



The Panthers and Rams have a return date on Wild Card Saturday

THE VOICE OF THE BLACK COMMUNITY SINCE 1906

The Charlotte Post

WEEK OF JANUARY 8, 2026

VOLUME 52 NUMBER 18

WWW.THECHARLOTTEPOST.COM

\$1.50



VIA X

Mecklenburg County Sheriff Garry McFadden is the subject of a petition signed by former agency employees demanding a judge remove him from office.

Court petition demands the ouster of Sheriff McFadden

Former employees and NC lawmaker want Garry McFadden out of office

By Herbert L. White

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A petition signed by four former Mecklenburg County Sheriff's Office employees and a state lawmaker urges a judge to remove Sheriff Garry McFadden from office.

N.C. Rep. Carla Cunningham is among the petitioners demanding McFadden's removal for alleged extortion and corruption, willful misconduct and maladministration, and refusal to perform duties of the office. Cunningham, a Charlotte Democrat, alleges McFadden leveled a threat against her in connection with her support of House Bill 318,

which mandates sheriffs in all 100 counties to honor detainee requests by Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

"No sheriff should ever suggest that a legislator's safety depends on how she votes," Cunningham said in a statement. "I was afraid and the intimidation affected me. This process exists for serious situations involving public trust, and the people of Mecklenburg County deserve transparency."

"Filing this complaint is part of rebuilding trust — trust in fair process,

trust in our institutions, and trust that concerns will be handled through proper channels, such as dialogue and negotiation rather than silencing and bullying."

Cunningham's support of the Republican-sponsored House Bill 318 provided the margin needed for an override of then-Gov. Roy Cooper's veto. McFadden, who declined to respond to The Post's request for comment, opposed the bill.

"The Sheriff is aware of the removal petition however, we are not releasing a statement at this time," MCSO spokeswoman Sarah Mastouri wrote in an email response.



Cunningham

Please see **PETITION** | 2A

« **FADING HARVEST** »

Seeds of Black farm advocacy take root

By Herbert L. White

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Second in a series produced in partnership with Pulitzer Center.

The end of federal equity programs left farmers of color in a bind.

In 2025, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, following President Donald Trump's insistence on race-neutral policy, wiped out programs that addressed previous harms to Black farmers in areas like loan access. The final blow came in July when USDA removed requirements for the use of discriminatory racial and gender preferences in programs when they aren't required by Congress.

The year prior, Black farmers began receiving payments from the \$2.2 billion Discrimination Financial Assistance Program. Two years earlier, President Joe Biden signed the Inflation Reduction Act Section 22007 that authorized compensation for farmers who faced racial discrimination in USDA's farm lending practices before 2021.

An estimated 43,000 farmers received payments of up to \$500,000, with the average award \$82,000. Trump's USDA canceled the program.

"This was ... one of the major endeavors that we worked on in terms of — really trying to help Black farmers out, knowing — to put it plain — the racist history of USDA and how they've impacted black farmers for over decades," said Gbinga Ajilor, chief economist at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities in Washington, D.C., and a USDA senior advisor for rural development during the Biden ad-

Please see **THE SEEDS** | 2A

Middle housing as affordable alternative

By Kylie Marsh

THE TRIANGLE TRIBUNE

Middle housing is what's missing from the nationwide affordable housing conversation.

Casita Coalition is a California-based housing nonprofit dedicated to middle housing solutions, a creative variety of dwellings like duplexes, triplexes, townhomes and Accessory Dwelling Units, which can all fit on smaller tracts of land.

The virtual panel discussion featured Rhett Fussell, founder of Raleigh Area Land Trust; Taryn Bell, founder and CEO of Bell Liberty Group; and Eli Spevak, founder and CEO of Orange Splot LLC.

Bell presented on The Cottages of Carey Park, a middle housing subdivision in Atlanta. It consists of 10 units with multiple floorplans development with prices ranging from \$215,000 to \$405,000. "Middle housing provides a replicable model for urban infill in neighborhoods nationwide," Bell said. "Hopefully, this won't be as unique as the years progress."

Some of the designs Bell showed featured shared driveways and closer distances between dwellings, but community members welcome and love it, Bell said. The Cottages at Carey Park were designed within the existing fabric of

Please see **MIDDLE** | 3A

End of health tax credits strains NC budgets

By Eric Tegethoff

NORTH CAROLINA NEWS SERVICE

More North Carolinians are facing tough choices because of health insurance tax credits that expired at the beginning of the year.

Congress declined to extend the Affordable Care Act credits at the end of 2025, leaving nearly a million residents in the state to decide whether they can afford health care in 2026.

Dr. Daniel Frayne is director of Medical Ministry with the Asheville Buncombe Community Christian Ministry, a free clinic for people who are uninsured or who have incomes less than 250% of the Federal Poverty Line. Frayne said health insurance was already out of reach for many before the credits expired.

"It's going to be so many fewer people who are going to choose that option over using their money for other critical needs in their household," he said.

The credits were cut under what was known as the One Big Beautiful Bill Act. Republicans in Congress said an extension of health insurance tax credits would not fix the underlying problems of the Affordable Care Act. By 2034, 450,000 North Carolinians are expected to lose coverage from changes in the One Big Beautiful Bill Act. Frayne said other cuts, including \$186 billion to SNAP, will also affect people.

"Certain benefits such as SNAP benefits for food are also hitting the same population, and because of work requirements and other new rules and regulations, many people are going to be receiving fewer benefits. It's not just about health insurance," he said.

"The whole system is going to be stressed, so I think that all of the health-care organizations, faith-based institutions and local leaders are going to need to actually step in to help solve this problem because the government solutions are going to not work for our community."



HERBERT L. WHITE | THE CHARLOTTE POST

Mecklenburg County recorded zero smog days in 2025, the first time in county history air quality remained at healthy levels throughout a calendar year.

A first for Mecklenburg County's air quality: Zero smog days in 2025

By Herbert L. White

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Mecklenburg County's air was historically clean in 2025.

For the first time since air quality records have been kept, air pollution stayed within healthy limits every day. Although Mecklenburg has met health-based air quality standards over the last decade, it still averaged five unhealthy days yearly — usually caused by high levels of ground level ozone and particle pollution.

County officials cited favorable weather conditions, pollution reduction efforts and limited impacts from

wildfires, prescribed burns and fire-works for the improvement.

"It's important to celebrate this milestone for the health of our community," District 1 county Commissioner Elaine Powell, who chairs of the panel's Environmental Stewardship Committee. "Clean air is vital and something we should never take for granted. We are proud to continue to invest in a team of dedicated experts who take a proactive approach to public engagement, pollution reduction programs, and data monitoring."

Please see **A FIRST** | 2A

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Please
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Petition demands court removal of McFadden

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Under North Carolina law, only a court can remove a sheriff from office once allegations are proven. Mecklenburg District Attorney Spencer Merriweather, who would be tasked with prosecuting the case, has asked the State Bureau of Investigation to probe the allegations.



Merriweather

“Accordingly, before an approval determination comes from this Office, I will, in my discretion, request that the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation ... investigate each allegation and report its findings to my office directly,” Merriweather said in a statement. “As with any inquiry, a request for an investigation is not itself a confirmation of the existence of wrongdoing.”

The petition asks a judge to review sworn allegations from Cunningham and the former MCSO employees, who alleged a hostile work environment and a culture of intimidation and retribution against employees.

In addition to Cunningham, the petitioners include former Chief of Staff Kevin Canty, who resigned in 2024; former Sgt. Marcia Crenshaw Hill, a 13-year MCSO employee who said her job was eliminated while she recovered from an assault by an inmate; Major Bryan Adams, who retired from the agency in 2025 after 30 years and Captain Juan Delgado, an MCSO officer from 2004 until his retirement in 2022.

The petition alleges staffing at

MCSO has fallen from 1,300 to around 770 during McFadden’s tenure, resulting in staffing shortages that made facilities less safe for the incarcerated and jail personnel.

