



Former North Carolina assistant coach Marcus Paige adds youth to Charlotte basketball staff

THE VOICE OF THE BLACK COMMUNITY SINCE 1906

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Ka'Derrio White, owner of Mr. Pull Up, a mobile barbershop in Rock Hill, South Carolina, sits in his customized van. White said he's been forced to raise prices by \$30 to \$40 in order to keep up with rising fuel costs.

## Rising fuel prices a shock for mobile entrepreneurs

As energy costs climb due to war, they're driven to make difficult decisions

By Cameron Williams  
cameron.williams@thecharlottepost.com

Rising fuel prices are hitting mobile entrepreneurs hard.

Spikes over the last month are connected to oil supply shocks caused by the United States' war with Iran. The fighting - initiated in February by the U.S. and Israel - has disrupted shipping through the Strait of Hormuz and a reduction in global oil supplies. The result is prices over \$100 a barrel, causing the national average for gas to surge over \$4 a gallon.

For entrepreneurs who rely on motor

vehicles for their livelihood, it's caused a burden.

Ja'Derrio White, owner of a mobile barbershop in Rock Hill, South Carolina, said he has told customers they would have to wait on services and in some cases raise prices by \$30 to \$40 to fill his customized van with diesel fuel, which costs around \$120.

"It's unfortunate, but I had to raise some of my costs," said White, owner of Mr. Pull Up, which serves customers across the Carolinas. "The gas prices being so high right now, I had some clients who were used to paying a certain rate,

'Hey man, I am sorry, but I have to [charge more]. Right now, the price of diesel is \$5.29, and I have to raise my prices to be able to afford the travel.'

According to the American Automobile Association, the average gas price in North Carolina as of early April is \$3.93 per gallon, which is slightly lower than the national average of \$4.12 per gallon.

"With gas prices putting pressure on household budgets, drivers can take simple steps to stretch every gallon," AAA spokesperson Tiffany Wright said. "One of the most effective ways to save

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## What's next after Leandro dismissal?

Court determines NC lawmakers ultimate authority on schools

By Herbert L. White  
herb.lwhite@thecharlottepost.com

North Carolina's Supreme Court dismissal of the Leandro case leaves state lawmakers as the lone authority on education funding.

The April 2 ruling, which affirmed the General Assembly with ultimate jurisdiction over school appropriation, overturned by 4-3 vote a 2017 ruling requiring lawmakers to fund public schools according to a court-approved remedial plan. As a result, all subsequent Leandro rulings were declared invalid.

The original Leandro lawsuit, filed by five low-wealth public school districts in 1994, argued the state has a constitutional duty to give all students adequate resources.

Republican lawmakers applauded the decision as a win for constitutional fidelity by withdrawing the court as an arbiter of fiscal responsibility.

"For decades, liberal education special interests have improperly tried to hijack North Carolina's constitutional funding process in order to impose their policy preferences via judicial fiat," Senate Pro Tem Phil Berger said. [The] decision con-

Please see **WHAT'S** | 2A

## Miss NC 2024 Carrie Everett dies at age 22

By Bonitta Best

THE TRIANGLE TRIBUNE

Miss North Carolina 2024 Carrie Everett died April 6 from stomach cancer.

Everett, 22, a North Carolina Central University graduate, was the first historically Black college student to win the title. The Seattle, Washington, native was a sophomore when she won the crown.



Everett

Everett was diagnosed with a rare and aggressive gastric cancer called metastatic signet ring cell carcinoma last July while visiting family in Seattle.

"This is happening for a reason, and God has allowed me to use my voice to give a voice to others," Everett said about the diagnosis.

Everett was crowned Miss Johnston County before the Miss North Carolina pageant and competed in the Miss America pageant.

Everett was the fourth Black woman to win the title since the pageant began in 1937, following Deneen Graham (1983); Alexandra Badgett (2019-2020); and Karolyn Martin (2022).

"When I registered to compete this year, I only had \$40 in my pocket," Everett said of her Miss North Carolina experience. "That is the reality of many young women in this country. I believe in the Miss America Opportunity, what it has done and what it continues to do for young women like me. With this title, I am empowered and ready to facilitate a new culture of equity within this brand."

Please see **TRANSITION** | 2A

## Barber-Scotia College president touts revival

By Ashleigh Fields  
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

Two years into his tenure as Barber-Scotia College president, Chris Rey is touting the school's revival.

Rey was hired during educational and operational deficits, with declining enrollment, \$500,000 in arrears and more than two decades without accreditation. His challenge was straightforward: grow enrollment and drive down debt to move the historically Black college toward sustainability. To make it happen, he pooled alumni and community support for academic and community programs.

"When an HBCU thrives, the community thrives," Rey told the National Council of Negro Women's Charlotte Section Brotherhood and Sisterhood last month, where he received an award for investments in scholarship. "When Black institutions are strengthening, Black futures are expanding. Organizations like the National Council of Negro Women are algorithmic changers and shifters. You recognize leadership, you cultivate excellence."

Rey, the former international president of Phi Beta Sigma fraternity, told the gathering Barber-Scotia was "born in the aftermath of slavery" but "rooted in the belief that education is liberation."

"When I arrived, we faced significant challenges," he said. "Limited enrollment, financial strain, accreditation hurdles, and deferred maintenance. The algorithm was survival. But we made a decision we would not let the narrative define who we were. We would change that algorithm, we shifted from scarcity to

Please see **BARBER-SCOTIA** | 2A



MECKLENBURG COUNTY SHERIFF OFFICE

The interior of The Sheriff's House, a transitional facility that helps the formerly incarcerated move toward independence and sobriety.

## Transition house helps formerly incarcerated return to independence

By Herbert L. White  
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There's a new asset to help the formerly incarcerated adjust upon their return to society.

The Mecklenburg County Sheriff's Office recently launched a transitional home to support people prepare for independent living. The home is believed to be the first such facility established by a sheriff's office in the Carolinas. The facility, called The Sheriff's House, is funded

through a Bureau of Justice assistance grant to address gaps in services for residents leaving the jail, particularly those who want treatment for drug use.

"This home represents more than just a place to stay, it represents hope, responsibility and a second chance," Sheriff Garry McFadden said in a statement. "The Sheriff's House is for individuals who have put in the work, shown real change and are

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### STAY IN TOUCH

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## Mobile entrepreneurs driven to tough decisions

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money is to slow down, because fuel economy drops significantly at speeds above 50 miles per hour. Using cruise control on the highway, combining errands into one trip, and avoiding aggressive driving like rapid acceleration can also make a noticeable difference at the pump.



Wright

"Regular vehicle maintenance plays a big role in fuel efficiency. Keeping tires properly inflated, removing unnecessary weight from the vehicle, and staying on top of oil changes can improve gas mileage by several percentage points. Drivers should also limit idling — if your car will be parked for more than a minute, turning the engine off can help conserve fuel and reduce wear on the vehicle."

The spike in fuel costs caused White to lose some clientele.

"Some customers, they were like, 'Hey, man, when the gas prices go back down then I'll call you back because you are one of the best barbers to ever cut my hair, so I like your cuts, but I just can't afford the prices right now,'" he said. "So, that's affected me

in that way, because I've lost about six or seven people. Well, I won't say I lost them, but I'm not currently cutting their hair."

