



Children's Theatre of Charlotte reimagines Cinderella story as a comedy

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HERBERT L. WHITE | THE CHARLOTTE POST

Charlotte City Council member Malcolm Graham told reporters last week the proposed I-77 South toll lanes shouldn't be built to disadvantage lower-income communities.

Council member pushes service and assertiveness

District 2 representative Malcolm Graham hails safety and responsibility initiatives

By Herbert L. White
herb.l.white@thecharlottepost.com

Malcolm Graham wants a Charlotte budget that delivers on safety and manages growth.

Graham, who represents District 2 on City Council, shared his views on challenges and initiatives in west Charlotte in a 30-minute media availability on Jan. 9. Graham, who chairs the city's Budget, Governance and Intergovernmental Relations Committee, is a member of the Safety and Transportation committees. Responses are edited for brevity and clarity.

On collaboration with Mecklenburg

County to deliver social services, code enforcement, mental health and substance abuse outreach along the Beatties Ford Road corridor:

"We've done a lot of work on Beatties Ford Road, specifically targeting Catherine Simmons [Avenue] ... working in conjunction with Mecklenburg County focusing on [using] the New York analogy we're trying to fix the broken windows in a very narrowly tailored corridor to provide better quality of life.

"The city buying property on Catherine Simmons in November that we're going to transform into affordable housing - we will continue to bear down on those

types of initiatives. If they can work on Beatties Ford Road, it certainly can work throughout the city, I believe."

Prioritizing public safety and reducing crime:

"I want to be a lot more assertive. The first murder of the year occurred last week in District 2, and one of the [TV] stations ... interviewed a resident, and the resident said, 'You need to be a lot more assertive.' If you do the crime, you got to do the time, and I want this council, from my perspective, to be a lot more assertive in terms of loitering, panhandling, those types of issues that really im-

Please see **COUNCIL** | 2A

Stein's backing sends a message

Democratic loyalty is rewarded in contested primary campaigns

By Herbert L. White
herb.l.white@thecharlottepost.com

Gov. Josh Stein's endorsement of Democratic party loyalists in legislative primaries could determine the viability of his legislative veto.

Stein last week weighed in on races where Democrats bucked party orthodoxy to side with Republicans, including in Charlotte's House District 106, where state Rep. Carla Cunningham faces a primary challenge from Rev. Rodney Sadler. Cunningham has supported Republican overrides, notably on immigration enforcement and environmental protections. In return, GOP leaders promoted her to committee leadership posts. In December, Stein endorsed incumbent Rep. Rodney Pierce of Halifax County, who faces a challenge by former Rep. Michael Wray, whom Pierce beat in the 2024 primary.

"I am proud to stand with Rev. Dr. Rodney Sadler in his campaign to put people first," Stein said in a statement. "The people of North Charlotte deserve a representative who will fight for Democratic values, defend our public schools, and keep costs down. Rev. Dr.

Please see **STEIN'S** | 3A



Cunningham



Sadler



Stein

Without restoration of subsidies, health care insurance grows distant

By Cameron Williams
cameron.williams@thecharlottepost.com

Open enrollment for health care insurance ends Jan. 15, and with it goes the last opportunity for coverage in 2026.

Congress was supposed to have already decided on whether to extend Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act tax subsidies, but due to a government shutdown from Oct. 1-Nov. 12, 2025, votes are just beginning to take place with the House of Representatives voting to renew subsidies on Jan. 8. The Senate has yet to do so.

However, Americans enrolled in the federal marketplace have already received their new subsidy amount. Those who signed for coverage that started Jan. 1 already have already paid the first month's premium. The larger issue, however, is how many will have to choose between paying rent or health insurance.

Natalie Marles, who works at Charlotte Center for Legal Advocacy, is North Carolina benefits navigator program manager and paralegal advocate for Mecklenburg, Cabarrus and Union counties. She said the 2025-26 signup period has been one of the worst in terms of numbers enrolled since she started in 2016.

"This year open enrollment has been particularly challenging," Marles said. "This is because of the lower subsidies but also the price of insurance in general is now almost double or triple. In some cases, we have seen some of our own clients that weren't able to afford insurance, and some have had to decide to eat and pay rent or to have insurance. So, we've definitely seen a decrease in enrollment this year. I would say maybe 60% of our clients still enrolled in a marketplace plan, but the other 40% are

Please see **WITHOUT** | 2A



ARCHIVE PHOTO

The Martin Luther King holiday, first celebrated in 1986, wasn't adopted by every state until 2000 when South Carolina signed on.

MLK holiday endured long road of legislative opposition before adoption

By Herbert L. White
herb.l.white@thecharlottepost.com

The Martin Luther King Jr. holiday is universally celebrated across the United States with parades, festivals and service projects.

The path to adoption was more complicated.

The proposal languished in Congress 15 years after introduction before President Ronald Reagan signed it into law, then another 17 years for every state to sign on as a paid holiday. Advocates marched and made speeches; opponents resisted, using

veiled and openly inflammatory language to block the measure. Even the National Football League, where Black people make up 70% of its player rosters, flexed its economic might to push one holdout state across the finish line.

King's birthday was approved as a federal holiday in 1983 with North Carolina among the first states to adopt a paid holiday the same year. The first national MLK Day was celebrated in 1986 and by 2000, every state did as well.

Please see **PATHWAY** | 2A

Anti-ICE march in NC planned for February

By Clayton Henkel
NC NEWSLINE

Bishop William J. Barber II choked back emotion as he reflected on the death of Renee Nicole Good, the 37-year-old mother who was fatally shot last week by a U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officer in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

"My God, they're killing mothers. And the grossest image that I've seen in a long time - you have an [airbag] covered with blood and baby dolls in the dashboard," Barber said in recalling his reaction to seeing the videos of Good's shooting which have been widely circulated on social media. "The question in this moment is what kind of systems, what kind of attitudes create the atmosphere that can gin somebody up to the point that they would shoot a woman, a mother, at point blank range?"

The Department of Homeland Security and President Donald Trump maintain the ICE agent was acting in "self-defense." Barber did not see it that way.

"Because the spirit of hate has been unleashed. If it's not turned

Please see **ANTI-ICE** | 2A

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Council member pushes service and assertiveness

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pact the quality of life, the perception of crime in our community.

"I want to run people to services for sure, give them the help that they need, whether it's substance abuse or mental health, wellness, housing, workforce development opportunities, but we do all of that, and folks are still breaking the law, I think we need to be very assertive in enforcing the laws that are already on the book."

I think we have an opportunity to, under [Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police] Chief [Estella] Patterson leadership and working in conjunction with the city attorney's office, really even cracking down on businesses and landowners who buy property and lease them to those who are selling drugs. We just need to be no tolerance on a wide variety of issues moving forward."

On potential I-77 South toll lanes and the impact on communities:

I'm a member of the Transportation Committee, and lots going on there. In particular that's impacting District 2 is all conversations about the expansion of I-77 South residents along the Beatties Ford Road corridor are extremely concerned and frustrated regarding both of the plans that have been produced thus far by [North Carolina Department of Transportation] that really, from my perspective, continues to put burdens on Black and brown communities as relates to infrastructure and road widening.

"I 77 has a long history in reference

to that, we don't need to repeat those type of mistakes that we've made in the past.

... "I want to create an environment where residents can be heard. I want to create an environment where folks can have the opportunity to communicate with one another, and that we can talk to NCDOT and have a relationship that's mutually beneficial, because two things can be true at the same time, right? I-77 South probably does need to be widened, but it shouldn't be done at the expense of black and brown communities."

