

Devotional Exercises

Devotional exercises were conducted by the Reverend Kenzan of East Montpelier.

Message from the House No. 29

A message was received from the House of Representatives by Ms. Courtney Reckord, its Second Assistant Clerk, as follows:

Mr. President:

I am directed to inform the Senate that:

The House has passed House bills of the following titles:

H. 582. An act relating to adult protective services.

H. 635. An act relating to eliminating Department of Corrections supervisory fees.

In the passage of which the concurrence of the Senate is requested.

The House has considered joint resolution originating in the Senate of the following title:

J.R.S. 43. Joint resolution providing for a Joint Assembly to vote on the retention of six Superior Court Judges.

And has adopted the same in concurrence with proposal of amendment in the adoption of which the concurrence of the Senate is requested.

The House has considered joint resolution originating in the Senate of the following title:

J.R.S. 44. Joint resolution relating to weekend adjournment on March 13, 2026.

And has adopted the same in concurrence.

Bills Referred to Committee on Finance

Senate bills of the following titles, appearing on the Calendar for notice, and affecting the revenue of the state, under the rule were referred to the Committee on Finance:

S. 198. An act relating to the regulation and taxation of tobacco products and tobacco substitutes.

S. 327. An act relating to economic development.

Bill Referred to Committee on Appropriations

S. 89.

Senate bill of the following title, appearing on the Calendar for notice and carrying an appropriation or requiring the expenditure of funds, under the rule was referred to the Committee on Appropriations:

An act relating to expanding survivor benefits.

Bills Referred

House bills of the following titles were read the first time and referred:

H. 582.

An act relating to adult protective services.

To the Committee on Health and Welfare.

H. 635.

An act relating to eliminating Department of Corrections supervisory fees.

To the Committee on Institutions.

Rules Suspended; House Proposal of Amendment Concurred In

J.R.S. 43.

Pending entry on the Calendar for notice, on motion of Senator Baruth, the rules were suspended and joint Senate resolution entitled:

Joint resolution providing for a Joint Assembly to vote on the retention of six Superior Court Judges.

Was taken up for immediate consideration.

The House proposes to the Senate that the resolution be amended in its Resolved clause, following "That the two Houses meet in Joint Assembly on", by striking out "Thursday, March 19, 2026" and inserting in lieu thereof "Wednesday, March 25, 2026"

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

Bills Passed

Senate bills of the following titles were read the third time and passed:

S. 179. An act relating to the Uniform Disclaimer of Property Interests Act.

S. 212. An act relating to potable water supply and wastewater system connections.

Bill Amended; Bill Passed

S. 227.

Senate bill entitled:

An act relating to creating immigration protocols in Vermont schools.

Was taken up.

Thereupon, pending third reading of the Bill, Senator Ram Hinsdale moved to amend the bill as follows:

First: In Sec. 2, 16 V.S.A. chapter 33, in section 1486, in subsection (d), by striking out subdivision (2) in its entirety and inserting in lieu thereof a new subdivision (2) to read as follows:

(2) The superintendent or designee shall not allow a law enforcement officer appearing on an immigration-related matter into a nonpublic area of a school unless the officer provides official identification and a judicial warrant that names a specific individual under arrest or subject to a search.

Second: In Sec. 2, 16 V.S.A. chapter 33, in section 1486, in subsection (d), by striking out subdivision (6) in its entirety and inserting in lieu thereof a new subdivision (6) to read as follows:

(6) On or before January 1, 2027, the Agency of Education, in consultation with the Vermont Superintendents Association, shall develop, and review at least annually, model administrative procedures to help schools execute the policies set forth in this subsection. The procedures shall additionally provide a process to follow in the event that a law enforcement officer on an immigration-related matter enters a nonpublic area of a school without providing official identification or a judicial warrant.

Third: In Sec. 2, 16 V.S.A. chapter 33, in section 1486, in subsection (d), by striking out subdivision (3) in its entirety and by renumbering the remaining subdivisions to be numerically correct.

