



North Carolina high school basketball playoffs tip off

THE VOICE OF THE BLACK COMMUNITY SINCE 1906

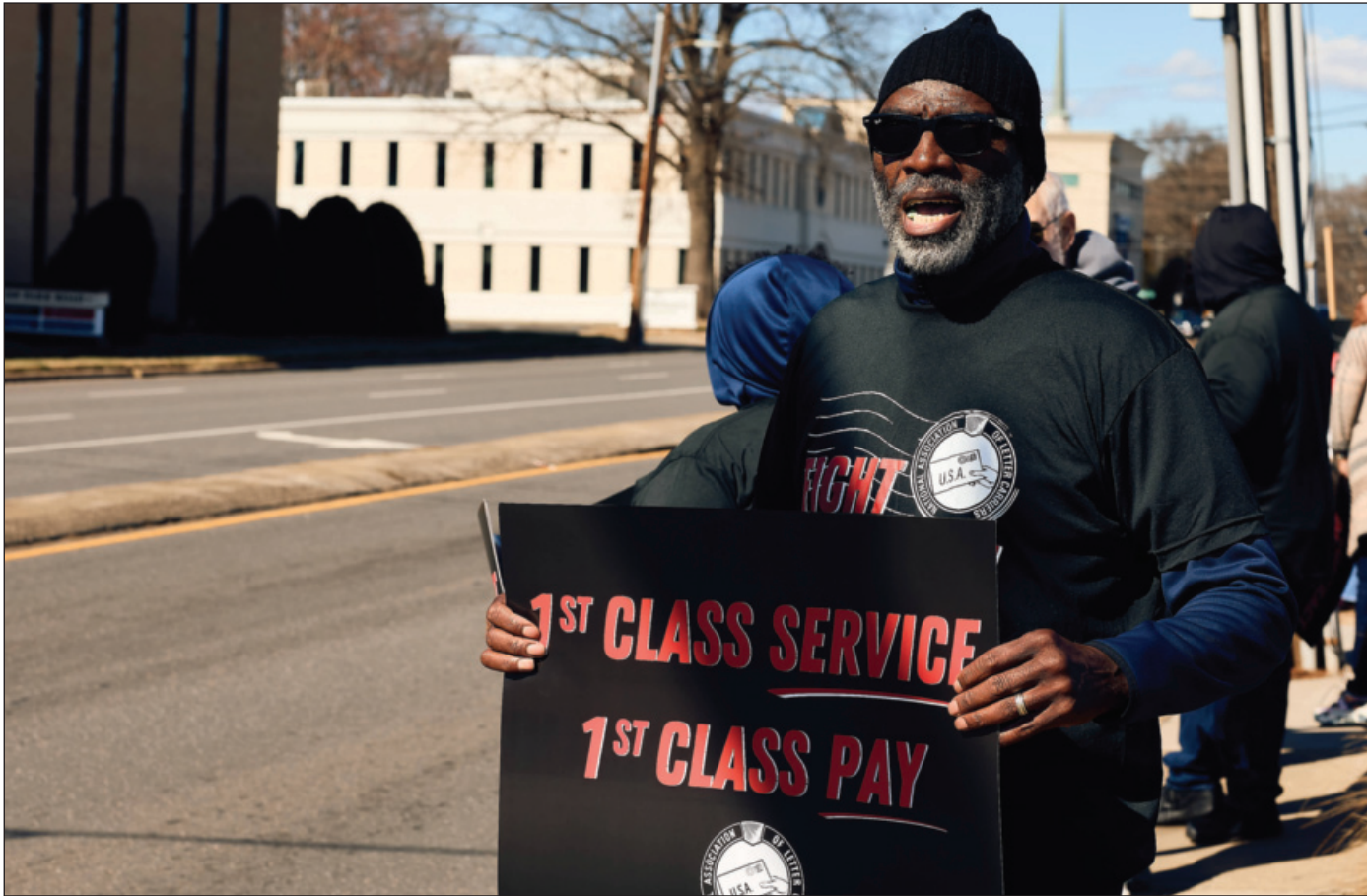
# The Charlotte Post

WEEK OF FEBRUARY 26, 2026

VOLUME 52 NUMBER 25

WWW.THECHARLOTTEPOST.COM

\$1.50



MATT LACZKO | THE CHARLOTTE POST

Sylvin Stevens, president of the National Association of Letter Carriers Branch 545, rallies with postal workers Feb. 22, 2026, in Charlotte. Postal workers demand better pay and workplace protections in their next contract with the U.S. Postal Service.

## Postal workers: 'All we want is a fair contract'

### Mail handlers and carriers rally for better pay, workplace safety in next deal

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

Postal workers want first-class pay for first-class work.

Mail carriers and handlers lined Park Road Sunday as part of a national rally for better compensation from the U.S. Postal Service. The workers, who are represented by the National Association of Letter Carriers, want USPS to approve an across-the-board pay boost as well as remove wage disparities that disadvantage employees hired after Feb. 15, 2013.

Workers who were hired before that date generally have higher hourly rates and fewer obstacles to top pay - which is now 15.5 years.

"All we want is a fair contract that keeps up with the rate of inflation," said Sylvin Stevens, president of NALC Branch 545 in Charlotte. "Right now, we're falling way behind the rate of inflation. ...

"There's a two-tier workforce. There's Table 1 and a Table 2, and it shouldn't be. It should be all one pay scale work ...

but a lot of the newer carriers that were hired after 2013 [on] Table 2 puts them at a lower starting wage, and it takes them longer to get up to that wage."

Another issue is workplace safety. Stevens, who has worked for USPS for 37 years, cited increasing threats employees face on their routes as more parcels go out for delivery.

"It's getting more dangerous with this job," he said. "Carriers are being robbed at gunpoint. As a matter of fact, just as

Please see **POSTAL** | 2A

## Housing insecurity widens in the region

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

Housing insecurity is growing across the Charlotte region.

Mecklenburg County Community Support Services, which released the 2025 State of Housing Instability and Homelessness Report, found that 77% of low-cost housing available in 2015 was wiped out by 2024 as redevelopment and gentrification spread across the region. Also, the housing affordability gap continued to widen.

The study combined local, regional and national data on homelessness, housing stock and affordability. The research included the number of people found in shelters as well as those without permanent housing; substandard housing and cost-burdened housing, defined as paying at least 30% of household income on shelter.

Researchers found:

- Low-cost rental housing is disappearing. The region's focus on building high-end housing as well as rising construction and rental cost increases is speeding the loss of affordable units. There is a 32,601-unit gap in rental units affordable for extremely low-income households who are at or below 30% of the area median income. In 2023, 41% of Black households are homeowners compared to 66% of white households and 44% of Latinos.

- Cost-burdened renters are becoming the norm. With fewer affordable housing units and a widening rent-to-income gaps, Please see **HOUSING** | 2A

## Families demand abuse probe at school

By Kylie Marsh  
THE TRIANGLE TRIBUNE

Nine-year-old Harlem Barrett is homeschooled.

He also is nonverbal and autistic. His mother, Atoya Barrett, told The Tribune that finding the right school for him has been tough.

For the past two and a half years, Harlem attended PreEminent Charter School in Raleigh, one of several campuses run by National Heritage Academies, a national for-profit education company.

Before attending PreEminent, Barrett said her son wasn't being academically challenged in his special education classes at Wake County Public Schools. "They weren't challenging him enough. I felt like he was doing a lot of coloring and whatnot, and I know my son can do much more than that," she said.

Harlem bounced around schools trying to find the right fit. At the recommendation of one of her neighbors, Harlem was accepted at PreEminent Charter, but Barrett said it's "been a rollercoaster" since then.

Harlem was doing wonderfully until May 2024, she said, when his special education teacher, Kaitlyn Jacobson, was arrested for misdemeanor child abuse. Soon after, his second teacher was let go. After that, his third teacher left.

"She was an excellent teacher, and she quit overnight," Barrett

Please see **FAMILIES** | 2A

### « APPRECIATION »

## Yvonne Pettis advocated for education, democracy

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

Yvonne Simmons Pettis, a longtime force in Charlotte's business and political communities, died Feb. 11 at age 83.

Mrs. Pettis started her professional career as a college educator, where she worked in North and South Carolina, Tennessee and Oklahoma. In 1977, she moved to Charlotte to launch Von Pettis Realty and became a force in civic circles, including president of the Mecklenburg County branch of the NAACP, PTA president at West Charlotte High School and Cochrane Middle School.

