



With a postseason berth in hand, the Hornets aim to move up in Eastern Conference standings

THE VOICE OF THE BLACK COMMUNITY SINCE 1906

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UNSPASH

A woman holds photos of ultrasound images of a fetus. Black babies are three times more likely to die within the first year of life than white babies, a gap advocates believe are caused by disparities in maternal and infant care.

Maternal health forum's goal: narrow the race gap

Third annual conference aims to advance solutions through policies, advocacy

By Herbert L. White
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Closing the race gap in healthy pregnancies is the focus of a Charlotte forum. The third annual Maternal Health Conference on April 9 forum at Friendship Missionary Baptist Church will bring together health professionals, advocates and families to discuss policies and solutions. Registration is required and a virtual participation option is included at caringnc.org/events/2026-mh-conference.

"We are celebrating in a small way the gradual improvement in infant mortality rates that have decreased, so we do,"

said Care Ring CEO Tchernavia Montgomery, the forum's convener. "We have been digging in, doing the work and making sure that we are focusing on things like high-risk pregnancies and the disparities that we know that exist persistently, and especially with black infants."

On the agenda are expert panels and breakout sessions, networking with professionals from health systems, public health agencies and grassroots initiatives. Presentations by maternal health equity and

care delivery leaders as well as lawmakers are also scheduled.

One of the scheduled speakers, U.S. Rep. Alma Adams, last week reintroduced the Kira Johnson Act along to address the Black maternal health gap. The bill, which was also introduced in the Senate by Sen. Raphael Warnock of Georgia, is named after Kira Johnson, a Black woman from Los Angeles who died following childbirth when hospital staff didn't respond to

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Montgomery



Adams

A hunger for West End food sovereignty

By Charles K. Harris
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

The screening of a documentary centered on food access and environmental justice became a spirited discussion about solutions.

"Food Sovereignty," produced by SOL Nation, was shown at the Independent Picture House. The film focuses on food access, environmental justice and the effects of intentional disinterest in developing Black communities like the Beatties Ford Road Corridor, which is featured in the documentary.

"One of the most powerful parts of the documentary screening was hearing directly from residents," said Tiffany Fant, executive director of SOL Nation, a Black woman-led environmental justice organization. "We work with residents to build community-led solutions that strengthen health, economic opportunity, and long-term resilience."

"Beatties Ford Road is an important part of the Historic West End community, and like many historically Black corridors across the country, it has experienced decades of disinvestment."

Lifelong resident Bob Willis, who was present for the screening, pointed out during the discussion that over the years he had seen large chain grocery stores abandon or overlook predominately Black

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Fant

Removing voters for undeliverable mail OKd

By Brandon Kingdollar
NC NEWSLINE

A federal judge upheld a 2023 North Carolina law allowing voter registrations to be denied after just one address verification card is returned as undeliverable, marking a second victory for the General Assembly's ballot restrictions in just one day.

Previously, voters would receive two mailed address verification requests from the State Board of Elections before their registration would be denied and their ballot canceled. The provision was blocked from going into effect for the 2024 election by U.S. District Judge Thomas Schroeder, who ultimately upheld the law March 26, and so it will first apply to the November election.

A trio of civil rights groups — Democracy North Carolina, the North Carolina Black Alliance, and the League of Women Voters of North Carolina — challenged the law, known as Senate Bill 747, in 2023, a week after it passed over Gov. Roy Cooper's veto.

The three organizations, represented by the Southern Coalition for Social Justice, argued that the law discriminates against young voters, and students in particular, by making it easier to discard their votes. The case went to trial in October 2025.

Because many young voters cast ballots away from home while studying at college and move more frequently than older voters, the

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NC fails to track, prevent 'wandering officers'

By Lucas Thomae
CAROLINA PUBLIC PRESS

Nearly two decades ago, Catherine Netter, formerly a detention officer with the Guilford County Sheriff's Office, volunteered to assist the agency's background investigator for law enforcement applicants.

She took a week-long training course and found she enjoyed the work. Eventually the sheriff's office selected her to be a full-time recruiter and background investigator.

Netter, who has since switched careers and moved away from North Carolina, attests to the struggles of finding information about an officer's past. Part of her job involved going to applicants' previous employers and reviewing their personnel files and relevant internal affairs investigations.

But not every important detail in an officer's past would make it into those files.

"The agency controls what you see," Netter explained in an interview with Carolina Public Press.

A persistent concern, she said, was that some agencies purge their records after a certain number of years. Another problem was that an officer's past misconduct might not have made it into their personnel file at all.

"Disciplinary action can sometimes vary based on demographics or based on relationships to the power structure," Netter said.

"So, not everything makes it into a personnel file for everybody in the same equitable manner."

If she got the sense that something was missing, she'd make it a point to press applicants about their work history.

While Netter said she didn't experience it directly, some law enforcement agencies are reluctant to release any information contained in an officer's personnel file at all, for fear that it would open them up

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RICKY ROBBINS FOR SHERIFF

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Sgt. Ricky Robbins, who lost to incumbent Sheriff Gary McFadden in the March Democratic primary, has been hired as chief deputy by the sheriff's office.

Onetime sheriff candidate Ricky Robbins on board as chief deputy

By Herbert L. White
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Ricky Robbins, who lost the Democratic primary to incumbent Sheriff Gary McFadden, is now Mecklenburg County's new chief deputy.

McFadden, who won the March primary with 34% of the vote, hired Robbins, a Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police sergeant who finished second with 31%. Robbins, who starts on April 1, will oversee the courts and field operations divisions. He has more than 40 years of law enforcement experience from his time with CMPD, where he worked in several capacities, in-

cluding patrol, SWAT, crash investigations and homicide investigations.

"Mr. Robbins' experience and vision align with our mission to promote safety, accountability and trust across Mecklenburg County," McFadden said in a statement. "As chief deputy, he will play a key role in advancing our priorities and supporting the dedicated men and women of the Mecklenburg County Sheriff's Office."

Robbins' addition to MCSO's leadership tier comes amid a series of challenges at the department. A Su-

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Maternal health forum's goal: narrow race gap

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signs of internal hemorrhaging for more than 10 hours. The bill would fund federal grants to reduce racial bias through anti-discrimination training in maternity care settings.

It would also fund community-based organizations to prevent maternal mortality and severe morbidity among Black women along with maternity care compliance offices in hospitals to provide mechanisms for pregnant and postpartum patients to report racial, ethnic, or other types of bias.

"Kira Johnson is one of the many women who we have lost too soon," Adams, a Charlotte Democrat who is co-founder and co-chair of the Black Maternal Health Caucus said in a statement. "It's been 10 years since Kira Johnson's death, yet Black women are still two to three times more likely than white moms to die in childbirth. Eighty percent of those deaths are preventable. We need to close the Black maternal health gap."

Birth outcomes are improving in Mecklenburg County, but racial disparities persist. A study on infant mortality published in March by the public health department found that non-Hispanic Black babies remain at increased risk of birth complications and death in their first year compared to their non-Hispanic white peers.

From 2014-23, the overall rate of infant mortality dropped to 5 deaths per 1,000 births, which is better than the national rate of 5.6 and North Car-

olina rate of 6.8. When accounting for race and ethnicity, mortality rate from 2021-23 was 8.8 for Black infants, 4.8 for their Hispanic peers and 2.4 for white babies.

"We have learned over the last decade or so that poverty and education level have very little impact in someone's ability to have a healthy pregnancy," Montgomery said. "What we do know, however, is that race does play a factor. You can have a Black woman that has a PhD that unfortunately is experiencing systemic challenges with within their pregnancy that is contributing to them not having the experience that we know they should have. So we are framing it not just as a medical issue, but as a systemic issue and also paying attention to those social determinants of health."

According to county data:

- Perinatal conditions are the leading cause of infant deaths, accounting for nearly half of fatalities. Birth defects are the No. 2 cause.