Which was agreed to.

Thereupon, the bill was read a third time and passed.

Bill Amended; Third Reading Ordered

S. 211.

Senator White, for the Committee on Transportation, to which was referred Senate bill entitled:

An act relating to motor vehicle inspections.

Reported recommending that the bill be amended by striking out all after the enacting clause and inserting in lieu thereof the following:

Sec. 1. TWO-YEAR MOTOR VEHICLE INSPECTIONS;
IMPLEMENTATION PLAN; REPORT

(a) The Secretaries of Transportation and of Natural Resources shall develop a plan to transition to a safety and emissions inspections program that requires pleasure cars to be inspected once every two years beginning in January 2028. The plan shall:

(1) establish a timeline for developing and implementing changes to the existing safety and emissions inspection program to ensure that the program can transition to a biennial inspection requirement for pleasure cars beginning in January 2028;

(2) identify specific actions that are necessary to ensure that Vermont remains in compliance with the requirements of the Clean Air Act, including any necessary changes to the emissions inspection program and the State Implementation Plan;

(3) in addition to any issues or actions identified pursuant to subdivision (2) of this subsection, identify any additional issues related to a change to biennial emissions inspections that could prevent Vermont from remaining in compliance with the requirements of the Clean Air Act and potential options for addressing those issues;

(4) propose a fee structure for inspections and address the potential for different fees charged in relation to the inspection of different vehicle types;

(5) identify any anticipated impacts to State revenues during the transition to biennial inspections for pleasure cars and potential options for mitigating those impacts;

(6) include a proposal for amendments to the mileage-based user fee related to annual reporting of miles traveled by battery electric vehicles during years when they are not required to be inspected;

(7) outline an outreach and education program to inform inspection mechanics, inspection stations, vehicle owners, and other interested parties of the requirements of the new biennial inspection program; and

(8) identify any changes to the Vermont Statutes Annotated and the Code of Vermont Rules that are necessary to implement the plan.

(b) While developing the plan pursuant to subsection (a) of this section, the Secretaries of Transportation and of Natural Resources shall solicit feedback from stakeholders, including inspection station owners, inspection mechanics, motor vehicle owners, motor vehicle dealers, and other interested parties.

(c) On or before October 15, 2026, the Secretaries of Transportation and of Natural Resources shall submit a written report to the House Committees on Environment and on Transportation and the Senate Committees on Natural Resources and Energy and on Transportation regarding the plan developed pursuant to this section and any recommendations for legislative action.

Sec. 2. EFFECTIVE DATE

This act shall take effect on July 1, 2026.

And that when so amended the bill ought to pass.

Senator Mattos, for the Committee on Finance, to which the bill was referred, reported that the bill ought to pass when so amended.

Thereupon, the bill was read the second time by title only pursuant to Rule 43, the recommendation of amendment was agreed to and third reading of the bill was ordered.

Bill Amended; Third Reading Ordered

S. 298.

Senator White, for the Committee on Government Operations, to which was referred Senate bill entitled:

An act relating to creating the Vermont Voting Rights Act.

Reported recommending that the bill be amended by striking out all after the enacting clause and inserting in lieu thereof the following:

* * * Vermont Voting Rights Act * * *

Sec. 1. SHORT TITLE

This act may be cited as the “Vermont Voting Rights Act of 2026.”

Sec. 2. 17 V.S.A. chapter 59 is added to read:

CHAPTER 59. VERMONT VOTING RIGHTS ACT

Subchapter 1. Rights of Voters

§ 2801. DEFINITIONS

As used in this chapter:

(1) “Municipality” means a town, city, village, school district, or other political subdivision that holds public elections.

(2) “Protected class” means a group of citizens protected from discrimination based on race or color or membership in a language minority group.