Constructing a fiscal year 2026 budget that reflects city priorities:

"I think we have taken several really good steps forward that demonstrates that we acknowledge that Charlotte is one of the fastest growing cities in the country, so growth and development is really important in intergovernmental relations in the budget. I'm not a finance guy, I'm not a CPA, so I'll be leaning on some of my colleagues for sure, but obviously, dealt with budgets at the state level as well as the local level for decades.

"Our budget cycle will be challenging at best. No prediction about what's going to happen. We're going to follow the [city] manager's lead as he presents the budget. Council has already gotten our schedule for our budget workshops, so we do our budgets as a whole. All the council members, not just the committee members, will be working on and receiving input within the budget."



ADOBE STOCK

Without restoration of insurance subsidies that expired last year, the cost of health care insurance through the federal marketplace will spike in 2026.

Without restoration of subsidies, health insurance grows distant

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not going to be insured for 2026, which is very sad."

Marles said some clients were able to qualify for Medicaid plans, but not many. The Medicaid income cut-off is generally based on 138% of the federal poverty level. It was expanded in 2025 in some states — North Carolina among them — to \$1,304 per month. Now, it is \$1,800 per month for individuals and \$3,065 for a family of three.

The increase helps a fraction of Americans who need health coverage. Another thing Marles said is that some clients must change their plan tier. In the health-care marketplace, there are five categories of plans: Bronze, Silver, Gold, Platinum and Catastrophic. The tier selected determines the amount paid for healthcare visits, deductible and out of pocket fees.

People that need more frequent care would likely need a Silver or Gold plan to lower costs. But, many don't have that choice because those plans are so expensive that without a substantial subsidy, it is unaffordable, because of larger out of pocket costs.

"Some have to choose a Bronze plan, which is not ideal, because some of them have a really high need for medical attention," Marles said, "so the co-pays and the deductibles for a Silver for a Bronze plan, each much higher than for a Silver plan that they were qualifying before.

"A lot of my clients, actually, the ones that are insured, are choosing a Bronze

plan instead of a Silver plan. They were paying like \$50 for a Silver plan last year. Now they have to pay \$300, so that's not affordable for them anymore. They have to choose maybe a Bronze plan, which they are going to pay pretty much the same that they were paying, but for a very higher deductible. Some of them didn't even have a deductible in 2025 and now they are going to have \$9,000 or \$7,000 deductible in 2026."

The Senate vote on the tax credit extension date has not been finalized yet due to partisan differences on the extension. The Senate is majority Republican (53 of 100 seats) who have been mostly in opposition of the ACA extension, so there will be pushback. Meanwhile, more Americans will go uninsured. One possibility is extending the open enrollment period if the Senate passes the subsidy bill to let people whose plans lapsed re-enroll.

"You never know when you have some type of accident at work or maybe some car accident," Marles said. "With the ACA, you are insured. Right now, the cost of health in the United States is very expensive. Just to go to the emergency room is going to cost you at least \$1000 or \$1,500 just to go there and give your name, right? So having health insurance will prevent you from having higher bills, or maybe even have to file bankruptcy or have a really high debt. ... Hopefully the extension of the subsidies will pass, and we'll really have to think about health insurance in future elections."

Pathway to the MLK holiday

Continued from page 1A

King was born on January 15, 1929, in Atlanta, but the federal holiday, which focuses on civil rights, the use of nonviolent activism to demand change and public service is celebrated on the third Monday in January. It wasn't an easy task for holiday supporters, who pushed Congress to create the bill and have Reagan sign it into law. There was a second battle: convincing states to follow suit with a paid holiday, which also sparked emotionally- and racially charged disagreements, especially in the South.

U.S. Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.), a co-founder of the Congressional Black Caucus, introduced the first motion to make King's birthday a federal holiday on April 8, 1968, four days after King's assassination in Memphis. It took 11 years for the bill to come up for a vote on the House floor but fell five votes short of the two-thirds majority needed to advance on a 252-133 count. Among the supporters were the CBC, the King Center for Nonviolent Change and President Jimmy Carter.

Supporters intensified their efforts, and the campaign got a cultural boost from musician Stevie Wonder in 1981 with the release of "Happy Birthday" to promote the holiday. The King Center organized a march on Washington that drew an estimated 500,000 people and King's widow, Coretta Scott King, along with Wonder, presented a petition signed by 6 million people to House Speaker Thomas "Tip" O'Neill (D-Mass.)

Two years later, the bill passed the House by 53 votes. O'Neill and fellow Democrat Jim Wright of Texas, along with Republicans Jack Kemp of New York and Newt Gingrich of Georgia, gave speeches supporting the holiday. Passing the Senate, though, proved contentious. North Carolina's Jesse Helms, who built his political career railing against civil rights advances and was particularly critical of King, openly opposed it. Helms introduced a filibuster, then presented a 400-page file that accused King of communist ties.

Still, the bill passed the upper chamber by 12 votes, with Sen. Strom Thurmond, an avowed segregationist and a 1948 Dix-

iecrat candidate for president, voting in favor. Reagan signed the bill in 1983, and the first federal King holiday was celebrated in 1986.

By 1986, 17 states had followed, but Arizona was resistant to adopting the holiday. In 1987, Gov. Evan Mecham rescinded predecessor Bruce Babbitt's executive order enacting a state holiday in Arizona.

"He said 'Black people don't need a holiday. Y'all need jobs,'" Dr. Warren H. Stewart Sr., senior pastor at First Institutional Baptist Church in Phoenix told the Associated Press last year. "That started the war."

In response, boycotts were launched against the state and the NFL threatened to remove the 1993 Super Bowl from Tempe if a 1990 voter referendum failed. The referendum lost with 76% of votes cast in opposition and the NFL made good on its threat by moving its championship showcase to Pasadena, California - costing Arizona an estimated \$500 million in lost revenue.

Arizona voters approved the King holiday two years later. Super Bowl XXX was played in 1996.

South Carolina was the last state to approve a paid King holiday for state employees in 2000. The decision coincided with the removal of the Confederate flag from the South Carolina's State House dome at the capitol. The stars and bars banner was removed from the capitol grounds in 2015 after the murder of Black parishioners at Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston.

MLK Day is the only federal holiday where Americans are encouraged take a "day on, not a day off." In 1994, President Bill Clinton signed into law a bill sponsored by Rep. John Lewis, a civil rights leader in the 1960s as a student, and Sen. Harris Wofford declaring a National Day of Service.

Nearly every major U.S. city - including Charlotte - celebrates the holiday with parades, street festivals and concerts in addition to service projects from community clean-up initiatives to food donations.



CLAYTON HENKEL | NC NEWSLINE

Bishop William Barber announces "This Is Our Selma," a memorial march from Wilson to Raleigh to be held in mid-February.

Anti-ICE march in NC planned

Continued from page 1A

around, it could destroy us all," he said.

Barber's remarks came as a coalition of North Carolina religious and advocacy organizations held a Friday press conference to announce "This Is Our Selma," a memorial march from Wilson to Raleigh in mid-February.

Barber said North Carolinians are tired of hate and tired of regressive policies that threaten Medicaid, restrict voting rights and instill fear in immigrant communities.

The coalition includes Repairers of the Breach, Indivisible, the North Carolina Council of Churches, the North Carolina Poor People's Campaign and the Union of Southern Service Workers.

Organizers say the need for a massive march became even more apparent after legislative leaders decided last fall to redraw North Carolina's congressional districts at the request of Trump to favor Republicans in the U.S. House ahead of the 2026 midterm elections. Critics have argued the new map undermines the voting power of the state's rural Black voters in the 1st Congressional District, which

has been represented by Black lawmakers for decades.