McFadden has been the focus of several lawsuits in recent months. In September 2025, Angelia Riggsbee, a former member of the agency’s executive team, filed a federal lawsuit alleging she was fired in 2024 from her job as business operations director as reprisal for alerting McFadden to remedy pay disparities between a Black woman employee who earned less than white employees with less seniority and experience.

Riggsbee’s suit seeks at least \$75,000, back pay and reinstatement or compensation if she isn’t.

In 2024, McFadden pledged to make changes to MCSO’s leadership in addition to apologizing for racially inflammatory statements he made about department employees.

In an audio recording, McFadden was heard using bigoted language in describing Black and white people on his executive staff. He called a white captain a “cracker,” and a racial epithet to describe former chief deputy Rodney Collins, who is Black.

“It doesn’t matter who recorded or how many years ago it was recorded, today I want to apologize for that language,” McFadden said in a video apology.

“Held to a higher standard, that’s the office of the sheriff. But you must understand that I am human, and I am not perfect, and I will make mistakes.”



NORTH CAROLINA A&T STATE UNIVERSITY

Elvin and Madeline Eaton of Fairport Farms in Kittrell, North Carolina the 2025 North Carolina Small Farmers of the Year, share a laugh with Granville County Extension Director Selena McKoy (left) and local foods coordinator Wendy Tatum (right).

The seeds of advocacy take root for Black agriculturists

Continued from page 1A

ministration. “A lot of it was figure out what are the barriers, the structural barriers that occur at USDA that always made it difficult for Black farmers to succeed.”

President Donald Trump accused Biden of weaponizing the department to “willfully discriminate on the basis of race and gender” and Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins directed USDA to review IRA funding and rescind so-called diversity, equity and inclusion programs.

“We are taking this aggressive, unprecedented action to eliminate discrimination in any form at USDA,” Rollins said. “It is simply wrong and contrary to the fundamental principle that all persons should be treated equally. President Trump has directed the cabinet to scrutinize all programs for illegal and unfair discrimination, and as long as I am Secretary of Agriculture, when we find leftover Biden discrimination in our programs, we will hold those persons who have committed these insidious acts accountable and take swift action to correct these illegal actions.”

The rollbacks produced swift results. Black agriculture producers no longer had viable recourse to access federal funding to maintain their businesses. Politically, Republicans hail race neutrality while Democrats accuse the administration of reviving bias that Black farmers have dealt with for more than a century.

“I was appalled and disappointed to learn that the USDA is no longer taking remediation steps for race- and sex-based discrimination in farm lending, conservation grants, loans, and other programs,” U.S. Rep. Alma Adams, a Charlotte Democrat and a member of the House Agriculture Committee said at the time. “According to the Trump administration, the ‘socially disadvantaged’ designation is no longer needed since past discrimination has been ‘sufficiently addressed.’ Who is the administration trying to fool? And where’s the data?”

According to USDA data, socially disadvantaged agriculture producers:

- On average have fewer financial resources than their white male peers, which makes buying land more difficult
- Earn about \$60,000 annually in median household income compared to \$75,000 for non-SDA households
- Are more likely to operate smaller farms and face greater financial challenges compared to white farmers.

Before Trump’s return to the White House, Black farmers made modest progress. In 2022, the National Black Farmers Association filed a class action lawsuit charging Black farmers lost \$326 billion in land value due to discrimination. USDA previously acknowledged its complicity through rejection of loan applications at higher rates than white farmers.

Previous settlements with Black farmers, include a \$1 billion payout in 1999 and \$1.25 billion in 2013. Similar agreements were struck with Hispanic and women farmers (\$1.3 billion), Native Americans (\$800 million), and the class action Cobell case settlement (\$3.4 billion) for tribal landowners.

Trump’s closing of race-aware programs doesn’t preclude congressional action, though. U.S. Rep. Don Davis, who represents a rural district in northeastern North Caro-

lina, introduced a pair of bills last year that focus on expanding access to federal resources and farm succession. The Rural Uplift and Revitalization Assistance Act and the Farm Transitions Act would help rural communities build long-term capacity and ease the path for property heirs to carry on as producers.

“We’re committed to ensuring rural communities have the tools they need to grow, thrive, and prepare for the future,” said Davis, who like Adams, is a Democrat and member of the House Agriculture Committee. “From expanding access to federal rural development resources to supporting the next generation of family farmers, this work is critical to the long-term success of eastern North Carolina and rural communities nationwide.”

There are also local efforts to engage small-scale farmers. North Carolina A&T State University’s cooperative extension program launched Small Farms Week in 1975 to recognize producers – especially those in small communities with limited resources – and educate the public about their role in the state’s \$111 billion agriculture economy.

The 40th annual Small Farms Week in March will include workshops, hands-on demonstrations, and the 2026 Small Farmers of the Year announcement. “One of the reasons we launched Small Farms Week was to give small farmers and small-scale producers recognition for their excellence and the hard work they do to enable families to put fresh, healthy food on their tables,” said M. Ray McKinnie Ph.D., extension administrator and associate dean of A&T’s College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences. “Forty years later, it’s more important than ever to shine a light on our small farmers as they deal with the financial, environmental, intellectual and emotional realities of producing food and fiber in a world where change is constant.”

The week will include a TED Talk-style lunch for the sharing of challenges and successes, a peer-learning gathering where farmers rotate among tables hosted by specialists, field staff and researchers, and a networking workshop where resources from business development loans to educational materials and tools for physical, social and emotional well-being are made available. As climate change continues to alter the agriculture landscape, extension agents are stepping in to help producers.

“Hurricane Helene did more than flood farmers’ fields; it wiped out entire communities and eliminated ways of life,” McKinnie said. “Farming is a passion, not just a job, and as extension professionals, we must understand what that means and offer assistance and relief as more severe weather events threaten our farms and ways of life.”

Ajilore believes Black farmers will carry on – regardless of challenges.

“I tend to be somewhat optimistic about this, that there’s always going to be people who want to farm, and as difficult as it may be, always going to find a way through,” he said. “Now, the number of people that may could continue to go down, but I just think about there’s certain ... people who’ve been farming for generations, and they like the act of farming. It’s more than just ‘we want to make money.’ There’s a calling to that. There’s always going to be people hear that calling, but the issue is can we make it not difficult for them to do it, to be able to engage with it.”

NC faith leaders and advocates outline their legislative wish list

By Clayton Henkel

NC NEWSLINE

North Carolina faith leaders gathered at the General Assembly in Raleigh Monday to advocate for policies they believe will improve the lives of all North Carolinians in the new year.

The legislature was not in session Monday. They’re scheduled to begin a short session in March and may not address many of the issues advocates highlighted. But Reverend Dr. Floyd Wicker of the People’s Fellowship of North Carolina said the group wanted to speak out in the face of voter suppression, chronic underfunding of public schools, and a health care system which has become unaffordable for far too many.

“To the lawmakers in the General Assembly who wish to suppress our voices and erase all of the gains our dear ancestors fought so hard for us to attain, let it be known we will do all that is in our Holy Ghost power to organize to a better, more equitable North Carolina,” said Wicker.

Geraldine Alshamy, a 72-year-old social justice minister and founder of Mary Magdalene Ministries, braved Monday’s chilly temperatures to advocate for disadvantaged students.

“When lawmakers fail to pass a state budget, it hits not only Black, brown and poor children hardest. It hits all children everywhere,” said Alshamy.

Alshamy grew up in rural Wilson County during the early days of integration. She sees similarities between those days and how schools are being funded now.

“Access to education was promised, but never delivered. We are still at those same times. Support and resources were withheld, and communities were told to make do,” she said.

Alshamy said without appropriate funding, more students in North Carolina struggle with behavioral health problems, and teachers who are not trauma-informed are able to provide little support.

“Every time early intervention is denied, the cost is simply shifted to the courts, law enforcement, prison, and broken families,” said Alshamy.