In addition, Mrs. Pettis was Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority's North Carolina state coordinator for the Mid-Atlantic Region, where she coordinated political engagement initiatives for 75 chapters as well as the inaugural statewide Divine Nine Legislative Day in 2016.

Mrs. Pettis was a member of the Black Political Caucus of Charlotte-Mecklenburg and volunteer at Democracy North Carolina and League of Women Voters. She was an advocate of voter access, leading an initiative for Sunday voting that included collaboration with community organizations to improve participation at the ballot box. In addition, Mrs. Pettis organized a political forum sponsored by a Greek-letter organization in 2005 and a candidate roundtable in 2015 that used a speed-dating format.

Mrs. Pettis' advocacy earned her numerous accolades, including the Order of the Long Leaf Pine and torchbearer ahead of the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Mrs. Pettis, who graduated North Carolina Central University in 1963, earned a master's degree at the University of Tennessee in 1972.



Pettis



FILE PHOTO

Measles cases are rising across North Carolina and more acute among children.

## Health experts plead for more vaccinations as measles hit NC, US

By Eric Tegethoff  
NORTH CAROLINA NEWS SERVICE

As measles cases mount in North Carolina and across the country, health experts are urging people to get vaccinated.

The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services says 18 cases of measles have been reported since December. The issue is especially acute for young people - all but two of the cases were in people under the age of 18 - and the unvaccinated or under-vaccinated.

Dr. Cameron Wolfe, a professor

of medicine in infectious disease at Duke University Medical Center, said health experts have to had redouble their efforts on conveying the importance of vaccines and that he's pivoted his conversations with patients and parents.

"No longer can you rely on the rest of the community having done the right thing for you," he said. "If you choose that your child or yourself is unvaccinated or under-vaccinated, then you likely will run into measles. I think that's the reality that we have to face upfront.

Please see **HEALTH** | 2A

### STAY IN TOUCH

Snapchat: thecharpost  
X: @thecharpost  
Facebook: The Charlotte Post  
Instagram: @thecharlottepost



#PaperThursday

INSIDE  
Sports 5A  
Life 1B  
A&E 5B  
Classified 4B

Digital edition:  
www.thecharlottepostnewspaper.com

To subscribe: (704) 376-0496 or online  
http://tcppc.com/Subscribe

Please Recycle



## Postal workers rally for 'a fair contract' in next deal

Continued from page 1A

recent as Feb. 12, almost ... a city letter carrier in Decatur, Georgia, ... was murdered while at work. We don't know the circumstances, if it was a theft or anything, but I'm certain there are a lot of perpetrators out there trying to get carriers for packages of value and the arrow key that the letter carriers carry, because the arrow key is a universal key that opens up every mailbox where that key has use."

The workers' demands are part of a long-term debate about retention, workforce stability, and equity at USPS. Newer carriers often receive fewer benefits despite performing the same duties as more experienced employees, and turnover is higher among non-career employees.

According to NALC, newer and veteran workers receive cost-of-living adjustments and general wage increases, with updates in 2023-25. The national contract expires in May.

"Union means togetherness," said Marcelle Vielot, an organizer with the MetroLina Labor Council. "The key here is that all working people are able to work with dignity, are able to be paid fair wages and also are able to get home safely. That's what collective bargaining does. We can't insure against every issue that could possibly pop up in the workplace, every hazard, but if we collectively bargain, we can be able to minimize these types of instances, allow us to have a safer working and more equitable working environment."

Organized labor is undergoing a renaissance nationally, including the South, which has resisted worker-led movements dating to the 1800s. Black workers have historically been foundational to organized labor and in 2025 had a union membership rate of 11.4% - which surpasses white (9.9%), Asian (8.7%), and Hispanic (8.9%) workers.

Black Americans, especially women, have emerged as leaders in modern union leadership and organizing. At the Park Road rally, the gathering of postal workers was overwhelmingly Black.

"I will say that Black folks have always been president in the labor movement," Vielot said. "In fact, statistically, Black folks are more likely



MAIT LACZKO | THE CHARLOTTE POST

Marcelle Vielot, an organizer with the MetroLina Labor Council, supports postal service workers' contract demands: "Union means togetherness," she said. "The key here is that all working people are able to be paid fair wages and also are able to get home safely."

to unionize than any other demographic. We may be a smaller portion of the labor movement, but our likelihood to be a member of a union is higher than anybody else. We know for generations of fighting, how important it is for us to be able to collectively bargain, to be able to advocate for ourselves, and to be able to know that we are not fighting any sort of workplace issues by ourselves. We know that there is strength in unity."

Stevens, NALC's local president since 2016, said postal service compensation hasn't kept pace with USPS's evolution as a business, and employees want a better deal.

"I've seen all the changes - the growth, the volume of mail decrease, the volume of packages increase," he said. "We're seeing a different fluctuation, just like any company. There are times when there's plenty and there's times when there's not plenty, but at the end of the day, the Postal Service is a company that the American public relies on, and the American public wants us to deliver to every household that has an address."

## Housing affordability gap widens

Continued from page 1A

more households struggle to remain in rental housing in Mecklenburg. In 2023, half of all renters (nearly 107,000 households) were cost-burdened, which is households earning less than \$75,000, with 53,900 households severely cost burdened. By comparison, 74,243 households were cost burdened in 2013, with 33,666 households severely cost-burdened.

Homelessness impacts thousands of people in Mecklenburg. The number of people who stayed in emergency shelters, safe havens, or transitional housing increased 6% from fiscal year 2024 to fiscal year 2025. As of June 2025, there were 2,404 unsheltered people in Mecklenburg County, a 14% reduction from the previous year, but the number of first-time homelessness in 2024 spiked by 11%.

The racial affordability gap is getting worse. The cost burden and housing in-

security is more likely to hit low-income households of color hardest. In Mecklenburg County, most renters who are cost burdened or can't afford housing are Black and/or Latino.

Black people make up 29% of the county's population, but account for 74% of homeless people. The most recent Point-In-Time census found 384 unsheltered people on a single night in Mecklenburg.

The study compiled regional data for housing instability and homelessness as well as all types of permanent, affordable housing. The report covers the county's housing inventory, impact of cost-burdened housing, evictions, and the Point-in-Time count of homeless people, rental gaps and the Housing Trust Fund. New to the study is information on housing vouchers, government financial investments, critical home repair, housing interventions, and emerging practices.

## Health experts plead for more vaccinations as measles hit US

Continued from page 1A

That's a different calculation of risk."

While Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. has been inconsistent on expressing the importance of vaccines, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services Director Dr. Mehmet Oz strongly urged people to get vaccinated last week. South Carolina has seen one of the largest measles outbreaks in recent U.S. history, with more than 900 cases reported.

The uptick in cases also

affects hospitals, and Wolfe said he thinks that unfortunately, people are going to learn the hard way.

"What does it mean for our health system?" he asked. "What does it mean for centers and the nation's health system to have to cope again with so many more imminently transmissible infections circulating? What does that do from a strain point of view?"

Wolfe said accurate information on measles can be hard to come by. Some

myths persist about vaccines, including a false link to autism, which Wolfe said actually detracts from research into autism. However, he does feel optimistic that Americans will get serious about measles.

"I have a lot of faith, in fact, that actually when presented with this issue," he said, "nine out of 10 people are going, 'I want to do everything I can to make sure I'm healthy and to make sure everyone else in my community is healthy because of the decisions that I'm taking.'"



The Creatives:  
A podcast about  
Charlotte's most  
creative people

On SoundCloud, Apple  
Podcasts and Spotify

## Families demand probe of student abuse allegations

Continued from page 1A

Barrett said she is now the face of a group of at least eight parents, because the others are scared about retaliation.

On Jan. 7, Barrett received an email from Solomon stating that Harlem had over 10 unexcused absences and his attendance must improve or the school "may refer the issue to the District Attorney and/or the District Court."

Barrett believes this was an act of retaliation against her for speaking out. "Retaliation is real, and that's exactly why, on Jan. 13, I pulled my son out, because I know once I started telling the story, things were going to get bad," she said.

Barrett said she would like a full, independent investigation into the school. According to North Carolina School Report Cards, PreEminent Charter has a D rating.

The Rev. Charlean Mapson sits on the North Carolina Council of Developmental Disabilities, as her son, Jadon, has autism. She told The Tribune that she's "not surprised" at the alleged PreEminent Charter incidents, sharing her own struggles with public and charter schools treating her son poorly.