Kwindarius Sapp, owner of Q's Culinary in Charlotte, runs a restaurant and a food truck. Sapp, who normally travels the region with his truck, admits he has had to take into consideration the mileage to some of his normal set-up spots.

"So far, the gas spike has us being a little more cognizant of how far away events are," he said. "Of course, you hope all events are successful but now there is additional pressure being added up because the travel expenses are going up."

Sapp plans to continue business as normal while remaining aware of the distance to customers.

"For most food truck operators, I don't think scaling back is a solution to combat the rising fuel costs," he said. "We are all counting on the income to some degree, so using different strategies like having travel fees or incorporating fuel costs in sales minimums for hosts kind of helps offset some of the [costs]."

White said he has other business interests to supplement his revenue, pointing to disruptions like this as to why it's needed.

"I am a photographer and videographer," he said. "I have three rental properties. It is a good thing too, 'cause I have had to pull some money from the savings I've generated from those rental properties to cover certain things due to losing clients because of these crazy gas prices."

Sapp admits he didn't have a crisis plan in place if gas prices remain elevated long-term. But, as an entrepreneur, he's thinking about the future.

"When some of your typical fixed costs rise due to reasons beyond your control, all you can do is try to push through it until normalcy returns," Sapp said. "Also, being transparent with your guests if you have to increase prices has been something that seems to help keep your supporters in the loop as the effects trickle down from providers to consumers."



**When some of your typical fixed costs rise due to reasons beyond your control, all you can do is try to push through it until normalcy returns.**



Q's Culinary owner  
**KWINDARIUS SAPP**

## What's next after Leandro?

Continued from page 1A

firmly that the proper pathway for policymaking is the legislative process. ...

"North Carolina's children have access to world-class educational opportunities because of the legislature's commitment to improving educational outcomes. As we prepare for the short session, Senate Republicans will continue our ongoing focus on increasing parental involvement and educational opportunities for students."

School districts in Cumberland, Hoke, Robeson, and Vance counties joined Halifax County in the original lawsuit. In 1997, the state Supreme Court ruled and reconfirmed in 2004 that every child has a right to a "sound basic education" that includes competent and well-trained teachers and principals and equitable access to resources. The court ordered the state to pay for a \$700 school improvement plan in 2022 when Democrats held a 4-3 majority. The court has a 5-2 Republican majority now.

Justice Anita Earls, one of the dissenters, wrote of the dismissal: "The Court today betrays these constitutional commitments. The majority dismisses North Carolina's landmark constitutional education rights litigation with prejudice and with no relief for any injured party because no plaintiff formally filed an amended pleading to challenge the current statewide funding system. In other words, the majority concludes that it will not order the State to correct the way it has harmed public school students, even in very low-wealth school districts like Hoke County, and even as two previous Courts concluded that the State is failing to adequately educate students and must act to fix the public education system. In reaching that decision, the majority relies on a hyper-technicality that is not even lawful grounds to dismiss these proceedings and was not argued by any party. Specifically, no party asked this Court to dismiss this case because it was an improper 'facial' challenge. The majority's

narrow holding rests on stunning and unsupported assertions."

Although Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools wasn't a plaintiff, the state's second-largest district won't face immediate impact to operations.

"To see our students continue to excel despite the lack of adequate state resources for their teachers and classrooms makes me so proud as a superintendent," Superintendent Crystal Hill said in a statement. "Our hardworking teachers and students should not have to overcome this challenge, yet they overcome this state-imposed resource barrier every day."

Public school advocates contend the General Assembly has failed to properly fund traditional public schools while moving resources to charter schools and expanding tuition scholarships to private schools. North Carolina ranks 49th in the nation in per-pupil investment and 43rd in base teacher pay.

"By not providing funding to support a sound basic education as Leandro requires, North Carolina sends a clear message to our 139,000-plus students and their families, and that message is, 'Public education students are not the priority,'" CMS board Chair Stephanie Sneed said.

Lauren Fox, interim president and CEO of Public School Forum, contends the ruling will extend inaction to address the needs of low-wealth districts but the constitutional principle of adequate funding hasn't changed.

"Ensuring adequate funding for North Carolina's public school students is not a partisan issue — it's a constitutional one, and the responsibility before us is just as clear as it was before," she said. "North Carolina law expressly states that it is the General Assembly's responsibility to provide the resources necessary for every child to have access to a sound basic education."

"The latest ruling does not change that reality, nor the reality that our state is not meeting that responsibility. We are 50th in the country in per-student funding, to the detriment of our children, communities, and our state's overall well-being."



Berger



Earls



Hill

## Barber-Scotia College president touts revival

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strategy, from decline to determination, and from survival to sustainability."

Founded as an all-women's school best known as alma mater of NCNW founder Mary McCloud-Bethune, Shaw University President Paulette Dillard, and Vivian Ayers Allen, the mother of Phylcia Rashad and Debbie Allen, was on the brink of closing before Rey stepped on campus.

In Rey's first year as president, BSC underwent a series of changes: gaining property tax exemption and a small volunteer staff to support an enrollment of over 100 students.

One of his first goals was to hire staff, which included former High Point University professor Christopher Hinton as vice president for recruitment and first-year experience. Hinton, who is also chief of staff, recruits Cabarrus and Charlotte-Mecklenburg high schools for students along with Senior Vice President of Government and External Affairs LaToya Crawford, Vice President of Student Services Tiffany Tuma and Executive Vice

President and Provost Kenneth Taylor. That team promotes the Barber-Scotia RISING (Rebuilding - Instruction - Strategy - Infrastructure - Network - Governance) fundraising campaign.

"We decided to re-engage our alumni, we are building partnerships, we launched our new programs, we re-opened residence halls, we raised funds transparently, we told the truth about our challenges, and we invited the community to be a part of our solution," Rey said. "And guess what? Enrollment grew. Donor engagement increased. Athletics returned. Community partnerships were strengthened and hope returned to 145 Cabarrus Avenue. Not because it was easy, but because we changed the code."

The goal is to earn accreditation this year and eventually offer automatic acceptance to Cabarrus students to drive enrollment.

"We decided that a 158-year-old Black institution was too valuable to disappear," Rey said.

## Transition housing for formerly incarcerated's return to society

Continued from page 1A

committed to continuing that progress as they return to the community. Today, the first person moved into the house and shared that they 'never expected it to look this nice.'"

Admission is limited to people who meet department eligibility requirements and demonstrate a commitment to sobriety, rehabilitation and overall readiness for reentry. Along with housing, res-

idents will also receive substance use treatment, peer support and wrap-around services designed to help them maintain sobriety and build a stable foundation.

Residents are required to complete regular check-ins with a peer support navigator and receive support from a team that includes a licensed clinician, peer support services and MCSO's reentry team. In addition to housing and

treatment support, residents can also access essentials like cell phones, bus passes and rideshares that remove barriers to re-entry needs like appointments, employment or treatment.

The accompanying Post Release Resource Center is the support hub for residents to get help from MCSO reentry staff, access referrals and transition to permanent housing.