Republican state legislative leaders have often pointed out that the state’s spending on education has grown every year for the past decade. But the increases have not kept pace with inflation or need, and North Carolina now ranks 48th among all states for per-pupil spending.

Kate Daley with the nonprofit Down Home NC joined the group to advocate for health care funding.

“North Carolina state budget is the last of all 50 states to be passed, still tabled after our legislators left unfinished business,” said Daley. “It remains to be seen how our lawmakers will respond to the billions of dollars missing in federal spending for Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.”

Daley said North Carolina will be challenged this year to fill the gap left by federal budget cuts and the state’s shrinking tax revenue.

“Affordable health care, SNAP, and public education are on the line for North Carolina more than ever before, and the time has come to end our state’s corporate tax cuts,” said Daley.

Whether to pause scheduled cuts to state personal and corporate income taxes is one of the sticking points that led to a budget impasse between state House and Senate Republicans in 2025. There’s no indication they’re any closer to an agreement yet.

Tyler Daye, Common Cause N.C.’s policy and civic engagement coordinator, said he was frustrated legislators did not have time to finish a state budget in 2025, but did have time to redraw congressional district maps giving Republicans an advantage in the first congressional district.

“They made the decision to manipulate our voting districts to protect themselves and their friends in power. And legislators went after the only truly competitive congressional districts in the state,” said Daye.

Daye said by ignoring historical voting patterns, legislators have made it more difficult for Black voters in the state to have their voice heard.

“This is cheating,” he said. “It is disgraceful, shameful, and it should be illegal.”

Daye said his organization would again make the case this year for an independent redistricting commission.

“This gerrymandering, or a better word for it, election fraud, election manipulation, must be stopped,” Daye said. “It is disintegrating the integrity of North Carolina’s elections.”

Alshamy knows lawmakers may not choose to address many of the group’s issues this spring. But she remained hopeful – and offered elected officials a stern reminder.

“Leadership is not measured by how much power you hold, but how you protect the citizens of this state,” she said. “I urge you to choose wisely. Choose courage over convenience. Choose children over ideology.”



CLAYTON HENKEL | NC NEWSLINE

Geraldine Alshamy, a social justice minister, said the failure of the General Assembly to pass a comprehensive budget hurts poor children the hardest.

A first for Mecklenburg County air quality: Zero smog days in ‘25

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Mecklenburg County is one of three North Carolina counties – Buncombe and Forsyth are the others – with a dedicated air quality agency to monitor data and compliance with air pollution rules as well as implement programs.

“Mecklenburg County Air Quality is a local team of scientists, engineers and communications professionals who are out in the community measuring air pollution, improving air quality, and listening and responding to residents,” director Leslie Rhodes said

in a statement. “We are proud of their work, which has culminated in a decade of meeting health-based air quality standards and a full year without a Code Orange or higher air quality day.”

HHS orders justification for child care spending

By Shauneen Miranda

STATES NEWSROOM

WASHINGTON — States must now provide “justification” that federal child care funds they receive are spent on “legitimate” providers in order to get those dollars, President Donald Trump’s administration announced.

The shift in policy came following allegations of fraud in Minnesota’s child care programs, which prompted the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to freeze all child care payments to the state.

HHS could not offer many specifics on how the review process will play out for other states, but clarified that the money in question is provided through the multibillion-dollar federal Child Care and Development Fund, or CCDF.

“States will be required to provide documentation, such as written justification, receipts, or photographic evidence, demonstrating that funds are supporting legitimate child care providers,” Emily Hilliard, a spokesperson for HHS, said in a statement to States Newsroom on Wednesday.

CCDF provides federal funding to states, territories and tribes to help low-income families obtain child care.

The program, administered within the Office of Child Care under HHS’ Administration for Children and Families, combines funding from the Child Care and Development Block Grant, or CCDBG, and the Child Care Entitlement to States, or CCES.

Funding for CCDF in fiscal year 2025 stood at roughly \$12.3 billion — comprising \$8.75 billion from CCDBG and \$3.55 billion from CCES.

Head Start — a separate program that provides early childhood education, nutritious meals, health screenings and other support services to low-income families — does not appear to be affected.

In a social media post announcing the move, Health and Human Services Deputy Secretary Jim O’Neill said he had “activated our defend the spend system for all ACF payments” and “starting today, all ACF payments across America will require a justification and a receipt or photo evidence before we send money to a state.”

He clarified in a separate post shortly after that “funds will be released only when states prove they are being spent legitimately.”

Funds undergo ‘regular audits’

“Federal funding enables millions of parents in every state and Congressional district to access and afford quality child care,” Sarah Rittingling, executive director of First Five Years Fund, a federal advocacy group, said in a Wednesday statement.

Rittingling added that “these funds are essential to the nation’s well-being, allowing parents to work while ensuring their children are cared for and safe.”

She also described the reports of potential fraud as “deeply concerning” and pointed out that “state oversight through regular audits is required by law to ensure that every dollar intended to protect and support young children is used properly and effectively.”

“At the same time, we must ensure that nothing takes away from making sure funds for child care continue to reach the children and families who depend on them,” she said.

Presidential order loosens US pot rules, but it’s still illegal

By Jacob Fischler

STATES NEWSROOM

President Donald Trump signed an executive order Dec. 18 to loosen federal restrictions on marijuana, which Trump said reflected the drug’s potential medical benefits while discouraging recreational use.

The order moves cannabis from Schedule I to Schedule III on the Federal Drug Administration’s list of controlled substances. Schedule I, the most restrictive category under federal law, indicates a high likelihood of abuse and no accepted medical value.

Trump said the move reflected that cannabis could have medicinal value, even if abuse was still possible.

The order “doesn’t legalize marijuana in any way, shape or form and in no way sanctions its use as a recreational drug,” Trump said. “Just as the prescription painkillers may have legitimate uses, but can also do irreversible damage ... it’s never safe to use powerful controlled substances in recreational matters.”

Still, the order marks a major step in the decades-long liberalization of cannabis policy.

Since 2012, when Washington and Colorado voters legalized personal marijuana use, 22 other states have legalized at least some form of recreational use. Only 10 states still restrict both medicinal and recreational use.

In a statement, Colorado Gov. Jared Polis, a Democrat, praised Trump while calling for further reforms to bring federal law into harmony with states where the drug is legal.

“I thank the President and am pleased that they are finally taking this step to begin the process to reschedule,” Polis wrote. “Colorado’s cannabis industry is the gold standard ensuring that products are safe and regulated. It’s good to see the federal government finally following suit, but it’s frustrating it’s taken this long and there is much more to do for a full descheduling.”

President Joe Biden started the process for rescheduling the drug last year.

Medical angle

A group of administration officials and medical doctors flanked Trump during the Oval Office signing, with some speaking to the potential medical benefits of marijuana, including as an alternative to highly addictive opioid painkillers.

“The facts compel the federal government to recognize that marijuana can be legitimate in terms of medical applications when carefully administered,” Trump said.

Researching the potential benefits of marijuana is nearly impossible because of the tight restrictions on Schedule I substances, advocates have argued. Removing cannabis from Schedule I would help ease those restrictions, Trump said.

“This reclassification order will make it far easier to conduct marijuana-related medical research, allowing us to study benefits, potential dangers and future treatments,” he said. “It’s going to have a tremendously positive impact.”

In addition to researchers, the split between federal law and the legal landscape in many states has created challenges for the industry, users and law enforcement, among others.

For example, the unusual position of state-legal businesses in a federally banned industry means they cannot use certain tax provisions, access some banking instruments or transport their product across state lines.

In a lengthy statement, Paul Armentano, the deputy director of leading marijuana legalization organization National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws, offered qualified praise for the move, saying it “validates the experience” of patients who have used marijuana to treat chronic pain and other conditions.