"They don't think they can get caught because if they do it with a child who's nonverbal, the child cannot express what's happening," she said.

Mapson said there should be some sort of investigation into whether North Carolina's schools are actually meeting the requirements of The Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act, federal legislation that tailors public education to fit every student's individual needs, regardless of ability.

"We need more compassionate people in the field," she said. "You can't just go into teaching and just say, 'oh, I'm gonna do special needs just because I need a job.' You have to be prepared to understand that that job comes with a lot."

Barrett said she is now the face of a group of at least eight parents, because the others are scared about retaliation.

On Jan. 7, Barrett received an email from Solomon stating that Harlem had over 10 unexcused absences and his attendance must improve or the school "may refer the issue to the District Attorney and/or the District Court."

Barrett believes this was an act of retaliation against her for speaking out. "Retaliation is real, and that's exactly why, on Jan. 13, I pulled my son out, because I know once I started telling the story, things were going to get bad," she said.

Barrett said she would like a full, independent investigation into the school. According to North Carolina School Report Cards, PreEminent Charter has a D rating.

The Rev. Charlean Mapson sits on the North Carolina Council of Developmental Disabilities, as her son, Jadon, has autism. She told The Tribune that she's "not surprised" at the alleged PreEminent Charter incidents, sharing her own struggles with public and charter schools treating her son poorly.

"They don't think they can get caught because if they do it with a child who's nonverbal, the child cannot express what's happening," she said.

Mapson said there should be some sort of investigation into whether North Carolina's schools are actually meeting the requirements of The Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act, federal legislation that tailors public education to fit every student's individual needs, regardless of ability.

"We need more compassionate people in the field," she said. "You can't just go into teaching and just say, 'oh, I'm gonna do special needs just because I need a job.' You have to be prepared to understand that that job comes with a lot."



TRIANGLE TRIBUNE

Henry Edwards II, seated, with Edward Scott, left, Tommy Green and Dennis Gaddy.

## Formerly incarcerated share stories of success after prison

By Freda Freeman

THE TRIANGLE TRIBUNE

Formerly incarcerated men want people to know they should not be defined by their past. They want a genuine second chance.

Henry Edwards II is trying to help them get it. Edwards, who has never been incarcerated, is producing "I Am Successful... Unfolding" — a cinematic fashion event centered on the identity, resilience and transformation of formerly incarcerated Black men. The Feb. 22 event at The Cookery in Durham, includes a short film, fashion show and panel discussion. Tickets for the event are available on [www.eventbrite.com](http://www.eventbrite.com), and Edwards' Facebook and Instagram pages.

Hoping to debunk the stereotype of what formerly imprisoned men look like, the fashion show features clothes depicting struggle, shift, arrival and legacy.

"I Am Successful" came to me from the personal experience of being judged before being known. People will make assumptions about me based on my appearance without even knowing my story. That made me realize how many people, especially Black men, carry stories that aren't fully seen. So, I created 'I Am Successful' to shift narratives and highlight dignity, growth and purpose," Edwards said.

Edwards, a Snow Hill native, held similar events while living in the Washington, D.C., area. This will be his premiere event since

moving to Durham in 2020.

Edwards' mission is to elevate the stories of Black men rebuilding their lives with purpose, dignity and community support. His 2019 production featured a man arrested for drug possession the day after his college graduation, who served a lengthy sentence and is now a tenured professor at Howard University.

"These are the type of stories I want to share," Edwards said. "Yes, I understand you have those stumbling blocks, but you still have a chance to make it and become other things as opposed to what society and your community is still telling you."

Sharif Brown, of Knightdale, a mental health advocate and director of reentry with the Alliance of Disability Advocates, will discuss resources available to help those reentering society. Over the past nine years, Brown has transitioned more than 700 people from state and federal prison back into society, particularly those with disabilities. He helps with housing, employment, medical benefits, therapy, and sometimes family and location services.

"There is life and opportunity for individuals who have a justice-involved background. That particular felony does not dictate their future, that's their past. The conference he's putting on highlights individuals who have a justice-involved background who are now really productive,"

Brown said.

One of the panelists, Edward Scott, of Wendell, was in prison for almost 30 years. He is now a community help worker and forensic support specialist who helps reacclimate those coming out of prison.

"He's (Edwards) highlighting that even though an individual goes to prison, prison doesn't define that individual. He also shows that even though people made terrible decisions, they can come out and be successful and give back to the community," Scott said.

Panelist and Durham resident Tommy Green, who served 12 years, said everyone deserves a second chance. Green runs two reentry programs in which he helps formerly incarcerated men gain marketable life skills and those with chronic illnesses find health care.

"I want people to see that you can give a person with a horrible background or substance use or recovery a second chance or fair chance, and they can do something great. I want them to see guys like me who came from that life and made a change, and most of it is because someone gave us a chance," he said.

"I want my legacy to be just that, a person that has turned his life around, gives back to the community and is an upstanding citizen. I don't want to leave this world always being known as Tommy from the streets."



CATO INSTITUTE

The United States pumps billions of taxpayer dollars into health insurance annually through Medicaid, Medicare and the Affordable Care Act.

## Federal dollars support more than Obamacare

By Julie Appleby

KFF HEALTH NEWS

Subsidies. Love 'em or hate them, they dominated the news during the Affordable Care Act's sign-up season, and their reduction is now hitting many enrollees in the pocketbook.

While lawmakers continue to disagree on a way forward, and the politics of affordability keeps the issue front and center, it would be understandable to think these are the only taxpayer-funded health insurance subsidies in the U.S. system.

But that would be wrong. "The vast majority of people with health insurance get some kind of federal subsidy for it, from Medicaid to Medicare to the ACA to employer-sponsored insurance," said Larry Levitt, executive vice president for health policy at KFF, a health information nonprofit that includes KFF Health News.

These broad taxpayer supports are rarely discussed, though, as they apply to work-based coverage.

### Adding up the tax breaks

Nearly half of the more than \$1.1 trillion in annual spending on Medicare, the second-largest program in the federal budget behind Social Security, comes from general federal funds. The rest comes from payroll taxes and the monthly premiums paid by enrollees, who number more than 66 million.

Medicaid — the nation's largest health insurer, covering more than 70 million low-income people — costs more than \$918 billion annually. It's jointly financed by the federal government (65%) and states (35%).

For both programs, expenses are partially funded with taxpayer dollars. A less obvious form of federal support comes through employer-sponsored health coverage. Here, the impact on the federal bottom line is less visible, as hundreds of billions of dollars never reach the U.S. Treasury because it takes the form of tax breaks for employers and workers.

"It's a world apart from Medicare, Medicaid, and Obamacare — from the government writing checks to people," said Michael Cannon, director of health policy studies at the libertarian Cato Institute.

Job-based insurance provides coverage for at least 154 million people under age 65. (By comparison, about 23 million people enrolled in Affordable Care Act plans for this year, generally because they don't have job-based insurance. Extending the enhanced ACA subsidies that expired at the end of 2025 would cost about \$350 billion over a decade, or roughly \$35 billion annually.)

In fact, contributions to employer-sponsored health plans are the single-largest "exclusion" — a tax policy that allows certain income to be exempt from taxes — in the federal budget. For this fiscal year, the estimated amount is \$451 billion, according to the Joint Committee on Taxation and the Congressional Budget Office.

The money employers spend to offer health coverage to their employees can be written off as a business expense. And workers who receive this benefit don't have to pay income or payroll taxes on its value.

Those tax savings can be worth hundreds or even thousands of dollars a year for workers. The amount varies, with the biggest breaks going to those with the most expensive health plans and those whose wages put them in the upper tax brackets. Contributions to health savings accounts are among other tax breaks related to health insurance.

But the exclusion can be a difficult concept for insured workers to wrap their heads around, as most employees still contribute a portion of their pay to health coverage.

Even though they're not taxed on that, "it doesn't necessarily feel like a subsidy to people," Levitt said. "They do feel like they're paying."

### Baked into the tax system

The tax treatment evolved along with work-based health insurance pol-

icies in the U.S., fueled during World War II, when wage and price controls spurred interest in offering health coverage to lure workers. It was enacted into tax law in 1954.