- Sudden unexpected infant deaths, or SUIDs, are the top cause of injury-related deaths and third leading cause of deaths overall.

- High blood pressure is a common maternal health risk factor before and during pregnancy.

- One out of five pregnant mothers receive inadequate prenatal care, meaning they start care after the fourth month of pregnancy, or complete half or fewer recommended care visits. Hispanic women have the highest rates of inadequate care.

"Black infants are still three times more likely to die in the first year of life than white infants, so [there is] progress overall, but inequity is still a very central issue that we are trying to combat," Montgomery said. "Where our organization is supporting those efforts is within our prenatal to 2 [years of age] programming that is evidence based, collaborative and very sensitive to the social determinants of health that we know our families are facing day to day."

We have learned over the last decade or so that poverty and education level have very little impact in someone's ability to have a healthy pregnancy.

Care Ring CEO
TCHERNAVIA MONTGOMERY

Judge: Removing voters for undeliverable mail affirmed

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groups argued, they are significantly more likely to miss a single mailed verification request. Expert testimony provided at the trial showed that over the last 15 years, young voters have disproportionately relied on the second request to verify their registration, with around 20,000 confirming their eligibility to vote this way.

Schroeder, a judge in the Middle District of North Carolina, ruled that the civil rights groups failed to demonstrate that the legislature passed S.B. 747 with intent to discriminate against any group of voters, the same grounds under which the Middle District struck down a challenge to the state's photo voter ID law on March 26.

Recent rulings from the U.S. Supreme Court and the 4th Circuit Court of Appeals have significantly raised the threshold to establish voting rights violations. A successful challenge must show clear intent by lawmakers to discriminate against a group of voters and demonstrate an unreasonable burden placed on voters at large, not only that group.

Schroeder said lawmakers had legitimate reason for election integrity concerns. Some voters who completed same-day registrations had their ballots counted under the previous law, he said, even though both cards were eventually returned as undeliverable. In those cases, the votes could not be challenged in time because the second undeliverable notice made it back only after the county canvass.

"A legislature is entitled to make such policy choices and is not precluded from improving its electoral system because of its inability to perfect it," Schroeder wrote. "Nor should election changes become a one-way ratchet, incapable of alteration merely because some voters may be affected."

He also noted that the State Board of Elections sends a "Notice to Verify Your

Address" by mail and email if the county board receives the undeliverable verification card at least two days before the election canvass, providing voters a second opportunity to cure their ballots.

"Any burden on voting rights from SB 747 with its notice-and-cure provisions is minimal, at best, given North Carolina's array of methods to register and vote," Schroeder wrote. "And such minimal burden is justified in relation to the State's legitimate interests in preventing voter fraud, promoting election integrity, addressing the appearance of voter fraud, and ensuring efficient election administration."

Adrienne Spoto, voting rights counsel for the Southern Coalition for Social Justice, said the ruling will have "devastating consequences for our electoral system for decades to come."

"When young voters casting their first ballots see them rejected for technical snafus, it creates lasting barriers to participation and jeopardizes their lifelong civic engagement," Spoto said.

Democracy NC executive director Adrienne Kelly said the law was an effort by the legislature to "attack our state's incredible student voter bloc."

"Today's deeply disappointing decision is sadly no surprise given these systemic efforts to silence young voices, particularly from communities of color, by any means necessary," Kelly said.

Sam Hayes, executive director of the North Carolina Board of Elections, said in a statement that both of the decisions Thursday vindicate the state's election protection efforts.

"This decision affirms that same-day registration safeguards are constitutional and serve an important role in ensuring that registrants are who they say they are," Hayes said of the decision in the Democracy NC case. "We are pleased with the court's ruling and appreciate its thorough review of this matter."

Onetime Mecklenburg sheriff candidate Ricky Robbins on board as chief deputy

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rior Court judge in January tossed a petition urging McFadden's removal but ruled it can be refiled if approved by district attorney Spencer Merriweather.

McFadden was sued last year by former business operations director amid allegations of retaliation for alerting him to remedy pay disparities between a Black woman employee who earned less than white employees with less sen-

iority and experience. Concerns about staff retention and inmate deaths by suicide as well as attempts have also brought scrutiny to the department.

"We are excited to welcome Mr. Robbins to our executive leadership team as our new chief deputy," chief of staff Valerie Fields said. "His leadership, professionalism and commitment to collaboration will be invaluable as we continue strengthening our

operations and service to the community."

Said detention chief Celeste Youngblood: "We are proud to welcome Mr. Robbins as our new chief deputy."

"Mr. Robbins brings a strong record of leadership, professionalism and dedication to public service. I am confident he will be a great addition to our agency as he continues to serve our community."



SOL NATION

Bob Willis makes a point during a discussion on the documentary "Food Sovereignty" at Independent Picture House. "Food Sovereignty" examines food insecurity in predominantly Black Charlotte communities.

Westside neighbors hunger for real food sovereignty

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communities. "[The documentary] was right on point," Willis said, "and it was something that was really needed," adding that it made him happy to see the community congregate to support the film and its vision.

"It let me know that some people still care in our neighborhoods," he said.

While SOL Nation's focus is not strictly on community revitalization, many of its goals align with helping communities regain and keep control of what happens there.

"Access to healthy food is one of the clearest indicators of whether a community has been invested in or overlooked," Fant said. "For decades, many Black residents have had limited access to full-service grocery options. When residents have access to healthy food, economic opportunities, and meaningful roles in shaping development decisions, that naturally contributes to stronger neighborhoods."

While the documentary highlights food access disparities, it doesn't stop there.

"The film is not simply documenting a problem," Fant said. "It's highlighting the solutions and partnerships already emerging from within the community."

Fant cited examples like the Three Sisters Market cooperative, which is working to establish a community owned grocery store combining food access and ownership for locals. Another is Weaver Street Market, a worker- and consumer-owned cooperative that plans to expand into Historic West End.

"Efforts like these are helping create the infrastructure for stronger local food sys-

tems," she said. "Community-led initiatives provide opportunities for residents to contribute ideas, volunteer, and help shape the future of their neighborhoods."

While Willis agreed that such community action is important, he called for elected officials to step up as well.

"We need to hold [politicians] accountable," he said, "Tell them, 'If you want my vote, feed the people.'"

Said Fant: "City and county leaders play an important role. Through policy, funding, and partnership," adding elected officials are responsible to "ensure that [all] communities have a voice in decisions related to land use."

"The goal is to help demonstrate how a more complete system can emerge, from seed to table and even compost, where local farms, businesses, and residents are connected in ways that strengthen both health and economic opportunity."

Willis agreed, adding elders should be part of the movement.

"It irks me [when] senior citizens are excluded," he said, "They think we can't learn. Let us be a part of the solution."

"Food Sovereignty" will be screened again on April 11 as part of the Earth Day Film Festival. Fant wants to hold more future screenings and discussions.

"[We plan] to continue hosting screenings as part of its broader community engagement work, using the film to convene residents, partners, and leaders together to explore solutions," she said.

Willis believes change may be within reach.

"We can solve this problem," he said.

On The Net
solutions.org

NC educators struggle with teaching about religion

By Kate Denning

CAROLINA PUBLIC PRESS

In the wake of the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, Tim Hall, a K-12 Social Studies Instructional Specialist at Vance County Schools and former president of the North Carolina Council for the Social Studies, learned in real time that he didn't know how to teach his students about religion.

"I was teaching about Islam, I was doing the text and just kind of doing the historical viewpoint. A student just raised their hand and said, 'Is Islam really a religion of peace?' And I really didn't know how to answer it at that time," Hall said.

"At first there was the anxiety associated with that — what you say and how you say it and making sure the kids understood it is a religion of peace. But I'm trying to wrap my head around 9/11 as well."

North Carolina is one of few states in which public schools' social studies curriculum includes at least some form of religious literacy education. Despite that, most educators are unprepared, like Hall once was, to teach about religion academically or simply avoid it out of fear of pushback.