“This directive certainly marks a long overdue change in direction,” Armentano said. “But while such a move potentially provides some benefits to patients, and veterans especially, it still falls well short of the changes necessary to bring federal marijuana policy into the 21st century. Specifically, rescheduling fails to harmonize federal marijuana policy with the cannabis laws of most states.”

The reclassification could provide tax relief to many marijuana businesses, he added.

GOP senators opposed move

Many Republicans in Congress remain opposed to legalizing marijuana.

In a letter dated Dec. 17, 24 Senate Republicans urged Trump not to reclassify marijuana, which they said had a high likelihood of abuse and no medical value.

Allowing marijuana businesses to take advantage of federal tax deductions would give them a tax break of as much as \$2.3 billion, allowing them to increase marketing efforts and expand into additional states, the lawmakers wrote. The benefits of economic growth would be outweighed by the costs of accidents, “not to mention the moral costs of marijuana advertising that could reach kids,” they wrote.

“In light of the documented dangers of marijuana, facilitating the growth of the marijuana industry is at odds with growing our economy and encouraging healthy lifestyles for Americans,” the GOP senators wrote. “We urge you to continue your strong leadership of our country and our economy, and to turn away from marijuana rescheduling.”

North Carolina’s Ted Budd led the letter, which was also signed by John Barasso and Cynthia Lummis of Wyoming, Tom Cotton of Arkansas, Shelley Moore Capito of West Virginia, James Lankford of Oklahoma, Roger Marshall of Kansas, Pete Ricketts of Nebraska, Tommy Tuberville of Alabama, John Cornyn of Texas, Marsha Blackburn and Bill Hagerty of Tennessee, Jim Banks of Indiana, Ron Johnson of Wisconsin, Mike Crapo and Jim Risch of Idaho, Rick Scott of Florida, Kevin Cramer of North Dakota, Cindy Hyde-Smith of Mississippi, Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, Dave McCormick of Pennsylvania and Mitch McConnell of Kentucky.

US’s Nigeria bombing rationale universally contested by history

By Stacy M. Brown

BLACK PRESS USA

President Donald Trump says U.S. bombs fell on Nigeria to protect Christians.

That explanation does not survive memory, geography, or fact.

On Christmas Day, American missiles struck northern Nigeria. The administration said the targets were terrorists killing Christians. But the same administration had already stripped away humanitarian aid, dismantled U.S. Agency for International

Development programs, shut asylum doors, and blocked visas for Nigerians fleeing violence. The hand that claimed salvation had already withdrawn food, medicine, and refuge.

Nigeria is not a parable. It is a place where Muslims and Christians live side by side, where violence grows from drought, land loss, criminal networks, and borders carved by European powers to guarantee friction long after independence. The bloodshed there is not governed by scripture. It is governed by scarcity and power.

Professor Uju Anya named the contradiction without decoration.

“Trump says he’s protecting Nigerian Christians,” Anya said. “Trump shuts down USAID and kills Nigerian Christians. Trump bans asylum for Nigerian Christians. Trump bans visas for Nigerian Christians. Trump bombs Nigeria, causing more misery, insecurity, and instability for Nigerian Christians.”

That misery was predictable.

When USAID was dismantled, clinics closed and food support vanished. More than a quarter-million people in Nigeria relied directly on U.S.-backed assistance. Those lives were weighed and dismissed before the first missile was launched.

Then came the strikes.

Witnesses described missiles tearing into farmland and open fields. Anti-war journalist Dave DeCamp reported that multiple U.S. missiles failed to detonate, sinking into the ground. The operation cost nearly \$30 million. No evidence was released tying the bombed areas to the killings Trump cited.

At the same time, the administration also bombed Somalia. By DeCamp’s count, U.S. Africa Command has carried out at least 127 airstrikes in Somalia this year alone, more than double the previous annual record. AFRICOM has largely stopped responding to press inquiries.

The facts on Nigeria further unravel the story being told.

From 2020 through 2025, more Muslims than Christians were killed in religiously targeted attacks. Armed groups

such as Boko Haram and ISIS-West Africa primarily kill Muslims who resist them, alongside Christians and others. The deadliest Christian losses have largely occurred in Nigeria’s Middle Belt, not in the northern regions struck by U.S. bombs.

If the goal were protection, the map would not look like this.

Northern Nigeria sits beneath Niger and alongside Mali and Burkina Faso, members of the Sahel alliance that expelled Western military forces and reclaimed control over gold, gas, uranium, and other strategic minerals. Niger is one of the world’s leading suppliers of uranium. Mali and Burkina Faso sit atop vast gold reserves. Nigeria remains Africa’s largest oil producer and holds significant rare earth deposits.

This pattern is not new.

In a social media post, human rights lawyer Chief Malcolm Emokiniyovon Omirhobo described the strikes as part of a broader design.

“The United States of America is not interested in the lives of Black Christians in Northern Nigeria,” Omirhobo said. “The real interest of the U.S. is geostrategic control.”

He said Nigeria is being positioned as a military launchpad for pressure and potential regime-change operations against Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso.

“This has nothing to do with Christianity,” Omirhobo said. “This has everything to do with resources, power, and influence.”

The selective outrage has been noticed.

Former MSNBC host Keith Olbermann questioned why Trump claimed moral urgency over Christians in Nigeria while remaining silent about Christians killed during Russia’s war in Ukraine.

Members of Congress have also raised alarms. Texas Democratic Rep. Jasmine Crockett warned against normalizing evidence-free violence. “None of this should be normalized,” Crockett said, noting that Trump has bombed Iran, Iraq, Syria, Somalia, Nigeria, Yemen, and targets in the Caribbean and Eastern Pacific this year alone.

Nigeria is left with the consequences.

President Bola Ahmed Tinubu now governs a country pulled deeper into proxy conflict, religious polarization, and regional instability. History offers no reassurance. From Libya to Iraq to Afghanistan, U.S. bombs have never stayed to rebuild what they destroyed.

“When the dust settles,” Omirhobo warned, “the U.S. will leave just as it left Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya, and Nigeria will be left to deal with the blowback: deeper insecurity, ethnic tension, religious polarization, and a weakened sovereignty.”

Middle housing as an affordable alternative for budget conscious

Continued from page 1A

the community, which minimizes disruptions.

“You always hear about developers coming and making decisions for communities; we’re making decisions with communities,” Bell said.

Fussell discussed the Cottages of Idlewild in Raleigh, an 18-unit cottage court of affordable units, up to 80% of area median income.

All designs presented are fee-simple, meaning homeowners purchase only the structure and not the land with it. This is an increasingly popular form of property development and acquisition which protects homeowners from skyrocketing property tax costs. “Zoning is critical when it comes to housing and addressing the lack of middle housing that our nation is facing,” Bell said.

Zoning can be tricky for

these types of developments, though. They can take a long time. For example, Fussell said the Raleigh Unified Development Ordinance allowed for cottage courts. The process for getting the Cottages at Idlewild began in 2021 and didn’t break ground until this summer. That said, they didn’t have to go through a rezoning process.

They were able to acquire city-owned land and build 18 units in partnership with Raleigh Raised Development, a Black-owned residential development company started by three friends who grew up in Southeast Raleigh.

“A lot of banks don’t understand it,” Fussell said. “If you’re not making a profit, they don’t understand.” To get the project to the finish line, Fussell said RALT had to piece together funding from cor-

porate donors, private donations and four different lenders. The city and county added approximately \$8 million.

Bell said there’s frequent pushback from community members when zoning is brought up, but constant communication is important. People just want to be informed and involved in the process.

“Communication matters,” she said. “No one’s happy about construction, but that involves asking more questions.”

Eli Spevak presented on several middle housing projects he has designed in Oregon. He also mentioned the policy changes that Portland and the state adopted that make it easier for developers to build these types of developments. Fussell said the North Carolina legislature is listening.

Secret Service prepares for expansion

By Stacy M. Brown

BLACK PRESS USA

The U.S. Secret Service is preparing for one of the largest expansions in its history as officials confront what they describe as an unprecedented volume of credible threats, fueled by escalating global tensions and a series of aggressive U.S. actions overseas that have triggered unrest at home and abroad.