Backers, which often include labor unions and employers, say it encourages companies to offer health insurance, as most large companies do. Because of the cost, smaller companies are less likely to do so, even with the tax incentive. Also, for workers, getting \$1 of health care coverage is worth more than an extra dollar in wages, which would be taxed and, thus, worth less.

Opponents of the tax break, however, note the lost revenue to the Treasury and that the tax exclusion, according to some economists, leads employers and workers to choose the most generous — and expensive — health insurance offered, which they say drives up health care spending. The tax break benefits wealthier workers more than those in lower-income tax brackets, and economists also say the amounts employers pay for health insurance might otherwise be spent on boosting workers' wages.

While there is currently no pending legislation to modify the tax break, the growing federal deficit has some employer groups worried the policy will change. Benefit experts say the outcome would vary.

"It's not clear that it would wind up in increased wages for everyone," said KFF's Levitt. "Some workers have more negotiating leverage than others."

Decades of efforts to cap or eliminate the exclusion have all failed.

"It's had a bipartisan target on its back for 40 years," said Paul Fronstin, a director at the Employee Benefit Research Institute, a private, nonprofit, nonpartisan organization.

Any change, however, "would raise some revenue, but it's also a tax increase for workers," Fronstin noted. "What would that mean, if their taxes go up? Do wages go up because they're not getting the same tax breaks? There will be winners and losers in that equation."

Still, because job-based coverage is the way so many Americans get health insurance, some policy experts warn that eliminating or even lowering the exclusion could remove an incentive for employers to offer coverage. While some employers would likely keep offering coverage even without the tax break — because it is a benefit that helps attract and retain workers — it is a huge expense, so others might drop it. Average family premiums cost an employer nearly \$27,000 last year, according to KFF.

"These are businesses, which weigh the costs of offering insurance, which have gone up dramatically," said Elizabeth Mitchell, CEO of the Purchaser Business Group on Health, an organization of large public and private employers that offer health insurance to their workers. "If there's not some sort of tax incentive, I would expect them to revisit whether they would bear those costs."

Cannon, of the Cato Institute, considers the tax policy bad because it takes choice away from workers, who might rather have increased wages, even if they are taxed. Those additional wages, he argues, could then be invested in tax-advantaged health savings accounts, used to pay medical costs.

Under the current tax break approach, "you are effectively saying let the employer control a huge chunk of your earnings and enroll in the plan the employer chooses," he argues.

Employers counter by saying they are better able to negotiate higher-quality, lower-cost health insurance packages than individuals could on their own.

Mitchell, at the employer group, said, "It is challenging for an enormous employer to negotiate fair prices with the large consolidated systems. So it's hard to imagine how an individual would be able to navigate our current system."

## Dems compete to reverse appeals court losing streak

By Brandon Kingdollar

NC NEWSLINE

The Democratic primary race in North Carolina's 4th Congressional District has attracted a lot of attention this election cycle.

But it's not the only race that highlights the conflicting priorities of Democratic voters seeking to recover from key state and federal losses in recent years.

The party's closest primary race may be the one for Seat 3 on the North Carolina Court of Appeals, a contest between long-time Wake County District Court Judge Christine Walczyk and Raleigh attorney and political newcomer James Whalen. The incumbent, Democrat Allegra Collins, is not running for reelection.

The winner will face Republican Superior Court Judge Craig Collins, who does not have a primary challenger, in November.

The Seat 3 primary has drawn more than 100 endorsements, with Democrats from the courts to the halls of the General Assembly to local offices weighing in on behalf of both contenders.

For Democrats, the stakes are enormous. The party has lost every Court of Appeals race in the state since 2020 — two years prior, the party won all three seats up for grabs. Those three judges are now the only Democrats on the Court of Appeals, and all three are up for election this year, meaning Republicans could hold all 15 seats on the court after November's elections.

The two incumbent Democrats seeking reelection in November are Judges John Arrowood and Toby Hampson. Neither has a primary challenger.

Here's what you need to know about the candidates in the Court of Appeals Seat 3 Democratic primary.

### Christine Walczyk

Walczyk said she is running to ensure a "strong, independent, balanced, and diverse Court that will safeguard individual liberties and due process."

"It's a false choice to suggest that people must choose between experience and a commitment to protecting our liberties. Throughout my career as a lawyer, I fought to defend constitutional rights," Walczyk said. "If voters are looking for someone who will steadfastly defend our constitutional rights and who can win in the fall, I am that choice."

Endorsed by former Chief Justice Cheri Beasley and former Justice Robin Hudson, two Democrats who served on the state Supreme Court, Walczyk has premised her candidacy on experience and preserving judicial independence. She has served for 19 years on the Wake County District Court.

"She spent a lot of time on the bench, and she seems to be very widely respected by her fellow judges," said Rep. Pricey Harrison (D-Guilford), who serves on the state House Judiciary 1 Committee and has endorsed Walczyk. "She has been the lead judge in family court for many years, so I think that just reflects how her peers respect her."

Harrison said in an interview with NC Newsline that she respects both candidates and thinks "either one would be great," but prefers Walczyk because of her qualifications. "She has the resume and the experience to represent us well on the bench."

Walczyk cites former U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, a Reagan appointee and the first woman to serve on the court, as a key inspiration for her judicial philosophy. On her website, she cites a quote from O'Connor stressing the importance of "maintaining the independent judiciary that the Framers sought to establish."

Judges, Walczyk has said, should set aside politics and refrain from advocating for causes or ideas on the bench. In her view, taking a partisan approach diminishes the integrity of the judiciary. "I am committed to bringing integrity, impartiality, and hard work to the bench," she said in a Dec. 1 post on social media.

Harrison said she does not view that level of impartiality as an impediment to the campaign, despite critics who say voters want a candidate who will take a strong stand on the issues that are important to them.

"We just want the fairest and the best

judges," Harrison said. "I don't know why Democrats keep losing. I really don't. But I don't think it's because of the kind of candidates we're running. I think it's the way the races have been run."

Walczyk also has the endorsement of the North Carolina Association of Educators, the Durham People's Alliance PAC, and the Black Political Caucus of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The top Democrat in the North Carolina Senate, Democratic Leader Sydney Batch of Wake County, also backs her candidacy.

She would be the only Democratic woman on the Court of Appeals if elected, following the departure of incumbent Judge Allegra Collins.

"We need skilled and experienced leaders on the Court of Appeals — and a Court that truly reflects the people it serves," Walczyk wrote on social media on Feb. 10. "Democratic women deserve a seat at the table."

### James Whalen

James Whalen, a Raleigh attorney who represented Justice Allison Riggs in the effort by Republicans to overturn her election victory, said he jumped into the race because Democrats need a candidate who can "protect our rights."

"I have focused my career on protecting our rights in these high-profile cases," Whalen said in an interview with NC

Newsline on Thursday. "I'm proud of the work I've done as an attorney, but experience after experience has shown me that the only true way to safeguard our rights is to have state appellate judges who have the right background to be protectors of our rights."

Whalen is a fresh face, with only five years practicing as an attorney — first under then-Attorney General Josh Stein on appellate cases for the North Carolina Department of Justice, and now in private practice focusing on constitutional and business issues. During that time, he has litigated on public education funding, elections and gerrymandering, issues that he said are central to his judicial campaign.

"We're in a moment of crisis. We just are, all over the country. And in North Carolina, we've been in it for a little while now," Whalen said, citing the nearly 30-year clash over equal funding for school districts and repeated fights over election maps. "We have taken a real beating in these judicial races."

He said his relative inexperience makes it more impressive that he has the backing of five former N.C. Supreme Court Justices, including former Chief Justices Henry Frye and Burley Mitchell. The two justices who endorsed his opponent, he noted, did so before he entered the race.

"The five who had a choice between two alternatives all endorsed me," Whalen said. "They certainly had questions about whether somebody who's been an attorney for as long as I have would be right for the job, but they've done thorough research as people who are steeped in appellate law."

He is also endorsed by the Durham Committee on the Affairs of Black People, the NC National Organization for Women, and the Progressive Caucus of the NC Democratic Party.

Whalen said while he has not served as a judge, he is the only candidate in the race to have litigated before the North Carolina Court of Appeals, experience that he said makes him better suited for the role and more familiar with the issues the court faces. Both Riggs and Justice Anita Earls also came from advocacy rather than judicial backgrounds, Whalen said.

"The ones who have been successful have not been trial judges," Whalen said. "We need young people who understand the threats we face and are willing to be clearer with voters and have the right background to meet this moment."