## 'Let them be worried:' Rep. Cunningham on short session

By Lynn Bonner

NC NEWSLINE

State Rep. Carla Cunningham starts the legislative session this month as a lame duck who is ticked off at Gov. Josh

Stein for endorsing one of her primary opponents.

In an interview on WBT last week, Cunningham, a Charlotte Democrat, said she felt confident last year going into the primary race as a seven-term incumbent, but Stein's endorsement of the Rev. Rodney Sadler was decisive.

"It changed the dynamics for me," she told host Brett Jensen. "That's when I realized I was in trouble."

Cunningham said she knew two weeks before the primary that she was going to lose. She fell to Sadler by more than 48 percentage points. Sadler also won the endorsement of local and

state organizations, including the Black Political Caucus of Charlotte-Mecklenburg, the North Carolina Association of Educators, labor and environmental groups.

Cunningham angered Democrats when she voted to override Stein's veto of a bill outlining how sheriffs must cooperate with ICE. Before she voted, Cunningham gave a controversial speech saying immigrants must assimilate. "All cultures are not equal," she said.

She was the only Democrat in either chamber to vote for the override, and without her vote, the House override effort would have fallen short.

Cunningham is the House Democrat who has voted most often with the Republican majority this session.

"It's not beneficial for me to line up behind a party agenda," Cunningham told Jensen. "What's beneficial to my constituents is that I serve them and prioritize what their needs are."

Cunningham's votes could be crucial in the short session with important bills up for final votes.

In the interview, Cunningham said Stein's endorsement of Sadler was a power play.

"Josh Stein's endorsement of my opponent was never about immigration," she said. "It's about power. It's about telling us, if you don't do what we tell you to do, we're going to put you off the plantation. And I'm not on it. I'm free. And I'm glad that I stood where I stood. I'm not changing where I am. Because I don't have to. I can be authentic. I can be who I am."

Stein's office did not respond to emails or a text message seeking comment.

Jensen asked Cunningham if she was going to "go scorched earth" on the Democrats who turned their backs on her.

"There are a lot of people who are worried about you right now," he said.

"Let them be worried," Cunningham replied. "When I make the decisions on my vote, I'm going to do my research. I'm going to look at what's good and I'm going to look at what's bad and I'm going to weigh it. And then that's how I determine how I vote. They'll know when I know."

As a Democrat with Republicans in charge, it's important to know how to negotiate, she said.

"I'm transactional," she said. "It's business. It's government doing business."

## The resistance that toppled Democrats

By Sarah Michels

CAROLINA PUBLIC PRESS

The seeds of the resistance that kicked several incumbent Democrats out of office in the primary election were sown two years ago, in a Roanoke Rapids hotel room.

In the month leading up to the 2024 primary election, a loose partnership came together to oust then-State Rep. Michael Wray from the legislature, after he voted with Republicans more than any other Democrat two sessions in a row.

Temporarily stationed in Roanoke Rapids, 15 North Carolina members of hospitality worker union Unite Here knocked on 15,000 doors in Halifax, Northampton and Warren counties. The North Carolina League of Conservation Voters' political advocacy group sent direct mail to Democratic and unaffiliated voters in the district.

The organizers told voters that Wray was not acting like a "real Democrat." He overrode the Democratic governor's vetoes on environmental bills and a budget prioritizing private school vouchers, they explained. They encouraged prospective voters to come out and instead support Wray's primary opponent, public school

educator Rodney Pierce.

There was no guarantee it would work. In fact, similar efforts failed in State House District 60, where incumbent Rep. Cecil Brockman, D-Guilford, narrowly fended off Democratic challenger James Adams in the face of grassroots resistance.

But in the end, Pierce beat Wray, a 20-year incumbent, by 34 votes.

For Unite Here and NCLCV, it was proof of concept. Apparently, several other political organizations agreed. Two years later, Down Home North Carolina, the Carolina Federation and the advocacy arm of the Environmental Defense Fund joined the fight — this time, to take out three incumbent Democrats who gave Republicans a working supermajority by overriding governor vetoes.

"We joked, we got the band back together, but the band got bigger," said Dan Crawford, NCLCV senior director of public affairs.

More than a million dollars of spending and 170,000 door knocks later, each of the coalition's preferred candidates won — by wider margins than expected.

In northeastern North Carolina, Patricia

Please see **COALITION** | 3A

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# Coalition toppled 3 Dems

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Smith defeated 11-year incumbent Rep. Shelly Willingham, D-Edgecombe, by 11 percentage points. Pierce also won reelection in a rematch against Wray, this time by nearly 4,000 votes.

In the Charlotte area, Veleria Levy bested seven-year incumbent Rep. Nasif Majeed, D-Mecklenburg, by 42 percentage points, and Rev. Rodney Sadler beat 13-year incumbent Carla Cunningham, D-Mecklenburg, by 48 percentage points.

"With the margins and success that we had in all four of those races, ... if I were an elected official, I would be paying attention and making sure you got the message that you will be held accountable for your votes," Crawford said.

#### Building frustration among Democrats

Despite recent knee surgery, Unite Here member Maria Hernandez was going to hit the streets, knocking on doors for Sadler and Levy in the weeks before the March primary. For her, it wasn't just political; it was personal.

Hernandez remembers the day in 2017 when her grandchildren came home crying. President Donald Trump had just entered his first term. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers had parked outside her grandchildren's school, arresting parents as they picked up their kids.

While Hernandez is a U.S. citizen, she is a Latina woman.

"I asked, 'What happened?'" Hernandez recalled. "And one of them goes, 'Nana, we thought you were not going to be home because ICE took the Mexicans away.' I go, 'What do you mean?' And she goes, 'My friends were crying, and they don't have parents anymore.'"

For days, Hernandez's grandchildren wouldn't let go of her. In the middle of the night, the littlest one, about 6-years-old, would put her hand on Hernandez's face, making sure she was still there.

Hernandez couldn't afford to miss more than a day of work, so she gave each of her grandchildren something of hers to take to school with them. She left work early to stand at the front door of the school, so she would be the first person they saw when they left.

The experience was traumatic, she said. So when Trump was on the ballot again in 2024, Hernandez joined the Unite Here canvassing team.

In July 2025, Cunningham made a controversial floor speech calling for immigrants to assimilate and suggesting that "all cultures are not equal" before overriding Gov. Josh Stein's veto on House Bill 318, an immigration bill that requires sheriffs to comply with ICE detainer requests.

Hernandez was more motivated than ever — Cunningham had to go, even at the risk of her surgery recovery.

Hernandez is not the only one whose frustration reached a breaking point.

In 2024, organizers worked hard to break the Republican supermajority and elect a Democratic governor, so that Republicans could not unilaterally advance their agenda. The goal was to restore power to the governor's veto.

They succeeded, by one seat. However, during the 2025-26 session, several Democrats voted with Republicans on key issues, effectively negating the governor's veto power. The work was not done.

Cunningham, Wray, Willingham and Brockman in particular often voted with Republicans on controversial bills and veto overrides, said Dustin Ingalls, North Carolina director of political programs at EDF Action, the advocacy arm of the Environmental Defense Fund.

