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HERBERT L. WHITE | THE CHARLOTTE POST

Descendants of Willie McDaniel unveiled a historical marker detailing his 1929 lynching in Charlotte. The April 18, 2026 dedication at Reedy Creek Park & Nature Preserve in the vicinity of McDaniel's murder, was a collaboration between Charlotte-Mecklenburg Remembrance Project, Equal Justice Initiative and Mecklenburg County.

Acknowledgment of terror, a path toward reconciliation

Dedication of historical marker centers Mecklenburg County's lynching victims

Herbert L. White
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Tiffany McDaniel was anxious. As she prepared for Saturday's unveiling of a historical marker recognizing the 1929 lynching of her great uncle Willie McDaniel, there was foreboding. His death was one of three confirmed instances of racial terror violence against Black Americans in Mecklenburg County. Nearly a century later, the marker erected at Reedy Creek Park & Nature Preserve near the murder scene is liberating.

"I feel joy because it recognizes what happened to our family and many other Black families in American history and I feel sadness because it happened to a

person, not because it was my family member but because it happened to untold families — other Black and brown people," said Tiffany McDaniel, a native Charlottean who attended the ceremony with her mother, Johnnie McDaniel Harris. "It's a mixture of emotions. It's a ball of emotions and I'm in the middle of it all right now."

The dedication was a public acknowledgment of Charlotte's history of racial terror. Willie McDaniel, a 22-year-old farmer who lived in the Newell neighborhood, was found on June 30, 1929, in a wooded area near his home. His lifeless body was lying face-down, neck broken with abrasions on his neck and wrists. Court witnesses testified that the day be-

fore, McDaniel demanded his white landlord, Mell Grier, pay for work done by McDaniel and his wife. Grier refused and threw a rock at McDaniel when he talked back. The men wrestled before Grier went home to retrieve a shotgun. McDaniel ran and Grier gave chase.

It was the last time McDaniel was seen alive. No one was charged with his death and Grier wasn't charged. An all-white grand jury investigation didn't produce an indictment.

The marker is part of a campaign by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Remembrance Project to raise awareness of lynching in Mecklenburg and the racial climate that led to such attacks. Willie

Please see **MARKER** | 2A

Making sense of 2 SAVES for NC voting

Initiatives would disqualify noncitizen ballots that don't exist

By Sarah Michels

CAROLINA PUBLIC PRESS

Of the 4.76 million voters who cast ballots in North Carolina's 2016 election, 41 were noncitizens.

In a 2017 post-election audit, State Board of Elections auditors found that while these noncitizens came from 28 different countries, they had one thing in common: they were in the United States legally. But while they were granted the right to reside in the country through a green card, visa or another pathway, they did not have the right to vote in U.S. elections.

Many said they didn't realize they couldn't vote. One noncitizen voter was married to a US citizen and believed that qualified her. Others were misinformed by election officials or voter registration drive workers.

Together, the confirmed noncitizen voters made up 0.0008% of the electorate. Once their ballots were removed, no election outcome changed.

Despite the relatively small number of confirmed noncitizen voters in North Carolina and across the country, a decade later, concerns about noncitizen voting and registration remain at the forefront of national and state election policy — and political rhetoric.

On the federal level, lawmakers are debating the Safeguard American Voter Eligibility (SAVE) Act, which would require all voters to provide documentary proof of citizenship — like a birth certificate or U.S. passport — in order to register to vote.

In North Carolina, the State Board is planning to use the Systemic Alien Verification for Entitlements

Please see **PROPOSALS** | 2A

Drought highlights disparity in tree canopy

By Cameron Williams
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Charlotte is under an extreme drought. North Carolina is in the middle of the third-driest January-March on record since 1895. March was the fifth-driest March on record since 1895 with 1.85 total inches of precipitation, which is down 2.44 inches from the normal average.

During periods of drought, one thing that sometimes goes overlooked is the importance of trees to combating the impacts of drought. In urban Charlotte where asphalt is everywhere and trees are disappearing, it remains hot and drought impacts are heightened.

Allison Rhodes, executive director at TreesCharlotte, said trees play a vital role in keeping people cool year-round.

"The trees shade the ground and the air surface," she said. "Think about it like this: when you walk into a forest, you notice that it feels cooler and then the ground is damp. That's because the trees are helping to keep the air cool. The rain falls, the trees soak up that water, and then they slowly help release it into the ground and into the air, to keep more moisture in the air and to keep the temperature cooler."

In neighboring Gaston County, the city of Gastonia and Two Rivers Utilities are urging residents and businesses to conserve water after the Catawba-Wataree Drought Management Advisory Group declared a Stage 1, or voluntary advisory for the Catawba-Wataree River Basin.

The Catawba-Wataree Drought Management Advisory Group is an alliance of water utilities as well as cities, businesses and Duke Energy that rely on the

Please see **DROUGHT** | 2A

« APPRECIATION »

Rev. JA Cuthbertson, Pleasant Hill Missionary Baptist Church pastor

By Herbert L. White
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The Rev. J.A. Cuthbertson Sr., pastor at Pleasant Hill Missionary Baptist Church for 54 years, died April 1 at his Charlotte home.

The home going celebration was held April 15 at Pleasant Hill Missionary Baptist.

Rev. Cuthbertson, born June 16, 1934, in Matthews, graduated Second Ward High School and spent more than five decades leading Pleasant Hill Missionary Baptist in the Cherry community.

Raised Presbyterian and baptized at Pleasant Hill, Rev. Cuthbertson's first pastoral assignment was at a church in Harmony, N.C., in 1965. He lived 52 miles away and commuted every Sunday.

