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Local legislators had successes, some failures

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RICHMOND

--In 46 days, state legislators passed 892 bills and 707 resolutions.

The bills go to Gov. Bob McDonnell, who has 30 days to decide whether to sign, amend or veto them. He has already approved 15.



Here's a look at the outcomes of some bills that The Free Lance-Star covered this session:

Texting while driving: Bills to make it a primary offense to text while driving, as well as bills requiring hands-free devices to talk on the cell phone while driving, failed.

Fees for sports: A bill that would have barred schools from charging students fees for extracurricular sports failed.

Tracking foreign students: A bill that would have required schools to track how many students don't have birth certificates or enroll in English as a Second Language classes passed the House but failed in the Senate.

ABC: Del. Bobby Orrock's bill to make an assault on an ABC agent a felony--the same as any other law enforcement officer--passed. Spotsylvania County ABC agent Linda Wright said the bill was needed because assaults on ABC agents had been thrown out or reduced by some judges because the law was unclear.

The session's bigger ABC issue--Gov. Bob McDonnell's proposal to sell off the state's liquor stores--didn't get a hearing in either house. McDonnell said he's not giving up on the idea.

BPOL: Del. Mark Cole, R-Spotsylvania, had a bill that would let localities apply the business professional occupational license tax to a business's Virginia taxable income, rather than its gross receipts, as is now done. The current method can result in businesses paying the tax even if they lost money for the year. The bill passed.

A Cole bill to exempt goods manufactured, sold and used in Virginia from federal oversight under the interstate commerce clause failed.

State primaries: Primary elections for state legislative races this year will be held in August, rather than in June as is usual. That's because the state is redrawing district lines this year, and it will take time to reconfigure the districts and get federal approval.

Two amendments from Cole that would limit how the state and local governing bodies could raise taxes or appropriate money failed.

UDAs: A bill from Del Bob Marshall that would have made participation in urban development areas by localities

optional failed.

Markets: Vendors at farmer's markets won't have to pay sales tax on the eggs and produce they sell, under a bill from Del. Albert Pollard that passed. Pollard's bill exempts from the sales tax the first \$1,000 in sales of agricultural products sold at farmers markets or roadside stands.

ABC license: Gourmet oyster houses can get a special wine and beer ABC license under a bill of Pollard's that passed. In a city the license would cost \$150; in a county or town, \$37.50.

Transportation: House Speaker Bill Howell, R-Stafford County, rarely submits legislation because he is speaker. But he did sign on as chief sponsor of the governor's transportation bill, which passed on Sunday. Among other things, the bill borrows about \$3 billion to speed up hundreds of transportation projects around the state.

Repeal amendment: Howell heavily backed a bill that called for a constitutional convention in order to pass an amendment allowing states to overturn federal laws. The bill was supported by some tea party groups, who want to limit federal power, but opposed by others, who feel a constitutional convention would get out of hand. It failed in the Senate.

Farmers killing deer: Sen. Richard Stuart, R-Stafford, had a bill that would have made it easier for farmers to get permits to shoot bear, deer or elk that were eating the farmers' crops. It failed.

Toll road: Stuart's bill to add Stafford as a participating locality in the George Washington Parkway Toll Authority passed.

Tidal fishing: If you're fishing in tidal rivers that flow into the Chesapeake Bay, you'll be able to buy a combined fishing license that covers both saltwater and freshwater fishing for tidal waters. Stuart's bill provides a combined license for a boat, and it would cover everyone in the boat. It passed.

Tax break: A Stuart bill that would have given a tax break to Northern Virginia businesses opening satellite offices in the Stafford area failed in the House.

Golf carts: A Stuart bill will allow golf carts in Colonial Beach to cross a highway at intersections marked as golf cart crossings by VDOT signs. It passed.

Autism: Bills to mandate insurance coverage of certain autism treatments for children passed, as did a bill from Houck to create an autism advisory council in state government.

Confederate graves: A bill from Houck, as well as budget amendments, provide money for upkeep of 310 Confederate graves in the Fredericksburg Cemetery.

Gambling: Bills to ban "free-spin" gambling machines passed. Free spin machines, often found in mom-and-pop stores, had been a gray area of gambling law because customers didn't actually spend money to gamble; they bought something else of negligible value--a movie rental voucher, for instance--and that then gave them a chance to play the game. The bill tightens up that loophole.

Physical education: Bills to require elementary and middle schools to provide kids with 150 minutes a week of physical education passed.

Lake Anna bridges: A bill from Houck names six bridges in the Lake Anna area. The bridge on U.S. 522 across the Pamunkey Creek in Spotsylvania will be the Pamunkey Bridge. In Louisa County, the bridge on U.S. 522 across Christopher's Creek will be Christopher's Bridge; the bridge on U.S. 652 across Contrary Creek will be the Contrary Bridge; the bridge on State Route 652 across Elk Creek will be Elk Bridge; the bridge on Route 652 across Millpond Creek will be Millpond Bridge; and the bridge on Route 652 across Coleman Creek will be Coleman Creek Bridge.