Experts say world religions need to be taught in the classroom in order for students to understand the full historical and cultural context of their social studies curriculum. But first, North Carolina needs to have better training, firmer guidelines and absolute transparency.

North Carolina's standards

It's important to know religious literacy is not about promoting religion in schools but about helping students understand how

religious communities have shaped history, culture and civic life, Hall told Carolina Public Press. He founded Religion Matters to encourage educators to teach religious literacy from a nondevotional, academic perspective.

The state standards allow educators to teach about religion academically, which is "constitutionally appropriate and historically necessary," Hall said, but they aren't as thorough and consistent across the state as would be ideal. In North Carolina, learning objectives related to religion mostly appear in the world history and civic literacy standards and briefly in American history.

"World History is designed to be a historical study of societies, nations, economies, events and cultures of the many regions of the world, providing historical background for each area and details inclusive of change over time, historical impact, religion, diplomacy, culture practices and beliefs, and economic, political, and social institutions," the Standards for World History states.

One learning objective within the Standards for American History addresses religion, which states students should "distinguish religious beliefs and human reasoning in terms of their influence on American society and culture," compared to five of the World History objectives.

Course catalogs for high schoolers may offer a dedicated world religions class as an option for students, but that tends to be only at larger schools, Hall said. Most schools lack a qualified educator to teach the class or simply don't want to offer it for fear of parent pushback.

"I appreciate the stan-

dards, but the guidance in the standards is brief and uneven, so how religion is taught in the classroom varies widely from classroom to classroom and district to district," he said.

"So North Carolina standards do include religion, but guidance is often thin, which means implementation depends heavily on individual teachers' preparation and comfort level."

Vicki Garlock, founder of World Religion for Kids and a former Warren Wilson College professor, said one downfall of the state is that there's not even an agreement on which religions should be taught, let alone how to do it or to what extent.

Teachers vary in whether they choose to focus on five, six or seven of the "major world religions," and the ideas on which religions should be taught can be outdated. For example, Confucianism and Taoism are often emphasized, despite not being widely practiced anymore, Garlock said. That can lead to other religions that are more pertinent to today being left out.

"Unfortunately, we're operating at a very, very basic level," she said.

"There's not even agreement on which religious traditions should be covered, so a lot of times, Confucianism and Taoism show up in the standards (...) and yet, those are not considered to be major world religions currently being practiced by people."

"Just as a simple example, Sikhism is the fifth-largest religion in the world, and most people in America don't know anything about it. It's one of the largest immigrant groups we have right now, people from India being

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NC fails to track or prevent 'wandering officers'

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to legal liability for sharing confidential information.

At the conclusion of her investigation, Netter would provide a recommendation on whether to hire that applicant. At least once, she said, an applicant whom she didn't recommend for hire ended up getting the job anyway.

The article is the second in the three-part investigative series Stray Cops from CPP, examining the problem of wandering officers. These are law enforcement officers who are fired from one department or resign under a disciplinary cloud and find employment elsewhere. This article explores the systemic reasons why these officers continue to find work and the potential risks they pose to the public and the agencies that hire them.

The first article in the series examines the scope of the issue in North Carolina and explored the kinds of agencies most likely to hire wandering officers. The final article in the series looks at potential solutions.

Process for hiring, certifying cops

Officer hirings and firings, and certifications and decertifications, are two wholly different processes carried out by separate government entities.

Individual law enforcement agencies make hiring and firing decisions. Those agencies must notify the state whenever they hire an officer or when one leaves the department, but the state doesn't have a direct role in the hiring or dismissal of most officers.

What the state can do, through its two Education Standards and Training Commissions, is grant, deny and revoke certifications for all law enforcement officers working in North Carolina.

A person can't work as a police officer or sheriff's deputy unless he or she holds certification from the appropriate commission.

One of these commissions is dedicated solely to employees of sheriff's offices. Everyone else is certified by the Criminal Justice Education Standards and Training Commission.

A commission's decision to suspend, revoke or deny an officer's certification would prevent that person from continuing to work in law enforcement. An agency's decision to fire an officer, however, wouldn't automatically hold the same weight.

Firings that don't result in decertification are a key mechanism in the creation of wandering officers.

The state also sets minimum standards for the hiring and certification of law enforcement officers.

In North Carolina, certification of police officers and sheriff's deputies requires that they must:

- Be U.S. citizens
- Be at least 20 years old
- Have a high school diploma or equivalent education

• Possess "good moral character," a vague standard which has only been partially defined by previous judicial rulings

• Not have been convicted of a felony or any other crime with a punishment of two or more years, which would prohibit them from possessing a firearm

Applicants with past misdemeanor offenses might still be hireable depending on the severity of the crime and how long it had been since those convictions.

The state mandates that agencies conduct background checks on all applicants, but it doesn't set limits on agencies' ability to hire or retain officers who were fired from a past employer, are currently under criminal investigation or have received accusations of misconduct in civilian complaints or lawsuits.

Likewise, the two standards commissions aren't required to deny or revoke certifications based on those factors.

State rules outline plenty of circumstances that

"may" trigger decertification, but very few that "shall" — leaving the final decision up to the commission's discretion.

This lack of definitive guidance in state rules has also allowed hundreds of previously fired officers to continue working in North Carolina.

When the state intervenes

So why not mandate that the state decertify officers if they are dismissed from an agency?

A good reason for not automatically decertifying them exists, said Eddie Caldwell, general counsel for the North Carolina Sheriff's Association — one of the most influential lobbying groups in the state legislature.

If decertification was mandatory, officers could lose their careers for reasons that wouldn't necessarily preclude them from being good employees somewhere else, Caldwell said. Current state guidelines also factor in the potential for an officer to recognize and learn from past mistakes.

"You could have an officer who comes in late three days in a row, and an agency head could say that's unacceptable," Caldwell said.

"Well, that doesn't necessarily mean that person lacks training or lacks ethics or morals to be a law enforcement officer. They just made some mistakes. So that officer could easily go to another agency and be on time and not be a problem."

For the reason that Caldwell outlined, the current state guidelines are mostly a list of situations under which a certifying agency "may" revoke, suspend or deny certification.

The only instances in which the state must decertify would be when an officer is convicted of a felony or convicted of a lesser crime with a sentence of more than two years imprisonment. Those certified with the Sheriff's Standards Commission will also be decertified if they fail to keep up with their training requirements and drug screens.

Each commission has staff who approve applications for certification and conduct investigations to determine whether officers still meet the requirements for certification. Those investigations are reviewed by what's called a Probable Cause Committee, made up of a subsection of commission members, who make the ultimate determination on whether to decertify an officer.

"(The Standards Commissions) aren't evaluating if this person is the perfect employee," Caldwell said. "They're evaluating, 'Do they meet the minimum standards?'"

An officer who has been denied certification may contest the commission's decision to an administrative law judge, and the commission may reevaluate its decision based on the judge's recommendation.

Officers who dispute the basis for their termination from an agency may also seek a name-clearing hearing, which may get factored into a future employer's decision to hire them.

Why do agencies hire wandering officers?

Ben Grunwald, an expert on criminal procedure and professor at Duke Law, co-authored a landmark research paper on wandering officers in Florida in 2020.

The study, which the Yale Law Journal published and news media reports have cited widely, found that about 3% of Florida's sworn law enforcement officers in any given year between 1988 and 2016 had been previously fired from another agency. A significant majority of those officers had been dismissed for misconduct.

In an interview with CPP, Grunwald said he can't say much about the prevalence of wandering officers or their behaviors outside of Florida without further research. But little reason ex-

ists to think Florida is an outlier when it comes to the problem.

One significant question the paper addressed was why agencies hired these officers in the first place. Identifying the reasons behind the phenomenon is the first step in fixing the issue.

"It's kind of a fundamental question here," Grunwald said.