"I could preach, but not pastor to those people," he recalled in a 2011 interview with The Post. "When I got through with preaching on Sunday I was tired and wanted to go home. I couldn't make the activities during the week because I was so far away."

Then the opportunity arose at Pleasant Hill.



Cuthbertson

"I was in my 30s when I came to this church," Rev. Cuthbertson recalled to The Post. "I came here in 1970."

Rev. Cuthbertson touched generations through preaching, teaching, counseling, and pastoral care. He delivered more than 2,600 sermons, officiated hundreds of weddings, baptisms, and baby dedications.

"A lot of those babies up there now have their own babies," Rev. Cuthbertson said in 2011. "I have so many photos that some of them are in a box and can't fit on the wall."

Rev. Cuthbertson's Sundays were for pastoring; Saturdays for funerals and weddings, and weekdays for visiting the sick and shut-in. Thursdays were his day off, which he spent tending his garden.

The Rev. Lincoln Lee, past of Silver Mount Baptist Church before his death in 2019, recalled in 2011 that Rev. Cuthbertson's attention to his congregation motivated him to do likewise.

"He is known for visiting the sick and shut-in," Lee told The Post. "He goes to the hospital to check in on members, friends and family at least twice a week. I was weak in that aspect, but by hanging out with him I now visit the sick in shut-in also."

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HERBERT L. WHITE | THE CHARLOTTE POST

A glass jar with soil collected at Reedy Creek Park & Nature Preserve represents the scene where Willie McDaniel was lynched in 1929. The soil is part of an exhibit of more than 4,000 jars collected from lynching sites across the United States at the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama.

Marker reclaims and connects shared history

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McDaniel's death was the focus of a five-part series published last year by The Post. Another confirmed lynching victim, Joseph McNeely, was dragged from his bed at Good Samaritan Hospital - now the site of Bank of America Stadium - and shot to death by a white mob on Aug. 26, 1913, after a fight with a white police officer. No one was charged.

In 1896, Craig Kirkpatrick was found dead with a .38-caliber bullet wound in the back of his head that newspaper reports of the time broke his neck. A month later, a Mecklenburg grand jury indicted Sam Grier - Mell Grier's older cousin - for murder. Law enforcement never apprehended him for trial.

Other lynchings were believed to have taken place in Mecklenburg but unconfirmed according to the Birmingham, Alabama-based Equal Justice Initiative, which has documented 4,084 racial terror lynchings in 12 Southern states between the end of Reconstruction in 1877 and 1950.

"I knew it was going to pull up something from the past, something that's painful at first, and then I was excited, because it's an acknowledgment to help other families heal as well as my family heal," Tiffany McDaniel said. "This is helping out more

than just my family, so it's some joy in there as well."

The marker - a collaboration between the Remembrance Project, EJI and the county - is a token of reconciliation, an admission of racial terror and starting point for honest conversations on a subject most Americans hesitate to acknowledge, much less discuss.

"We've not only remembered him, but also reclaimed the piece of our shared history, one that reminds us of both our pain and our progress," said Justin Perry, a member of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Remembrance Project steering committee. "This historical marker will stand as a lasting witness to truth. It's a symbol of our community's willingness to face the past honestly so we can move forward with integrity."

The marker - gold lettering on blue background - lays bare the circumstances and approximate location of Willie McDaniel's murder on one side and the Americanization of racial terror on the other. At the plaque's base is a quote by James Baldwin: "Nothing can be changed until it is faced."

"When we use the words racial terror lynching, the terror has got to be recognized in that there was a purpose," Perry said. "This was not flukish, this was not random, this was not just emotional. This was intentional. ...

"With 9/11 we use the words 'Never forget,' but forever with Black trauma, we have always said, 'Get over it.' But we're stopping that. There's no get over it in the same way that we say with 9/11 'Never forget.'

"We don't honor Osama bin Laden. We don't have Osama bin Laden schools. We honor the people who died in the same way when it comes to the history we have in this country, here in the South, in the Confederacy, in the movement of white supremacy. It is time that we honor the victims and their descendants, no longer the perpetrators of the harm."

That acknowledgment is important to Willie McDaniel's descendants.

"I'm super excited to have this documented for future generations and the current generation to understand what happened to my family member, Mr. Willie McDaniel, and other countless untold families to hopefully help heal some of the racial divides," said Tiffany McDaniel. "At the end of the day, we're all God's children."

When we use the words racial terror lynching, the terror has got to be recognized in that there was a purpose. This was not flukish, this was not random, this was not just emotional. This was intentional.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Remembrance Project Steering Committee member
JUSTIN PERRY

Drought and tree disparities

Continued from page 1A

basin's water. The goal is to reduce consumption by 3-5%.

Trees - whose numbers over the last four years have drastically decreased - lower heat by creating shade and releasing water vapor through their leaves. They also protect people from heat-related injuries.

"The number one environmental killer is heat," Rhodes said. "And a lot of people don't know that. They think it's hurricanes or floods or whatnot, but it's actually heat. It is the number one killer for people. So obviously, people that are sensitive, that have health issues, or elderly people, they're more prone to that."

"If there's not a tree in your yard or shade, it could be crucial. You see workers outside, if they don't have a place to go in the shade and rest and cool down, their bodies will overheat and they'll get heat stroke and other things that could be even worse."

Another key contribution of trees is air quality. According to the Centers For Disease Control and Prevention, drought degrades air quality by increasing particulate matter in the atmosphere.