§ 2802. VOTE DENIAL OR DILUTION

(a) No voting qualification or prerequisite to voting or standard, practice, or procedure shall be imposed or applied by the State or any municipality in a manner that results in a denial or abridgement of the right of any citizen of the United States to vote based on race or color or membership in a language minority group.

(b) A violation of subsection (a) of this section is established if, on the basis of the totality of circumstances, it is shown that the political processes leading to nomination or election in the State or a municipality are not equally open to participation by members of a protected class in that its members have less opportunity than other members of the electorate to participate in the political processes or to elect representatives of their choice. The extent to which members of a protected class have been elected to office in the State or municipality is one circumstance that may be considered.

(c) Nothing in this section shall be construed to establish a right to have members of a protected class elected in numbers equal to their proportion in the population.

§ 2803. IMPAIRMENT OF VOTING RIGHTS OF REGISTERED VOTERS

Nothing in this chapter shall be construed to deny, impair, or otherwise adversely affect the right to vote of any registered voter.

§ 2804. CIVIL ACTIONS BY ATTORNEY GENERAL

(a) Whenever the Attorney General has reasonable cause to believe that a violation of this subchapter has occurred and that the rights of any voter or group of voters have been affected by such violation, the Attorney General may initiate a civil action in the Civil Division of the Superior Court in the county in which the alleged violation has occurred for appropriate relief.

(b) In such civil action, the court may:

(1) award such preventive relief, including a permanent or temporary injunction, restraining order, or other order against the person responsible for a violation of this title, as is necessary to ensure the full enjoyment of the rights granted by this title;

(2) assess a civil penalty against the respondent of not more than \$5,000.00 for a first violation and of not more than \$25,000.00 for any subsequent violation; and

(3) issue an order requiring reimbursement to the State of Vermont for the reasonable value of its services and its expenses in investigating and prosecuting the action.

Sec. 3. 17 V.S.A. chapter 35 is amended to read:

CHAPTER 35. OFFENSES AGAINST THE PURITY OF ELECTIONS

Subchapter 1. Penalties Upon Officers

* * *

§ 1934. INTERFERENCE WITH VOTING

(a) An election officer or a person acting under color of the law shall not intentionally:

(1) refuse to permit or fail to permit a qualified voter to vote;

(2) refuse or fail to tabulate, count, or report the vote of a qualified voter;

(3) change a ballot of a voter to prevent the voter from voting as the voter desires.

(b)(1) A person who violates subdivision (a)(1) or (2) of this section shall be subject to a civil penalty of not more than \$1,000.00 for each affected voter.

(2) A person who violates subdivision (a)(3) or (4) of this section shall be imprisoned not more than six months or fined not more than \$1,000.00, or both, for each affected voter.

(c) This section applies to any election and to any method used by a political party for selection of its nominees and for selection of delegates to its conventions and meetings.

* * *

Subchapter 3. Miscellaneous

* * *

§ 2022. INTIMIDATION OF ELECTION OFFICERS

(a) A person shall not intentionally, by bribery, intimidation, threats, coercion, or other means in violation of the election laws, hinder or prevent, or attempt to hinder or prevent, an election officer at any polling place from holding an election.

(b) A person who violates this section shall be imprisoned not more than two years or fined not more than \$2,000.00, or both.

§ 2023. INTIMIDATION OF VOTERS; CIVIL CAUSE OF ACTION

(a) A person shall not intentionally intimidate, threaten, or coerce, or intentionally attempt to intimidate, threaten, or coerce:

- (1) any other person in giving the person's vote or ballot; or
- (2) a voter to deter or prevent the voter from voting.

(b) A person who violates this section shall be imprisoned not more than two years or fined not more than \$2,000.00, or both.

(c) In addition to the criminal penalty provided in subsection (b) of this section, such actions shall also create a private cause of action. A voter who is intimidated, threatened, or coerced by another person in violation of subsection (a) of this section shall be entitled to institute an action for injunctive relief, including an application for a permanent or temporary injunction, restraining order, or other order, against such person. The action shall be initiated in the Civil Division of the Superior Court in the county in which the alleged violation has occurred. A court may, in its discretion, allow a private plaintiff a reasonable attorney's fee as part of the costs, if the plaintiff is the prevailing party.