The 1st District seat, currently held by Rep. Don Davis, was North Carolina's only competitive House seat. The Cook Political Report notes that race is no longer a toss-up. The seat leans Republican.

"That's the only reason people do all this tricky redistricting and try to block voting rights is because they have considered that they cannot win in a fair fight," said Barber, who called the new map blatant and racist.

The Rev. Hanna Broome, director of religious affairs for Repairers of the Breach and president of the North Carolina Council of Churches, said the march from Wilson to Raleigh is not only a commemoration of a historic moment, but a continuation.

"One hundred fifty-six years after the ratification of the 15th Amendment, we are still pressing forward toward the promise of justice and democracy for all people," Broome said.

Dennis Gaddy, executive director of the North Carolina Community Success Initiative, said he was moved by a sign in the

chapel that read, "We won't be diluted, we won't be dismissed." Gaddy said his nonprofit represents thousands of people who have at one time or another found themselves entangled with the criminal justice system and are turning their lives around.

"And there are people now who are eligible to vote that don't know it, and they need to be empowered to go to the polls," Gaddy said. "That's one of the things we'll be doing along this movement."

In-person, early voting for the March primaries begins Feb. 12, and the group hopes the march will put a spotlight on that opportunity to be heard.

Barber encouraged the group to not speak out against the policies or an administration they oppose, but to speak out boldly in support of policies they would love to see pass including healthcare for all, fully funded public education, and living wages.

"All over the nation, people of goodwill must decide now to stand and push for democracy and a society worth having and then love forward to get it."

« PEOPLE OF NOTE »

Post adds Vorachith as reporting fellow

Jaslynn Vorachith has joined The Post for a semester of reporting on the Charlotte community.

Vorachith, a junior communication arts major at Johnson C. Smith University and Berry Academy graduate, is an Emerging Journalist Fellow, which exposes students and recent college graduates to extensive real-world reporting opportunities. Her work will appear on The Post's print, web and digital platforms.

In addition to joining The Post, Vorachith is an anchor at Golden Bull TV, an on-campus broadcast program JCSU. She also produces audio podcasts,

conducts interviews and edits multimedia content. Vorachith is also active with the University Sustainability Garden as part of her sustainability minor. The program supports community gardens across Charlotte through its aquaponics initiative to address food insecurity.

Raushanah Butler has been appointed senior director of alumni engagement at Winston-Salem State University.

A South Carolina State University graduate, Butler has more than 15 years of experience strengthening alumni connection, volunteer leadership and phil-

anthropic engagement across higher education. She started work on Jan. 12.

Before WSSU, Butler was director of alumni engagement at Emory University's Candler School of Theology, where she developed comprehensive strategies to increase alumni participation, volunteerism and philanthropy. She also collaborated with annual giving teams to help grow alumni participation and philanthropic support.

Photographer Jerry Taliaferro has published on Amazon "Black Woman As Muse."

The book, a compilation of images of African American women from all walks of life taken over three decades, is a homage to the beauty of women who inhabit the day-to-day lives of most Americans.



Vorachith



Butler

NC teachers walk out over benefits, funding

By Kate Denning
CAROLINA PUBLIC PRESS

“Our public school system is not OK, our students are not OK, our educators are not OK,” said Jennilee Lloyd on why she was protesting near a Morrisville intersection last week, even though she’d prefer to be in her classroom teaching. Teachers from more than 50 North Carolina schools staged a “walkout” Jan. 8 to draw attention to issues facing school funding and teacher pay in the state. It’s the first in a series of planned protests over the months until lawmakers return for the start of a new legislative session in April.

A few miles down the road from where Lloyd stood, Mills Park Elementary School teachers gathered at a Cary intersection with signs and matching t-shirts that read, “Today’s lesson: Standing up for yourself.” Drivers honked in support and runners breathlessly thanked them for the demonstration.

Seemingly every homemade sign named a different grievance — the lack of a state budget, elimination of master’s pay, rising health care premiums, frozen step increases.

Caitlin Dowell, a second-grade teacher at Mills Park, was nearly finished obtaining her master’s degree when she moved to North Carolina from New York in 2016. Her new co-workers were the ones to inform her that just three years before, North Carolina eliminated its master’s pay program which rewarded teachers who obtained the advanced degree with a salary increase.

While Wake County and a few other districts, primarily in the Triangle, offer locally funded master’s pay today, it’s far from the statewide guarantee eliminated 13 years ago. That was Dowell’s first red flag that teacher benefits were headed in a disappointing direction.

Years later, the state rolled back health benefits for retirees for those hired after Jan. 1, 2021 — an example of the progressively worsening state of things, Dowell said. These changes to teachers’ benefits combined with already low pay stack up to create a profession that Dowell wonders why anyone would willingly choose to go into going forward.

“For me, when you go into a public servant position like teaching, your salaries are low, but the good thing is you’re kind of taken care of by the state afterwards,” she said.

“To be able to have health benefits when you retire is a huge benefit, which is why people go into the profession. So when you take that away, there’s gonna be no one that wants to go into teaching. You get paid so little and you’re not getting anything additional. Who’s gonna sign up for that?”

Teachers as well as other state employees are now facing rising health care costs as the State Health Plan’s budget deficit prompted increases on out-of-pocket costs for the state’s employees. Now, Dowell is looking at a health care premium nearly triple what she once paid.

“All of these costs are increasing to live here, but our salaries are not keeping up with that,” she said.

North Carolina remains the only state in the country without a budget a week into 2026 as lawmakers continue to butt heads. The stalemate leaves a lot of factors up in the air, just one of them being wage increases for teachers. An initial proposal of the budget from the House last May actually restored master’s pay and offered higher starting salaries — although the Senate’s proposal diverged.

But the fate of any proposal is unclear as the state exceeds six months without a resolution. The inability to come to a consensus on these key issues for educators is sad, Dowell said.

“Even within the General Assembly you have this divide of how we should

be treating teachers,” Dowell said.

“And this is the same party (controlling the House and Senate), so even if you take politics out of it, this is just two sides that are not agreeing on how to do right by teachers.”

Aside from being funded themselves, educators are sounding the alarm on classroom funding, too.

A study released in December from the Education Law Center gave North Carolina an F for its ranking of 50 of 51 based on the amount of state and local revenue it spends per student. The state received another F in funding effort with the study saying North Carolina “makes a lower than average effort to fund its schools” despite the state’s fiscal capacity being categorized as average.

The state received a C for its ranking of 17 of 48 in funding distribution for its “progressive” allocation of funds in which high-poverty districts receive 5% more per student than low-poverty districts. The passing grade might seem ironic given recently renewed restlessness over a decades-old school funding case, Leandro v. State of North Carolina, after the state Supreme Court once again delayed a ruling in December.

In the 1994 lawsuit, the plaintiffs from five low-wealth counties claimed the state was not fulfilling its constitutional duty to provide a sound, basic education to all children on the argument that their children didn’t have access to the same education and resources as children in wealthier districts.

Despite multiple rulings in favor of Leandro spanning decades — the most recent being in 2022 — the newly-Republican majority state Supreme Court reheard the case in February 2024, but has yet to issue a decision nearly two years later.

Educators are pushing for the court to settle Leandro once and for all and enforce the additional funding recommended as part of the remedial plan developed for the state in 2019.

