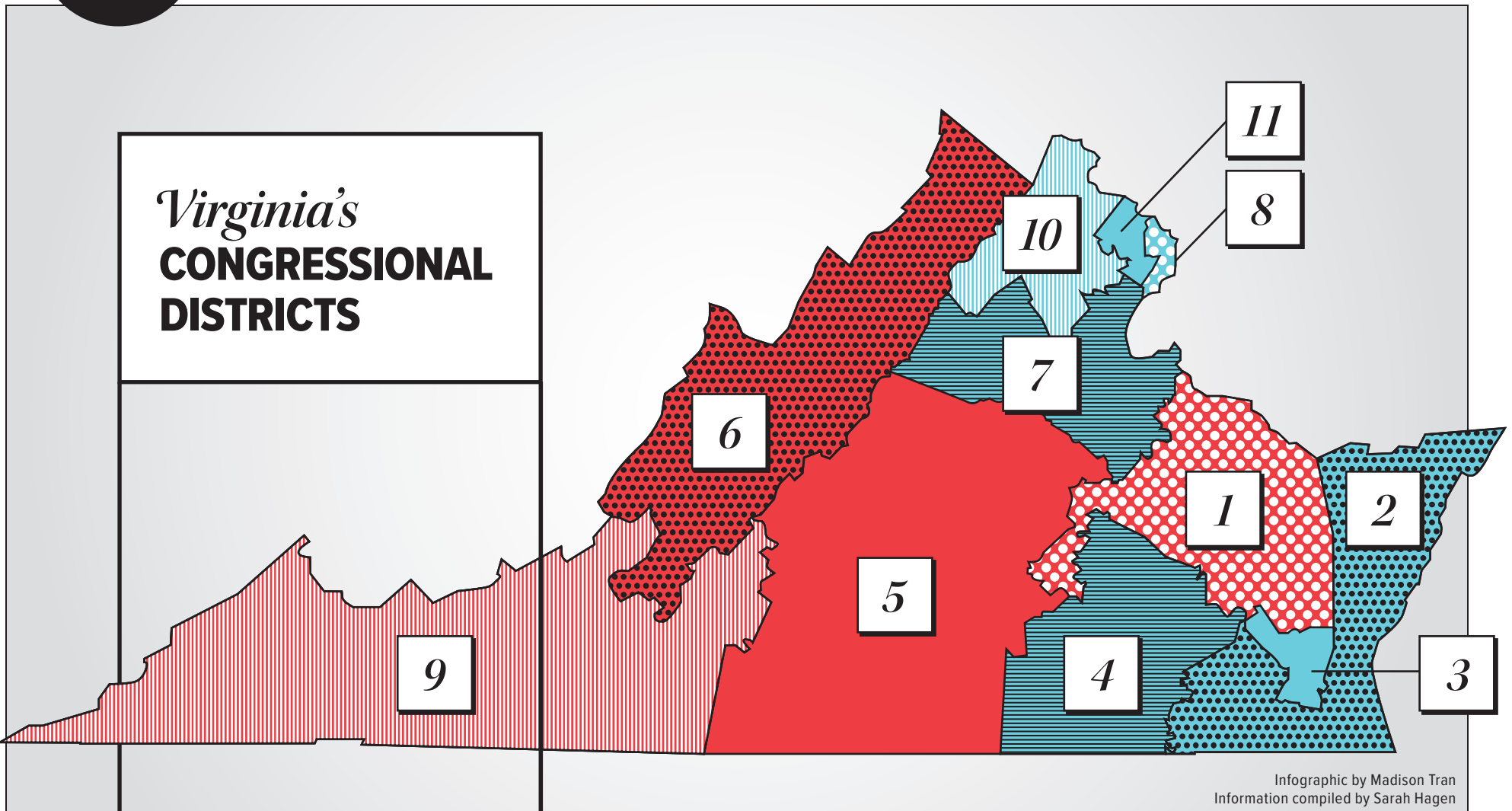




The Commonwealth Times

VOL. 66, NO. 3
NOVEMBER 2, 2022



Midterm elections to take place next week

SARAH HAGEN
Contributing Writer

VIRGINIA'S CONGRESSIONAL midterm elections are set for Nov. 8, where constituents will vote for their house representatives.