In his view, judges must be clear about their values and the importance of protecting civil rights. That openness, he said, does not compromise the neutrality of the court.

"I will not pick winners and losers based on things outside of the merits of the case. I will be impartial to the parties," Whalen said. "I am not impartial to the rule of law. I am not impartial to justice. I am not impartial to our rights."



Walczyk



Whalen

In other  
**Words**  
The Charlotte Post

Download the podcast at  
[thecharlottepost.com](https://thecharlottepost.com)

## 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.com

Herbert L. White | EDITOR IN CHIEF

herb.white@thecharlottepost.com

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

## February is about Loving decision, too

We keep Black History Month on one shelf and Valentine's Day on another.

One is supposed to be about pain and struggle. The other about flowers and pastel sugary hearts. Public remembrance of the most important Supreme Court decision about love in American history — Loving v. Virginia — waits for June, as if love itself were a summer excursion.



BEN  
JEALOUS

My life has taught me that matters of the heart belong in Black History Month too. Indeed such a short and bitterly cold month needs the memories of courageous love perhaps more than any other.

When I was a child in the 1970s, barely a decade after the court decided Loving, I watched my parents hold hands in public and draw the kind of looks a child never forgets. The law had changed. The reflex had not. We honor Mildred and Richard Loving for their courage, and we should. Yet their victory was not a gift delivered from above. It was the law finally meeting the life people had already been living.

My maternal grandmother, Mamie Bland, taught me that long before I could name it. Her face was very English. Yet by Virginia law she was unquestionably Black. She carried the stories of our family quietly, without ornament, the way some people carry a Bible. She knew the South lived two lives at once — one written in statutes and another written at kitchen tables. Mamie believed the second life would outlast the first. She was right.

Virginia's history shows that interracial unions were never an exception. They were part of the everyday rhythm of the Commonwealth. After Bacon's Rebellion — hardly the only time Virginians of different races had made common cause — the ruling class answered with laws meant to keep Black and white people from finding one another again.

Those walls were rebuilt after Reconstruction and perfected in the Racial Integrity Act of 1924, the eugenic scheme that forced Virginians into two boxes: white or colored.

The hypocrisy was written into the fine print. The same statute that criminalized Black-white marriage carved out a special door so white Virginians could continue boasting of descent from Pocahontas and John Rolfe. By law you were 100% white even with one-sixteenth Native ancestry. And by the same law yet one-thirty-second African Ancestry made you 100% Black.

My own family sits inside that ledger. DNA confirmed what Mamie already knew. I descend from the Bland line of Virginia, a family that proudly traced its roots to the Pocahontas-Rolfe union. Yet my great-great-grandfather Edward David Bland was born enslaved because his father Frederick was the son of a Bland planter and an enslaved woman — and Frederick was legally owned by his own half-brother, Richard Yates Bland. That is not a metaphor. It is a document. It is a life passed from one column of a will to another.

Virginia celebrated a legend while punishing a reality. The colony preferred a story about John Smith rescuing an Indian princess to the recorded marriage between Pocahontas and Rolfe that produced living descendants. Myth was easy to salute. Intimacy was harder to face.

By the time Mildred Jeter and Richard Loving married in Washington in 1958, generations had already voted with their hearts. Couples crossed county lines, raised children in common-law homes, or kept their vows in quiet rooms. The state called those unions unnatural, yet they were as Virginia as the river and the red clay. In 1967 the Supreme Court did not create a new country. It recognized the one that had been breathing all along.

Judge Leon Bazile, who sentenced the Lovings to exile, said God had placed the races on separate continents and never meant them to mix. But the very families who wrote Virginia's laws had been mixing since the first ships anchored at Jamestown, perhaps even before. There is the truth defined by legislating otherness. And then there is the truth defined by loving one another despite it all.

That is why the story of Loving should be celebrated in February, too. Black history is not only the history of pain and protest. It is also the history of love surviving under threat.

Ben Jealous is a professor of practice at the University of Pennsylvania, best-selling author, and former National President and CEO of the NAACP.

## Laws and rules without protection

America is a nation that has laws and rules.

They govern our everyday lives. Wherever we go, at least in this country, we know we are protected. We know that we are safe because of them.



JAMES  
EWERS

As I was coming of age, my earliest recollection of rules was in my house. My parents had rules that I had to follow. For example, I had to make my bed, and I had to do my homework. Those were just a few of them.

I had the good sense to follow them. Not to follow them put me at risk. If you are old school, you know what I mean by the phrase, "put me at risk." Back then, there were some unjust laws that were in place. There wasn't much compromise about them. During my early years, there were rules in my city and state that didn't benefit all people. The overarching term to describe them was

segregation.

America just celebrated the Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday. He was one of many leaders who helped to change laws that gave people more rights. Without struggle and sacrifice, people of color and other marginalized groups would have been hopeless and forgotten.

The premise is that laws were made to protect all people. Is that premise still being followed? Let's fast forward to today as laws on the books aren't followed as they should be. In America, we have the right to assemble in a peaceful and orderly way. We should not be subjected to brutality or intimidation. Self-expression peacefully has always been a part of our democracy. Has that changed?

The city of Minneapolis has become the center of violence and protests. America is watching and the reviews aren't good.

The tragic death of Renee Good in Minneapolis has triggered a number of events where ICE agents have overstepped their au-

thority. This sentiment has been widely confirmed by citizens in the city.

Another citizen, Alex Jeffrey Pretti, was shot and killed by ICE agents. Video shows his registered gun was taken from him before he was shot. While the gun was registered in another state, he was shot after the gun was taken from him.

There have been different reports about the deaths of Ms. Good and Mr. Pretti. At this juncture, tempers are high and will remain that way for the foreseeable future.

Regarding the untimely death of Renee Good, the lead attorney for the Good family, Antonio M. Romanucci said, "We believe the evidence we are gathering and will continue to gather in our investigation will suffice to prove our case."

Public outcry favors both Renee Good and Alex Pretti. Many are saying the current administration has not given enough of a rationale to dispute claims of overstepping by these federal agents. Their statements are not grounded in law and order. However,

they are indicative of putting fear in the lives of folks in Minneapolis.

Another case in this same city involved a boy and his father. The boy is 5 years old. According to reports, the man had been granted asylum and therefore was in this country legally from Ecuador.

If you take a step back, what we have here is a 5-year-old boy detained in a prison-like setting. It's his fifth year on Earth and he is being held in a strange place by strange people.

I hope what is playing out in the city of Minneapolis troubles you, regardless of your political stripes. If you are in office, how are you feeling right now? So, America, we do have laws, some re-written and some interpreted differently. We have standards yet we have trouble adhering to them. What is happening to us?

James Ewers Ed.D. is an author and member of the National Association of Black Journalists.

## How low can President Trump really go?

Not talking about a party game here. I am talking about the meme Donald Trump delighted in sending out on social media during the Super Bowl game.



LIB  
CAMPBELL

How can anyone, even the most MAGA of you think portraying the Obamas as chimps was OK? That our morally bankrupt, convicted sexual predator, twice impeached, Jeffery Epstein loving president thinks this is a good idea should disgust and repel all of us.

Trump's mental decline is on full display now. He has a hard time processing clear thought. He slurs words, and generally reeks in disgusting behavior. He is a crook and a grifter who is a clear and present danger to our democracy.

Here and there are Senate voices saying on air that

this is not right. Truthfully, there should be a lot more hue and cry, hair-on-fire moments when most of us are screaming, "what the hell is going on?"

Is there anything we can do to stop him? I do not advocate violence, but I have talked before about the 25th Amendment, where a president can be removed due to incompetence. Now he is talking about doing away with elections and remaining in office, like the autocrat he has always wanted to be. Voices roaring resistance in numbers too loud to ignore get under his skin. Watch for him to start making bad decisions that will hurt all of us.

Our allies are abandoning us. Our friends in Greenland and Europe think we are nuts to put up with this.

Who among the MAGA cult will admit buyer's remorse? Surely not all of you have abandoned morality and social conscience to follow this man

into a way of life that is antithetical to all America has ever stood for!

The "now what?" question is bubbling up among us. Trump was annoyed at Bad Bunny's halftime performance of music sung in Spanish. I felt like dancing in the living room. We had taco salads for lunch. We eat tortillas and make bean Burritos. I think we should get a Babel course to learn Spanish.

No one is going to stop the browning of America. Trump has tried to get rid of African Americans, now he is going after Latinos. He can't pretend that he is not racist; we see it with our own eyes.