Wray was ousted in 2024. Brockman resigned from the legislature in 2025 in the face of criminal charges. Majeed was a later addition to the list, as he hadn't been as "frustrating" for Democrats in the past, Ingalls said.

"A lot of folks have tried to get Cunningham and Wray and Willingham, particularly, to hold the line on vetoes, and been burned, really, too many times," he said. "We decided ultimately, enough was enough."

While each targeted incumbent has a slightly different voting record, they had one particularly controversial vote in common: the veto override of Senate Bill 266.

SB266 does two things. First, it removes the interim, 2034 goal of a 70% reduction in carbon emissions by Duke Energy on the way to 2050 carbon neutrality — a bipartisan aim set by the legislature in 2021.

Second, it allows public utilities like Duke Energy to charge ratepayers for the cost of construction of electric-generating facilities before they are completed.

For NCLCV, Down Home NC and EDF Action, swing Democrats' support of Senate Bill 266 — or as some call it, "the Duke Energy bill" — was the core message to voters. They argue that the policy will unnecessarily raise rates in the midst of an affordability crisis.

"Universally, especially in Eastern North Carolina, when we go into communities and we ask people, what's your number one concern, it's always health care, education or the cost of living," Down Home NC political director Vicente Cortez said. "And when we dig into the cost of living, it is the energy bills."

#### Doing the work

Building the primary electorate wasn't easy. It took multiple layers of political education in many cases, Cortez said.

Sometimes, people didn't know what a primary is and why it was important. Organizers helped prospective voters understand that in many solid one-party districts, the winner is decided in March, not in the November general election.

Once organizers established that, they

could appeal to voters' concerns — which tended to include health care, housing and utility costs, Graham said. Finally, they would make a plan to vote.

To get people to actually vote, organizers had to be persistent. Unite Here member Denise Jackson said they went out six days a week.

"They see you're willing to come out in this kind of weather and talk to them," she said. "That lets them know how important this is."

The campaign literature organizers handed out or left on doorknobs was fact-based, Jackson added. Voters could double check it themselves.

Often, organizers knocked on people's doors more than once. Hernandez said they would make their pitches to Ring cameras if people didn't come to the door.

Carolina Federation engagement director Ashley Evans said they knocked on more than 100,000 doors and had about 30,000 conversations over the course of the primary. Carolina Federation organizes North Carolinians across race, class and gender, with a focus on working class power.

She took one message away: voters are ready to organize and "fight for what we deserve."

"Look at who won in each of the legislative primaries where our members endorsed: a preacher and two public school teachers," she said. "Folks from our own communities who understand that our tax dollars should go to better jobs, affordable homes, and fully funded schools, not handouts for the rich."

#### Money matters

In 2024, NCLCV's political action committee, Conservation Votes PAC, spent \$132,000 on newspaper advertisements and direct mail to convince voters to oppose Wray and support Pierce, according to campaign finance records.

This year, they upped the ante, spending \$179,000 in the District 27 primary. The organization also spent big in the other three targeted districts, for a total of over \$628,000.

They used brightly colored mailers, which labeled Democratic challengers as "real Democrats," while citing in big, bold letters how often incumbents voted with Republicans.

Rodney Sadler is a father, Bible scholar and Baptist minister, "the real Democratic we can count on," one mailer stated. Meanwhile, Rep. Carla Cunningham votes with Republicans "nearly 85% of the time" and "was the deciding vote to expand ICE's brutal tactics."

Community advocate Veleria Levy will "stand up to Trump Republicans and deliver results." Rep. Nasif Majeed, however, "turned his back on the LGBTQ+community" and "made it easier for corporations to pollute our water."

Small business owner and accountant Patricia Smith is a "proven Democrat our community can count on," while Rep. Shelly Willingham voted to allow concealed guns in schools and churches.

The average person spends only a few seconds looking at a piece of political mail, Crawford said. So, they had to make it stand out. They also created short digital ads.

If NCLCV and EDF Action's bread and butter is digital ads and political mail, one-on-one conversations are Unite Here, Down Home NC and Carolina Federation's specialty.

It takes both to be successful, said Aiden Graham, Unite Here North Carolina political director. He learned that by working with the North Carolina League of Conservation Voters in 2024.

"So they sent all this mail, which meant when we got to people's homes, people had already heard a little bit about what was going on," he said. "So we were just reinforcing that message. The mail on its own is not enough. Field on its own is not enough, but together, that's really how we won that race."

The coalition layered communications again in 2026, on a broader scale. They organized who was doing what to avoid duplicating efforts, Crawford said. That way, every dollar went further.

There were a lot of dollars to stretch. The five organizations spent \$1,045,816 on the four primary races.

The most expensive was House District 27, the rematch between Wray and Pierce, coming in at more than \$329,000. The least expensive was House District 23, where Smith defeated Willingham, with \$196,000 spent by the coalition.

That doesn't include candidate spending. Smith said when she was canvassing, she heard about the other door knockers and phone callers working to support her.

"The efforts made on behalf of my campaign were definitely above and beyond a phenomenal job," she said.

#### New leaders, fresh energy for Democrats

Before these wins, organizers like Crawford made a lot of "empty threats and promises" to lawmakers. Now, there's some substance behind their pleas.

"Taking out three incumbents, that's a pretty big deal," he said.

While the vetoes mattered, Cortez said a sense that incumbent lawmakers had gotten disconnected from their districts and local issues also influenced voters.

It's too early to tell whether other lawmakers will heed that message, Cortez said.

Ingalls agreed.

"Listen to your people," he advised lawmakers. "The people have spoken overwhelmingly. You've got high-paid corporate lobbyists from Duke and other companies bending their ear all the time, but if you forget the people who put you in office, eventually the people are going to remove you from office."

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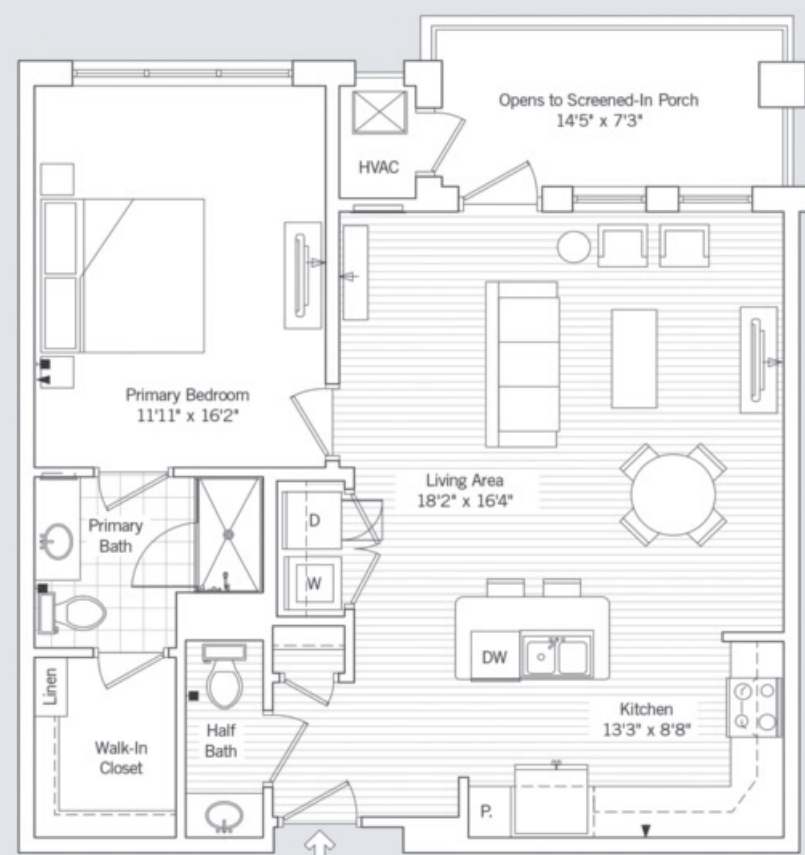
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## Day of inspiration, then infamy

On 4 April 1967, Martin Luther King Jr. gave one of the most comprehensive, brave, ethical, compassionate, eloquent speeches of his life, "Beyond Vietnam: A time to break the silence."