"Trees are natural air scrubbers," Rhodes said. "They make the air cleaner. CleanAir [NC] has a great program where they are testing the air quality through all

of Charlotte and areas like Myers Park especially have higher air quality than areas like Derita. A lot of that has to do with not only the lack of tree canopy (in lower-income neighborhoods) but also the businesses that are in those areas. If you had trees around those businesses, it would help offset some of the pollutants that those businesses are putting out."

According to Mecklenburg County records, the tree canopy in the last 20 years has dropped 5% in large part due to development. TreesCharlotte's socio-demographic analysis indicates that parts of west and east Charlotte along with up-town have some of the lowest percentages of active tree canopy and as a result tend to be hotter on average. In times of drought, it's amplified.

"With the west side, they have a lot of impervious surface," Rhodes said. "So, they have a lot of concrete, a lot of asphalt, not a lot of grass. So those parts of town, if you look at heat maps, are hotter for that reason, because they don't have impervious surfaces. And that's one of the reasons that it causes it to and it makes everything drier, because the trees add water to the air. ... When you cut down trees it can make areas anywhere from 10 to 30 degrees warmer in those areas with a lack of trees."

Proposals would disqualify noncitizen ballots in NC

Continued from page 1A

(SAVE) system - a collection of federal databases - on a broad scale to determine how many noncitizens are on the voter rolls.

The board voted last week along party lines to approve the process that North Carolina will use to challenge voters whom the SAVE system identifies as potential noncitizens.

State election staff will begin uploading portions of North Carolina's voter roll - including voters' names, birthdates and the last four digits of their Social Security numbers - as early as Friday.

However, no voter identified as a potential noncitizen can be removed from the rolls until the Rules Review Commission approves the process, which could happen in June or later.

How does NC make sure noncitizens don't vote?

If it wasn't clear before, it is after a successful 2024 constitutional referendum: Only U.S. citizens are allowed to vote in North Carolina elections.

Election officials enforce that requirement during the voter registration process. The first question on the voter registration form every applicant must sign, under penalty of perjury, is "Are you a citizen of the United States of America?"

If not, the form instructs applicants to not submit the form. They are not qualified to vote.

Again, at the bottom of the form, right above the signature line, each registrant must attest to having reviewed the form and being a U.S. citizen.

Once registered, voters can be challenged on grounds they are noncitizens - but that's "incredibly rare," former State Board attorney Paul Cox said.

Post-election audits, like the 2017 one, show that some noncitizens still might be improperly registered to vote and cast a ballot. The source of many of those non-citizen registrations appears to be the Division of Motor Vehicles, said Jim Womack, founder of the conservative North Carolina Election Integrity Team.

Noncitizens can obtain driver's licenses under certain circumstances and may be asked whether they want to register to vote while taking care of other DMV business.

"A lot of times, the DMV makes a mistake and adds them to the voter list," Womack said. "And if they're not very fluent in English or not paying careful attention, they may get added to the voter list, even though they're not trying to break the law."

Once voters are on the rolls, it becomes a lot harder to get them off, he added. Womack suggested a comprehensive audit of the DMV's voter registration processes to ensure things run more smoothly.

Is it worth the effort?

Even if only a handful of noncitizens are voting, proponents of efforts like the SAVE Act and SAVE system, including Womack, argue that each one of those votes dilutes the vote of a US citizen.

During last week's meeting, Republican board member Stacy "Four" Eggers said the alternative to using the SAVE system is to not verify citizenship, which is a nonstarter.

"What I hear from my colleagues on the other side of the fence is that we should trust in human nature and that people will just simply do the right thing," he said. "And that's a nice thought, but it is not something that is a reality that we can go through."

Critics say the cost of rooting out the tiny number of noncitizens comes at a steep price: the almost-certain disenfranchisement of some legal U.S. citizens. In theory, Democratic board member Siobhan Millen said, she would approve a citizenship check system, but SAVE is not a reliable enough tool.

Every system run by humans is going to produce errors, said North Carolina State University political science professor Steven Greene.

It comes down to whether the cost of fixing those errors is worth it. If elected officials want to make sure no noncitizen can vote, they will probably be able to accomplish that, but they might end up spending a million or more dollars per identified noncitizen, he said.

"The idea that we should expend valuable political time and resources stopping a problem that is infinitesimal in magnitude, is, on its face, ridiculous," he said. "How many coyotes a year drown in neighborhood ponds? I have no idea. But if they did, it's not something we should be spending public resources on."

If the state enacts higher barriers to vote in order to root out noncitizens, they will also block other, eligible voters who might not have the motivation or ability to jump over the hurdles, Greene said.

"It seems quite likely that the people play up this issue to fearmonger, to suggest that there is a problem when there isn't one, to stir up anti-immigrant sentiment and for further political gain," he said.

Bringing a different SAVE to NC

The acronyms may be identical, but key differences exist between the federal SAVE Act and the SAVE system run by the Department of Homeland Security's U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

The SAVE system was originally meant to verify whether people applying for certain government benefits that require citizenship qualified. It includes information from databases including the Social Security Administration and Department of Homeland Security.

North Carolina election officials began

using it on a limited basis in January 2025 as part of a new law requiring court officials to provide state election officials with lists of people who asked to be excused from jury duty because they weren't citizens.

When the state elections board received those names, they checked them against the SAVE system to determine whether they were actually noncitizens. If they were identified as confirmed noncitizens, the state would send names to county election boards for further review and potential removal from the voter rolls.