In a December press conference, North Carolina Association of Educators President Tamika Walker Kelly said the court’s delaying of a ruling was neglectful of students and educators, as well as the legislature’s lack of an approved budget.

“Once again, (the state Supreme Court) ignored the Leandro case, the clear constitutional promise that every child in this state is entitled to a sound basic education,” she said.

“And with that choice, they made a decision to neglect almost 1.5 million public school children here in North Carolina. They neglected their needs for books in classrooms. They neglected their need for school counselors and nurses in our buildings, they neglected the need for us to have safe buildings, smaller class sizes and educators who are supported — not exhausted and burnt out.”

Honoring the court’s consistent rulings in favor of Leandro is key for school funding in the state for a number of reasons, Lloyd said. While the funding schools would receive as a result of the Leandro case would go toward all the typical classroom resources, it would also help provide additional support staff in schools and thus teacher retention and satisfaction.

While protests requiring absent teachers can often garner criticism, such as the massive 2018 Red4Ed march that led to closures in over 40 school districts for the day, Lloyd said it’s not about taking a day off. It’s necessary in order to draw attention to the issues facing educators, students and the state at-large.

“It’s not about leaving our students at school,” she said.

“It’s very much about that we need the citizens of North Carolina to truly understand what the issues are with public education so that our students and us in our schools can be fully funded.”

Stein’s backing sends a message in NC primaries

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Sadler will help us build a North Carolina where we can all afford to thrive.”

Said Sadler, a community activist and first-time candidate: “It is a true honor to receive the endorsement of Gov. Josh Stein. In the N.C. House, I will stand with Gov. Stein to build a stronger North Carolina where everyone can thrive.”

Democrats are a sizable majority of District 106’s electorate, so the primary winner is virtually assured a win in November’s general election.

Cunningham downplayed Stein’s endorsement.

“While I respect the office he holds, the principle of separation of powers exists for a reason — to ensure balance and keep government accountable to the people, not personal agendas,” she said in a statement. “Our communities deserve leadership that listens, not intimidation, division, or political pressure. Several months ago, I made it clear to the Governor and his staff that our district will no longer accept empty promises. The needs of our families, seniors, and children are real and urgent.”

Deal-making is part of the political process as elected officials use give-and-take to win concessions for constituents or gain leverage on pet legislation. In North Carolina, where votes are cast near evenly for Democrats and Republicans, gerrymandered districts give GOP a clear legislative advantage in the General Assembly. For Stein to sustain a veto, Democrats, who can’t afford to lose a vote among their caucus, must stay in line.

“Stein’s move is about strengthening his political power,” said Thomas Mills, publisher of the Politics North Carolina newsletter and a longtime Democratic campaign operative. “Right now, Democrats in the House have a narrow one-vote margin to sustain his veto. However, several House members, including Cunningham, have sided with Republicans to override vetoes, negating the most signif-

icant power the party has in legislative politics. When he was in the legislature, Michael Wray frequently voted with Republicans to override then-Governor Roy Cooper’s veto. Stein doesn’t want that headache again.”

Cunningham, a seven-term representative, says her independence has benefited District 106, citing \$23 million in state money to Mecklenburg, Medicaid expansion, more jail inspectors and an \$835 million investment in mental health and substance abuse services.

“My career has been dedicated to improving lives across North Carolina and ensuring every voice is heard — not silenced to serve one politician’s goals,” she said. “I believe in service that helps our community thrive, not partisan loyalty.”

Successful primary challenges are rare in North Carolina, but there’s precedent. Aside from Pierce beating Wray two years ago, Sen. Val Applewhite, who unseated incumbent Kirk deViere in 2022. Stein is betting his endorsement carries enough weight with voters to push out Democrats who defy the party’s legislative agenda, especially because of their thin veto margin.

“Leaders of the minority party have few enforcement measures to keep their rank-and-file members in line,” Mills said. “They can’t dole out pork or committee assignments. They have limited ability to assign offices or other perks and the ones they do have are often because of the benevolence of the majority party, which means they come with strings attached.”

“Stein is stepping up as a legislative enforcer. He’s using primaries as a tool to punish disloyalty. He’s also trying to strengthen the Democratic caucus by electing more loyal members, which, in turn, bolsters his veto power. As a minority party, Democrats’ primary job is to stop bad legislation and, in the case of a budget bill, influence spending priorities.”

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« GIVING BACK »



CAROLYN TARRANT

Metro Charlotte Chapter AARP, a nonprofit organization of persons 50 years old, co-hosted Trunk or Treat at West Charlotte Community Center and donated 200 pounds of food to Statesville Avenue Presbyterian Church’s Nourish Up program. Chapter members also donated classroom supplies to Devonshire Elementary School.

The Charlotte Post

The Voice of the Black Community

Gerald O. Johnson | CEO/PUBLISHER

gerald.johnson@thecharlottepost.com

André P. Johnson | CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER

andre.johnson@thecharlottepost

Herbert L. White | EDITOR IN CHIEF

herb.white@thecharlottepost.com

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Finish the work King died doing

Let's honor Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday by remembering his final mission — and by picking up the mantle he left behind.

Every year, America remembers a dream. But the work that placed King in the greatest danger was not dreaming. It was organizing to make the dream real. King was assassinated in Memphis in April 1968 while supporting striking sanitation workers and preparing to launch the Poor People's Campaign. He was there because he had come to understand something fundamental about American life: that racism and economic exploitation are intertwined, and that neither can be defeated without confronting both.

He was not killed while leading a desegregation battle in a northern suburb. He was killed while trying to unite economically struggling Americans across racial lines around shared demands for dignity, wages, and opportunity.

When that unity fails — when workers and the poor are kept divided — the consequences are not abstract. Wages stagnate. Healthcare becomes conditional. Food insecurity spreads quietly. People turn on one another while decisions that shape their lives are made far out of reach. Division does not just weaken movements; it deepens suffering.

The Poor People's Campaign was designed to confront that reality directly. King envisioned a coalition of poor people drawn from many communities—Black and white, Native American, Latino, Asian American, and other communities pushed to the margins—coming together to demand economic rights that democracy had long promised but rarely delivered.

History reveals a pattern we are often reluctant to name. In the United States, one of the most dangerous roles a leader can take on is the work of uniting poor and working people across racial lines — especially when that unity threatens systems that depend on division to function.

Fred Hampton understood that early. Most people remember Hampton only as a Black Panther, frozen in time at age 21, killed during a predawn police raid in Chicago in December 1969. But before joining the Panthers, Hampton first gained recognition as a teenage organizer in the NAACP. As a youth leader, he showed a rare ability to mobilize people, build coalitions, and translate moral clarity into action.

That instinct carried forward. As a Panther leader, Hampton helped build the original Rainbow Coalition — bringing together the Black Panthers, the Puerto Rican Young Lords, and the Young Patriots Organization, made up largely of poor white Appalachian migrants. In one of his most consequential public moments, Hampton stood at a press conference alongside William "Preacher" Fesperman, a leader of the Young Patriots, to declare that poor and working people had more in common with each other than with the forces exploiting them.

That image — Black, brown, and white organizers standing together, unapologetically—was the point. Less than a year later, Hampton was killed by Chicago police in a predawn raid.

The same pattern appears, with devastating clarity, in the lives of Harry and Harriette Moore.

Harry Moore was the founding president of the Florida NAACP and one of the most effective organizers the association ever produced. Under his leadership, Black voter registration in Florida surged despite poll taxes, intimidation, and violence. He fought for equal pay for Black teachers and worked closely with labor and progressive allies, believing racial justice and economic justice could not be separated.