Some say it was the speech that moved enough Americans against the war so that it made it impossible for that war to continue except as one opposed by most Americans, especially important politically because there was conscription.

Some say that speech, delivered at the Riverside Church in New York City, was the moment that triggered plans to assassinate MLK. Indeed, President Lyndon Johnson was enraged at King for stepping out of his Civil Rights lane and into the peace movement that was gathering energy and numbers. With one speech, King created a new, very large, and increasingly powerful coalition.

And so, one year to the day later, 4 April 1968, King was in fact assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee, and Black communities across the U.S. erupted into riots big and small in some 100 U.S. cities and towns.

King was simply regarded as the favorite son, the hero who spoke overriding ethical truths no matter the risk to himself, and always to the benefit of Black people who had suffered centuries of kidnapping, inhuman treatment, slavery, Jim Crow segregation, lynching, discrimination, police brutality, redlining, over incarceration, medical research victimization, voter suppression, lower access to health care, and much more.

King, more than anyone, kept Black communities far less violent in their social movement struggles.

King's assassination - the violent ending of a young life of such remarkable achievement, the hero of his people - lifted the proscription against violence for many who simply could not stand this ultimate act of profound cruelty and disrespect of an entire persecuted race. While some serious rioting had broken out in the three years before his murder, all that had been in northern U.S. cities, where MLK did not hold as much moral sway.

After his killing, the gut punch to an entire people symbolized by that act seemed to simply erase barriers to a highly emotional violent uprising, a fiery catharsis for centuries of horrific abuse based on virulent racism, objectification, and moral depravity.

King's "Beyond Vietnam" speech did indeed add powerful weight to the growing opposition to the war, but also awareness of, and opposition to, the racist greed behind the war.

Racist? Hell, yes. The entire Cold War was a racist project. During it - that is from the end of World War II until the dissolution of the Soviet Union - every war except one (the 1956 uprising in Hungary) was waged on the soil of people of color, from Korea to Algeria to Chile and beyond, chronicled especially well by journalist Patrick Brogan in his remarkable 1990 collection of cases, "The Fighting Never Stopped: A Comprehensive Guide to World Conflict Since 1945."

The common refrain from nuclear weapons apologists is, "Well, they have kept the peace between the superpowers." But MLK pointed to the lie and to the truth, that the primary victims of war and the nuclear "peace" were millions of people of color.

Greed? Double hell yes. The hardworking citizens of the U.S. at almost every economic and social level have lost enormous amounts of the fruits of their labor to the war profiteers, the contracting billions that go to the owners and stockholders of Lockheed Martin, Northrup Grumman, General Dynamics, Boeing, and other corporate beneficiaries of Pentagon contracting. With a Pentagon budget of close to a trillion, that means multiple billions every single day.

And now, of course, Trump is telling his team of operatives that federal funding for frills like daycare need to end in favor of his record-smashing Pentagon budget proposal of more than \$1.5 trillion. He starts a war of choice - which is exactly what the Vietnam debacle was too - with Iran and, once again, the poorest Americans will join people of color in another country in paying the hardest prices for it all.

The wisdom of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. has never been more relevant and is what we still need.

Tom H. Hastings is coordinator of conflict resolution degree programs at Portland State University. His views, however, are not those of any institution.



TOM HASTINGS

## Tipped wage a legacy of slavery

The subminimum wage for tipped workers is a legacy of slavery.

After the Civil War, many employers in hospitality and rail service hired newly freed Black workers into jobs where tips often replaced wages. Tips became, for too many workers, the wage itself.

That injustice still lives on today in the form of a lower minimum wage for tipped workers. We should call that system what it is: an old injustice that never ended.

Today, it does not just hurt Black workers. It hurts tipped workers of every race. It leaves millions of people with unstable incomes. Too many workers finish a shift without knowing whether they earned enough to cover rent, groceries, or childcare.

It also leaves workers more vulnerable to harassment. When your livelihood depends on pleasing

the customer in front of you, even when that customer is drunk, crude, or predatory, the power imbalance is obvious. No worker should have to put up with humiliation to earn enough to live.

No decent society should accept that as normal.

Yet for decades, the corporate restaurant lobby has fought to preserve exactly that arrangement. Its argument is always the same: pay workers fairly and the industry will suffer. But what it is really defending is a business model built on paying some workers less and making customers close the gap.

Chicago is right to reject that model.

Today, tipped workers in Chicago can still be paid \$12.62 an hour before tips, while the full city minimum wage is \$16.60. The city's 2023 law was designed to close that gap over time, ending the tip credit by July 1, 2028. And when the City Council moved last month to freeze that progress, Mayor Brandon Johnson vetoed the measure and

fought to keep the phase-out in place.

He deserves credit for that.

Because this fight is bigger than restaurants.

We are living through twin crises of affordability and democracy. The first shows up at the kitchen table. Rent is too high. Groceries are too high. Child care is too high. Too many families work hard and still cannot get ahead. The second shows up in the growing number of working people who no longer believe democracy can improve their lives.

Those crises are connected.

When government moves quickly to protect loopholes for powerful interests and slowly to raise wages for working people, faith in democracy erodes. People start to believe the system is rigged because too often it is. But when leaders stand up to lobbyists and fight for the people who do the work, democracy starts to feel real again.

That is why this matters. The issue here is dignity. It is whether a woman

serving your dinner should have to tolerate harassment to make enough to buy groceries. It is whether a man working a late shift should have to wonder if a weak night in tips means his child goes without. It is whether labor will be respected in this country or merely used.

A tip should be what it was always supposed to be: extra. It should not be an employer's excuse not to pay a real wage.

And the principle should not stop with tipped workers. In a country as rich as ours, the minimum wage should be a living wage, with no carveouts, no loopholes, and no second-class categories of worker.

Chicago has a chance to say something to the nation: work has dignity, and every worker deserves a full wage.

Mayor Johnson is right to keep fighting. Now the city should finish the job.

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



BEN JEALOUS

## Trump wants to save whose America?

The power grabs are coming from all directions now. Unprovoked war is raging in Iran. Gasoline prices are escalating rapidly. MAGA Republicans are gaining steam, realizing nobody is going to stop them

The "Save America Voting Act" has passed the House but is stalled in the Senate. Good thing. If you have read it, you see how it could disenfranchise large groups of people. Especially women and people of color.