A few months after the law passed, only three noncitizens were identified through the process, according to State Board of Elections spokesperson Pat Gannon.

Womack thinks the jury duty system isn't working as well as it should. Noncitizens looking to get out of jury duty might select a different excuse, like not understanding English, for example, he said.

A special offer

In August, the State Board got a special offer from USCIS. After major upgrades, the SAVE system could now use the last four digits of voters' Social Security numbers to verify their citizenship.

And it didn't have to be on an individual basis anymore; election boards could upload up to a million voter records at a time. The federal agency gave the State Board a week to take advantage of the offer.

The board passed on it. Chair Francis De Luca said they decided to postpone the decision for another day after hearing legal advice in closed session. They needed more information to move forward, he said.

In November, the idea reemerged. This time, the board voted along party lines to participate in the SAVE system. Executive Director Sam Hayes said he was satisfied that the system would protect voters' privacy.

"We have very few tools at our disposal," he said. "This is a good one."

Then-Republican board member Robert Rucho brought up issues with the DMV improperly registering noncitizens to vote. This process could "go a long way to guaranteeing the absolute correctness of the voter rolls," he said.

One of the two board Democrats, Siobhan Millen was more hesitant. She cited the 2017 audit, which found that when the SAVE system identified someone as a potential noncitizen, it was often wrong.

The SAVE databases often don't have the latest information on naturalization and miss out on birthright citizens who haven't paid for a certificate of citizenship, for example.

While county election boards will investigate potential noncitizens and provide an opportunity for challenged voters to prove citizenship before removing them from the rolls, Millen wasn't convinced.

"I'm not sure I trust that the process in all 100 counties is going to be good enough due process, given the seriousness of this," she said.

Cox is also wary of the SAVE system. He said in an expansive federal government, data can be stale and incorrect.

"In a perfect world where we have perfect and updated data and information about citizenship status, it's theoretically a great idea to match it against the voter registration rolls to flag noncitizens," he said. "The problem is, we can't be guaranteed that it is perfect data. Far from it. We know that there are errors."

Womack, however, is a fan. It's just another tool in the tool bag, and there's enough of a process on the back end to make sure eligible voters don't get taken off the rolls because of a database issue, he said. Initially, he said he thinks the election board will find quite a few non-citizens on the rolls, but he can't predict how many.

Womack thinks North Carolina needs a SAVE Act of its own - a requirement that all registrants provide documentary proof of citizenship. So far, the legislature hasn't bit.

Using SAVE to stop noncitizens from voting

The State Board last week approved the process for challenging potential noncitizens identified through the SAVE system. Board Democrats Siobhan Millen and Jeff Carmon voted against the rules process.

"You've done an awesome job of putting a tuxedo on a pig but I stand by what I said earlier," Carmon told election staff. "This is still a pig."

Millen added that requiring eligible voters to spend time and money to prove their citizenship to keep their right to vote "is pretty much the definition of a poll tax."

After issuing four proposed rules, the board got thousands of public comments. So many, in fact, that they had to postpone the final vote to review them all. Some of the early comments were helpful and taken to heart, State Board Chief of Staff Brian LiVecchi said in March.

The updated rules include several changes. One gives challenged voters more time to prepare documentation and evidence before election board hearings. Another clarifies that the name on challenged voters' documentary proof of citizenship doesn't have to match their name on the voter rolls exactly, if they are "substantially equivalent."

When the SAVE system identifies a potential noncitizen, the State Board will notify county election boards. If county boards can't find evidence of citizenship in their own records, they will set a date for a preliminary hearing to challenge the voter's registration.



CHRISTINE ZHU | NC NEWSLINE

The NC General Assembly held skeletal sessions this week with no progress on a comprehensive state budget.

Can state lawmakers finally pass a budget?

Continued from page 1A

than 8% over two years, with a big boost in starting teacher pay to \$50,000 a year. The House budget also paused future cuts to the personal income tax rate. The House had proposed spending \$32.6 billion in the current budget year.

Senate Republicans proposed teacher raises averaging 3.3%, and wanted the future tax cuts to go ahead as planned. The Senate proposed spending \$32.3 billion this year.

Medicaid and the children's hospital One of the pressing issues for the legislature is a \$319 million Medicaid shortfall. The health insurance program that covers about 3.1 million North Carolinians is about to run out of money, and Stein has been demanding the additional money for months.

Last year, bills that would have provided more Medicaid money were caught up in other budget disagreements between House and Senate Republicans and the funding didn't come through.

In committee meetings over the winter and spring, Republicans have questioned state health officials about the Medicaid numbers and extent of the shortfall.

At a March event on civil debate about health care, Rep. Grant Campbell (R-Cabarrus) said he supported filling the Medicaid budget hole, but wanted to make sure it will really cost \$319 million.

"I'm all for it if you can show me the money has been calculated appropriately," he said.

House and Senate Republicans differed on funding a children's hospital being built in Apex. Senate Republicans want additional funds approved for the hospital. They attached \$103.5 million for the hospital to a bill on added Medicaid funding. House Republicans have resisted more spending on the hospital.

Automatic tax cut

The largest hang-up in budget talks between House and Senate Republicans is automatic tax cuts.

House Republicans want to pause those reductions, while Senate Republicans want the cut to go forward as planned.

The offices of House Speaker Destin Hall (R-Caldwell) and Senate leader Phil Berger (R-Rockingham) did not respond to requests for interviews.

Berger acknowledged in a recent press release that "progress was elusive" on tax issues in last year's session, but said "circumstances do exist for us to reach an agreement on a comprehensive state budget."

