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VIRGINIA

# Virginia's Elaine Luria sworn in as Democrats take over House

By MARIE ALBIGES  
STAFF WRITER | JAN 03, 2019



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Elaine Luria, a Democratic representative from Virginia's 2nd Congressional District, hugs her father Herbert Luria at a reception before she is sworn in to Congress, Thursday, Jan. 3, 2019, in Washington. The former Navy commander defeated Republican Scott Taylor, a former Navy SEAL, in November to take over his seat. (Steve Earley/The Virginian-Pilot via AP) (Steve Earley / Staff)

Hampton Roads' newest representative in Congress was welcomed into her new role Thursday with a vow to uphold the Constitution and a major to-do list.

At the top of that list? Reopening the government.

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U.S. Rep. Elaine Luria, the Norfolk Democrat, took the oath of office alongside her daughter, Violette, and more than 100 of her newly elected congressional colleagues — including two other new Virginian women, Abigail Spanberger and Jennifer Wexton.

“It was a lot of energy and enthusiasm in the room,” Luria said later. “I was just excited to be there as part of the new Congress and meet some more of my new colleagues and talk about things that are important that we plan to work on very soon.”

Luria was one of 126 female U.S. senators and House members elected in 2018 and is now among a record number of women in the House — 102, according to the Rutgers University Eagleton Institute of Politics. And she voted to make Nancy Pelosi the House speaker.

“I’ve always said that I think that Congress would be better when it looks more like the people that it represents,” Luria said in a phone interview the day before she was sworn in.

Democrats — Luria among them — faced their first challenge as the party in control of the U.S. House of Representatives after being sworn into the 116th

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the government has been in partial shutdown, with thousands of federal employees being told they couldn't work, and thousands more working without pay.

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“It’s not fair for government workers to be asked to work without pay,” Luria said, adding she’s asked for her salary to be withheld until federal workers were paid, one of several House members to say so.

The president has repeatedly said he would refuse to sign a bill that didn’t have at least \$5.6 billion in funding for the border wall, blaming Democrats for the impasse.

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Luria wouldn't say how much, if anything, she would support spending on a border wall. But she said that however the border was secured, it needs to be done in a “smart way.”

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Elaine Luria waves from the House floor before she is sworn in as the Democratic representative from Virginia's 2nd Congressional District in Washington, D.C., on Thursday, Jan. 4, 2019 (Steve Earley / Staff)

## Climate change and military

Luria said one of the first bills she'll put her name on once the government reopens is one to stop offshore drilling off the East Coast.

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U.S. Rep. Don McEachin, who represents Richmond, first introduced the bill in June along with Rep. Walter B. Jones, a North Carolina Republican, that would amend the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act to forbid issuing federal lease-sales “for the exploration, development or production of oil or gas” in the areas that include waters off Virginia, North Carolina, Maryland and Delaware.

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Issues like offshore drilling and seismic testing — both of which Luria opposes — are why she said she wants to get assigned to the special committee on climate change.

Luria said during her campaign she would fight for clean water and air initiatives in Congress and wanted to address rising sea levels in Southeast Virginia.

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Given Hampton Roads' deep ties to the Pentagon — the area is home to 78,000 active military personnel, according to the Hampton Roads Economic Development Alliance — and reliance on defense spending, she also wants to be on the House Armed Services Committee and the Veteran Affairs Committee.

“We need to do a lot more to make sure the veterans receive the benefits they’ve earned,” she said, adding there are “efficiencies to be gained” in the VA.



Elaine Luria walks in the tunnel to the Capitol with her daughter Violette and husband Robert Blondin to be sworn in as the Democratic representative from Virginia's 2nd Congressional District in Washington, D.C., on Thursday, Jan. 4, 2019 (Steve Earley / Staff)

## A diverse district

As a 20-year veteran of the Navy, Luria has a lot in common with her many military constituents — but so did her opponent, one-term Republican Scott Taylor, a Virginia Beach resident and former Navy SEAL.

Voters elected Luria on Nov. 6 by a margin of just over 6,100 votes, out of 273,400 cast amid unusually heavy turnout, both in the 2nd Congressional District and throughout Virginia.

Most of Luria's victory margin came from Virginia Beach, where she beat Taylor by

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There's a lot of energy across the district, she said Wednesday. I think people were ready for change and to have a new voice in Washington and I'm glad to be here."

The 2nd District includes all of Virginia Beach and the state's Eastern Shore as well as Norfolk's north side and several localities on the Peninsula, including Williamsburg and York County.

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Several of her supporters, from Virginia Beach to Bethesda, Md., attended an open house at her office — Cannon 534 — on Thursday. She expected 350 attendees throughout the day.

Since her win, Luria said she's been learning how diverse the district is.

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infrastructure and rural health care dominate. She's getting up to speed on projects like a regional sewer line between Nassawadox and Accomac, and tuning in to transportation and economic development issues in Hampton Roads.

"There's such a variety of issues, and we want to make sure we hear about those and prioritize them," she said.

Luria said she plans to be in the district on weekends and at least one week out of the month, with votes taking place in Congress the other three weeks. She plans on hosting a town hall soon.

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As she's getting to know the district, she has one message for the people she represents:

"We all have more common ground than we have differences. The door is open, the phone is on. I'm your representative whether you voted for me or not."

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Marie Albiges



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Marie Albiges writes about state government and politics. A graduate of Christopher Newport University, Marie has previously covered local government, courts, breaking news and education in Williamsburg and Texas.

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A Newport News man was found dead Tuesday afternoon with multiple gunshot wounds, according to a news release from Hampton police.

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## Grand jury indicts former Lafayette High School principal on charge of felony embezzlement

Four months after Kimberly Hollemon resigned as principal of Lafayette High School, a grand jury in the Williamsburg-James City County Circuit Court indicted her on a single count of felony embezzlement.

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