Harriette Moore was not simply his wife. She was an organizer, educator, and strategist who sustained the work under constant threat.

Despite Harry Moore's effectiveness, he was never elevated into the national leadership of the NAACP. The historical record offers no single explanation. What it does show is that his work — rooted in voter power, labor solidarity, and interracial organizing—placed him at extraordinary risk in the Jim Crow South.

On Christmas night 1951, a bomb exploded beneath their home in Mims, Florida. Both Harry and Harriette Moore died from their injuries. Their crime was not extremism. It was effectiveness.

Malcolm X's life followed a similar arc. After returning from Mecca in 1964, he spoke and wrote about encountering a brotherhood that crossed racial lines. His politics remained complex and uncompromising, but the direction was unmistakable: away from race as destiny and toward coalition as possibility. Within a year, he was assassinated.

King came to the same conclusion. His final campaigns were not a departure from civil rights work. They were its fulfillment. He understood that rights without economic security are fragile—and that democracy without solidarity is easily divided against itself. That truth matters now.

Ben Jealous is a professor of practice at the University of Pennsylvania and former president of the NAACP.

In King's America, value one another

Martin Luther King Jr. set out to break down divides in our nation.

I am a product of his mission. I never viewed anyone that looked different than me as "different." It never truly crossed my mind as a kid. Sure, once I got older and the world puts it in your face all the time it b e c o m e s

CAMERON WILLIAMS

more obvious, but I accept people for who they are — people. As a child in all the blissful innocence I consider it a privilege to have never seen anyone as different because of the tone of one's skin.

That's because of King. He closed the divide — one that should not have been there in the first place. In his "I have a Dream" speech, King said he hoped

the nation would rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed. I think it started to work.

Call it naive if you will, but for me to go through my elementary school years not knowing my classmates were different because of melanin level, I think King broke through. It is sad, though, to hear stories from my grandparents that they never got the same opportunity to live a childhood where being friends with Black people didn't turn heads.

Both sets of grandparents grew up in the 1960s at the height of the civil rights movement. It is heartbreaking to understand their perspective because Black and white — the way it comes across to me — were pitted against one another during this era.

Fast forward to 2026 and in my opinion, King wouldn't be happy with the pro-

gress America has made. Just look at the last 10 years. National media force feed us news about white people killing Black people and Black people killing white people. Can we take a step back for once and see that these narratives are driving the nation apart.

No race is free of crime. National media — the MS NOWs, CNNs, and Fox News among others — constantly make it apparent what race did the killing and what race was the victim.

Stop it! We all bleed the same and should be treated the same. Why should I feel any differently about someone that looks like me being victimized versus someone that doesn't? Short answer, I shouldn't. Anyone's life that is taken should be mourned and what we get by letting major media entities drive the narrative is

a hardened heart.

For that, I am sorry, Dr. King.

You had a dream that this nation would live out the meaning of its creed that all men are created equal. You were right, but for some reason unbeknownst to me, America wants chaos and division.

As a Caucasian male working for an African American publication, I see daily the racial inconsistencies Black people face. Until we do better by one another, stigmas will not fall, prejudices won't end and equality won't be achieved.

So, my encouragement to you: Let's truly value one another for the people we are and not focus on skin color. It doesn't make us who we are.

It is 2026. It's time to do better, America.

Cameron Williams is a reporter at The Post.

'Justified' and the killing of Renee Good

One of my kids recommended to me that I watch the program titled "Justified."



KARY LOVE

I was prejudiced against it because it appeared to be one of those Clint Eastwood "cops as killers" programs that have so warped American culture into one celebrating violence and war while somehow pretending to preach the gospel of Jesus, though not living it. Turns out it was worse than I prejudged.

The first episode reveals a U.S. marshal, honorable law man that he is, giving a notorious "narco-terrorist" hit man a chance to leave Miami or be killed by a deadline. When the deadline approaches, the good Marshal meets the hit man at a table at a restaurant. Following the usual banter so beloved by American movie goers, the hit man draws, the Marshal is faster and the hit man is the hittee, dead on the table. The shooting is "investi-

gated" and found, as is the title of the series, justified. Now I was so horrified that in a kind of trance, or temporary insanity, I watched more episodes.

As the story arc unfolded, the moral arc of the program revealed its forlorn judgment: sometimes one must be evil to defeat evil. Soon the question of justified killing became confused. Was the killing by the bad guy of another bad guy to stay in business (drugs, protection, prostitution) justified? Was the killing to take over another bad guy's territory justified?

I watched in growing horror until I watched the epiphanic, truth-exposing episode, where all was revealed: the good marshal had had enough and he went full on bad guy to defeat the bad guys. The "good Marshal" had become the enemy of all he stood for, but it was justified to defeat the enemy.

This was just before I watched the video of the ICE agent killing Renee Good. Soon enough it was claimed the ICE Agent had to kill Good because she had "weaponized her car"

and she was a "domestic terrorist" deserving to die because of turning her car around. Having been fully brainwashed by Justified, I should have admitted it is a paragon of American narrative. I should have been happy. I should have stood up and sang "The Star-Spangled Banner" while saluting the flag.

Having dedicated my life to the rule of law, however, I was instead troubled.

As a teenager I watched Vietnam vets return home having been tortured by their experience, suffering from moral injury, who morphed into Black Panthers. Besides providing breakfast to hungry kids, they took up arms to defend their neighborhoods against the violence black people were subjected to by law enforcement and they claimed it was justified.

I watched as the War on Drugs of Dick Nixon morphed into a War on the Bill of Rights and violence and destruction used in that war spread while law retreated. The cops became robbers. And it was said to be justified.

Now I watch as the

Iraq/Wars of Choice vets morph into ICE agents along with testosterone-filled 18-year-old kids who want to pretend they are heroic warriors protecting America from the "worst of the worst." As people are shot and killed in the streets of America, the Bully Pulpit thunders out "justified."

The last nuclear weapons treaty between the USA and Russia is set to expire in February. No new negotiations are planned. Russia invades Ukraine. American invades Venezuela, threatens Greenland, Cuba, Mexico, and Columbia. China threatens Taiwan.

The Mideast remains a tinderbox following America's wars of invasion. The pandemic of violence spreads its oily, bloody miasma across the globe. The world is on a hair trigger seconds from extinction, and everywhere I hear the judgment: "Justified."

Kary Love, syndicated by PeaceVoice, is a Michigan attorney who has defended nuclear resisters and many others in court for decades.

Will investment ban boost housing stock?

In a Truth Social post, President Donald Trump says he's "immediately taking steps to ban large institutional investors



THOMAS KNAPP

from buying more single-family homes," and will call on Congress to legislate those steps.

He promises more details in his coming address to the World Economic Forum.

Absent those details, it's impossible to know if his proposal will make it past the courts, or whether Congress is likely to buy in. But of course the biggest question is whether banning home purchases by the likes of Blackstone, American Homes 4 Rent, and Invitation Homes would truly make housing more affordable for Americans.

Short answer: It wouldn't. Why?

A lot of the negative response from economists (some of them admittedly affiliated with those institutional investors or related businesses) centers

around the fact that large investors — those who own more than 100 homes — own only 2% of U.S. housing inventory. The proposed ban just wouldn't have much of an effect because that sector just isn't very big.

Another piece of the consensus response is that institutional investors are better equipped to manage rental property efficiently and uniformly on a large scale. No matter what the market in buying houses does, there will always be people with good reason to rent rather than buy — they expect to move in the near future, they haven't yet socked away enough for a down payment, etc. Fewer homes available to rent means higher rents and thus less affordable housing.