"Our policy success is largely grounded on the continuing exercise of discipline on two fronts — tax reduction and spending restraint," Berger wrote. "Failure to adhere to fundamentals on either front will thwart sustaining progress in our never-ending competition with other states for economic growth, job creation, and a better future for our

people."

The tax cuts are based on revenue triggers that the state is expected to meet. But the reductions mean that the state will have less money to spend in future years.

The individual tax rate is scheduled to fall from 3.99% to 3.49% in 2027. The rate is to fall again to 2.99% in 2028.

Stein wants to pause the cuts too, and his Office of State Budget and Management projects that the first reduction will mean the state collecting \$2 billion less each year.

The corporate income tax is being phased out, with elimination set for 2030.

The individual and corporate tax cuts will result in a structural budget deficit, reducing annual state revenues by \$7.7 billion in 2033-2034, OSBM anticipates.

Federal fallout

A major federal law shifted more of the cost of providing food benefits, known as SNAP, from the federal government to counties.

The total increase to counties comes to \$52 million starting in July, according to the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners. The association is asking the General Assembly to cover the cost.

Sen. Jim Burgin, chairman of the Senate Health and Human Services budget committee, told NC Newsline the state can't afford it.

The state will also need to foot the bill for monitoring new work requirements and verification requirements for Medicaid. DHHS officials have said that could run into the tens of millions of dollars.

Burgin said DHHS may be able to help the counties with additional tasks that will fall on local case-workers.

Hurricane Helene relief

Stein is pushing lawmakers for a third round of recovery funding to western North Carolina, requesting \$792 million in a March proposal.

Among the largest line items in the budget request is \$100 million for repairs to private roads and bridges. Another recommendation would allocate \$50 million for a revolving loan program to help local governments avoid budget cuts while funding repair efforts.

Republican lawmakers have grown skeptical of the governor's handling of Helene relief, grilling recovery officials earlier this month over rising costs and a home rebuild and repair initiative that has completed work on just 30 houses since its inception.

"The numbers don't add up and meanwhile, the citizens of North Carolina are suffering," said Rep. Karl Gillespie (R-Macon), the House Majority Whip, at a Helene oversight meeting on April 2. "We're going to have to have a lot more conversations and a lot more oversight and a lot more efficiencies in the program to ever make this work out."

NC teacher pay high on agenda for lawmakers

Ahmed Jallow

NC NEWSLINE

North Carolina lawmakers are in Raleigh, still without a full state budget after more than a year of negotiations stalled by divisions over spending.

Teacher pay is expected to be one of the central issues lawmakers will try to resolve. Leaders in both parties agree that raises are needed, but they remain divided on how much to increase salaries and how to structure those raises.

House Republicans have proposed an average 8.7% raise over two years, including a 22% increase in starting pay. Senate Republicans, citing concerns about long-term costs, have backed a smaller plan, offering about 3.3% over the same period, supplemented by one-time bonuses.

Democratic Gov. Josh Stein's plan would give teachers nearly a 6% raise on average, along with restoring extra pay for teachers with master's degrees and increasing compensation for veteran teachers and school leaders.

The debate comes as North Carolina continues to lag behind much of the country in teacher pay. The state ranks 43rd nationally, with an average salary of \$58,292 — nearly \$14,000 below the national average — and lower than every neighboring state.

A top House Republican said earlier this

month that teacher pay will be a priority as lawmakers return.

Rep. Brian Biggs (R-Randolph), chair of the House Education Committee, told education advocates last week that the state must offer meaningful raises this year, not small increases that fail to keep teachers in the profession.

While the short session is scheduled to run through the summer, Biggs signaled that negotiations could stretch much longer.

"We're working now, getting ready for this short, long session," Biggs said. "If we're there December 31, that's fine. We're going to get it done."

The session also begins in the wake of the state Supreme Court's decision to end the long-running Leandro school funding case earlier this month, shifting responsibility for education funding away from the courts and squarely back to state lawmakers.

North Carolina ranks near the bottom nationally for teacher pay growth and per-student public school funding, according to multiple reports.

Public education advocates say they will use the weeks ahead to pressure legislators to increase spending, arguing the court's decision leaves elected officials with little excuse not to act.

Stein calls for full Medicaid funding for maternal health

Ahmed Jallow

NC NEWSLINE

Gov. Josh Stein stood with advocates at the Executive Mansion last week to mark Black Maternal Health Week, and used the event to call on the General Assembly to close a \$319 million Medicaid funding gap.

"If we do not fully fund Medicaid soon, health care for millions of North Carolinians could be in jeopardy, and the entire health care system weakens," Stein said.

The event brought together lawmakers and advocates who highlighted persistent racial disparities in maternal health outcomes that impact not just Black women in North Carolina, but across the country.

Stein noted Black women are twice as likely as white women to die from pregnancy-related complications in North Carolina, regardless of their income or education.

"While there is no single solution, strengthening Medicaid and our health-care system is essential," he said.

Health officials and advocates said

many pregnancy-related deaths could be prevented with earlier intervention, better access to care and stronger coordination across the health system.

Advocates also highlighted community-based services aimed at filling gaps in care, including doula support, mental health services, transportation assistance and nutrition support.

Sen. Natalie Murdock (D-Durham) said the state has made some progress, including extending postpartum Medicaid coverage to 12 months. "But we still need a budget to fully fund Medicaid to keep those gains," Murdock said.

Murdock also said she plans to reintroduce the "MOMnibus Act," a proposal specifically addressing disparities affecting Black mothers. She has introduced similar bills in the past three years, but none has made progress.