The mid-term voting has already begun in North Carolina. If you are not already registered, you may do so at early voting sites. There is a Board of Elections Office in every county. Contact them to find locations of early voting.

This is an important election. As voting rights and

civil rights are being stripped, we need to be loud.

I registered as a Democrat as soon as I was old enough to vote and have been a yellow-dog Democrat ever since. Years ago, we had a yellow lab, and I would tie a red, white and blue scarf around her neck and take her to the polls. Now is a time for a little holy boldness. This democracy rests on each of us.

Voting is a great American freedom, and a great sign that our democracy still works. A lot of what happens about Trump and MAGA is in our hands. Do we love America enough to keep it? The answer lies in each of us.

See you at the polls. Lib Campbell is a retired Methodist pastor, retreat leader, columnist and host of the blogsite www.avirtualchurch.com. She can be contacted at libcam05@gmail.com

## A 'post constitutional moment' in the US

"There will be Voter I.D. for the Midterm Elections," President Donald Trump declared in a Feb. 13 Truth Social rant, "whether approved by Congress or not!"



THOMAS  
KNAPP

While I oppose government ID mandates for any purpose — as did "conservatives," at least as late as the 1990s, when it came to national requirements of the sort — I don't consider voting a special case for which my objections need be stronger or weaker.

Voting in America is a ritual through which we flatter ourselves that we're engaging in "democracy," even "self-government," when 99% of participants periodically choose between two convergent (and nearly identical) wings of the single state-approved political party.

As for the other 1%, which includes me (I'm a partisan Libertarian), we enjoy the freedom to cough during communion, to whisper "I rather prefer freedom" as the crowd yells "Hail Caesar," but it's not like our votes are going to bring down the Church of American Government.

It makes about as much difference to how we're governed from D.C. as the selection of local Communist Party delegates in Norilsk made to how the Soviet Union was governed from Moscow.

Since voting is purely ceremonial affirmation of our masters' authority over us, I don't see that adding a card-flashing element to the liturgy makes much difference. I am, however,

glad to see Trump once again reaffirming Office of Management and Budget director Russell Vought's 2022 observation that "we are in a post constitutional moment in our country."

Vought says that like it's a bad thing, calling on his audience to become "radical constitutionalists."

His version of "radical constitutionalism," though, can't be found anywhere in the actual Constitution. Instead of the mere functionary described in the Constitution, whose job is to "take Care that the Laws be faithfully executed," Vought's envisions the president as Kim Jong Un on the Potomac.

Which brings me back to voter ID.

According to Article I of the Constitution, "The

Times, Places and Manner of holding Elections for Senators and Representatives, shall be prescribed in each State by the Legislature thereof; but the Congress may at any time by Law make or alter such Regulations, except as to the Places of choosing Senators."

And the Constitution leaves the selection of presidential electors to the states.

Here's the constitutional role of the president in American elections:

Nothing. So, constitutionally, Trump is not acting — and cannot be acting — as president when he bellows "whether approved by Congress or not!"

Post constitutional much?

But that's just saying the quiet part out loud. In reality, we've been in "post constitutional" mode for most of the country's history. As early as 1867, Lyndal Spooer noted that "whether the Constitution really be one thing, or another, this much is certain — that it has either authorized such a government as we have had, or has been powerless to prevent it. In either case, it is unfit to exist."

Now that even supposed constitutionalists are openly admitting it, the rest of us should start acting on it.

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



The Charlotte Post

Bringing you 52 Weeks of Black Brilliance.

Our stories. All year long.

# Sports

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2026



JOHNSON C. SMITH ATHLETICS

Johnson C. Smith basketball is a long shot to hoist the CIAA basketball tournament trophy in Baltimore while Virginia Union is a favorite along with rival Virginia State and Bluefield State.

## Final grades for CIAA basketball

Clear-cut separation between conference haves and havenots going into the postseason tournament

THE TRIANGLE TRIBUNE

The CIAA Tournament runs through Feb. 28 at CFG Bank Arena in Baltimore.

For those of us not traveling, the entire tourney will be streamed on ESPN+, and the championship games on ESPNU. Money well worth spending.

So, without further ado, let's get to it. And, for the 25th straight year, ladies first.

### NORTHERN DIVISION

Bowie State: B-plus. The Bowie State family suffered a tremendous blow in the sudden death of vice president of athletics and recreation Clyde Doughty Jr.

We're sure the Bulldogs have dedicated the rest of the season to Doughty. We upgraded Bowie State (8-1, 10-5) from B to a B-plus after knocking off Virginia State last week and moving into sole possession of first.

Coach Shadae Swan is in her 11th season. Bowie hasn't won a championship during her tenure, and the team's last postseason bid was in 2020, which it didn't get to play because of COVID-19. The Bulldogs also haven't won 20 games in a season since.

Bowie clinched the division title. That changes things some, but with four

losses to Southern teams, can Bowie compete with the bigger boys, er girls, in the tourney?

Virginia State: B. The Trojans haven't skipped much of a beat under first-year coach Milette Green, a former Wake Forest assistant. Hiring a Division I assistant coach has not always been successful at VSU. Who will EVER forget the dreadful hire of men's basketball coach George White? OK, we won't!

The Trojans (7-3, 11-5) still have the third best conference record, and CC won't be surprised to see them in the semifinals.

Virginia Union: C-plus. The Panthers finished 21-9 overall and 13-3 in the conference last season but were denied a postseason berth. So, they decided to participate in the inaugural Black College Invitational Championship and lost to Clark Atlanta and Livingstone. They also lost head coach Tierra Terry to Winston-Salem State.

New coach Alico Dunk has kept the team (6-3, 9-6) together and respectable, but they lost back-to-back games to Shaw! Nuff said.

Bluefield State: C-minus. The Big Blue Please see **CIAA** | 6A

## Bench depth key for the shorthanded Hornets

By Cameron Williams  
cameron.williams@thecharlottepost.com

The shorthanded Hornets look a bit shaky without a couple of starters.

They dropped games against Houston and Cleveland on back-to-back nights. But the bright side is both games were tightly contested, and the Hornets are getting key contributions from unheralded role players.

The Hornets played eight reserves against Cleveland on Feb. 20 and six off the bench the previous night against Houston. Tidjane Salaün, the 2024 first round pick, played 37 minutes in the two games. Pat Connaughton, who played 20 minutes against Cleveland, doesn't see the floor often. Other role players like Trey Mann and P.J. Hall also contributed.

Hornets coach Charles Lee was pleased with how the reserves contributed when the team desperately needed them.

"They're consistent competitors," Lee said. "They work their tails off every day. ... They have all had moments throughout their career, throughout this year, where they can play, they can hoop, and they've earned the respect and trust of their teammates and as

Please see **BENCH** | 6A



CHARLOTTE FC

Charlotte Hornets guard Josh Green blocks the shot of Cleveland's James Harden in a 118-113 loss Feb. 20 at Spectrum Center. The Hornets are 1-2 since losing Miles Bridges and Moussa Diabate to four-game suspensions for fighting.

## Chase for basketball state titles underway

North Meck is top seed in 7A draw; Lions No. 2 in 8A

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

The North Carolina high school playoffs chase is underway.

Mecklenburg County is represented in the top three classifications, with nine of 12 teams (75%) in the 8A West Region along with four each in 7A and 8A. The county has the top seed in the 7A (North Mecklenburg) tournament and second seed in 6A (Charlotte Catholic) and 8A (West Charlotte).

To set the stage for opening week, here's a look at Mecklenburg's contingent with their overall and conference records as well as first round games.

### 8A tournament

No. 2 West Charlotte (19-6, 7-3). The Lions' three conference losses were to North Mecklenburg, the 7A West's top seed. That those losses were within two possessions is testament to West Charlotte's potential to walk off with a trophy from the second seed.

No. 3 Hough (20-6, 7-3). The Huskies are pretty good, with a 20-win season in their pocket - the only team in the West region bracket to do so. Hough's certainly capable of bringing championship hardware back to Mecklenburg.

No. 4 Ardrey Kell (19-7, 6-4). Don't sleep on the Knights, who are consistently one of Mecklenburg's top basketball programs. They earned a first-round bye as the fourth seed.

Also: No. 10 Northwest Guilford (11-12, 6-4) at No. 7 East Mecklenburg (18-9, 9-2).