State district lines were redrawn in 2021, meaning residents may have different representatives on the ballot than they did previously. All 11 seats are up for reelection this year. VCU's campus is in the 4th District, which has been represented by Democratic incumbent Donald McEachin since 2016.

Republican Leon Benjamin is challenging McEachin again. Despite the fact that Benjamin lost once before to McEachin in 2020, Benjamin is running against him this year.

VCU political science professor John Aughenbaugh said Benjamin has more name recognition after running once, which could give him a better chance than the past year.

"Many observers in the first contest were surprised that Benjamin did so well," Aughenbaugh said. "So maybe the thinking is, 'now that I have greater name recognition, I might actually be more successful in the second contest.' I'm not entirely sure if that's going to make a difference."

Name recognition is important for many voters, so much so that 94.7% of House in-

<i>Candidates running by district</i>		
<i>District 1</i>		
<i>Incumbent</i> Rep. Rob Wittman Republican	Herbert "Herb" Jones Democrat	David Bruce Foster Independent
<i>District 2</i>		
Sen. Jennifer Kiggans Republican	<i>Incumbent</i> Rep. Elaine Luria Democrat	
<i>District 3</i>		
Terry Namkung Republican	<i>Incumbent</i> Rep. Bobby Scott Democrat	

cumbents were reelected in 2020, according to OpenSecrets. However, it may not be enough to override the advantages that incumbents have, according to Aughenbaugh.

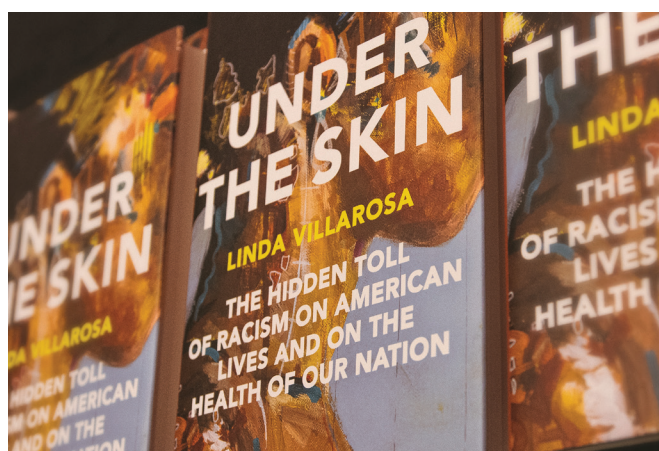
Leon Benjamin has endorsements from Gov. Glenn Youngkin and Lt. Gov. Winsome Sears, according to Benjamin's website. Aughenbaugh said that may not be enough to push him over the edge.

"Political science research suggests that endorsements typically help candidates for party primaries," Aughenbaugh said. "Endorsements don't help all that much in general elections."

Aughenbaugh compared it to a letter of recommendation for a job — it helped Benjamin get on the ballot, but it may not do much for him beyond that.

In the 7th District, there is another race to watch. Democratic incumbent Rep. Abigail Spanberger narrowly won against Nick Freitas in the 2020 election, and now Republican newcomer Yesli Vega is challenging her. Spanberger is not a traditional democrat, leaning more towards the middle than the left, which has gotten her elected in a more conservative area, according to Aughenbaugh.

See **MIDTERMS** on page 2



'Under the Skin': VCU Libraries launches social justice lecture series

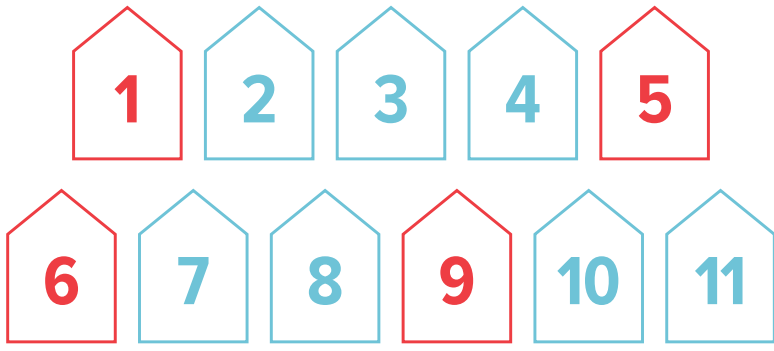
Many copies of Villarosa's book 'Under the Skin' were for sale at the social justice lecture hosted by VCU.
Photo by Kobi McCray