The agency plans to hire roughly 4,000 new employees by 2028, a surge that would increase its workforce by about 20 percent, according to internal planning documents and senior officials familiar with the effort. The expansion comes as the United States faces heightened security demands following military operations in Venezuela and Nigeria, along with continued threats and warnings directed at Cuba, Greenland, Colombia, Mexico, and other sovereign nations.

The strain on federal protection services became visible over the weekend as Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro was transported under heavy guard to federal court in Manhattan, prompting protests across the United States and

overseas. Demonstrations erupted in Washington, New York, Chicago, Detroit, Minneapolis, and San Francisco, while crowds gathered in Bogotá, Caracas, and other cities to denounce the U.S. operation that removed Maduro from power.

Outside the Metropolitan Detention Center in Brooklyn, protesters questioned the scope of American authority.

“What’s stopping Trump from doing this to other countries?” said Zoe Alexandra of the ANSWER Coalition.

The Secret Service has not publicly tied its expansion to any single event, but officials acknowledge that the protective mission has grown sharply. The agency is responsible for safeguarding the president, former presidents, visiting foreign leaders, major political candidates, and major public events, while responding to a surge in online and direct threats deemed credible by investigators.

Deputy Director Matthew Quinn said the agency’s workload has outpaced its staffing levels.

“Our numbers are low to meet those needs,” he said.

The Charlotte Post

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Published weekly by The Charlotte Post Publishing Company Inc., 5118 Princess Street, Charlotte, NC 28269 (USPS #965500). Subscription is \$65 per year. Periodicals postage paid at Charlotte, NC. Postmaster: Send address changes to The Charlotte Post, PO Box 30144, Charlotte, NC 28230

You’ve always been enough

When New York City Public Advocate Jumaane Williams spoke directly to Black boys at a recent inauguration, his words spread quickly. Clips ricocheted across phones and timelines far beyond City Hall.

Not because they were clever. But because they were rare.



BEN
JEALOUS

“Little Black boy,” Williams said, “you were worth it, and you always were. Without any titles, you were enough. You were always enough. You deserve to accept love, and you deserve to be protected.”

No charts. No statistics. No list of disparities. Just a sentence we almost never hear spoken by people with power, in public, about Black boys.

It landed because it broke an unspoken rule most leaders follow without realizing it: the rule that says Black boys must always be spoken about in the conditional tense. If they behave. If they comply. If they survive. If they overcome.

Williams did none of that. He asserted worth. Full stop.

There is a name for that choice. Years ago, Trabian Shorters gave it one: asset framing.

Asset framing is not optimism. It is not denial. It does not pretend hardship is imaginary. It simply refuses to define people by their wounds. Deficit framing leads with problems. Asset framing leads with strengths, capacities, and humanity—without asking anyone to earn dignity first.

A decade ago, Trabian Shorters and I edited “Reach,” an anthology of forty first-person essays by Black men—famous and not—written to challenge deficit narratives and widen what America is willing to see. The book is still in print. That matters. It reminds us this is not a new insight reacting to a new crisis. It is a long-standing challenge to an old habit.

For years, asset framing lived mostly in movement spaces and philanthropic circles. It was a theory about language. A strategy for organizing. Something you might hear at a conference, not an inauguration.

What Williams did was different. He put that theory into motion, out loud, with authority.

That matters, especially when you understand how deeply the opposite framing is embedded in American life.

Nearly two decades ago, sociologist Devah Pager published a book that should be required reading for anyone who talks about work, crime, or merit in this country. It was called “Marked: Race, Crime, and Finding Work in an Era of Mass Incarceration.”

Pager ran rigorous audit studies in the low-wage labor market. Young men with identical résumés applied for the same jobs. The only variables were race and criminal record.

What she found was devastating, and precise. White men with criminal records were more likely to receive callbacks than Black men with no criminal record at all.

In the low-wage economy, Blackness itself functioned as a criminal marker. Long before a police stop. Long before a courtroom. Long before a mistake could even be made.

Pager proved that deficit framing is not just cultural. It is economic. It is enforced by markets. It punishes people before they act.

That is the lie Williams was pushing back against—not rhetorically, but morally.

And his words did not come out of nowhere.

When Williams served on the New York City Council, his chief of staff was K. Bain, now the founder of Human Justice in New York City. Bain’s work is rooted in the same refusal to reduce people to their worst moments. The same insistence that safety and dignity are not opposites. The same belief that justice fails the moment it forgets the humanity of the people inside it.

Ideas shape institutions when they sit in the room long enough. Asset framing did not just live in a book. It did not just live in a nonprofit. It lived in a governing culture. And eventually, it surfaced at a microphone.

This is why the moment mattered.

We are living in a season of backlash politics, fear-based messaging, and calls to “get tough” that flatten entire communities into threats to be managed. Even well-meaning leaders often fall back on deficit language because it sounds serious. Responsible. Realistic.

But it is not neutral. It is corrosive.

When you repeatedly describe children as problems, do not be surprised when systems treat them that way.

Asset framing is not soft. It is countercultural. It undermines the moral logic of cruelty. It challenges the quiet assumption that some people must be broken before they can be seen.

What Williams did was remind us of something we once knew: public safety does not begin with suspicion. It begins with recognition.

If Black boys are “already enough,” as he said, then our policies, schools, labor markets, and justice systems have obligations they can no longer evade.

That is the real work asset framing demands. Not applause. Accountability. And it starts with telling the truth about who our children are—before the world tries to mark them as something else.

Union workers build better lives

A union contract delivers good wages, affordable health care and retirement security for my co-workers and me at the Corning plant in Wilmington.

We’re proud of successfully fighting for these essentials, which anchor our



DONNETTA
WILLIAMS

families in the middle class, but it’s important to understand that our membership in the United Steelworkers also lifts us up in other ways that are just as powerful.

The union affords us a voice on the job. Our solidarity earns us respectful treatment from management, ensures equitable opportunities for all, and fuels our commitment to activism outside the plant gate.

We’re building better lives and stronger communities through our union, and that’s why we’re excited to see workers at other Corning plants joining us.

About 50 workers at the plant in Blacksburg, Va., recently voted to join the USW, and our colleagues at facilities in Winston-Salem, Concord, Durham, Hickory and other locations in North Carolina are organizing now.

We held a rally outside Corning’s headquarters in Charlotte last month to highlight these efforts and to urge management to halt its union-busting tactics. Workers need to be free to exercise their rights and choose what’s best for them.

USW members from Wilmington have talked with some of the workers from Blacksburg, Durham and the other locations. We understand the challenges they face. We’re certain we can help.

It’s no surprise that public support for unions jumped to record levels in recent years. Growing numbers of workers across the country are learning what I did long ago—that a union contract provides much-needed stability and protection in an uncertain economy like the one we’re facing right now.

After landing a job at Corning three decades ago, I immediately tripled my income and became active in the USW. Over the years, my co-workers and I successfully fought for further improvements in wages and benefits, winning compensation exceeding those of our colleagues at Corning’s nonunion facilities.

We also won industry-leading health, safety and environmental safeguards, along with a strong griev-

ance procedure and other language protecting us from favoritism, discrimination and retaliation.

This is our union, and we set the agenda, from electing our leaders to voting on contracts. By valuing everyone, by empowering everyone, we make Corning a profitable company and good place to work.

We’re effective advocates outside the plant as well.

We give back to our communities through backpack drives, sock collections and other projects, and we fight for legislation aimed at creating jobs and expanding the economy. I was honored to speak at the White House four years ago when then-President Joe Biden signed a law releasing \$1.2 trillion for job-boosting infrastructure projects, including expansion of the critical broadband systems we support at the Wilmington plant.

None of this is easy. Companies never give workers an extra penny, let alone a seat at the table, unless they’re forced to do so.