No. 11 South Mecklenburg (12-15, 4-6) at No. 6 Chambers (15-11, 4-6).

No. 12 Palisades (11-15, 4-6) at No. 5 Myers Park (17-8, 8-2).

Please see **HIGH** | 6A

## Kevin White is Charlotte's pick for athletics chief

By Cameron Williams  
cameron.williams@thecharlottepost.com

After four months of searching, the Charlotte 49ers have their new athletics director.

Kevin White, deputy director of athletics at Clemson, will take over as Charlotte's top administrator. He previously was chief operating officer and deputy AD at Northwestern and chief operating officer at Southern Methodist. He will be officially introduced at a public press conference Feb. 26 at Halton

Arena.

"I am honored to join Charlotte at such an exciting time," White said in a statement.

"Charlotte has tremendous potential, strong institutional support, and a passionate fan base. I look forward to working with Chancellor Gaber, our coaches, staff, student-athletes, and supporters to build a championship-driven cul-



White

ture and position Charlotte Athletics for sustained success."

White has been at Clemson since 2022, where he oversaw the football and basketball programs. According to his biography, during three years as basketball supervisor, the Tigers men's program had its best three-year stretch in school history with an Elite Eight appearance, 74 wins and ranking second among ACC schools in conference wins, trailing only Duke.

## Tim Ream keeps Charlotte FC, and himself, centered on task

By Steve Goldberg  
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

Sitting before a gaggle of media in the small auditorium that coach Dean Smith rechristened the Learning Center upon his arrival two years ago, Tim Ream was as calm, cool, and collected as he is when patrolling the defensive third for Charlotte FC.

Since leaving Fulham FC and London after 13 seasons in the English Premier League and Championship divisions - his first three and a half with Bolton Wanderers - to join Charlotte FC in 2024, Ream has been what he has always been: the consummate team player, and a leader in the squad's ascension up the MLS East table.

Joining midway through Smith's first season with the club in 2024, Ream has been part of the chemistry that has seen Charlotte im-

prove from ninth in 2023 (10-11-13), to fifth in 2024 (14-11-9), to fourth in 2025 (19-13-2).

The Crown surrendered 52 goals in 2023, scoring 45. In Smith's first season, the scoring improved by one, but the goal differential went positive at plus-9, and the 37 goals conceded were second best in the entire league. Last year saw the scoring improve, but the differential stayed at plus-9 (55-46). Only Philadelphia (14) had more shutouts than the 13 Charlotte produced (equal with Vancouver) in 2025. They were second only to Seattle (13) the previous year, with 12 (equal with LAFC). In 2023, they kept opponents out of the net just seven times.

### Man in the middle

Who will pair with Ream in the center of the Charlotte back line? With Adilson Malanda now in central defense for Middlesbrough in

the English Championship, Ream says Charlotte will still be a hard team to beat.

"There's a lot of work that's going on, and everybody who's here, myself, Privs (Andrew Privett), and even the guys who are coming in, we've all kind of been around."

One of the guys coming in is veteran centerback Henry Kessler, who signed recently as a free agent. The 6-4 New York City native won't be available for the first match at St. Louis on Saturday due to injury. A former University of Virginia standout, Kessler was the sixth pick in the 2020 MLS SuperDraft and played 98 games for the New England Revolution from 2020-24. Coincidentally, he made 25 appearances for St. Louis last season.

"We all know each other's tendencies," Ream said. "Privs and I played together last

Please see **REAM** | 6A

## CIAA tournament split between haves and nots

Continued from page 5A

(5-5, 8-8) are discovering just how tough women's basketball is in their third season in the conference. Before Wednesday, they had given VSU its only division loss, so they can't be overlooked early on. But there's not enough OOMPH to do any major damage.

Elizabeth City State: F. What has happened to the Vikings? Did former coach Tynesha Lewis put some roots on the team before leaving for UNC Asheville? ECSU is 13-36 overall, 7-24 CIAA since losing to Fayetteville State in the 2024 championship game. The team's two conference wins this season are against Lincoln. Bye.

Lincoln (Pa.): F-minus. Did the Lions get the same root doctor as the Vikings? After winning seven conference games last season, they are 0-11 and on a 16-game losing streak. Bye.

### SOUTHERN DIVISION

Winston-Salem State: A. The Rams' loss to Fayetteville State kept them from getting an A-plus, but what more can be said about WSSU under first-year coach and alumna Tierra Terry?

The Rams are nationally ranked, have the most total wins (23) in program history and won 16 straight games before losing to the Broncos. After FSU's loss, they are in sole possession of first place with Livingstone on the horizon. About the only thing that could go wrong is the pressure gets too much. The program hasn't advanced to the semifinals since 2020.

Expectations are off the chain. Folks are talking national championship. The only way the tourney is not a bust is if they lose in the championship game to FSU, depending on how the seedings go. Can't wait for this drama to unfold.

Fayetteville State: B-plus. The Broncos have been the hunted for the past two seasons, and they have defended themselves just fine.

Their upset loss at Clafin is what it is, but it does nothing to diminish their capability of winning another title.

We still get ticked off at their post-season seeding last year. After advancing to the Sweet 16 in 2024, the NCAA made sure they got a lower seed for a tougher opponent in 2025. C'mon, how do you win your conference tournament and DROP in the regional rankings, huh?!!

With all the hoopla over the Rams, and deservedly so, nobody has beaten the Broncos in two years and until that happens, CC is going with the champs.

Clafin: C. The Panthers will finish either first or second in the division for the last four seasons but have no championship ring to show for it. They did win the inaugural Black College Invitational Championship last year. Clafin (12-4) is tied with Virginia State with the second-best conference record, so a deep run in the tourney won't be a surprise.

Shaw: C-minus. Two weeks ago, the Bears had a D-minus rating, but they pulled up their jockstraps and went on a short winning streak. Still, losses to ECSU, Bowie State and Livingstone are unacceptable for a team coach Bobby Collins swore during the preseason was his best yet.

The Bears (5-5, 7-9) have not advanced to the semifinals in Collins' five-year tenure. They need to at least get that far or else it's time for a change.

Johnson Smith: C-minus. The Golden Bulls earned an upgrade from a D-plus after last week's win over WSSU. JCSU is 24-26 overall since Steve Joyner Sr. retired. Last season's third-place finish looked hopeful for the program and took the interim tag off head coach Antwain Banks. At least they're not moving down the food chain.

Livingstone: D-minus. We said last year that coach James Stinson has done more with less than any other coach. But it's obvious the school is not sharing any of those big donation dollars with basketball. If Stinson had more to work with, the Blue Bears (2-7, 5-10) would be a better team.

Livingstone's last winning season was 2021-22. Stinson is in his 22nd year AND he's deputy athletics director. It'll be interesting to see what happens if the Blue Bears exit early again.

Winston-Salem State: F-plus. Don't laugh. The plus is only because Cory Thompson is gone. Another bad hire down the drain. The women's success makes the men (0-9, 2-13) look even worse than their 11-game losing streak. Fans are already hollering for Chris Paul. Keep hollering!

tells CC Butler and staff have much higher aspirations.

Virginia State: B-plus. A month ago, the defending champs might have received a C-minus, especially after that 28-point loss to VUU in January. But leave it to a Lonnie Blow team to right the ship at the right time. VSU is 8-0 since that blowout loss and first in the division after winning the rematch on Saturday. Will the teams have anything left for the tourney?

Bluefield State: B. Is anybody surprised that new coach Lou D'Alessio has Big Blue in contention? Being third place is certainly no shame, not to mention Bluefield gave the Panthers one of two division losses. If there's a team that can upset VUU or VSU, it's D'Alessio. And, admit it, don't you want to see a Bluefield vs. Fayetteville State matchup after the head coaches switched teams? Must-see TV.

Lincoln (Pa.): D. The 2024 tournament champs advanced to the semifinals last year before losing to the Trojans. This season is a different story. The Lions (2-8, 4-12) are on a seven-game losing streak after their loss to ECSU Wednesday. Bye.

Elizabeth City State: D-minus. So, did Lewis put roots on the men (2-7, 3-12) as well as the women?

Bowie State: D-minus. The magic is gone from men's basketball (2-8, 5-11). The Bulldogs haven't advanced to the semifinals since the 2017-18 season. On a positive - and somewhat sad - note, Jolisa Williams has been promoted to interim vice president of athletics and recreation.