This voter suppression act sows doubt in our elections, which have historically been very well protected and administered. Donald Trump and many Republicans are casting doubt, because Trump lost the 2020 election. Trump would do away with elections altogether to stay in power.

Free and fair elections are a foundation of democracy. Great lengths are

taken to protect the process and ensure the integrity of elections in our country. Most people have not balked at showing IDs as they get their ballot. Being drawn into the mix now is the issue of whether the name on your ID matches the name on your birth certificate and on your passport.

Call me crazy, but this bill appears to be a solution in search of a problem. There is no problem. This scheme is manufactured by paranoid sycophants to please a party of one: DJT. The tyrant's playbook includes casting doubt on democratic systems.

People are gullible, not particularly well informed, and truth is fungible. Alternative facts are free flowing and unchecked.

A well-informed citizenry is fundamental to a functioning and effective democracy. That supposes people want a democracy. It is possible that democracy is no longer a primary goal of Americans? The hope I see is in the "No Kings" protests that have grown in number and strength from the rallies of

last year. A robust resistance giving witness to our civil disobedience is a healthy sign.

We are in the middle of this mess that many of us did not vote for. We have three more years of this. Can we survive?

To escape the reality of Trump's awful presidency, we have been watching "The West Wing," the entire series now shown on Netflix. A fictional President Jeb Bartlett brings morality, leadership, and a cast of competent advisors and assistants to guide the ship of state.

It is amazing to imagine the leader of the free world lead with clarity, honesty, and a moral center that considers the work he does "stewardship" of the democracy. Being an exemplar is not something Donald Trump has capacity to do.

It was fun to see Jane Fonda and Robert DeNiro speak at the rallies. Icons of resistance. Turns out Hanoi Jane was right about Viet Nam. We lost thousands of lives and billions of dollars with no clear victory in hand.

The mindset of war is foreign to me. War appears to be the marker of inability to negotiate a lasting peace.

At some point, the warmonger loses his capacity to fight. Age, dementia, frailty, loss of his peoples' confidence contributes to the failure.

I do believe this era of Trump will pass. I also believe it will leave indelible wounds on the America we love. We are no longer the "shining city on the hill" and have tarnished the legacy of a proud people in their quest for a more perfect union. For one brief shining moment we led the world. We were respected as we gave hope and help to people around the globe.

It is hard for me to believe we could give this up so easily. Take voting seriously. Be loud in protest. Nothing can be taken for granted.

Lib Campbell is a retired Methodist pastor, retreat leader, columnist and host of the blogsite [www.avirtualchurch.com](http://www.avirtualchurch.com). She can be contacted at [libcam05@gmail.com](mailto:libcam05@gmail.com)



LIB CAMPBELL

## Military spending isn't about 'defense'

\$1.5 trillion. With a "t."

That's how much President Donald Trump wants Congress to appropriate for military

(falsely called "defense") spending in 2027. And that number - there's no other way to put this - is insane. The only proper date for such

a spending request, followed by a winking grin emoji, is April 1. Let's compare.

At the height of the war in Vietnam, in 1969, the US government spent about \$85.5 billion (\$761 billion in inflated 2026 dollars) on "defense." In 1991, when the U.S. deployed hundreds of thousands of troops for Desert Storm, the government spent about \$313 billion, or \$750 billion accounting for infla-

tion. In 2004, while fighting wars in both Iraq and Afghanistan, that number was about \$450 billion, or \$780 billion in 2026 dollars.

Yes, it's wartime again. As usual, the war - this time with Iran - is entirely illegal/unconstitutional (only Congress can declare war, and it hasn't).

And, as usual, the war is entirely optional and serves no defensive purpose whatsoever.

The president keeps telling us THIS war will be over Real Soon Now, and he started talking about a \$1.5 trillion military budget months before he launched Operation Epic Fail, so the 40% bump clearly isn't about Iran.

In what universe does the already bloated U.S. military need nearly half again as much money next year as this year, and twice as much as it needed during previous wars?

I'm not one of those

people who waxes sentimental over what the government COULD spend money on rather than fake "defense." That money SHOULD be left in the wallets of taxpayers rather than being taxed from them or borrowed in their names. But I guess it's worth mentioning that Trump wants to partially "pay for" Operation Epic Dumb Idea with a 10% cut (less than \$75 billion) to "nondefense spending" programs that he considers "woke."

If the current "defense" budget was cut by 90%, a country that's geographically isolated from credible enemies by two oceans, hasn't been invaded since the War of 1812, and never really gets in a fight unless its government actively seeks one out, would still have far more actual "defense" than it needs.

Everything beyond that \$100 billion (at most) falls into one or more of three

categories: Waste, fraud, and abuse.

Perhaps congressional pushback will trim Trump's demands ... but don't bet on it. Congress usually ends up giving the Department of Defense MORE than the president asks for as Representatives and Senators advocate for military contracts that pad the bottom lines of campaign contributors' businesses in their districts and states.

If Congress won't cut off Pete Hegseth and take away his car keys, American taxpayers should cut off Congress and take theirs. Type "National War Tax Resistance Coordinating Committee" into your favorite search engine for more information.

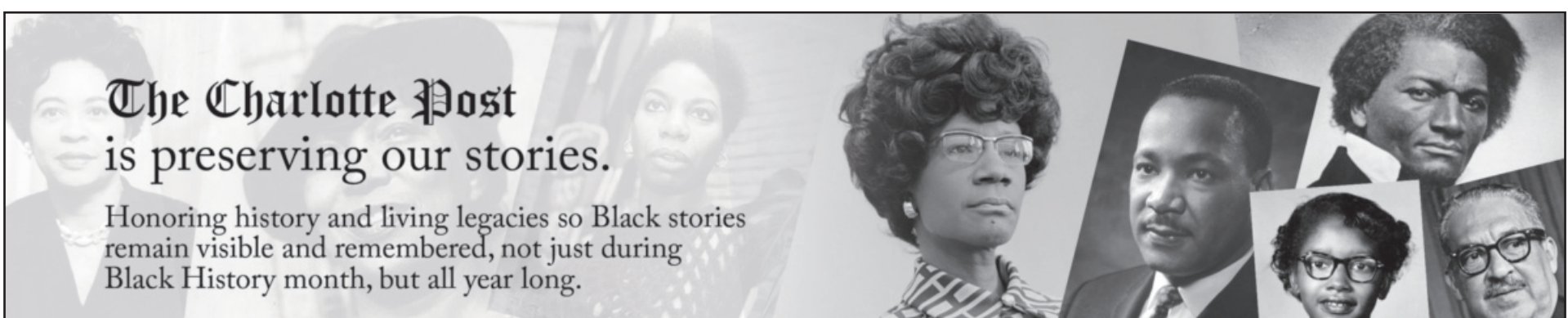
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THOMAS KNAPP

The Charlotte Post

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The Charlotte Post is preserving our stories.

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# Sports

THURSDAY, APRIL 9, 2026



NBAE

Charlotte Hornets guard Brandon Miller drives past Indiana's Ben Sheppard in the first half of the Hornets' 129-108 win on April 3, 2026, at Spectrum Center. Charlotte held opponents under 110 games in four straight games – all wins – leading into Tuesday's loss at Boston.