The U.S. maternal mortality rate is among the worst in the world, and worse for Black women, who are three times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes than white women.

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THE FALLS AVENUE WATER AND SEWER REPLACEMENT PROJECT TOWN OF GRANITE FALLS CALDWELL COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA CDBG-NR GRANT #21-C-4027

Sealed bids for the project entitled Falls Avenue Water and Sewer Replacement will be received by the Town of Granite Falls until 2 PM Wednesday, May 13, 2026, at which time, bids will be publicly opened and read aloud. The bid opening will be conducted in the Granite Falls Town Hall at 30 Park Square, Granite Falls, NC 28630 and via Microsoft Teams.

Project components include replacement of approximately 5,225 linear feet of 8-inch water main and associated appurtenances and 4,840 linear feet of 8-inch gravity sanitary sewer and associated appurtenances in Granite Falls, NC.

The Contract Documents and all addenda must be obtained from Town of Granite Falls website at <https://granitefallsnc.gov/rfp>. Bidders shall check for addenda 24 hours or less before submitting a bid.

All bidders are hereby notified that they must be properly licensed under the state laws governing their prospective trades. Bidders are also notified that applicable provisions of Chapter 87 of the General Statutes of the State of North Carolina shall be observed in the receiving of bids and awarding of contracts for the work.

Qualification of Bidder shall also be in accordance with Article 1.3 of Section 002113 "Instructions to Bidders." Further, the Owner may make such other investigations as he deems necessary to determine the ability of the Bidder to perform the Work, and the Bidder shall furnish to the Owner all such information and data for this purpose as the Owner may request.

Each Bid shall be accompanied by bid security as described in the "Instructions to Bidders" section of the Bid Package. The successful Bidder will be required to furnish performance and payment bonds as described in Section 007200 "General Conditions."

All contractors performing work must be properly insured to cover claims under workers' compensation, claims for damages because of bodily injury and property damage. The successful bidder must have Comprehensive General Liability insurance in sufficient sums. Proof of insurance must be presented and approved by the Town before work begins.

A General Warranty of the work shall be required for a period of 12 months from the date of final acceptance of the work. The contractor shall remedy any defects in the work and pay any damage to other work resulting therefrom during this period.

The successful bidder will be required to enter into a contract for services for this work within a reasonable time after the awarding of the contract.

This program is being funded in whole or in part by the Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG). All federal CDBG requirements will apply to the contract. Bidders must comply with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Davis-Bacon and Related Acts, the Anti-Kickback Act, the Contract Work Hours and Safety Standards Act, and 41 CFR. 60-4.

Statements of Minority and Women Business Enterprises participation must be presented with the bids. Bidder also agrees to comply with Section 3 provisions.

The Owner reserves the right to reject any and all Bids, to waive informalities, or to reject non-conforming, non-responsive, or conditional bids.

The goal of the Town of Granite Falls is for the expansion of participation by historically underutilized businesses (HUB) in construction projects as defined in GS 143 -128.2 (g). Equal access and opportunity to participate in all aspects of construction projects shall be provided to HUB. It is the policy of the Town of Granite Falls to award public building contracts without regard to race, religion, color, creed, national origin, sex, age or disabling condition. Each bidder shall make a good faith effort and shall document such efforts to utilize Minority/HUB businesses.

This information is available in Spanish or any other language upon request. Please contact Kyle Case at 828-485-4285 or at 1880 2nd Ave NW, Hickory, NC for accommodations for this request.

Esta información está disponible en español o en cualquier otro idioma bajo petición. Por favor, póngase en contacto con Kyle Case al 828-485-4285 o en 1880 2nd Ave NW de alojamiento para esta solicitud.



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The Charlotte Post

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Study: SNAP work rules drop participation

By Kevin Hardy

STATELINE

As states enact stricter work requirements for the federal food stamp program, a new analysis suggests those requirements won't enhance employment and will push more people off of food assistance.

The researchers conducted a review of studies on work requirements and concluded that "the best evidence shows they do not increase employment. Moreover, this research finds work requirements cause a large decrease in participation in SNAP."

The research from The Hamilton Project, an economic policy initiative at the left-leaning Brookings Institution, comes at a time of major upheaval for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP. Participation is already declining as states implement changes mandated by the president's major tax and domestic policy law enacted last summer.

Since the fall, states and counties that administer SNAP have been notifying residents who rely on food stamps that they must meet work requirements or lose their food assistance. Those changes affected exemptions to work requirements for older adults, homeless people, veterans and some rural residents, among others.

Known as the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, the law mandated cuts to social service programs, including Medicaid and food stamps.

While SNAP enrollment is declining nationally, more people will likely lose food assistance as states continue to implement the work requirements and recertify participants, said Lauren Bauer, a fellow in economic studies at Brookings Institution and the associate director of The Hamilton Project.

"Everything that we know about work requirements is that they do not increase employment among the groups that are subject to them," she told Stateline. "All they do is make it more likely that they are disenrolled from the program. And so, should these work requirements continue to be rolled out and implemented, we would expect to see declining enrollment and no changes in employment."

Bauer said the growing body of research on SNAP has changed her mind about its ability to affect employment. While food stamps reach millions of people each year, the program's work requirements have proven ineffective, confusing and burdensome, she said.

"I am now of the mind that SNAP should be an anti-hunger program, and there are many, many ways to do workforce development, career ladders, career training, job search — all of those things. That's not an anti hunger program and it shouldn't be associated with it."