For me, a lot of the problem comes down to what economists call "time preference," though.

People with "high time preference" want the benefit of their work or investment quickly, even if that benefit may be smaller than they'd get from waiting.

People with "low time

preference" are willing to wait.

In the housing market, contractors might be said to have "high time preference." When they build a house, they want to sell that house (ideally, have already sold it prior to building it), bank the profits, and move on to the next house.

Institutional investors have deeper pockets, other profit centers, and an eye on long-term profit — below time preference." They can afford to pay the "high time preference" contractor to build 100 houses and not worry about going broke waiting on those houses to sell or rent out.

So, what happens when the institutional investors get shut out of the single-family residence market? Contractors have to either build "on spec" and hope the homes sell, or take single jobs versus large-scale projects, charging a higher price per home because they don't enjoy economy of scale savings from ordering enough material for 100 homes at a time.

When government shoves its nose into markets, the supposed benefi-

ciaries usually end up losing. Politically connected businesses pocket more money. Government bureaucrats enjoy more power. Everyone else pays through the nose. Politicians' assertions of contrary motivation just add insult to injury.

To figure out who benefits from Trump's proposal, note that it targets single-family residences.

Institutional investors in multi-family residences would enjoy a windfall as shortages of single-family homes pushed disappointed home buyers and desperate tenants into apartments — and drove up rents to boot.

I can't help but notice that one large institutional investor in multi-family residences — boasting "some of the most coveted residential properties in the world" — is called The Trump Organization. Go figure.

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

Fewer white men in college keeps MAGA in power

By Rann Miller

WORD IN BLACK

Since race can't be used as a factor in college admissions, the number of white men enrolled in college has dropped significantly.

Colleges had relaxed admissions standards for white men to help balance a class's racial and gender diversity, but the move toward meritocracy has hurt white men the most.

Maybe Donald Trump wants to make it harder for white men to get into col-

lege. Perhaps it is not an accident that affirmative action has come to an end in higher education institutions. Maybe none of this is the irony some people think it is.

The Trump administration's rollback of DEI policies has an unintended consequence: white men, the Trump administration's core demographic, are being excluded from college admissions. And that could be playing into the hands of white conservative elites who depend

on white men and their grievances to stay in power.

The prospect of fewer white men attending school is part of a larger trend. Since 2018, enrollment among white students has dropped by 19% across all sectors: public, private, two-year, four-year, selective and non-selective.

Since the Supreme Court banned race as a consideration for college admissions, enrollment among college freshmen who self-

reported as white dropped to 31% in 2025 from 40% in 2023.

Generally, in sheer numbers, more women attend colleges and universities than men. Therefore, in an attempt to secure gender balance, higher education institutions will admit more white men with lower test scores or other qualifications than women. In that sense, white men benefited from affirmative action.



TROY HULL | THE CHARLOTTE POST

Jalen Coker snagged a team-high nine passes for 134 yards and a score for the Carolina Panthers in their 34-31 loss to the Los Angeles Rams in their NFC Wild Card game Jan. 10 at Bank of America Stadium. Coker scored four touchdowns in his last six starts to establish himself as a complementary receiver to rookie Tetairoa McMillan.

A spark of relevance in Carolina

Week 5 rally against Miami set the Panthers on course to win the NFC South and berth in NFL playoffs

By Jeff Hawkins
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

At 1-3 for the second straight season, the Panthers were coming off a 42-13 beatdown by New England and started slowly against Miami at Bank of America Stadium.

Midway through the second quarter, the Dolphins sprinted to a 17-0 lead and lined up to defend a fourth-and-4 play near midfield.

The Panthers needed a big play after quarterback Bryce Young lost a fumble and threw an interception on the first two possessions.

Scrambling to the far sideline, Young

sidestepped linebacker Bradley Chubb then spotted rookie Tetairoa McMillan and released a pass a moment before linebacker Jaelan Phillips pushed him to the ground.

McMillan secured a 21-yard reception. Five plays later, Xavier Legette caught a 7-yard touchdown pass. The rare clutch reception by the second-year receiver helped fuel a Rico Dowdle-inspired comeback.

Imagine what could have developed if Chubb wasn't faked out by Young's juke move or if Phillips had been a step quicker for a sack. The Dolphins would have started their next possession be-

yond midfield with under seven minutes left in the quarter. They would have been in prime position to go up four scores against a demoralized opponent.

The Panthers' season could have spiraled out of control. Instead, coach Dave Canales' risky call led to a 27-24 win that sparked a season-best three-game winning streak. Dowdle torched the Dolphins for 206 rushing yards, the second-highest total in franchise history, and Young directed the first of six fourth-quarter comebacks.

Season saved.

The Panthers went on to alternate

wins and losses over the next 12 games, putting themselves in position to take advantage of the league's weakest division. They captured the NFC South title despite an 8-9 record and being outscored by 69 points.

Qualifying for the playoffs for the first time since 2017, the Panthers' season ended with a 34-31 loss to the Los Angeles Rams in a dramatic Wild Card matchup.

When the players cleared out their lockers Sunday, most spoke of the revived home-field advantage they received from late-season near-sellouts.

Please see **FINALLY** | 6A

Postseason moment wasn't too big for the Panthers after all

By Cameron Williams
cameron.williams@thecharlottepost.com

The Carolina Panthers proved they belonged in the playoffs.

Despite a gut-wrenching 34-31 loss to the Los Angeles Rams in the NFC Wild Card round, the Panthers were far from 10.5-point underdogs. The moment could have gotten too big when the Rams ran out to a 14-0 lead, but they rallied take a 31-27 lead with 2 minutes, 39 seconds to play.

Carolina, though, was without cor-

nerback Jaycee Horn when the Rams methodically picked the Panthers' zone defense apart in seven plays and quarterback Matthew Stafford connected with tight end Colby Parkinson for the game-winning score. Carolina coach Dave Canales admitted to feeling mixed emotions afterward - they lost but proud of his players' resiliency to not fold when they went down early.

"There's such a mix of emotions in the locker room right now of guys who are proud of what we've accomplished

and proud of what we've gotten and sick about the missed opportunity that was right in front of us," Canales said, "and that's going to sting. That's going to sting for a good while. But I asked the guys to keep their heads up and let this fuel you for what we're going into and to understand how hard it is to work to get into this position where you get this kind of opportunity."

Bryce Young proved he could be Car-

olina's franchise quarterback moving forward. While he wasn't stellar at 21-of-40 passing for 264 yards, a touchdown and an interception, he made critical plays in key moments that helped lead the rally.

"I am so proud of the way that everyone responded to adversity," said Young, who added 24 yards rushing and a score on three carries. "Whatever it may be, the way that we fought, the way

Please see **PLAYOFF** | 6A



Young

Closing tight games an issue for the Hornets

By Cameron Williams
cameron.williams@thecharlottepost.com

Late game woes still haunt the Hornets. Before going on a five-game road trip, they stumbled during a back-to-back home stint that included a loss against Indiana, the NBA's second-worst team based on record at 9-31. As in the previous night's game against Toronto, The Pacers hit a game-winning shot late.

Indiana forward Pascal Siakam, who finished with a team-high 30 points and 14 rebounds, made a driving layup with 11.5 seconds to go.

Some controversy arose whenever Siakam hit the go-ahead layup. Charlotte (14-26) coach Charles Lee ran to midcourt to signal for a timeout to set the offense. The officials apparently didn't see him and Indiana's T.J. McConnell stole the inbounds pass from LaMelo Ball.