## Defense is Hornets' calling card

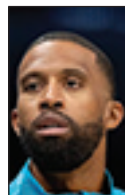
*The bedrock of Charlotte's turnaround season is limiting opportunities for opponents to score*

By Cameron Williams  
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The Charlotte Hornets look different in 2025-26.

Of course, they are winning games and healthy most of the season. But what has been one of the main catalysts has been their defensive intensity. Last week's 127-107 win over the Phoenix Suns, for example, doesn't truly tell the story. The Suns scored 41 points in the first quarter alone but Charlotte (43-37) held them to just 66 points over the remaining three.

"Great job by our team to have a much better second quarter response than the first quarter," Hornets coach Charles Lee said. "Too many moments of not locking into tendencies, having an active [center] at the rim to help protect the paint, just a lot of our defensive principles and who we are and the habits we built weren't there in the first quarter, especially consistently enough."



Lee

Lee highlighted two players he thought particularly excelled on the defensive side.

"Credit the team, but to [point] out Sion [James] and Ryan Kalkbrenner," Lee said, "I thought that their defensive physicality, their focus on Devin Booker's tendencies [were key]. Sion picks up a foul here or there, but he does a great job of moving on to the next play and responding to hold Booker to one free throw tonight is a great effort. It's mental focus. It's a great job by the whole team collectively

to be locked in on his tendencies."

The Hornets have keyed in on defense, really all season, but in games against some of the NBA's more physical teams, they've excelled. Charlotte has held opponents under 100 points in 18 games this season compared to 10 last season and seven the year prior.

The defense is trending in the right direction and has the Hornets sitting with their best record since 2021-22 with a chance to top that season with

Please see **DEFENSE** | 6A

## A&T athletics director Earl Hilton calls it quits

By Herbert L. White  
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North Carolina A&T athletics director Earl Hilton is retiring at the end of the academic year.

Hilton, who has led the Aggies' 17 sports programs for 15 years, will step down when his contract ends. A national search for his replacement will begin immediately while Hilton remain until his successor is hired.

"It has been my singular privilege to have worked with so many wonderful and talented student athletes and the dedicated coaches and staff who support them. I have been blessed to be part of a remarkable community of boosters and fans who have sustained us with unflinching resolve," Hilton said in a statement. "I am honored to have witnessed historic academic and athletic achievement and look forward to our continued success under the leadership of Chancellor [James] Martin and the next athletics administration."

Hilton who was hired full-time in 2011 after serving on an interim basis a year earlier, oversaw an era of transition in A&T athletics that coincided with the school's academic rise. The Aggies won four Black college na-

Please see **A&T** | 6A



NORTH CAROLINA A&T ATHLETICS

North Carolina A&T athletics director Earl Hilton, whose 15-year tenure included four Black college football national titles and three Olympic medalists, announced his retirement at the end of the academic year.

## Roulette wheel turns for coaches

After last year's 12 HBCU basketball coaching vacancies, I thought it couldn't be topped. But it has.

As of April 1, athletic directors were looking for 14 new head coaches.

Now, a couple immediately assigned interim head coaches, but the job is still technically open until the tag is removed.

But what's even bigger news than the 14 is the recruitment of two – possibly three – SWAC coaches by top-tier schools.

Alabama State coach Tony Madlock was recruited away by Memphis coach Penny Hardaway. Not

only are the two friends and former teammates, Madlock raised his stock tremendously after leading the Hornets to a SWAC Tournament championship and a First Four win – a first in program history.

"Coach Madlock did a commendable job leading our men's basketball program," director of athletics Jason Cable said. "In just three seasons, he transformed the program into a 20-win team, a SWAC champion and a history-making NCAA Tournament team."

Kentucky came calling for Jackson State coach Mo Williams to join head coach Mark Pope's staff. Williams compiled a 47-25 conference record in four seasons. Again, he and Pope are well acquainted.

JSU associate head coach Trey Johnson was named interim. Several HBCU media reports had Texas Southern coach Johnny Jones headed to LSU under new coach Will Wade. Jones denied the rumor a day later but admitted on ClutchPoints that he was in "discussions" with LSU.

The trio's recruitment raised many eyebrows, but coaching

Please see **THE ROULETTE** | 6A



BONITTA BEST

## Miller's 49ers coach hires are familiar, ascendant

By Herbert L. White  
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Wes Miller's first hires as Charlotte basketball are familiar faces.

The addition of Marcus Paige and Chad Dollar as assistant coaches gives Charlotte core elements to rebuild the program. Paige, who was on Hubert Davis' staff at North Carolina for three seasons, gives Charlotte a jolt of youth on the staff. He played seven years of professional basketball after suiting up for the Tar Heels from 2012-16.

"I'm thrilled to add Marcus Paige to our staff," Miller said in a statement. "He is a rising star in coaching. I've gotten to know him

well during his time as an assistant at UNC and have been blown away by him as a young man and coach. He works hard, he's curious, and he understands the game at an extremely high level. What I'm most impressed with is how naturally he communicates and connects with young people."

Dollar, who worked with Miller at Cincinnati for five seasons, was promoted to associate head coach a year later. Before landing with the Bearcats, Dollar was an assistant coach at Georgia from 2018-21 on Tom Crean's staff;

Auburn (2016-17) and Georgia Tech for five seasons, including two as an associate head coach.

"Chad Dollar is the total package as a coach," Miller said. "He brings with him a wealth of knowledge, wisdom, and experience. He connects with young people and has a passion for teaching our game. He's also a great evaluator and recruiter. Most importantly, we have worked together for five years, and we share the same vision and values for the direction of this program."



Dollar



Paige

## USMNT slides down a spot to No. 16 in FIFA world rankings

By Herbert L. White  
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The United States is 16th in the latest FIFA world soccer ranking.

The U.S., which has 1,617.13 points, slipped a spot to swap places with Concacaf rival Mexico after dropping friendlies against Belgium (5-2) and Portugal (2-0). Mexico managed draws against the same teams - 0-0 vs. Portugal and 1-1 against Belgium. The U.S. is 0-2 in 2026 international friendlies.

France, the 2022 World Cup runner-up, rose two spots during the international window to reclaim No. 1 for the first time since September 2018. Les Blues leapfrogged Spain and

2022 champion Argentina, which fell to second and third, respectively. Spain, the European champion, was hampered by a March 31 draw against Egypt, which jumped a couple of places to No. 29.

Other notable moves include No. 5 Portugal which changed places with Brazil after a win and draw in recent friendlies and while the Seleção lost to France. Otherwise, the top 10 is unchanged.

Only three of the top 30-ranked teams will miss the World Cup: Italy (12th, up 1), Denmark (20th, up 1) and Nigeria (26th, unchanged).

No. 22 Türkiye (up three spots), No. 34 Côte

d'Ivoire (up three), Sweden (38th, up four) and Tunisia (44th, up three) made the most aggressive moves in the top 50. Bosnia and Herzegovina (65th, up six places) have double cause for celebration, having shot up the standings after joining European playoff winners Sweden, Türkiye and Czechia (41st, up two) in clinching their World Cup berth.