(d) This section applies to any election and to any method used by a political party for selection of its nominees and for selection of delegates to its conventions and meetings.

§ 2024. COMMUNICATION OF FALSE INFORMATION TO ELIGIBLE VOTERS

(a) A person shall not intentionally communicate to a registered voter false information, knowing the information to be false, for the purpose of impeding the voter in exercising the voter's right to vote. The provisions of this section shall apply to information only about the date, time, or place of the election; how to register to vote; or a voter's registration status.

(b) Any person who violates the provisions of subsection (a) of this section shall be imprisoned not more than six months or fined not more than \$1,000.00, or both. A violation may be prosecuted in the Superior Court in either the county in which the alleged communication was made or in the county in which the communication was received, if different.

(c) In addition to the criminal penalty provided in subsection (b) of this section, a violation of the provisions of this section shall also create a private cause of action. A registered voter to whom such false information is communicated shall be entitled to institute an action for injunctive relief, including an application for a permanent or temporary injunction, restraining order, or other order, against the person communicating such false information. The action shall be initiated in the Superior Court in either the county in which the alleged communication was made or in the county in which the communication was received, if different. The court may, in its discretion, allow a private plaintiff a reasonable attorney's fee as part of the costs, if the plaintiff is the prevailing party.

* * *

* * * Safety Protections for Candidates * * *

Sec. 4. 17 V.S.A. § 2901 is amended to read:

§ 2901. DEFINITIONS

As used in this chapter:

* * *

(7) "Expenditure" means a payment, disbursement, distribution, advance, deposit, loan, or gift of money or anything of value, paid or promised to be paid, for the purpose of influencing an election, advocating a position on a public question, or supporting or opposing one or more candidates.

(A) Expenditures may include those expenses that are necessary to allow a candidate to campaign, such as expenses for the care of a dependent family member that are incurred as a direct result of campaign activity or for the provision of security for the candidate.

* * *

* * * Effective Date * * *

Sec. 5. EFFECTIVE DATE

This act shall take effect on passage.

And that when so amended the bill ought to pass.

Thereupon, the bill was read the second time by title only pursuant to Rule 43, the recommendation of amendment was agreed to, and third reading of the bill was ordered, on a roll call, Yeas 28, Nays 0.

Senator Ram Hinsdale having demanded the yeas and nays, they were taken and are as follows:

Roll Call

Those Senators who voted in the affirmative were: Baruth, Beck, Benson, Bongartz, Brennan, Brock, Chittenden, Clarkson, Collamore, Cummings, Hardy, Hashim, Heffernan, Ingalls, Lyons, Major, Mattos, Morley, Norris, Perchlik, Plunkett, Ram Hinsdale, Vyhovsky, Watson, Weeks, Westman, White, Williams.

Those Senators who voted in the negative were: None.

Those Senators absent and not voting were: Gulick, Harrison.

Report of Committee of Conference Accepted and Adopted on the Part of the Senate

H. 50.

Senator Benson, for the Committee of Conference, submitted the following report:

To the Senate and House of Representatives:

The Committee of Conference to which were referred the disagreeing votes of the two Houses upon House bill entitled:

An act relating to identifying underutilized State buildings and land.

Respectfully reports that it has met and considered the same and recommends that the Senate accede to the House proposal of amendment to the Senate proposal of amendment with further amendment thereto in Sec. 1, 29 V.S.A. § 165, by striking out subsection (e) in its entirety and inserting in lieu thereof a new subsection (e) to read as follows:

(e) The Commissioner of Buildings and General Services shall maintain an inventory of all State-owned or State-leased buildings and land and shall ~~biannually~~ annually compile and update the information received under subsection (g) of this section, which shall be considered once available in making spacing allocations and designating uses under subsection (c) of this section.