What's more concerning to her is how the stricter work requirements will affect people who lose jobs in an economic downturn. Traditionally, SNAP has been one of the most effective social supports for the unemployed, helping people who lose their jobs quickly gain food assistance. But laid-off workers will increasingly be told they cannot receive benefits without working.

"It's just this dissonant, unhelpful interaction that you have with the government," Bauer said. "I lost my job, I need food benefits. Well, you can only get food benefits if you have a job."

At least 2.5 million low-income people, or 6% of those enrolled, have lost SNAP benefits since the legislation was signed into law, according to a study by the left-leaning Center on Budget and Policy Priorities published Wednesday.

Bauer said it's unclear how much of that decline is directly related to the federal legislation. That's because SNAP participation generally declines during times of economic prosperity and increases during downturns.

But the program is facing unprecedented changes: Under the new law, states have also lost funding for nutrition education programs, must end eligibility for noncitizens such as refugees and asylees, and will lose work requirement waivers for those living in areas with limited employment opportunities. States are also forced to cover more of the costs of the program.

Earlier this week, a USDA spokesperson applauded the drop in SNAP participation, noting the program's rolls had fallen below 40 million for the first time since the pandemic. The spokesperson told States Newsroom the program would continue "to serve those with the greatest need while also strengthening program integrity."

Republicans, including U.S. House Speaker Mike Johnson of Louisiana, have defended the legislative changes to SNAP, arguing they will help eliminate waste and fraud in the program.

In a June news release, he characterized SNAP as a "bloated, inefficient program," but said Americans who needed food assistance would still receive it.

"Republicans are proud to defend commonsense welfare reform, fiscal sanity, and the dignity of work," Johnson said in the release.

Axing DEI costs life-saving results

Dr. Charity Oyedegi, a Duke University hematologist and researcher who focuses on sickle cell disease, had her five-year, \$750,000 NIH grant to improve care for sickle cell disease canceled last year by Trump administration executive orders that targeted "Diversity, Equity and Inclusion."



MARTIN HENSON

She is now using a patchwork of other funding sources to try to complete the same research. Her research was likely targeted because the 90% of the 100,000 or so people in the U.S. and 7,000 in North Carolina who have the disease are Black, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Other scientific researchers have not been so fortunate. A WRAL analysis last July found more than 2,500 grants were terminated last year, including approximately 80 from North Carolina universities. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled last August that the Trump administration was within its rights to

cancel \$783 million in healthcare-related grants it linked to "DEI."

North Carolina's ability to contribute to genetic research makes our state stand out. More than 800 life science companies are in North Carolina, and most of them are located in the Research Triangle.

Aside from research, North Carolina should step up to provide the services these patients need. North Carolina's Senate Bill 283, a bill to fund support programs for individuals with sickle cell disease, was filed in 2025 but hasn't been considered for a hearing or vote. Without the funding provided by that legislation, North Carolina would miss out on key services for these vulnerable folks, including six comprehensive sickle cell centers to meet patients' medical, social, and behavioral health needs and other positions.

Dr. Oyedegi's research for sickle cell treatments is vital. The tools she is developing, the Sickle Cell Disease Functional Assessment and the SickleFit exercise program, are the bridge between high-cost therapies and the day to day lives of patients who

are aging with this disease. There is some good news. North Carolina Medicaid is still participating in the federal Cell and Gene Therapies Access model, which will "provide treatments within a framework that lowers prices for states and ties payments to outcomes."

However, the reality that the Trump administration's anti-DEI initiatives can mark the difference between life-saving medication and the "colorblind" rule of law is still present. The National Institute of Health and the National Science Foundation were forced to terminate grants linked to equity. The long-term cost of inaction will be more costly than any short term budget cuts.

Escalating emergency rooms room visits and lost labor from preventable illness will be signs that it is too late to change course.

People with this genetic disease are literally running out of time. The Trump administration has often ruled according to grievance; in this case canceling "woke" scientific research that can help Black people.

North Carolina has the chance to be more sensi-

ble. State providers should fill gaps wherever they can; universities and the private sector should step up wherever they can and get creative so those that can benefit from North Carolinians' research are allowed to live.

Community members should also take the time to get educated on the rapidly shifting landscape of genetics and curative therapies and then rally elected officials to ensure research funding continues for the vulnerable sickle cell community. Raise the work of pioneering clinicians like Dr. Oyedegi into public sphere.

We should challenge these executive orders and show our values as North Carolinians. Let's not make life and death decisions based on labels. The quality of life of those living with sickle cell disease — and all marginalized communities in need of specialized care — depend on it.

Martin Henson lives in Raleigh. He is executive director of BMEN Foundation, which convenes Black men to address issues in their lives and communities. See his work at [MartinHSpeaks.com](https://www.martinhspeaks.com).

North Carolina has the chance to be more sensi-

Just when you thought we'd hit bottom

Evidently the war in Iran was not enough.

Now Donald Trump is waging war with the Pope. God is not amused and the



LIB CAMPBELL

two-thirds of Americans who did not vote for Donald Trump are a p p a l l e d . Trump is a pariah among us. He s h a t t e r s norms, silences the press, and behaves like he is king of the world.

He called the Pope a "liberal" for his treatment of immigrants and people of color. Pope Leo even welcomed the marginalized. Imagine that.

Trump's behavior is beyond the pale. Even the sycophants are beginning to turn on him. Some muse that Trump might resign his office, while others are demanding that the 25th

Amendment be invoked. That would be too good to be true.