"It's hard to know exactly what the policy intervention should be when you don't know what explains most instances where police departments are hiring wandering officers."

Grunwald did suggest a few hypotheses, however.

It could be that agencies do not know they are hiring a wandering officer, he said. In that case, it would be an information problem, something which Netter alluded to.

The North Carolina state legislature, with the support of the Sheriff's Association, passed a law last year that aimed to address that issue. It required agencies to review applicants' complete personnel files going back five years before hiring them as law enforcement officers. It also granted legal protections to agencies that provide that information for the purpose of a background investigation.

"That provides protection to the agency where (the applicant) used to work," Caldwell said, "because now they are required to provide either a copy or access to those records."

That law, however, doesn't apply to internal affairs files, nor does it require agencies to provide proof to the commissions that they are following those new rules.

Aside from a lack of information about an officer's past, agencies might know they're hiring a wandering officer, but they don't have any better alternatives because of a lack of quality candidates.

Vacancy rates at law enforcement agencies across the country have remained high since 2020, and pay — especially in North Carolina — has remained stagnant.

Agencies struggling to fill positions might be tempted to overlook an officer's checkered past. On the flip side, wandering officers with limited job prospects could be more willing to work for lower pay in suboptimal conditions.

This problem seems to be more of an issue in rural parts of the state, where wandering officers were most likely to work, according to CPP's analysis based on 2022, the last year for which the state's employment data included information about dismissals.

Finally, it could simply be that agencies are well aware of who they are hiring, but they do it anyway. In that scenario, they'd need to be educated about the risks associated with hiring wandering officers, Grunwald said.

Are wandering officers riskier?
Grunwald's research found that, at least in Florida, wandering officers tended to be riskier hires.

"We found that our wandering officers were twice as likely to get fired again and twice as likely to receive serious complaints for misconduct, including complaints for integrity-related issues and physical and sexual misconduct," Grunwald said.

"What we conclude from those numbers is that when a police department decides to hire someone who's previously been fired, they are taking an increased risk that that officer may engage in subsequent misconduct."

North Carolina's employment data doesn't include details about disciplinary actions that didn't result in termination, even if they resulted in resignation. But the data does show that officers who were fired from a previous job were significantly more likely to get dismissed from their next



LUCAS THOMAS | CAROLINA PUBLIC PRESS

The two standards commissions that decide on North Carolina law enforcement officer certification are housed in this Raleigh office.

law enforcement job, compared to veteran cops with no dismissals on their record and rookie officers.

Hiring a wandering officer poses a risk, not just for the general public who faces the potential of abuse at the hands of that officer, but also for the hiring agency, which could be found liable if it were later sued for that officer's misconduct.

If the question of morality can't convince a law enforcement agency not to hire a wandering officer, the potential of having to pay out a lawsuit settlement might, attorney Keisha James said.

James works for the National Police Accountability

Project, which litigates cases of police misconduct across the country. She represented the plaintiffs in their lawsuit against wandering officer Jeffery Edwards, who was accused of using excessive force while he was a deputy at the Washington County Sheriff's Office. Edwards is currently a deputy in nearby Tyrrell County.

Reporting from CPP revealed that the State Highway Patrol fired Edwards for misconduct before the Sheriff's Office in Washington County hired him.

Even though he's no longer employed in Washington County, the plaintiffs suing Edwards in his individual capacity also

filed suit against the Sheriff's Office for having negligently hired and trained Edwards. In addition, they are suing the Sheriff's Office and Town of Plymouth for having trained the other officers who were present at the scene and didn't intervene.

"The bottom-line argument is that this costs money (for local governments)," James said.

"A better way of tracking and screening (wandering officers) will cut costs. I think there's no way around that, and I think sometimes that is a more persuasive argument than maintaining credibility and integrity and all that."

Struggle with teaching religion

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the largest immigrant group, and many of those people are Sikh."

Why teach about religion?

As a social studies teacher, Hall didn't put much thought into teaching about religion until after Sept. 11. In the aftermath of the attacks, the Federal Bureau of Investigation found hate crimes against Muslims in the U.S. increased seventeenfold, and misconceptions led to the conflation of different religions with Islam, like Sikhism, also leading to hate crimes.

But when global events have an element of religion involved there also tends to be a surge in good-faith interest in religious literacy, Hall said. The majority of religious literacy education work came out of Sept. 11, and there's been another recent surge due to the Israel-Hamas war and even the Russia-Ukraine war.

With misinformation rampant, Hall quickly learned it was going to be important for both himself and his students to understand religion not just historically but as it related to current events.

Part of Hall's work now is to convince social studies educators why religious literacy matters and why they should make it a priority for their students. He says being religiously literate is crucial to having a well-rounded education and understanding of the world.

"Religious literacy helps them understand global conflicts and cooperation, interpret historical events and political movements, engage in respectful dialog with religiously diverse communities and also practice constitutional reasoning about religious freedom," Hall said.

"What I like to do is frame it civically — religious literacy is really civic literacy in a diverse democracy. Students need to understand how religious ideas shape public life and how the Constitution protects religious freedom of belief."

Garlock's perspective veers a bit more into the personal. She's the author of several children's books made to teach elementary school children about world religions. She began writing them after working at a progressive Christian church where she wrote multi-faith Sunday school lessons.

She hopes her books can serve as a source for teachers wanting to teach age-appropriate lessons on world religions, not just to grow their religious literacy but so students can see a part of themselves represented that is often left out.

"It's more than just religious literacy — the other piece of it that's really important to me is this idea of identity," Garlock said. "Religion is part of kids' identity from the get go, and these students need to be seen."

"In the (language arts) world, they talk about books being windows and mirrors. They are windows into worlds outside of your own, but they also are mirrors of ourselves. And I think that one of the things that has happened because people are so nervous when it comes to talking about religion is that we tend to push it aside. We need to realize that we are also essentially squashing a really important component of many students' identity."

Barriers to teaching about religion

Despite the state's standards, Garlock doesn't necessarily feel like religious literacy is being prioritized in a meaningful

way, which can make it difficult to fine-tune or work on specifics.

"We don't have a situation where all these people are trying to do religious literacy and now we're trying to figure out the nuances of how to do it. I don't think we're there yet," Garlock said.

"A lot of what (Hall) and I are trying to do is just get people to realize, one, the importance of it, and two, encourage them to do something, and we can sort of sift through those details later."

Research shows there are four reasons for why religious literacy isn't prioritized in public schools on a wide scale, Hall said.

The first is that most educators aren't trained on how to teach about religion academically. There's also a fear of violating the First Amendment unknowingly because some teachers misunderstand it to mean they simply can't talk about religion in the classroom, even in an academic context, Hall said.

Greg Wallace, a professor at Campbell University Norman Adrian Wiggins School of Law who specializes in religious freedom, said teachers can certainly legally talk about religion academically, provided they don't violate guidelines set by the U.S. Supreme Court regarding the Establishment Clause.

So teachers must be neutral, meaning they cannot favor one religion over another or denigrate a particular religion. They also must be noncoercive, so they can't advocate or attempt to make students believe in any particular religion.

Naturally, a push to teach about religion in a more widespread way could lead to more instances in which teachers violate these principles intentionally or unknowingly. However, removing or avoiding lessons on religion sends the message that it isn't worth learning about, Wallace said.

"It can teach young children that religion really isn't important, it's not to be believed, it's something for older people and weirdos, so you don't want to send that message," Wallace said.

"Finding the right balance is very, very difficult when you have to bring this into an intersection of a classroom, you have parents, you have the First Amendment sort of hovering over it. It's a very delicate balance."

Then there's the issue of limited instructional materials and a lack of knowledge on where to look for them, so even teachers who want to teach about religion find it difficult to know where to start.

That's why Hall compiles teaching materials for social studies teachers across the country to let them know that they can and should be teaching about religion in the classroom and to help prepare them.