"I didn't get much of an explanation," Lee said about not getting the timeout. "I think that most of it was because they didn't see it. Again, the ball goes through the basket with 11 seconds to play, the team goes down

Please see **CLOSING** | 6A



CHARLOTTE HORNETS

Collin Sexton (8) of the Charlotte Hornets brings the ball up court while guarded by Jamal Sheard (23) of the Toronto Raptors in the first half during their game at Spectrum Center on Jan. 7.

Pep Biel remains with Crown on transfer; Nikola Petkovic loan

By Herbert L. White
herb.l.white@thecharlottepost.com

Charlotte FC's keeping a core midfielder on the roster and shipping another to an MLS West rival.

The Crown announced earlier in the week that midfielder Pep Biel has been acquired from Olympiacos on a permanent transfer. Biel's contract makes him a Designated Player and runs through 2027, with a club option for an extra year.

Charlotte FC sent midfielder Nikola Petkovic to Seattle Sounders FC on a season-long loan in exchange for Seattle's 2027 third round pick in the MLS SuperDraft and up to \$250,000 in 2027 general allocation money

if certain performance-based benchmarks are met.

Biel, 29, tallied 12 goals and 15 assists in 35 league matches over two seasons, including 10 goals and a team-best 12 assists in 26 matches in 2025 - making him one of 11 MLS players to reach the 10/10 plateau. His goals tally tied Wilfried Zaha for second among Charlotte players. Biel was shelved by knee and hamstring injuries that forced him to miss the postseason.

"Pep proved that he is a difference maker in this league and one of the key attacking players with a good work rate at this club and we're delighted to welcome him permanently on a long-term contract," Charlotte general

manager Zoran Krneta said in a statement. "We hope to see him bounce back from his late-season injury and return to the MVP-caliber form we saw last year."

Petkovic, 22, played in eight games across all competitions last season, with a goal and an assist. Moving him to Seattle gives Charlotte roster flexibility to improve depth.

"It is crucial for young players to earn minutes to continue their development," Krneta said. "We are happy to partner with Seattle on a loan opportunity for Nikola to earn more first team minutes this year. This move opens up a U22 Initiative slot and international roster spot which gives us more options to improve the squad at other positions."

Davidson recognizes '92 soccer pioneers

By Steve Goldberg
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

In fall 1992, Davidson College was preparing to host the first of three consecutive NCAA Men's College Cup final fours.

The dream of Wildcats coach Charlie Slagle and athletic department marketing director Pat Millen, both Davidson alumni, with support of then-athletic director Terry Holland, was to raise the profile of Division I soccer championship by making the small college town soccer's version of Omaha, Nebraska, where the college baseball World Series is held every year. They pitched the NCAA and were granted the 1992 and 1993 events. They hosted in 1994 as well.

What they never expected was that the Wildcats soccer team, often good but never great, would advance to that first tournament on campus and turn the first official College Cup into the hottest ticket in the Carolinas.

That 1992 team and other Class of 2026 inductees to the Davidson College Athletics Hall of Fame, including former basketball head coach Bob McKillop, were honored at halftime of the Davidson men's basketball game against Rhode Island on Jan. 10.

Please see **DAVIDSON** | 6A



TROY HULL | THE CHARLOTTE POST

Carolina Panthers cornerback Mike Jackson (2) celebrates his interception against the Los Angeles Rams with teammate Tre'von Moehrig in their 34-31 loss in the NFC Wild Card round on Jan. 10, 2026, at Bank of America Stadium.

Playoff stage wasn't too big for Panthers after all

Continued from page 5A
that we always stuck together. ... Again, a super special locker room. [Losing] is tough."

Jalen Coker stepped up in a big way with nine receptions for 134 yards and the go-ahead touchdown.

"It's awesome to see," Young said. "Not surprised at all. He is a special player and a special guy. The way that he works and carries himself... I am not surprised at all with a big moment like this and him stepping up and him being himself."

Rookie receiver Tetairoa McMillan was almost at a loss for words postgame. He was thankful for the fans that showed up to support the team when most national media did.

"Obviously, a lot of people doubted us," McMillan said. "I'm sure that's a given. Being the only team in the playoffs with a losing record, but that's just how the cards turned out. For some reason God wanted us in the playoffs to give ourselves confidence; to give the city of Charlotte confidence that we're here and we can continue to do tremendous things."

The Panthers enter the offseason with question marks. What do they do about free agent running back Rico Dowdle?

How do they address holes on defense, especially at linebacker, or offensive line?

Young's fifth year option was picked up, something every quarterback selected first overall since 2011 has managed.

While Canales wouldn't comment on Young's contract, he approved of how the quarterback performed against the Rams.

"Gritty," Canales said. "Just gritty and tough. [The Rams] are a really good pass-rushing group, and [Young] made plays. He extended the plays and found guys down the field consistently. He ran a touchdown in from a little bit further out. ... I just can't say enough about the way Bryce stepped up and played in this game."

The experience will go a long way. Going into the game against a Rams team with a roster comparatively short of playoff experience, it's a building block Canales hopes will propel them in the future.

"When we came here as a staff, our whole goal was to create a brand of football that we can be proud of," he said, "and that is what we are doing. We're building something from the ground up, from the basics."

"The fundamentals and the technique and all of that and trying to build it the right way. I'm just so proud to bring that to the Panther fans, to bring a brand of football that they enjoy watching and that they can connect with."

Finally, 'real playoff football' relevance returns to Carolina

Continued from page 5A
Despite Carolina's inconsistencies, the second-year regime of general manager Dan Morgan and Canales took a big step toward revitalizing the franchise.

If nothing else, the Panthers proved they were prepared for "real playoff football," guard Robert Hunt said. "We took a really, really good team, who I think could go win the Super Bowl, to the end of the game. This place was rocking. That was beautiful."

"We've got a core group of guys that's coming back. We can compete with anyone."

Looking forward

With a sense of rejuvenation, the Panthers entered the offseason with several questions. Here are some of the most significant issues to be addressed ahead of OTAs in the spring:

- Highlighted by Dowdle, the Panthers have 19 unrestricted, four pending restricted and two exclusive-rights free agents this offseason. How Morgan handles the team's depth could determine if they successfully repeat their division title.
- The Panthers extended Young's rookie contract to five years, according to general manager Dan Morgan. Young posted career highs in passing yards (3,250) and total touchdowns (27).
- When asked during their separate post-game press conferences, Canales and Young both deflected the questions. Since entering the league, Young compiled a league-best 12 game-winning drives.
- Panthers defensive coordinator Ejiro Evero was roundly criticized for directing a soft zone on the Rams'



Canales

game-winning drive Saturday. Quarterback Matthew Stafford completed 6-of-7 passes and covered all 71 yards through the air.

Canales, who revealed Evero earlier this season signed a contract extension through 2027, is reportedly set to interview for head coach vacancies in Atlanta and Las Vegas.

· What will Morgan do at left tackle? Starter Ikem Ekwonu suffered a ruptured patellar tendon Saturday that will require surgery and recovery time between six months to a year. It was a tough break for Ekwonu, whose representatives were in the midst of negotiating a new contract.

It also means Morgan will be forced to acquire a top-line replacement to start next season.

· Carolina has a rising star in McMillan, who recorded a franchise rookie record of 1,014 yards and paced all first-year players with 70 catches and seven touchdowns. He's a finalist for NFC offensive rookie of the year honors.