But with workers in Blacksburg and other locations in our ranks, we’ll be even stronger when a new round of negotiations with Corning begins next year.

Right now, the USW represents thousands of

workers at Corning plants all over the country. We make a variety of products for a variety of industries, from optical fiber in Wilmington to specialty glass for the semiconductor industry at a plant in Canton, N.Y.

Our colleagues at the company’s nonunion locations serve a variety of important markets as well.

This is a critical time for all of us, no matter what we produce or where we work.

As Corning expands its footprint in the optical fiber and solar industry, we need to grow our worker power as well.

That’s the only way to ensure we receive a fair share of the wealth that our labor creates for the company. It’s also key to maintaining a voice in evolving sectors of the economy and holding the company accountable.

The path forward is ours.

My co-workers and I look forward to welcoming more colleagues into the USW. Together, we’ll leverage the union difference to build a brighter future for all.

Donnetta Williams is a fiber maker at Corning’s Wilmington, N.C., facility and president of USW Local 1025, representing about 600 workers at the facility.

Woke: Weaponized language vs. freedom

In 1939, Billie Holiday gave voice to a nation’s darkest truths with Strange Fruit, her haunting lament for the bodies of Black men and women hanging from trees in the Southern states.



BOB
TOPPER

The year before, bluesman Lead

Belly had recorded Scottsboro Boys, a ballad chronicling the prosecution of nine Black teenagers falsely accused of rape. At the end of his song, he offered a warning — “stay woke” — a phrase that would enter the Black lexicon as a call to vigilance, a reminder to remain alert to the dangers of racism, especially in the South.

Weaponizing woke

Decades later, in 2019, The New York Times published the 1619 Project, a sweeping account placing slavery at the center of the American narrative. This interpretation clashed with the idealized, rose-colored version of history cherished by conservative groups, particularly White Christian Nationalists. Conservatives disparaged the article as “woke,” a de-risive abuse of the word.

Everyone can and should be proud of our American heritage. The founders and the ideals they championed, freedom, equality and democracy shaped the world’s first liberal democracy. They revolutionized government and brought

an end to the oppressive autocratic throne-and-altar alliance that had ruled western culture and denied basic human rights for centuries.

But the new American society was flawed. The treatment of Black people and native Americans was shameful. Yet the nation progressed. The civil war ended slavery, the 19th Amendment ensured women’s voting rights, and the Civil Rights Act banned discrimination, and more gains ensued for Americans with disabilities, Native Americans, and LGBTQ+. Still, the struggle to achieve Jefferson’s ideal of equality continues.

Clear thinking people know that good and bad are found in the history of every nation, and that the strongest nations are those willing to confront their failures. Germany, for instance, requires its students to learn about the Holocaust. America’s liberal education showed similar courage, until compromised by the Trump Administration’s recent attacks on our universities and museums. To deny historical truths, or to disparage them as “woke,” is both wrongheaded and corrosive.

Fundamentalists spread the word Until the middle of the past decade the word “woke” pertained to racial awareness.

But in that decade fundamentalists began to wield the word as a pejorative, and broadened its scope to mock other progressive

views, especially views on sexuality and gender. Liberals, guided by scientific findings, accepted that human sexuality is more complex than the binary of male and female. Gender exists on a continuum, encompassing gay, lesbian, intersex, and trans identities—each a natural variation of human life.

Christian extremists, however, cling to scripture and reject modern science. That is their right. But they are wrong to scorn those who see things differently and to repeat an old pattern: the refusal to reconcile faith with fact.

This conflict is not new. Galileo was imprisoned in 1610 for asserting that the earth revolved around the sun. Darwin, in 1859, was branded a heretic for theorizing that humankind evolved rather than descended from Adam and Eve. Most Christians today agree with Darwin’s findings, and all accept a heliocentric solar system. Yet fundamentalists remain unwilling to accept the science of human sexuality, despite overwhelming evidence. Over 7% of the population identifies as gay, lesbian, or trans. If one believes in a divine order, then surely such diversity must have been intended.

Unwilling to reconcile their beliefs, fundamentalists disparage those who accept the modern understanding of human sexuality just as they disparage people who have the courage to view America’s racial history objectively.

They wield the word woke as a cudgel against all DEI initiatives.

By misappropriating woke, they dilute the meaning of the word and, at the same time, reveal the childish pettiness that has overcome the minds of present-day Republican conservatives. Frustrated by their inability to defend antiquated beliefs with rational arguments, they deny truth and scorn people who think critically. This is a remnant of the times before the Enlightenment when fear and ignorance permeated society and witches and heretics were burned at the stake.

Using language to attack, control, and manipulate others conceals the underlying fear, ignorance, and insecurity of Christian extremists. This tactic serves not only as a mask for their own anxieties, but also as a tool to demean, intimidate, and incite hatred toward those with differing views. By distorting the meaning of words and using them as weapons, fundamentalists attempt to undermine critical thinking and rational argument, diverting attention from the substantive issues of our time. Their reliance on language as a weapon derives from a refusal to reconcile faith with actual inquiry and perpetuates discord within American society.

No wonder we are so divided.

Bob Topper, syndicated by PeaceVoice, is a retired engineer.

Trump’s the peace president? Yeah, right.

On Dec. 17, surrounded by festive holiday decorations, U.S. president Donald Trump delivered an upbeat — one might even say manic — address to the nation, preempting — and enraging fans of — network TV shows such as Survivor, The Floor, and Christmas in Nashville.



THOMAS
KNAPP

While many expected something weighty (perhaps announcement of further military escalation versus Venezuela), what they got was laundry list of Trump’s “accomplishments” since his inauguration in January.

Most of those “accomplishments” — ruinous tariffs on American consumers, immoral and economically damaging immigration raids, etc. —

were things we already knew about from watching our bank balances draw inexorably down.

One, however, stood out to me as the most risible. “For the first time in 3,000 years,” Trump said, he’s brought “peace to the Middle East.”

He said that, with as close to a straight face as he ever shows, hours after saluting the flag-draped caskets of two US National Guard members and a civilian interpreter killed in Syria the previous week.

He said that as thousands of Saudi-backed (and therefore U.S.-backed) forces massed on the Yemeni border, preparing for an offensive against one of that country’s dueling political/military factions.

He said that as (U.S.-backed) Israeli forces continued to conduct deadly strikes in Gaza and Lebanon, and raids in Palestine’s occupied West Bank, despite supposed “cease-

fires.”

Words can mean more than one thing, but only in the Newspeak Dictionary from George Orwell’s “1984” might we expect to find any of the above defined as “peace” — or Donald Trump described as a “peace president.”

In his first term as president, Trump escalated every war he inherited and re-started the previous war in Somalia. He “surged” troops into Afghanistan and Syria.

In Syria, he decupled the U.S. military presence, had Marines fire more artillery rounds than were used in the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, briefly feigned toward withdrawing, then decided to stay to “keep the oil.”

In Afghanistan, he eventually negotiated a U.S. withdrawal ... but then failed to complete that withdrawal, leaving it to his successor and complaining bitterly about it.

He reneged on the U.S.

government’s obligations under the “Iran nuclear deal,” and ordered an Iranian general assassinated while on a diplomatic mission in Iraq.

In Yemen, he ordered the murder of 8-year-old American girl Nawar Anwar al-Awlaki by U.S. Navy SEALs.

The list goes on and on.

In his second term, he’s continued the war in Somalia and on Venezuela (to name but two), while failing on his promise to negotiate an end to the Russia-Ukraine war “in 24 hours” (or, to date, at all).

As Christmas approaches, I’m all in favor of “on earth peace, goodwill toward men.” But I find Trump’s claims and promises on that subject less believable than stories about Santa Claus.

Thomas L. Knapp is director and senior news analyst at the William Lloyd Garrison Center for Libertarian Advocacy Journalism.