In December, the National Council for the Social Studies approved his proposal to reaffirm the importance of its Religious Studies Companion Document and agreed to advocate for professional learning opportunities that "equip educators to teach about religions in ways that are constitutionally sound, culturally responsive, and academically grounded."

But the most prominent reason educators don't teach about religion is because they are concerned about pushback from parents or the broader community.

The Charlotte Post

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Sen. Phil Berger deserves thanks

North Carolina experienced two political earthquakes in March.

The first, on March 3, revealed that North Carolina's most powerful politician, Phil Berger, trailed in his primary reelection. Polls had teased such an upset was possible, but few believed Berger would lose.

Recounts determined that Sam Page's 23-vote margin held. The second quake shook the state March 24. Berger announced he would concede the election.

It couldn't have been easy for Berger. The same district that had elected and reelected him for years turned on him. Give Berger credit and thanks for upholding the finest of North Carolina election traditions, where losers graciously accept defeat.

Berger could have fought, but he knew that prolonged appeals rarely result in the outcome being overturned. He may have lost but he wasn't a sore loser.

Some place the blame for the loss on Berger's attempts to locate a gambling casino in Rockingham County. It was a boneheaded move for the most powerful politician in our state. Berger became a pawn for big money gambling interests lining his campaign coffers without taking the time to consult with his constituents to find out how they felt.

But the casino issue was really just a straw horse for the real reason he lost. Phil had gotten, as my mother was fond of saying, "too big for his britches." Voters believed he had stayed too long, no longer represented their best interests and wanted a change.

The senator still has work to do. The short session of the General Assembly meets and lawmakers are under intense pressure to finally get a state budget passed. With elections coming in November, Republicans have been getting an earful from voters about their failure to do their jobs.

Berger's insistence that the legislature carry out more personal income tax cuts has been a stumbling block to budget passage. The House balked because of consensus revenue projections predicting a financial cliff if revenues are cut further from the budget. Berger disagreed with that forecast. But just this week the forecast was updated, giving a somewhat cloudy estimation of coming revenues. Regardless whose data you accept, the budget needs passing, and Berger doesn't need the distraction of his election hanging over lawmakers as they make decisions.

It is far too soon to give a full accounting of Berger's legacy. It will no doubt come soon, but we went back to notes, scripts from our previous TV shows and even sought help from The Google in trying to point out some highlights.

Without question the biggest accomplishment was stabilizing accountability in state finances, even getting voters to approve a constitutional amendment requiring local and state budgets be balanced at the end of each fiscal year. State spending was reined in, and revenue surpluses became common; the "rainy day fund" has grown to billions of dollars.

Berger and Republicans never met a tax they didn't want to cut. In 2011, when Republicans took control of state government, the joint personal income tax rate was a flat \$1,700 plus 15% of everything over \$17,000. Today that rate is 3.99% and corporate income taxes have been cut to almost zero.

The second most prevalent topic of the Berger era was power - who had it, who should have it and how to control it. Unquestionably, his leadership will be marked for the further accumulation of legislative power and the diminishment of power for the governor, especially in making key appointments. Lawmakers also tightened controls over local governments, including telling our 100 sheriffs they had to cooperate with ICE. Authority to conduct abortions was limited.

Under Berger's leadership the legislature passed HB2, the "bathroom bill" that brought scorn and embarrassment to our state. It finally went away. After refusing for years, Berger finally agreed to allow Medicaid expansion in 2023, giving 600,000 citizens health insurance.

Lawmakers delved deeply into politics, taking control of the State Board of Elections from the governor, declaring that all judicial candidates must list their political party affiliation, and Republicans took gerrymandering to an art form, making it highly difficult for Democrats to compete competitively in congressional and legislative elections.

But the most lasting change under Berger's leadership involved education. Early on, he and lawmakers overhauled the UNC Board of Governors, turning it into a partisan political mouthpiece. They did away with DEI. Berger led the Senate in the school choice movement that essentially just gave up on traditional public schools, not only encouraging more charter schools but instituting "Opportunity Scholarships," aka vouchers, to children to attend private schools.

The Berger era comes to a close in January. Regardless of whether you applauded or condemned his leadership he gave a quarter century to service in our state and deserves its thanks.

Tom Campbell is a broadcaster and columnist who has covered North Carolina public policy issues since 1965.



TOM CAMPBELL

Why people protest authoritarians

By Andrew Moss

SPECIAL TO THE POST

As you read these words, you've probably seen some or many of the images coming out of the No Kings 3 protests that took place all across America on March 28.

You may have joined one those protests yourself.

If the organizers succeeded in achieving their goals, No Kings 3 may well have turned out to be the largest protest in American history, amplifying resistance against an authoritarian Trump regime.

I haven't yet seen any of those images, for I am writing this column two days before No Kings. But my concern is a bit different from that of folks considering questions of numbers and impact.

I ask: why does an individual protest in the first place? What might draw this person to another protest, and to other (and more sustained) kinds of civic engagement?

A young researcher in social psychology, Anna Sach, offers a psychologically inflected perspective: "protest is not only a tool for political change, it is a deeply human experience that fulfills emotional and social needs. It creates community, restores a sense of agency, and offers hope in the face of uncertainty."

Sach describes how people may be moved to act out of a sense of injus-

tice, out of the moral urgency created by the awareness of something deeply wrong.

They will march, rally, or engage in civil disobedience from a belief in the efficacy of such action - a feeling that such protest can and does make a difference, as it has time and again in history.

But there is something else impelling people's involvement: a need to belong, a need for connection - an identification with others who share the same values. As Sach explains, "this identification, whether with a Pro-Palestine movement, a human rights coalition, or a peace organization, creates a sense of closeness to others and shared values. Emotional connection is crucial for sustaining long-term engagement."

It's this sense of identification, I believe, that allows people to begin seeing their protest activity as part of a life journey, a journey of personal transformation within ever-widening circles of identification. The protests against ICE and CPB have been particularly powerful in widening these circles, as people in cities across the country began showing up for their neighbors no matter what documentation those neighbors possessed or did not possess.

As one of the LA protesters, a young artist of

Afro-Latino heritage, told a reporter in June of last year, "It's the same thing to me as Black Lives Matter. We are all equals regardless of what color we are. And everybody needs support."

Identification can move, therefore, from a sense of shared values to a deeply held sense of shared humanity.

Perhaps this truth has been no more powerfully illustrated than in Minneapolis, a city that protested abductions, home invasions, beatings, and the killings of two of its citizens: Renee Good and Alex Pretti. Minneapolis not only showed up in sub-zero weather with whistles, signs, and cellphone cameras; they showed up for one another by driving other people's kids to school, by supporting restaurants and businesses jeopardized by ICE threats and abductions, and by donating all manner of necessities to people in dire need: groceries, diapers and wipes, and breast milk. Minneapolisians made clear to the world how expansively the word "protest" can be understood. It can mean tens of thousands of people marching, chanting, and singing down the streets of a major American city - or lining the roadway of a small rural community.

It can mean a single Minneapolis mother responding from compassion as

she provides breast milk to a 3-month-old infant left with the infant's 16-year-old sister when ICE had seized their mother and taken her into detention in Texas.

There's a long and venerable history of protest in the United States, a history marked by countless improvements in human rights and human life. Part of one's protest journey may be to learn something of that history, to feel one's self within its great stream.

Bryan Stevenson is the founder of the Equal Justice Initiative, a non-profit dedicated to fighting mass incarceration and racial injustice. He encapsulates these meanings of protest in describing his own journey:

"There is something about being lifted up by the whole of human history, by all who found a way to fight oppression and injustice, all who found a way to love despite the hate and brutality. There was something about being lifted up in that kind of community that shifts your capacity, shifts your identity. You don't think of yourself as an 'I' anymore; you think of yourself as a 'we.'"