The room also has Jalen Coker, who is emerging as a trusted WR2 after scoring four touchdowns in his final six starts. Then there's Legette. Too often, the 2024 first-round draft pick dropped passes, ran indifferent routes and failed to display awareness on the field. Canales routinely defended Legette. Is time running out?

· Canales, known as a quarterback guru, attended more defensive and special teams meetings last season. Canales often promotes a tough, family-like, locker-room culture. He described the Panthers' playoff performance as "gritty."

Cornerback Mike Jackson attempted to sum up the season by suggesting "we've got a lot to build on."

Closing tight games still a sore spot for the Hornets

Continued from page 5A

one, I thought I came out and called a time-out, but it obviously wasn't seen or heard."

Brandon Miller was ejected after receiving his second technical foul early in the third quarter, leaving the Hornets without an important scoring option.

Ball scored a game-high 33 points off the bench, his first reserve role since his rookie year.

"It's all just basketball," Ball said. "So, pretty much, just whenever you are in between the lines, I feel like it's all the same."

Ball said it didn't matter if he started or came off the bench, he wanted to win.

"I am just being open-minded," he said. "We all want to win, so just trying to figure out the best solution."

Although Ball was productive, he made crucial mistakes down the stretch. With 1:03 left, the Hornets up three with three seconds into the shot clock, Ball's halfcourt lob to Moussa Diabate was stolen and McConnell cut the lead to one.

"I didn't start today so I could finish the back end," Ball said. "I take full responsibility for that. I think that is my fault. That

last lob, we could have dribbled it out, and just some other silly possessions before that. Even the last pass [to Sexton for the final shot], I should have shot that instead of putting Collin in that position."

Other than the late mistakes, Ball was productive with minutes structured to play in half-quarter stretches.

"[We were] just trying to find a way to get more creative with how we manage Melo's minutes in order to keep him in a good place health wise," Lee said, "and also, just coming off that last game, we wanted to find a way to make sure we can have him in at the end of games."

"And sometimes when you start, and some of the stretches that go on getting stuck out there, maybe before a media [timeout] or something. You come off the bench, it helps us regulate his minutes, and then I thought he was able to play more minutes in the fourth quarter, so he had a great pop tonight. He gave us a huge boost off the bench."

Charlotte is on a road trip that started with a win Jan. 10 at Utah, followed by a loss Monday at the Los Angeles Clippers.



DAVIDSON ATHLETICS

Davidson's 1992 soccer team advanced to the first NCAA Soccer Cup semifinal on the Wildcats' home pitch. The team was inducted to the school's athletics hall of fame.

Davidson soccer pioneers

Continued from page 5A
The road leads to... Davidson

The tournament finals in Davidson sold out before the college season even started in August.

Tom Sorensen wrote in The Charlotte Observer, that Slagle "marketed the tournament the way the World Wrestling Federation markets WrestleMania."

The improbable journey to actually play in, and not just host the finals, started with Slagle, a former Davidson goalkeeper in the early '70s who led the Wildcats to their first Southern Conference tournament title in two decades and their first-ever NCAA bid.

In the postseason's first two rounds, Davidson gutted out penalty kick wins against Charlotte and Coastal Carolina.

As the Wildcats team continued to win, demand increased. Well before they qualified for the semifinals with a 1-0 overtime win on the road over North Carolina State, there were none to be had. Organizers decided to increase capacity at

Richardson Stadium from 5,300 to over 8,000 by adding temporary bleacher seats that also sold out.

"We've been thinking about that all year," Slagle told the New York Times about the possibility of playing in the Final Four on its home field. No one besides Slagle and his Wildcats would have thought it possible. The 1991 team struggled to an 8-10-2 record.

The home team was joined by ACC powers Duke and Virginia, and the University of San Diego.

Davidson lost 3-2 in double overtime to San Diego in the semifinal game. Wildcats fans got their money's worth as all four of their tournament games, just like the SoCon final, went to overtime. The Wildcats played 552 minutes of soccer during the NCAA matches, the equivalent of more than six regulation games.

Including their quarterfinal win against NCSU and loss in the semifinal, Davidson went 17-5-3 that sea-

son. Slagle was named National Coach of the Year.

Slagle left Davidson in 2001 to become CEO of the Capital Area Soccer League, which was then the largest youth club in the state. In 2019, he joined the Richmond Kickers, a USL team, as vice president of community engagement and gameday experience. He would pass away after collapsing outside his Richmond apartment that July.

Yes, Santa, there is a Virginia

In the three years of the NCAA College Cup in Davidson, Virginia won every time. Before they defeated Indiana in the 1994 final, the legendary Hoosiers coach Jerry Yeagley renamed the event as the Bruce Arena Holiday Invitational, in respect to the dominance the Cavaliers coach had created for his program.

Arena would go on to coach the U.S. Men's National Team and several teams in Major League Soccer. He is currently head coach of the San Jose Quakes.

Mike Jackson evolves as a playmaker

By Jeff Hawkins

FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

Panthers cornerback Mike Jackson was forced to think about a question after a recent practice:

Which does he think about more: the dropped interception against the Green Bay Packers on Nov. 2 or first career pick-six against the Los Angeles Rams in Week 13?

Jackson paused for a few moments. "Hmmm," he said before settling on an answer. "The Packers. I ain't going to lie." Jackson's reasoning was simple.

He failed. After the Packers passed on a short field-goal attempt while trailing by seven in the fourth quarter, quarterback Jordan Love attempted a fourth-and-8 pass, rolling right before throwing across the field toward the end zone. Jackson stood alone. The pass was directly at him and an opportunity for a 100-yard touchdown return. He dropped it.

The Panthers held on to win, but Jackson took the missed attempt personally. He returned with a different mentality.

Modifying his practice regimen, Jackson dedicating time to catching passes from the throwing machine.

Entering Saturday's 31-27 wild card loss to the Rams at Bank of America Stadium, Panthers coach Dave Canales noticed - and appreciated - a difference in Jackson's routine.

"That's the cool thing about Mike, having the humility to work on his craft," Canales said. "Knowing if something shows up as a weakness or just a part of your game you need to work on, go and attack it. Don't avoid it."

"That's a great way Mike Jack just models that to the rest of the group. If something came up during a game that you need to work on, you should be there before or

after practice. It's really cool that he sees the work paying off because he's come up with some big plays for us."

Game-deciding drive

Few were more significant than his 48-yard interception for a touchdown against the Rams on Nov. 30, helping to propel the Panthers to a 31-28 victory, one of the biggest of the season.

The interception, which he anticipated from the snap, occurred four weeks after altering his practice habits. The overtime paid dividends.

"He's a guy I've known for a really long time," said Canales, who was an assistant in Seattle when Jackson played for the Seahawks. "He's always been a fierce competitor. He doesn't say a lot, but he's so professional in what he does."

Jackson started all 34 regular-season games since he was acquired from Seattle prior to the 2024 campaign. This season, while playing in the shadow of Pro Bowler Jaycee Horn, Jackson collected 68 tackles and a league-high 19 passes defended. He grabbed his career-best fourth interception against Seattle in Week 17, triggering a \$500,000 contract incentive.

After the dropped interception at Green Bay, "I took my game to another level," Jackson said. "Ever since then, I've made sure I got on the Jugs (machine) so that don't happen again."

Jackson picked off Stafford again in the third quarter Saturday with the Panthers trailing 20-17. The turnover led to running back Chuba Hubbard scoring on a 3-yard run at 14:34 of the fourth quarter.

The Panthers, who fell behind 14-0 in the second quarter, earned four of their eight wins when trailing at halftime. In their first postseason game since 2017, the NFC South champions came up short against the Rams.