DONALD WATKINS | THE CHARLOTTE POST

Carolina Panthers running backs Chuba Hubbard (30) and Rico Dowdle have struggled to produce on the ground attack late in the regular season. They'll need to pick up the pace against the Los Angeles Rams in the NFC Wild Card game at Bank of America Stadium.

Ground attack crucial to Carolina

Running game, which gone been missing in recent weeks, needs a revival vs. Rams in Wild Card round

By Jeff Hawkins
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

Rico Dowdle didn't feel like a million bucks.

In the closing moments of the regular season finale at Tampa Bay, the Carolina Panthers running back stood on the sideline, hands on hips, staring at the rain-soaked field.

Despite triggering a \$1 million performance-based bonus for crossing the 1,000-yard barrier, Dowdle (1,076 yards on 236 carries) did not look like he was ready to celebrate after a 16-14 loss.

The Panthers (8-9) dropped their sec-

ond straight game, and their NFC South championship aspirations were momentarily threatened. A day later, the Panthers were awarded their first divisional title since 2015 after Atlanta topped New Orleans.

Coach Dave Canales didn't sound concerned about the Panthers, who finished in a three-way divisional tie with the Buccaneers and Falcons, earning a trip to the NFL playoffs for the first time since 2017 via tiebreaker. Canales said he was "grateful" Carolina qualified to host the Los Angeles Rams in the Wild Card round at Bank of America Stadium on Saturday.

"I'm so grateful to have one more opportunity to get back to work," he said. Carolina needs to revive ground attack

One of the Panthers' top priorities is reviving their running game.

Led by Dowdle and Chuba Hubbard, the Panthers eclipsed the 100-yard mark in eight of the season's opening nine weeks.

A second half skid culminated Saturday when the Panthers averaged just 1.4 yards per attempt against the Buccaneers. On their first five first-down rushes, they collected 3 combined yards.

"It's a full group effort," Canales said

Monday. "(It) starts with me and the coaching staff, making sure that we have the right plan together for our guys."

Like Dowdle and Hubbard demonstrated Nov. 30 when the Rams arrived in Charlotte with the NFC's top record and left with a 31-28 loss. It was one of the Panthers' signature performances, highlighted by 164 team rushing yards.

It was a rare second half flash. Since Dowdle ran for 130 yards on 25 carries at Green Bay on Nov. 2, no Carolina back has reached triple digits. The outing also pinpointed the key to the Pan-

Please see **CAROLINA** | 6A

Toss losing record out the window when playoffs beckon



HERBERT
L. WHITE

It's playoff time in Charlotte.

It's been a while since anyone around these parts dared wake to such a reality, yet here we are. The Carolina Panthers are in the NFL's championship tournament for the first time since 2017 when Jerry Richardson

owned the franchise and Cam Newton was the quarterback.

The drought has been long and arduous - not as long as the Charlotte Hornets' reality (at least if you don't count the NBA's nearly worthless play-in round) but this region has been starved for anything resembling competent football. That it's arrived in this at times underperforming gang of literal youth and reclamation projects is al-

most beside the point. No one in their right mind is going to get excited about an 8-9 record and a backdoor division title (thanks, Atlanta Falcons!) unless it buys a ticket to the playoffs.

That's what this season's Panthers managed.

"It's just a great feeling to be able to bring that back here, to Carolina, to Charlotte, and to share that feeling of that first championship," coach Dave

Canales said. "And now the mentality shifts. It's 1-0 with a chance to win the world championship."

Yes, the Panthers have been confusing. Beat Green Bay on the road and the Los Angeles Rams in Charlotte but fell flat on their faces twice against New Orleans and were pushed to the limit by the New York Jets, who've been bad so long they're perennials. Carolina isn't

Please see **TOSS** | 6A

Record-setting RB Duncan transfers to JC Smith

By Herbert L. White
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Fabian Duncan is coming home to Johnson C. Smith.

The North Mecklenburg High graduate is returning to the Golden Bulls after a record-breaking run at Allen, where he earned SIAC player of the year as a sophomore. Duncan has two years of eligibility remaining.

Duncan, a 5-10, 210-pound running back, originally signed with JCSU out of high school, but transferred to Allen, where he led the SIAC with 1,301 rushing yards in 2025 (ninth in Division II) and 15 rushing touchdowns (tied for 14th). Duncan became the first player in Allen history to rush for over 1,000 yards in a season and tallied more than 100 yards in six games.

His career best was a school record 229 yards on 46 carries against Clark Atlanta, which included a program-tying three touchdowns on the ground. Duncan averaged

Please see **FORMER** | 6A



ALLEN ATHLETICS

North Mecklenburg High graduate Fabian Duncan (center), the SIAC's 2025 player of the year, has transferred to Johnson C. Smith after rushing for a school record 1,301 yards at Allen.

When whole, Hornets are lively

By Cameron Williams
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The Charlotte Hornets were on the losing end of another close game.

This time it was against Stephen Curry and the Golden State Warriors after giving up 34 fourth quarter points. After the Warriors started the third quarter on a 10-0 run, the Hornets battled back and held a five-point lead until costly plays shifted the momentum.

"Obviously not happy about the results," Hornets (13-23) coach Charles Lee said, "but I am really happy with the group. I think when you play a team like the Warriors... and a player like Curry and all the pieces around him, they force you to kind of do some different things."

"I think we took our defense to another level. We added some layers. We added some tools. The guys really competed within it. And I thought the togetherness of the group was really good to try to cover for each other all night, to try to get the ball out of Curry's hands."

Four Hornets scored in double figures: Collin Sexton (16), Kon Kneuppel (20), LaMelo Ball (27) and Brandon Miller (33), the second straight game he

Please see **HORNETS** | 6A

Trading GK Callender opens opportunities at Charlotte FC

By Herbert L. White
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Charlotte FC is changing its goalkeeper depth chart.

The Crown traded Drake Callender to Minnesota United for \$450,000 in general allocation money with \$350,000 in 2026 - equal to what they paid Inter Miami to acquire Callender - and \$100,000 in 2027. Charlotte FC retains a percentage of any future sale or trade of Callender and up to another \$300,000 in GAM if conditional thresholds are met.

"I'm extremely excited to join Minnesota United FC and be a part of a growing club that has big ambitions," Callender said in a statement. "I've heard great things about the fan

base and the atmosphere they create at Allianz Field. It's going to be incredibly special to get to play in front of them."

Charlotte acquired Callender in August as a backup to starter Kristijan Kahlina. Before his arrival, Callendar was Inter Miami's top goalkeeper before a sports hernia sidelined him early in 2025. He posted 19 clean sheets in 118 appearances across all competitions and helped Miami earn the 2023 Leagues Cup and MLS Supporters' Shield (2024) titles.

"Drake brings winning experience and a strong understanding of Major League Soccer to our club," Minnesota Chief sporting director Khaled El-Ahmad. "He has proven himself as a consistent shot-stopper and a leader on

the back line. We believe his presence will strengthen our defensive unit, and we're excited to welcome him to Minnesota United as we prepare for the upcoming season."

Before Charlotte, Callender made 91 starts over the four seasons with Inter Miami but lost his starting job after sustaining a sports hernia and subsequent surgery. Callender has international experience as well with the United States, and in 2023 and 2024 earned call-ups and a roster spot for the Concacaf Nations Leagues semifinals and finals.

With Callender gone, Charlotte returns Kahlina, Chituru Odunze and Nick Holliday as well as 2025 SuperDraft pick Jahiem Wickham, who was taken in the third round.



TROY HULL | THE CHARLOTTE POST

Carolina Panthers quarterback Bryce Young (right) and receiver Jimmy Horn Jr. celebrate after Young's touchdown against Seattle on Dec. 28, 2025 in Charlotte. The Panthers, who won the NFC South with an 8-9 record, play the Los Angeles Rams in the Wild Card round of the NFL playoffs Jan. 10 at Bank of America Stadium.