Andrew Moss, syndicated by PeaceVoice, writes on politics, labor, and nonviolence from Los Angeles. He is an emeritus professor from the California State University.

The work of independence isn't complete

This year, America marks 250 years since the Declaration of Independence.

That should make us proud. It should also make us honest.

When my son was 11, we walked the Lexington battlefield in Massachusetts.

As we crossed that ground, I told him our family descends from the youngest person to carry a musket here that day. He was just a boy. He stood in a different unit from his father. Father and son, both there. Father and son, both fighting for freedom. Father and son, both fighting for the right of a people to govern themselves.

Then I looked at my son and said: He was only two years older than you are now. That moment has stayed with me. So has another truth. Our roots in the Revolution run through both Massachusetts and Virginia. We also descend from Richard Bland of Virginia, who argued for the rights of the colonies before independence was declared.

There is another way. It is called the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact. It does not end the Electoral College. It uses it the way the Constitution allows. The Constitution gives state

legislatures the power to decide how their electoral votes are awarded. Under this plan, states agree to give their electoral votes to the candidate who wins the most votes in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. No constitutional amendment is needed.

Virginia is now close to joining. The bill has passed both houses of the General Assembly. If Gov. Abigail Spanberger signs it, Virginia would become the 19th jurisdiction in the compact, joining states such as Vermont, Delaware, Maine and Illinois. Virginia is not some side note in this story. It is one of the places where the American idea of self-government first took root. If Virginia joins now, it will not be breaking with the founding. It will be honoring it.

That is not a radical idea. It is an American one. And it should not belong to one party. This is not about helping Republicans. It is not about helping Democrats. It is about trusting the people. That idea is not left-wing or right-wing. It is not urban or rural. It is not Black or white. It is patriotic. Of course, there are still

obstacles. More states would need to join. Lawmakers would need to act. Courts may weigh in. None of this is certain. But history does not move only when success is guaranteed. It moves when people decide that something is right.

And what better time than now? What better way to honor America's 250th birthday than by taking one more step toward becoming the democracy we have always said we are? The people who stood at Lexington did not risk their lives so future generations could accept minority rule. They did not fight so Americans would shrug when the person with the most votes loses.

They fought for freedom. They fought for self-government. They fought for the right of the people to decide their own future.

It is time to finish what they started. Let the people decide. Let the majority rule.

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

Are neo-Trumpers the next mutation?

By Joel Schlosberg

SPECIAL TO THE POST

A New York Times columnist offering pointers for "Pitchfork Pat" Buchanan-type populists on "the isolationist right who thought Trump shared his views" might seem akin to a mad scientist named Frankenstein offering a road map to a pitchforks-and-torches peasant mob.

Yet Michelle Goldberg does just that in "The President Was Never Antiwar" (March 2).

While maintaining that Donald Trump was indeed the embodiment through which "the once marginalized politics of Patrick Buchanan became a dominant force in the Republican Party," Goldberg insists that "Trump was never Buchanan's heir when it came to foreign policy."

While "it is true that he broke with key elements of neoconservative ideology," he hasn't distanced himself from even "the most fanatical of neoconservatives," preferring instead to discard the ideology's "notion that American power should ever be constrained

by a veneer of idealism." The end result is "less a repudiation of neoconservatism than a mutation of it."

Trump might, as Goldberg suggests, be "attracted to right-wing cranks of all stripes." But "paleoconservatives who are skeptical of foreign entanglements" can trace their views back to Thomas Jefferson and John Quincy Adams.

As Franklin Foer highlighted in The New York Times, during another rash Republican administration garnering "fierce loyalty from conservatives" to the point where rightist "backlash against the war may seem unexpected," the Buchanan who "vociferously opposed Bush's campaign against Saddam Hussein, just like he had opposed the one waged by Bush's father" was drawing on a tendency that included Gerald Ford and John F. Kennedy, "not just angry farmers and protofascists."

If none of those four forefathers were that peaceful as presidents, neither were they real-life versions of the reactionary rule of Charles Lindbergh

as imagined by Philip Roth in "The Plot Against America" (what was for Foer in 2004 a "new counterfactual novel" dramatizing a dystopia of paleocon precursors).

Contemporary conservatives who "bemoan feminism, immigration and multiculturalism" have given up hope of a USA unshaped by such movements to the point where "they see no point in exporting its values abroad."

By contrast, Goldberg points out that Trump being "anti-immigrant, hostile to free trade and given to John Birch Society-style conspiracy theorizing" is taken to show that he will cut off military maneuvering at the borders as well. That doesn't just ignore the longstanding observation by laissez-faire radicals that voluntary relations across state lines tend to defuse rather than fuel international tensions.

It's almost as if Perseus

didn't bother with his painstaking tracking and taming of the mythological winged horse Pegasus in "Clash of the Titans," but was satisfied with a particularly malodorous pile of manure.

Goldberg is on to something in noting how Trump's persona evolved in an environment with "no real cost to his belligerence" ... not even mentioning his 2000 interview in The Advocate magazine defining his politics in opposition to, not imitation of, "the things [Buchanan] had written about Hitler, Jews, blacks, gays, and Mexicans."

As Herculean as the task may seem, we don't need a Greek demigod to clean up the political horse race.

New Yorker Joel Schlosberg is a senior news analyst at The William Lloyd Garrison Center for Libertarian Advocacy Journalism.

Sports

THURSDAY, APRIL 2, 2026



NBAE

Charlotte Hornets center Moussa Diabate dunks the ball in the first half of their 114-103 win against the New York Knicks on March 24, 2026, at Spectrum Center. The Hornets, who started the week with a 39-36 record, have clinched at least a berth in the play-in round.

Hornets as a contender? Bee-lieve

Charlotte, which opened the week 39-36, have clinched a spot in the Eastern Conference's postseason

By Cameron Williams
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It is time to start talking about the Hornets like they are a top team in the NBA.

Sounds crazy, right? Well, not really. Since Jan. 1 the Hornets are sixth in best records at 28-14 at the start of the week, trailing only San Antonio (32-9), Oklahoma City (31-11), Boston (30-12), Detroit (29-12 and Cleveland (27-12).

Despite back-to-back losses to Philadelphia and Boston, Charlotte (39-36) has wrapped up at least a berth in the play-in round as 10th in the Eastern Conference, three games behind At-

lanta for sixth. All eyes are on the sixth spot because it would mean no play-in games and for the Hornets, a playoff berth for the first time in 10 years.

To Hornets forward Brandon Miller, their place in the standings isn't what motivates him or his teammates.

"We don't worry about [the standings]," Miller said after last week's 114-103 win against New York. "We just go out there game-to-game with the mindset of competing at the highest level every night. Whether we stand first or last, we're going to go out there and play as hard as we can every night."

Given the decade-long playoff

drought, is that motivation?

"You know, it's cool and all," Miller said. "It's not really our focus right now. Like I said, our focus is no control of what we control right now. I think we controlled the game tonight, and of course, we got a great win over a good team. So, just keep going."

Coach Charles Lee said he felt beating the Knicks was less of a statement than the team is focused on daily improvement.



Miller

"Our group has a lot to continue to learn," he said, "how to finish games, how to match the physicality that starts to come our way when you have a lead or you're into the fourth quarter. So, there's still some areas that we want to continue to get better at, but when we're playing the right way, when the communication is high, we're a really good team."

Lee also credited Hornets' fans for their support. Often fans of marquee teams like the Los Angeles Lakers, Boston Celtics and especially the Knicks take over Spectrum Center. That

Please see **HORNETS** | 6A

Charlotte football more developed for spring drills

By Cameron Williams
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Spring is in the air and Charlotte football is, too.

The 49ers' spring session is underway and as with every new season comes hope, optimism and the unknown. Coach Tim Albin, who enters his second season after finishing 1-11 in year one is optimistic about the season ahead.