SEN. WENDY K. HARRISON
SEN. JOHN BENSON
SEN. ROBERT PLUNKETT

Committee on the part of the Senate

REP. JAMES A.R. GREGOIRE
REP. CONOR CASEY
REP. SHAWN SWEENEY

Committee on the part of the House

Thereupon, the question, Shall the Senate accept and adopt the report of the Committee of Conference?, was decided in the affirmative.

Senate Concurrent Resolution Adopted

S.C.R. 8.

Senate concurrent resolution entitled:

Senate concurrent resolution recognizing March 2026 as International Long COVID Awareness Month in Vermont.

Was taken up.

Thereupon, the question, Shall the concurrent resolution be adopted in concurrence?, was agreed to.

Senate Concurrent Resolution

The following joint concurrent resolution, having been placed on the consent calendar on the preceding legislative day, and no Senator having requested floor consideration as provided by the Joint Rules of the Senate and House of Representatives, was adopted on the part of the Senate:

Offered By Senators Heffernan, Baruth, Beck, Benson, Bongartz, Brennan, Brock, Chittenden, Collamore, Cummings, Harrison, Hashim, Ingalls, Lyons, Major, Mattos, Morley, Norris, Perchlik, Weeks, Westman and Williams,

S.C.R. 7.

Senate concurrent resolution designating October 5, 2026, as Italian American Day in Vermont..

House Concurrent Resolutions

The following joint concurrent resolutions having been placed on the consent calendar on the preceding legislative day, and no Senator having requested floor consideration as provided by the Joint Rules of the Senate and House of Representatives, were adopted in concurrence:

Offered by Reps. Burditt and others,

Offered by Senators Collamore, Weeks and Williams,

H.C.R. 217.

House concurrent resolution congratulating McNeil & Reedy of Rutland City on 70 years as a superb men's clothing retailer.

Offered by All Members of the House,

H.C.R. 218.

House concurrent resolution recognizing April 2026 as the Month of the Military Child in Vermont.

Offered by Reps. Hango and others,

H.C.R. 219.

House concurrent resolution designating March 2026 as Athletic Trainers' Month in Vermont.

Offered by All Members of the House,

H.C.R. 220.

House concurrent resolution welcoming the March 17, 2026, namesake visit of the officers and crew of the U.S. submarine VERMONT (USS VERMONT (SSN 792)) to the State House and designating April 18, 2026, as USS VERMONT (SSN 792) Day in Vermont.

Offered by All Members of the House,

H.C.R. 221.

House concurrent resolution recognizing March 25, 2026, as National Medal of Honor Day in Vermont.

Offered by Reps. Rachelson and others,

Offered by Sens. Bongartz, Clarkson, Cummings, Hardy, Mattos, Perchlik and Ram Hinsdale,

H.C.R. 222.

House concurrent resolution honoring the Vermont nonprofit sector and the pivotal leadership and support it receives from Common Good Vermont.

Offered by Reps. Mihaly and Chapin,

H.C.R. 223.

House concurrent resolution honoring former Public Service Board Chair and East Montpelier Town Moderator Michael Dworkin.

Offered by Rep. Ode,

H.C.R. 224.

House concurrent resolution congratulating the athletes representing Vermont at the 2025 National Senior Games and designating March 18, 2026, as Vermont Senior Games Day at the State House.

Offered by Rep. Kascenska,

H.C.R. 225.

House concurrent resolution honoring East Haven Selectboard Chair Kirwin Flanders for his extraordinary municipal public service career.

Offered by Reps. Cooper and others,

H.C.R. 226.

House concurrent resolution remembering, with great sadness, the historic and interconnected 2011 earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disasters that struck the Tōhoku region of Japan.

Adjournment

On motion of Senator Baruth, the Senate adjourned, to reconvene on Tuesday, March 17, 2026, at nine o'clock and thirty minutes in the forenoon pursuant to J.R.S. 44.