Vietnam (99th, up nine spots), Nepal (176th, up six) and Bhutan (186th, up six), join the Dragons in climbing more than five places. Eritrea (184th) returned to the ranking for the first time in three years.

The next ranking will be released on June 10.

## Defense turned Hornets into an NBA contender

Continued from page 5A

five games remaining. You'd have to go back to 2015-16 – the last time Charlotte made the playoffs – to find a better record at 48-34.

"It was great for our team to come out with a victory," Lee said, "but I think also to be able to combat that physicality, there's a ton of growth that we made in a lot of moments tonight to not lose our minds and lose our focus on what the ultimate goal is, which is

building winning habits and the togetherness and focusing on us. And I thought our group did that at a really high level."

Charlotte is locked into an NBA play-in spot at worst and 1.5 games behind Toronto and Philadelphia in seventh and sixth respectively. They would likely need some help to move into sixth. Orlando and Miami are a half game and one game behind Charlotte in ninth and 10th.

## The roulette wheel turns for HBCU basketball coaches

Continued from page 5A

is a small world. Relationships are developed as early as peewee ball sometimes and definitely during AAU. People go different routes for various reasons, but the relationships are still there.

And just like coaches will follow a recruit's collegiate career in case things don't work out, they follow their peers. They know a good coach when they see one, no matter what level they're coaching on.

Last one hired turn out the lights Mississippi Valley State coach George Ivory was fired by his alma mater. That had to hurt. MVSU didn't win more than five games in a season in Ivory's four years.

Every time the Delta Devils hire a football or basketball coach, I want to send him or her a sympathy card. You can't win without scholarship money. The marching band performed at Trump's inauguration. What, no school donations from the MAGA folks?

Bethune-Cookman fired women's coach Janell Crayton Del Rosario after five seasons and a 48-101 record.

George Mason associate head coach Demetria Frank was hired. It's a full circle for Frank, who coached under former B-CU head coach Vanessa Blair-Lewis and then followed her to George Mason. Now, she's back in charge of the Wildcats program.

The CIAA and SIAC both have four openings in their respective conferences.

Bowie State made associate head coach Bryan Wilson interim, and Wykevin Bazemore is acting head coach at Shaw. That leaves the women's jobs at Shaw and Lincoln (Pa.), and Winston-Salem State men. Whomever is hired by the Rams has a tough act to follow after the season the women had. Folks say they don't compare programs within a department, but they do.

Surprisingly, Shaw didn't name an interim women's coach. Was it because the Bears played so bad late in the season that everybody had to go?

And 30 miles up the road, all eyes are on Fayetteville Street in Durham. Women's basketball hasn't had a decent coach since Joli Robinson during North Carolina Central's CIAA days.

The Triangle is too great an area and NCCU is too good of a university not to have a championship-caliber women's program. Dang, Maryland Eastern Shore, which probably couldn't beat Southern High School a couple of years ago, was in the WNIT.

C'mon now. There's no excuse.

*Bonitta Best is sports editor at The Triangle Tribune in Durham.*

## A&T athletics director Earl Hilton calls it quits

Continued from page 5A

tional titles during his tenure with Rod Broadway (2011-17) and Sam Washington (2018-22) earning a pair each. Broadway's 2017 squad finished a school-best 12-0 with a Celebration Bowl win in his final game. From 2015-19, the Aggies won four Celebration Bowls.

The Aggies succeed also became a force in track and field. Three A&T athletes won three medals – including a pair of golds – at the 2021 Summer Olympics in Tokyo and in 2022, the men's team finished second at the 2022 NCAA indoor championships – the highest indoor finish ever for a Division I HBCU.

Hilton also shepherded A&T through a pair of conference changes in which the Aggies moved from the MEAC, which they were a co-founder in 1970 to the Big South Conference and the Coastal Athletic Conference. Those transitions roiled A&T alumni, fans and leadership into distinct camps – those who wanted to stay in the MEAC, which is made up of historically Black colleges like A&T, and those who supported competing against campuses more academically aligned with A&T as research schools.

In three years as a CAA member, the Aggies are 2-22 in conference games, 4-31

overall. Shawn Gibbs, who was hired last year as coach, led the Aggies to a 2-10 record while winning their first two conference games.

Hilton also managed the program through major transitions in college athletics, including liberalized transfer rules and the launch of name, image and likeness deals and direct payments to athletes.

Hilton's leadership was nationally recognized in 2019, when he was named an Under Armour Athletics Director of the Year for Division I FCS programs. During his tenure, graduation rates among A&T athletes increased by 51%, while annual giving to athletics grew by more than 15-fold and Aggies earned more than 70 individual, team, conference, national and Olympic championships.

"North Carolina A&T is tremendously grateful for the outstanding leadership Earl has provided for our student athletes over the past 15 years," Martin said. "He created an environment in which more than 300 student athletes each year never lose sight of the fact that they are students first and that success in the classroom comes before competition on the playing field. We have especially appreciated his steady hand in a time of unprecedented change throughout the NCAA."

## Charlotte FC adds Hooper as assistant

By Herbert L. White

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Charlotte FC has a new set piece guru on the coaching staff.

Karl Hooper has joined the club as assistant coach with a focus on the set pieces and individual development plans for players. A native of Birmingham, England, Hooper spent the last six seasons with Aston Villa, including the last five as assistant Under-21 and professional development phase coach, where he worked to align playing styles and set pieces.

"He's a really, really good coach," Charlotte head coach Dean Smith said. "Knows how to get the best out of individuals, how to improve them, how to help develop them. He has good rapport with players, but on

the offensive set piece side as well. He's worked very close with Austin McPhee, Aston Villa's set piece coach who I worked closely with, and he's now the Portugal set piece coach as well. He's come to me with glowing terms from people who have worked with him as well."

Hooper's arrival coincides with improved production in set pieces compared to 2025. Through five matches, Charlotte (2-2-1) converted four set piece or free kick scenarios into goals, a pace that exceeds last season's five goals and eight in 2024. Set pieces are dead ball plays such as corner kicks, throw-ins, penalty kicks or goal kicks.

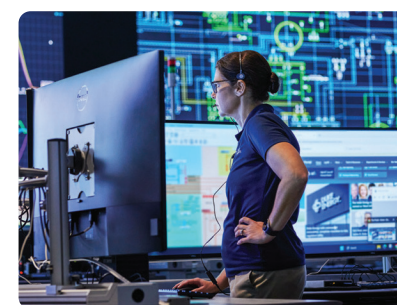
"They weren't great offensively," Smith said. "We didn't score anywhere near

what we should have, and I think it can be skewed a little bit sometimes as well. You're only as good as your delivery, so you've got to make sure you've got good delivery, but you're also only as good as the people who want to head the ball inside the penalty box as well or get on the end of things.

"They're two things that we feel that we could improve on. The quality that [Ashley Westwood] and [Pep] Biel can put into the penalty boxes is outstanding but then the other side of it is working to get the right people in the right places at the right time to go on score goals."

Hooper launched his coaching career at Birmingham City FC in 2010 in their academy program.

The Charlotte Post



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