"The first day of spring ball, I am very excited," he said. "There's unbelievable energy. I'm sure it is that way across the board everywhere, but just watching them move around, [I knew] it was going to be a really good first day. ... They're in helmets and jerseys, so I can't see their faces. I don't know all the jersey numbers yet. Half of them got new numbers anyway, so I'm a trainwreck out there, but we are going to power through. But, for the first day, I tell you, it is much different."

Who will lead the offense?

When quarterback Conner Harrell went down in week four, it left the 49ers scrambling.

Please see **OFFSEASON** | 6A



MATT LACZKO

The Charlotte 49ers return their top three quarterbacks from 2025, including Conner Harrell, who missed most of the season after leg surgery.

Wes Miller 'excited' for 49ers basketball future

By Cameron Williams
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A new era has begun for Charlotte basketball.

The 49ers welcomed new coach Wes Miller to Halton Arena last week, and in front of fans, donors, alumni and media, Miller — who had notes in hand — went off the cuff.

"I am completely overwhelmed by this," he said, "by all of you guys showing up. I don't know if I had an expectation, but if I did, it wasn't this. I'm sitting here thinking about this crowd right here for a press conference, and the next thing I'm thinking about is how we're going to get Halton Arena full, if we can

do this for a press conference."

Miller said he is pumped to be Charlotte's coach. His mother lives here and growing up, he attended Charlotte Country Day.

"[I am] fired up more than I've ever been to be the head coach at Charlotte," Miller said. "Like, I could not be more excited. And I don't know how to express that well enough today, but it's not an energy that's going to dissipate here in a day or a week or a month. It's a real, genuine energy that I think I can carry day after day, year after year."

Why Charlotte?

After spending the last five seasons at Cincinnati, Miller found himself in an unusual

spot. He was jobless and looking at where he could coach next. After the first Zoom conversation with UNC Charlotte Chancellor Sharon Gaber, Miller said he was surprised by the passion, enthusiasm alignment of her vision and athletics director Kevin White.

"I keep hearing this term about UNC Charlotte as a university and sleeping giant," Miller said, "I keep hearing sleeping giant. And I did the Zoom with Chancellor Gaber, and I got off the Zoom; her energy blew me away. For the leader of the university to have that level of energy, it just absolutely came through the screen first and foremost, and her vision blew

Please see **MILLER** | 6A

A legacy continued through giving

Joseph Merrick Sansom, Morehouse College Class of 1965, loved his family, his community and his alma mater.

Mr. Sansom, who died April 11, 2025, at the age of 81, attended a segregated Hillside High School before his family moved to Raleigh, where he completed his high school education at integrated Cathedral Latin (now Cardinal Gibbons) in 1961.

The military veteran was North Carolina's first African American deputy state treasurer.

Although Mr. Sansom was a member of the Shaw Board of Trustees and an avid athletic supporter, he was a "Morehouse Man" through and through.

Last year, the Morehouse Triangle Alumni Association, led by his daughter, Karen Sansom-Goodman, established the Joseph Merrick Sansom '65 Distinguished Scholarship to honor his commitment to education and community service.

Three young men from the Triangle, or more appropriately called "Men of Morehouse," were awarded funds to continue their education.

"My father's love for Morehouse was evident in the stories he shared, the wisdom he imparted and the encouragement he consistently gave to young men striving for excellence," Sansom-Goodman wrote in a fundraising letter. "...This scholarship celebrates that extraordinary legacy while 100% directly supporting current Morehouse students in their academic and personal growth."

Three generations of Sansoms have attended the college

Please see **LEGACY** | 6A



BONITTA BEST

Charlotte FC aims to extend MLS home unbeaten streak

By Herbert L. White
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Charlotte FC is a tough out at Bank of America Stadium.

The Crown improved to 2-0-1 at home after a 6-1 win March 28 against Red Bull New York to improve to 8 points and fourth in the Eastern Conference at 2-1-2. Charlotte seized the initiative early and when RBNY's Gustav Berggren was sent off with a red card, the flood gates opened to the Crown's club record for goals scored in a match.

"Just saw the intent from the boys were absolutely buzzing," said Archie Goodwin, who came off the bench to score a pair of goals -

his first in MLS. "The boys were flying, winning their battles, and we just looked energetic. And thanks to the home fans as well for giving that extra edge to us. Ran over the top of them in the end."

Said coach Dean Smith: "Very good day in the office. Good performance. Got the goals that we deserved. Missed some chances as well, and it can be difficult playing against a younger, energetic team like they are. But we, first off, we created some good chances, certainly on the breakaway. ... We thought that if we got a couple of passes and switch play early, we could get chances, and we created chances, but there were times that they got

bodies back, and we should have stayed on the ball a little bit longer, but we got what we deserved in the end."

Goodwin, who came on in the second half, recorded his first goals since joining the club during the 2025 summer transfer window after winning the A-League Golden Boot for Adelaide United.

"It's always the best feeling as a nine, as a striker, to score goals," he said. "To get the first one, the flood gates are open now, and more to come."

Said Smith: "It's great for him. Number one, he came in last at the end of last season. The

Please see **CHARLOTTE FC** | 6A



Charlotte Hornets guard Brandon Miller (24) shoots the ball against the Boston Celtics at Spectrum Center on March 29, 2026. Despite consecutive losses to Philadelphia and Boston, the Hornets clinched a spot in the Eastern Conference's postseason.

Hornets as postseason contender? Absolutely

Continued from page 5A
isn't the case now.

"It was amazing that our Hornets fans were able to drown out some of the Knicks fans, which I loved, and we appreciate," Lee said. "So, that definitely helped us and created a real home court advantage feel, even though they are such a top team and they travel so well."

Charlotte forward Kon Knueppel, who tied Knicks guard Jalen Brunson for a game-high 26 points, hit six three-pointers, grabbed 11 rebounds and handed out eight assists. Knueppel has separated himself from the field as front-runner for rookie of the year.

"I think sometimes he gets labeled as just a shooter," Lee said, "but we feel

his impact in so many different ways. It's defensively. He's got to guard Brunson at times when certain guys go out or maybe in foul trouble, other teams try to target him and realize that he's probably not as weak of a link as you think. He's helping us on the boards with his physicality. And then offensively, he definitely adds gravity ... so that we do have more driving lanes."

Said Knueppel: "I think just committing to the mentality of winning the day and just getting better within each day. We're not trying to look ahead. We're not trying to dwell in the past and what happened yesterday or last game and I think that's a good spot to be mind-wise."

Legacy continued with giving

Continued from page 5A
that can claim the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. as an alumnus.

Mr. Sansom's father, J.J. Sansom Jr., was a 1939 graduate, and his only grandson, Julian Joseph Sansom Goodman, is a sophomore in the Class of 2028.

The alumni association is hosting its second Father's Day Scholarship Brunch on June 20 at The Westin Raleigh-Durham Airport to celebrate fatherhood and raise funds for Morehouse students. The award amounts and recipients will be announced on that day, so all donations must be received by May 15.

"I am deeply honored to continue the second year of the scholarship," Sansom-Goodman wrote. "... Giving back and helping others were not simply ideals he embraced but principles he lived daily."

Because of the support they've received so far, the family said they've been able to:

- Ease the financial burden of several Morehouse students
- Extend Mr. Sansom's Morehouse legacy

- Host the Father's Day Scholarship Brunch
- Hold fundraising initiatives throughout the year to increase scholarship funds
- Raise awareness of the Morehouse brand in the Triangle and Eastern North Carolina
- Foster community engagement and service.

Supporters can make a direct donation to the Sansom Scholarship, purchase a ticket to the brunch or become a sponsor. Learn more at morehousetriangle.org.

"Your generosity ensures that deserving young men can remain enrolled at Morehouse and continue developing as leaders of character, intellect and service," Sansom-Goodman continued. "Thank you for honoring my father's legacy and for supporting the enduring mission of Morehouse College."