### SOUTHERN DIVISION

Fayetteville State: A. Critics might say that new coach Devin Hoehn is winning with former coach D'Alessio's players, but Hoehn also was successful at Bluefield State. He led Big Blue to the NCAA Tournament last season and almost upset West Liberty. That's what got him the job in Fayetteville. That and politics.

Whatever is in the water at Fayetteville, they need to ship some to Lincoln and Elizabeth City State. FSU wrapped up another division title after defeating Clafin. The Broncos are on a 13-game winning streak and have a chance to go undefeated in the division with a win at Shaw Saturday. That shouldn't be too hard.

And to repeat it again for the folks in the back row, who doesn't want to see a Bluefield-Fayetteville matchup during tourney week?

Clafin: B. The Panthers will finish either first or second in the division for the last four seasons but have no championship ring to show for it. They did win the inaugural Black College Invitational Championship last year. Clafin (12-4) is tied with Virginia State with the second-best conference record, so a deep run in the tourney won't be a surprise.

Shaw: C-minus. Two weeks ago, the Bears had a D-minus rating, but they pulled up their jockstraps and went on a short winning streak. Still, losses to ECSU, Bowie State and Livingstone are unacceptable for a team coach Bobby Collins swore during the preseason was his best yet.

The Bears (5-5, 7-9) have not advanced to the semifinals in Collins' five-year tenure. They need to at least get that far or else it's time for a change.

Johnson Smith: C-minus. The Golden Bulls earned an upgrade from a D-plus after last week's win over WSSU. JCSU is 24-26 overall since Steve Joyner Sr. retired. Last season's third-place finish looked hopeful for the program and took the interim tag off head coach Antwain Banks. At least they're not moving down the food chain.

Livingstone: D-minus. We said last year that coach James Stinson has done more with less than any other coach. But it's obvious the school is not sharing any of those big donation dollars with basketball. If Stinson had more to work with, the Blue Bears (2-7, 5-10) would be a better team.

Livingstone's last winning season was 2021-22. Stinson is in his 22nd year AND he's deputy athletics director. It'll be interesting to see what happens if the Blue Bears exit early again.

Winston-Salem State: F-plus. Don't laugh. The plus is only because Cory Thompson is gone. Another bad hire down the drain. The women's success makes the men (0-9, 2-13) look even worse than their 11-game losing streak. Fans are already hollering for Chris Paul. Keep hollering!

## Bench strength is tested during shorthanded stretch

Continued from page 5A

well as the staff. And so I feel very comfortable putting those guys out there in that situation and understand that they can hold their own. I just have to do a better job of trying to help put them in the best positions offensively to be successful."

For Charlotte, the good news is that they get starters Miles Bridges and Moussa Diabate back following their four-game suspension for fighting against Detroit before the All-Star break. Even though the first two games post-break were losses, Lee feels confident the team is still trending in the right direction.

"I think that we are making a ton of great gains," Lee said. "I know the results weren't there, but there's some moments where I'm watching Tidjane come into the game and impact it in a lot of different ways. [Connaughton] hasn't played in a while, and he comes in and gives us a good contribution. We have two two-way guys out there playing that have really impacted the game. And I thought Brandon [Miller] and Kon [Kneuppel] were better tonight than the game before. ... We're never happy with [losing] obviously, but I think there's a ton of positives to take from this, and we got to keep moving forward to our road trip coming up."

Kneuppel scored 33 points against Cleve-

land compared to 15 the night before and hit seven three-pointers in the process. Miller was 1-for-12 from three-point range against Houston and improved to 4-for-12 for 18 points in 23 minutes - likely due to minute limitations because of the back-to-back. Kneuppel didn't commit a turnover against Cleveland and led the offense for large stretches in the second half.

"I think that that's one of the things that makes him really special," Lee said. "How well he can score, but how unselfish he is, how well he sees the floor, reads coverages, and I think that after last night, he's also a super prideful person. And you know, coming off the loss or not having your best game, the great competitors, the great players that I have been around in my career, you know, the next game, they're going to respond no matter what. They had a bad game the team lost, they are going to show up because of their habits, because of who they are, their DNA. He's one of those guys, and so it's really fun and special to watch him."

The Hornets are on the road for a three-game road trip to Washington, Chicago and Indiana. Charlotte will likely be favored in each.

"I think that our group has done a great job of trying to learn and then reset and refocus on who that next opponent is," Lee said.

### « CHARLOTTE FC »

## Ream keeps the Crown, and himself focused on task at hand

Continued from page 5A

year a little bit. And so it's not difficult, it's just getting those repetitions together, which we have been doing, and making sure that the game understanding and the communication is high and at a really good level, because that's really what sees you through a lot of tough moments."

Talking about Privett, who came to the team as a midfielder but was moved to the back line by former coach Christian Lattanzio in 2023, Ream said: "Technically, he's still a young center back in the league. But he's not young, right? He's got plenty of games and plenty of experience under his belt so that he's able to step in right away."

### Homecoming

Last week's season opener at St. Louis was the first time that Ream will play in his hometown as a professional athlete - for club, anyway. Ream said that he's played there four times with the U.S. National Team, adding that didn't run counter to the support of local fans. This time will be a bit different as he will be on the opposing team. He'll be comfortable regardless.

Family and friends won't be a distraction.

"I'm all business all the time," Ream said. "That may come as a surprise to a lot of people, but when even with the national team, I tell people, 'Listen, I'm

there to do a job.'" The off-season is the time for visits, catching up, and enjoying those repetitions together, which we have been doing, and making sure that the game understanding and the communication is high and at a really good level, because that's really what sees you through a lot of tough moments."

### Busy summer

Though focused on the CLIFC campaign, Ream admits that this summer's FIFA World Cup in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico cannot be totally compartmentalized. But he knows that success with Charlotte will improve his chances of playing in a second World Cup.

"It's easy for me now," he said, "because I've fallen kind of victim to that in the past, of looking too far ahead or thinking that I have this wrapped up, or this is where I'm going to be, and that's guaranteed."

"I've had that happen to me, where I've had one eye too far forward, and in sport, the rug just gets pulled right out from under you, and you miss an opportunity (because) you were not focused on the on the here and now, and because you weren't focused on the here and now, you weren't looking or feeling or playing your best."

At 38, Ream is not putting undue pressure upon himself. As a father of three, he has learned the world doesn't revolve around him.

"It comes from learning. It comes from experience. I've

been to a World Cup. I achieved that goal, so, I'm actually pretty calm and comfortable with where I am as a player, where I am as a professional, and knowing that I'm going to do everything I possibly can to play in another World Cup.

"But also knowing that it's not really fully down to my decision. What I do day to day is, what's going to get me there? And if it does get me there, great. Everything I do day today to try to get there may not be enough. And that's kind of why I'm so at ease with being able to handle both."

### 17 opening days

This is Ream's 17th professional season, and he says that there will be some nerves ahead of the opener.

"Personally, I approach the first game as if it's my first game professionally," he said. "If you still have that pressure, that desire, you still have the will and the want to perform and do well, you should have that kind of feeling of nerves, and that energy, and a little bit of that anxiety."

"Playing with so many guys throughout the years, the guys who have that, even with it being their 10th, 11th, 12th, 13th season, whatever number they've been playing, they have that. And there's a reason that they're still playing at that level, which is because they do care."

## High school basketball tournament

Continued from page 5A

### 7A tournament

No. 1 North Mecklenburg (22-4, 9-1). Top-seeded Vikings are certainly one of North Carolina's best teams regardless of classification. While the popular thought is the 7A title is there's for the taking, one of North's four losses was to seventh seed Butler, which also has a first-round bye.

No. 7 Butler (16-9, 5-5). The Bulldogs aren't the most powerful group in terms of record, but they have something few teams can claim - a win against North.

Also:

No. 22 South Iredell (9-16, 4-6) at No. 11 West Mecklenburg (16-9, 8-2).

No. 23 Grimsley (7-15, 4-8) at No. 10 Independence (14-12, 5-5).

6A

No. 2 seed Charlotte Catholic (22-4, 11-1). Title aspirations are big for the Cougars, who lost one conference game and out-slugged Weddington 44-42 in the tournament finale.

Also:

A.C. Reynolds (11-15, 7-4) at Harding (13-11, 9-5).

Olympic (12-15, 6-8) at Ashbrook (10-10, 6-6).

Berry Academy (11-12, 7-7) at Piedmont (12-13, 6-6).

The Charlotte Post

