Seat of power

It evaded a fiery demise in 1747, steadfastly supported burgesses’ backsides through generations of historic debates and weathered the Revolutionary and Civil wars. Virginia’s throne-like speaker’s chair is no ordinary antique. Made in the 1730s and used in the Colonial House of Burgesses, it was retired from service in 1874 and has been on loan to Colonial Williamsburg since the 1930s. It was returned to Richmond in January to mark the 400th anniversary of the Virginia legislature, America’s oldest continuous legislative body. The chair was to be on display through mid-March, but its functional days are behind it. Not even Kirk Cox (R), the current speaker, was allowed to sit in it during its unveiling at a Capitol reception.

The speaker’s chair as it looks today, left, and as depicted in The Magazine of American History, in 1877, above.
NORTH DAKOTA

Fuming in Fargo

With retailers in North Dakota’s largest city weary of losing customers to neighboring Minnesota businesses on Sunday mornings, lawmakers are taking another crack at repealing the Sioux State’s ban on shopping before noon. The last effort to undo the law, which has been in place since statehood, failed in the Senate in 2017, making North Dakota the only state with a Sunday-morning shopping ban. The law exempts restaurants, hotels and movie theaters, among others, and retailers say it’s a matter of fairness that they, too, be allowed to set their own hours. Some opponents of the repeal cite the law’s roots in religious tradition, saying the Legislature is not above “God’s law.” Will history repeat itself? The House passed it and the governor supports it. Once again, it’s up to the Senate.

PENNSYLVANIA

Draft pick

Pennsylvania Representative David Zimmerman (R) is one speedy scurrier. He proved it in the Celebrity Draft Horse Feed Scurry Challenge, a new contest at this year’s Pennsylvania Farm Show. In the scurry, teams compete by loading feed onto sleds pulled by draft horses. As the Lititz Record Express explained it, Zimmerman “smoked the competition,” which included Miss Pennsylvania, fellow legislators and media personalities. The Farm Show, held this year for the 103rd time, is the largest indoor agricultural event in the U.S., showcasing animals, produce, farm equipment and more than 10,000 competitive exhibits.

MONTANA

Native legislators make gains

A record number of Native American lawmakers are serving in Montana’s Legislature this session, the Billings Gazette reports. Montana leads the nation in the percentage of American Indian representation in a state legislature, with 11 tribal members, or roughly 7 percent of the Legislature. That portion is on par with the percentage of Native Montanans. The American Indian Caucus, whose meetings regularly draw about 25 attendees, has introduced measures that would reauthorize Medicaid expansion, change laws related to the reporting of missing children and help to preserve Native languages. Representative Jonathan Windy Boy (D) has drafted several of the language bills. “If we see the loss of our Native languages, we’re going to see the extinction of that history from our land,” he said.

ANTE UP

More states place sports bets

The odds on sports betting—the first runner-up in our recent list of 10 hot issues for 2019—look good. Experts tracking the industry say they expect 30 states to consider bills on the topic during legislative sessions this year, The Associated Press reports. As of January, lawmakers in Kentucky, Missouri, Ohio, Tennessee and Virginia had filed bills to allow gambling on sports. The action follows the U.S. Supreme Court’s ruling in May 2018 that states could decide for themselves whether to allow it. Since then, Delaware, Mississippi, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and West Virginia have legalized it. Before the court’s decision, Nevada was the only state with legal sports betting.