Toss Panthers' sub-.500 record out for playoffs

Continued from page 5A
in that pot of woe – at least not this year. They graduated to playoff mid-dling, good enough to be a threat in a shambling and prolifically bumbling NFC South, which if it were a college basketball conference, would be limited to a single bid for the NCAA post-season.
No need to look at the downside of making the NFL's show. As the ultimate professional team game, anything can happen even when you know better. Carolina is the fifth sub-.500 team to make the playoffs since the 1982 strike-curbed season. Those other four teams went 2-2 in their first round game.
One of the winners was the 2014 Pan-thers, who knocked off Arizona despite a 7-8-1 record.
The Rams, who return to Charlotte Saturday for a slice of revenge, are and should be a huge favorite. Los Angeles has an MVP-caliber quarterback in Matthew Stafford, elite playmakers on

offense and one of the sport's best coaches in Sean McVay.
Carolina? Bryce Young is no Matthew Stafford, and their most consistent playmaker is a rookie, receiver Tetairoa McMillan. The defense is middle-of-the-road and Canales is learning the ropes of leadership and team building. Other than the venue, nothing favors the Pan-thers.
Big deal. Carolina is ahead of the curve with Canales calling the shots. As the offensive play caller, there have been missteps, but no one called McVay dumb after the Panthers hung an L on the Rams a few weeks ago. If Carolina does it again, maybe McVay will be shamed and called out while Canales is hailed as a genius.
All that will be decided in three hours or so on Saturday. Bask it the accom-plishment, Carolinians, and don't apol-ogize, even if it turns into one-and-done.
Herbert L. White is editor-in-chief at The Post.

Carolina needs to jumpstart ground attack against Rams

Continued from page 5A
thers' run-first offense.
In their eight wins, the Panthers averaged 127.6 rushing yards per game. In their nine losses, they averaged 88.
"Again, it's all of us, it's making sure we're running the right styles of runs for our group," Canales said. "We can-not let people run through the line of scrimmage. Safeties, line-backers cannot run through the line of scrim-mage. From there, (it's) challenging the backs (to) get that ball and run physical downhill."
Hubbard remained pa-tient throughout much of the regular season to get that chance.
After compiling a career-best 1,195 yards in 2024, Hubbard gained 511 this season. After losing his starting role to Dowdle in Week 7, Hubbard's role de-veloped to third-down back and kick re-turn responsibilities.
More touches for Hubbard
What's most surprising was Hub-bard's failure to break a tackle during his 134 regular season carries. Over his previous four seasons, he was credited with 44 broken tackles, including 14 in 2024.
Hubbard's most productive outing this season developed during the Week 13 win against the Rams with 83 rush-ing yards and 41 receiving. During the final two games, both losses, Hubbard posted a combined 22 yards on nine carries.
Canales, the primary playcaller, called himself out.
"I love Chuba," he said. "Gotta give

him the ball some more. He's a guy I really trust."
Quarterback Bryce Young said Hub-bard's lack of touches has not stunted his locker-room presence.
"The way that he works. The way that he carries himself," Young said. "He's someone you always see in the locker room after practice, when a lot of peo-ple are gone; he's playing on the ping-pong table or having a conversation that is not football related. That's just the type of guy he is. He's always been a cornerstone since I've been here and that hasn't changed."
Said Canales: "Chuba is an absolute stud. He's one of the leaders of the group. I lean on him to make sure we're in the right place (and) we're focused. He challenges the whole group with how he works and how he prepares."
Bursting on the scene with a 206-yard outing against the Miami Dolphins on Oct. 5, Dowdle followed it up a week later with a 183-yard performance against Dallas. The Asheville native has been slowed by a toe injury the past few weeks and averaged 42.6 yards per game during his final eight regular sea-son starts.
Against the Buccaneers last week, the Panthers registered just 19 rushing yards on 14 attempts. The lack of a running game played a role in the Pan-thers converting just 1-of-8 third down attempts. Dowdle, a pending free agent, also fumbled a flea-flicker at-tempt during the fourth quarter, stalling a comeback bid.
The Panthers will need more produc-tion.
Dowdle has a million more reasons to deliver.

Former Allen standout Duncan transfers to JCSU

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118.2 yards rushing per game for the Yel-low Jackets, who went 6-5 last season.
Duncan joins a Golden Bulls squad that finished a program best 10-2, won its first CIAA title since 1969 and earned the school's first NCAA Division II playoff berth. JCSU ranked second in the CIAA in scoring average at 33.6 points per game, including 40 points or more in five games.
As the roster stands now, Duncan will compete for carries along with All-CIAA pick Bobby Smith, a 1,000-yard rusher as a redshirt freshman in 2025, as well as Antonio Crim, Kamaro Edmonds and Avante George, who all missed stretches of the 2025 campaign with injuries.
Bowser takes over as Albany State coach
David Bowser, JCSU's linebackers coach from 2023-25, is Albany State's new head coach.
Bowser, a Charlotte native and former St. Augustine's head coach, succeeds Quinn Gray, who was hired by Florida A&M to the



Smith



Bowser

same position. Gray led the Rams to the program's best season with a 12-2 record, the SIAC title and a pair of wins in the Di- vision II playoffs.
"As the landscape of college athletics continues to evolve, it was important for us to identify a leader prepared to operate as a true CEO of the program in today's col- lege athletics environment," said ASU athletics director Kristene Kelly, who worked with Bowser at St. Augus- tine's before the school shut down athletics sponsorship after losing accreditation.
"Coach Bowser has demon- strated success operating within that change, navigat- ing Division II football through roster management, multiple re- cruiting pathways, academic accountabil- ity and the realities of the transfer portal."
In addition to coaching duties, Bowser was special assistant to JCSU coach Mau- rice Flowers and director of player person- nel. Before St. Aug's, Bowser was associate head coach at Fayetteville State for two decades.



CHARLOTTE HORNETS

Charlotte Hornets veterans LaMelo Ball (left) and Brandon Miller are healthy and playing some of their best basketball with the addition of newcomers like rookie Kon Knueppel.

Hornets are lively when healthy

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tallied more than 30. Char- lotte was without Miles Bridges after he sustained an ankle injury the game prior gainst Milwaukee.
"That's a good young team," Warriors coach Steve Kerr said. "They've done a really good job putting to- gether a roster of guys who you can tell they love. They are talented and not an easy team to beat. We had to make 24 threes to win a close game, so that tells you how well they are playing."
The Hornets are starting the season on a good note, going 2-1 on the road with back-to-back wins at Chicago and Oklahoma City. They played 6-30 Indi- ana Jan. 7 at Spectrum Cen- ter.
Curry said of Kneuppel, who returned after missing an NBA game for the first time with an ankle injury: "[He is] impressive. For as young as he is, he plays

with such composure. He obviously can shoot the ball at a high level. You can't leave him open at all. He just has such a good quick release. He is shooting with confidence, and his play- making is very underrated too."
Knueppel admitted it felt weird being sidelined.
"It's tough to miss one," he said. "I hadn't missed a game in all of high school or college, so it was a weird feeling. I was getting really shaky before the last game because I wanted to be out there. We got in a really good spot with the rehab we did, starting in the third quarter of the Orlando game, just getting the ankle ready to go.
"Honestly, I didn't notice it out there at all."
Miller has quickly become arguably the Hornets' best player.
"I feel great," he said. "Just glad to be back playing with

my guys, encouraging them while I'm on the court with them this time. I took that long year off, encouraging everyone off the court, but now that I'm finally back and helping everybody, that's all I can ask for."
Knueppel added: "Brandon's been great. He's at his best when he's aggressive, and aggressive to make plays, whether the shot or the pass. The last couple games, it's been more with his scoring ability. He's as we saw before, a willing passer and a good passer. We just want him to be ag- gressive, be playing down- hill, getting to the bucket and being aggressive. He's been doing great for us."
A losing record isn't ideal heading into a new year, but if the Hornets can get healthy and sustain mo- mentum, early January sets up well for them.

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