The letter also is signed by Mr. Sansom's wife, Sarah S. Sansom, and Julian Joseph. *Bonitta Best is sports editor at The Triangle Tribune in Durham.*

WSSU extends coach Tierra Terry

By Herbert L. White
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A historic season earned Winston-Salem State women's basketball coach Tierra Terry a new contract at her alma mater.



Terry

Terry, who led the Rams (26-3, 14-2 CIAA) to the school's first NCAA Sweet 16 berth and the conference tournament title in her first season, signed a two-year extension. WSSU finished the season No. 13 in the nation.

"Tierra Terry has set a new standard for our women's basketball program," interim athletics director Eric Burns said in a statement. "Her passion for this university, combined with her ability to develop student-athletes and build a winning culture, made extending her contract an easy decision."

Terry, who joined the Rams from Virginia Union, earned CIAA Coach of the Year after

leading WSSU to a school record for wins in a season. Two players earned CIAA All-Rookie honors, including Rookie of the Year Breonna Roaf, while three players were named to the all-conference second team.

"I'm grateful for the continued belief in our vision," Terry said. "Winston-Salem State is home for me, and we are just getting started. Our goal is to build a championship culture that our university and community can be proud of."

In addition to Terry's extension, assistant coach Jessica Freeman was named associate head coach.

"Coach Tierra Terry's leadership has elevated our women's basketball program and brought well-deserved recognition to Winston-Salem State University," Chancellor Bonita Brown said. "This historic season reflects the discipline, resilience and excellence we strive for across our institution, and we are proud to support her continued success."

2026 Keep Pounding Classic pairings

By Herbert L. White
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Two of the Carolinas' best public school football programs are back for another Keep Pounding High School Classic.

Hough will take on Cardinal Gibbons on Aug. 29 at Bank of America Stadium in the second half of the double while Indian Land takes

on Northwestern. General admission tickets are \$8 and available at Ticketmaster.com.

Hough won its first state title last year when the Huskies rolled to a 14-0 record, the 8A trophy and a national ranking to cap their season. Cardinal Gibbons' Crusaders, who went 12-2 last year with a state

semifinals berth, return the core of their 2025 roster.

Indian Land-Northwestern is the first all-South Carolina pairing in the classic's history. Indian Land's Warriors advanced to the 5A state semis along with an 11-2 record while Northwestern Trojans have won the last two state 5A titles, including a 13-1 mark.

Offseason development key to 49ers spring drills

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bling and alternating reserves Grayson Loftis and Zach Wilcke. Harrell, who underwent surgery, was warming up and stretching at the start of spring practice.

"I don't want to say [Harrell is] ahead of schedule. I'd say he's on schedule," Albin said. "He's battling, and with the injury that he had, being able to be out there today says a lot about him and our training staff. Hopefully, he keeps progressing."

Like last year, Albin will be tasked with finding a QB1 with a roster that features two returning quarterbacks in Harrell and Loftis along with a transfer and a freshman. Cole Gonzales comes to the 49ers from Pittsburgh, where he saw limited game action.

"It's day one. I'd like to see the tape," Albin said. "Just on what I see today for it being his first day, and all new verbiage with the huddle component of it. I'm not sure how many snaps he's got, really in a huddle offense. I thought he did some really good things."

Freshman Jaylen White, an early enrollee, is a three-star recruit from Clearwater High in Florida.

Health is the top priority and added depth

A big issue last season was injuries to key players like running back Henry Rutledge, defensive lineman Taz Williams and offensive lineman Jonny King.

"Just looking at the (linemen), on paper, we're 20-25 pounds bigger," Albin said. "We've got to develop, but without question, we are faster on both sides. We don't have any returners in the secondary, but we seem to be a lot faster, and that's exciting."

The 49ers added 46 new players in the offseason, which Albin feels they addressed roster needs in the offseason. It was also important to get freshman on campus early.

"It's a different world now," Albin said. "Our football team is here. We had, I want to say in the 70s, as far as roster in the spring. We were worried about even having spring ball in January. ... We were at 100 or 99 I think [now] ... we've got 15 early enrollees here in high school, as a part of the 99. That's unbelievable. That's exciting to me... they're here and using our resources which is invaluable. You can't put a price tag on it."



Charlotte FC wing Wilfried Zaha celebrates his first goal of the season in their 6-1 win against Red Bull New York March 21 at Bank of America Stadium.

Charlotte FC aims to keep their unbeaten home streak growing

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qualities are there for you to see with the goals and the finishes that he had today. He works extremely hard in training and been waiting for the chance, and he got his chance today and took it."

Goodwin's breakout match was just one of the benefits of Charlotte's romp. After midfielder Pep Biel's tally early in the second half boosted the Crown's advantage to three goals, the competitive

phase was all but over. Biel, Charlotte's best player five games in, was named to MLS Team of the Matchday for Matchday 5 with two goal contributions (he added an assist) against Red Bull New York. It was Biel's second nod to Team of the Matchday and his seventh since joining Charlotte FC, trailing only Kristijan Kahlina (eight) for the most in club history.

Charlotte's dominance opened the door for Smith to swap in substitutes for

valuable playing time ahead of a two-week international break.

"I think once Pep scored that third goal and the lad had got sent off, I thought it was getting out of reach for (Red Bull)," he said. "It was an opportunity to rest some legs but get some of the players on and give them some minutes. Archie took his, David Schwegg came on and did well. So, there's a lot of players that got minutes and deserve them."

Miller 'excited' for basketball future

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me away. And then I could tell from the many conversations that I had with Kevin, the alignment of that energy and vision. So, I hung up the phone and I went, "There's no sleeping giant, there's a giant that's waking up."

Miller added that he wanted to go where the university leadership values athletics, men's basketball specifically.

"What I was so excited about with the opportunity here is that Chancellor Gaber and Kevin see men's basketball as one of the many facets of the university that can be a part of that ascension and a part of that rise," he said. "And I wanted to be somewhere where it was aligned from the leadership all the way down with the role and the importance of athletics and of men's basketball, to a university."

How to put Charlotte on the map

Fans and alumni are probably tired of hearing it, but the 49ers have not made the NCAA tournament since 2005 when Miller was winning the national title as a player at North Carolina.

Miller is energized to change that narrative.

"This program was in the NCAA tournament year after year," Miller said. "It was nationally competitive, and so there's a great tradition. I was born in 1983, so '77 is a little before my time with the Final Four. But whether it's Cornbread Maxwell and the Final Four, Jeff Mullins, Melvin Watkins, Bobby Lutz and countless players."

"Jobey Thomas was my favorite. He probably doesn't even know me, but when I was a kid in Charlotte, Jobey Thomas was like a hero to me. There's countless players, there's history and there's tradition here, and there are not many places in col-

lege basketball [like it]. It's always been important to me to be able to coach places like that."

Although the NCAA tournament is winding down, Miller's plan is to hit the ground running.

"It's early now, but we'll get to work on that right away," he said. "First and foremost,

to meet with the current players and make sure to get a sense for them. I've been watching a lot of film on them. [I have] certainly watched them on TV a handful of times throughout the year. So, player meetings with these guys, and then after that, it's getting the staff assembled as quickly as possible. We've already done a couple things. They'll be announced here soon, but I'd like to have a staff in place as soon as possible so we can get things off the ground."

Miller considers North Carolina as the basketball state and some of the best players and coaches have connections to it. Having built the UNC Greensboro program into a championship caliber team, he understands the value in local recruiting.

He plans on doing the same in Charlotte. "We built first from the radius of this, where we're in Greensboro within this state," Miller said of his approach. "We'll do the exact same thing here at Charlotte. It'll start our recruiting efforts with the current players, but then when we start to build out our recruiting strategy, let's start with North Carolina. This state is, I think you could ask any college coach in America, any scout in America, it's one of the best states for talent, for coaching, high school coaching, grassroots coaching in America. I feel confident in that, because I've been here and been a part of it for a long time."