See **LECTURE** on page 3

Stories of the week

NATIONAL: David DePape is facing two felony charges for the assault and attempted kidnapping of Paul Pelosi.
INTERNATIONAL: Over 150 people are dead and 82 are injured after being crushed in a Halloween crowd in Seoul, South Korea.

MIDTERMS



All 11 house seats are on the ballot this midterm, and all 11 representatives are running for reelection.

Continued from front page

The redistricting could lead to trouble for Spanberger in her quest for reelection, according to Aughenbaugh. With her new district, she has to reintroduce herself to a whole new group of voters. The other variable has to do with the president.

“Historically, in midterm elections, the president’s party, especially in the House of Representatives, you typically see a decline in those candidates from the president’s party,” Aughenbaugh said. “I don’t know if that’s going to affect representative Spanberger. But it would not surprise me if she won reelection even though her district is so different from the one she won last year.”

Vega, despite being a new name against an incumbent, could have a better chance because of this, according to Aughenbaugh. If voters aren’t happy with the job that the president is doing, they vote for the opposing party of the president.

If a voter ends up in a different district than they were in previous years, they could end up voting for another candidate, but Aughenbaugh said it isn’t common.

“Research doesn’t suggest the redistricting is a major reason why people who previously voted stop voting,” Aughenbaugh said.

It causes more competitive races which can lead to people switching parties and even more voters, according to Aughenbaugh.

The major problem in midterm elections is the lack of turnout, but according to Aughenbaugh, redistricting in this case may cause more voters to come out because the races are more competitive.

Redistricting often results in gerrymandering, the act of manipulating boundaries to favor one party over the other, which Aughenbaugh said is a big reason for lack of turnout. When a constituent doesn’t feel like their voice matters, they’re less inclined to vote.

“If you don’t have a meaningful choice, that’s not democracy,” Aughenbaugh said. “That’s one click better than a dictatorship.”

Voting isn’t the only way that students can participate in politics — they can go out and participate in their community, according to the chairman of College Republicans of VCU William Faber.

Faber said the best way for students to ensure a win for their favored candidates is by supporting their campaigns with grassroots methods. Phone-calling, texting and door-knocking are all ways that students can support their candidates. Faber said that the College Republicans have helped Republican candidates with door-knocking campaigns across the state, as well as with campaigns across the country.

“Just go out and go to their local party,” Faber said. “Or they can come to us, and

we’ll point them in the right direction.”

VCU students should watch more than just the 4th District election because the state as a whole affects them, not just the district they live in, Faber said. There will most likely be a Democratic win in the 4th District, but that doesn’t mean the state will end up going a certain way, especially with a Republican governor.

Faber said that as part of College Republicans, they watch races around Virginia to root for their candidates and try to predict who will win. In the 4th District he thinks Benjamin will lose to incumbent Rep. McEachin. Faber said Jennifer Kiggins in the 2nd District is “looking very good” despite going against an incumbent. He said the same goes for Yesli Vega in the 7th District.

“

Historically, in midterm elections, the president’s party, especially in the House of Representatives, you typically see a decline in those candidates from the president’s party.

John Aughenbaugh, VCU political science professor

Faber encouraged VCU students to get involved in politics, no matter what party they’re part of or what they believe in. He said apart from voting and joining clubs that align with their interests, protesting is also a good option.

“If people want to get their voices heard, I think protesting is going to be the way to do it,” Faber said. “That’s how Gen-Z seems to be doing it.”

The Commonwealth Times reached out to VCU Young Democrats for an interview four times but did not get a response back.

Midterm elections consistently have less turnout than presidential elections, especially among young people according to research by the Nevada Current. Virginia now offers same day registration, so voting is still possible even if you’re not already registered.