Pope Leo, in his gentle voice and tone, did not get ruffled, saying he was not intimidated by the Trump administration. He did cancel his trip to the United States. The Pope will not play silly games with a lunatic.

People of faith will not be OK with Trump's madness. If we stand for such abuse of the Pontiff, we are also part of the problem. In the season of Eastertide, we still reflect on the movement from darkness to light. A lot of us are tired of stumbling in the dark.

What are we to do? Persistence in resistance is central in this struggle. This is the ancient struggle between good and evil. We have seen evil acted out among us in the killing of innocents, the locking up of citizens, the whitewashing of history.

Finally, after the war, higher gas and food prices and all the ugliness, we see this puppet for what he is — a small, ignorant, narcissist whose bullying has played itself out. He is naked, alone, and increasingly shunned.

People misjudged Trump. They thought he was a change agent who would bring increased prosperity to them. The gullible bought it. The snake oil salesman is alive and well. Psalm 119 says, "Happy are they who follow the ways of the Lord." Our goodness that incarnates the goodness of God is the only true influence that matters.

The Christian faith is about bearing Christ to others — feeding the hungry, caring for the poor and marginalized, loving the stranger. We know that Donald Trump is not a practicing Christian. We also know Christian na-

tionalism is a distortion of the faith. Hate is not part of Jesus's message.

A reckoning beyond earthly bounds will come to the evil, but that is in God's hands. In the meantime, we must be steadfast in our practice of good, and the calling out of wrongdoing.

My long practice of Lectio Divina gave me two words I have carried for years. They are risk and adaptation. This is where I find the strength to speak out. I have no desire to be a martyr, but I know there is risk in my outspokenness. I will watch my step, and risk keeping up the good fight.

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

Rural schools want access to opportunity

I grew up in Harnett County.

Rural roads. Tight-knit communities. Public schools that did everything



KIMBERLY JONES

they could with what they had.

My teachers knew my family. They pushed me, believed in me, and opened doors that my circumstances alone might not have opened. But even with such phenomenal educators, my classmates and I understood that our opportunities were not the same as students in wealthier districts, with fewer Advanced Placement courses or career training options.

We did not lack talent or ambition. We lacked access.

Today, I teach in Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools, one of the most well-resourced districts in our state, with its wealthy tax base and supplements above and beyond what is allocated by the state.

Students in my district have access to over 20 Advanced Placement and nearly a dozen Career and Technical Education pathways. Every day, I am reminded of what is possible when schools have the funding, staffing, and stability students deserve.

I am also reminded of the uncomfortable truth that where a child lives in North Carolina still shapes what

opportunities they receive. Too often, rural students are the ones asked to make do with less.

This is not accidental. It is the result of policy choices.

Through my work with the Rural Teacher Leadership Network, a program facilitated by the Dudley Flood Center for Educational Equity and Opportunity, I lead eastern North Carolina rural educators in improving their practice. These teachers are innovative, resilient, and deeply committed to their students and communities.

Their rural schools are not struggling because of a lack of passion or talent. The reason they are struggling is a lack of resources.

North Carolina ranks last in the country when it comes to "funding effort," the measure of how much a state or district invests in K-12 public schools relative to its overall economic capacity. North Carolina, a growing state with thriving areas of our economy, invests roughly \$5,600 less in public education relative to its capacity than nearly every other state.

Wealthier counties can compensate through local tax revenue that funds modern facilities, competitive salaries and expanded programs. When the state underfunds public education, rural students feel it first and feel it most — and our rural schools have nowhere else to turn.

This is exactly why the so-called Leandro state

preme Court case exists. In 1994, five low-wealth rural counties went to court because their students were being denied access to the sound, basic education guaranteed by our state constitution. The North Carolina Supreme Court agreed.

Every child, regardless of zip code, has the constitutional right to a sound, basic education, the court found.

That right requires well-trained teachers, strong leadership, and sufficient resources. Yet decades later, the state still has not fully met that obligation.

Instead, North Carolina is dramatically expanding private school vouchers, with more than \$575 million allocated this year and billions projected over the next decade instead of funding to public schools. In many rural counties, there are few, if any, private schools.

Just 17% of our state's private schools, which are often religious and exclusive, exist in rural areas and remote towns, according to a 2025 Learning Policy Institute study.

This is the part that is hardest to understand: Many of the lawmakers who support voucher expansion represent rural communities. They know these schools. They attended them. Their families still rely on them. Yet their votes are weakening the very institutions that serve as the backbone of their communities.

Public schools in rural

communities are more than educational institutions. They are community centers and large employers. They are gathering places on Friday nights and sources of pride year-round. When a rural school struggles, the entire community feels it.

I am the product of rural public schools. Without those teachers, those classrooms, and those opportunities, I would not be where I am today. Rural students today deserve the same investment.

The plan experts came up with to solve this disparity in the Leandro case provides a roadmap. It calls for a well-trained teacher in every classroom, a strong principal in every school, and equitable funding so every child has access to opportunity. This is not a political wish list. It is a constitutional mandate.

The question before our lawmakers is simple. Will they invest in the rural students they represent, or will they continue to divert resources away from them?

Rural students do not need sympathy. They need commitment. They need leaders willing to fund their future, not undermine it. I know what rural schools can do when they are supported.

I am living proof. Kimberly Jones is a high school English and Humanities teacher. She was the 2023 Burroughs Wellcome Fund North Carolina Teacher of the Year.

The Charlotte Post

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Sports

THURSDAY, APRIL 23, 2026



TROY HULL | THE CHARLOTTE POST

After two years of sitting behind older quarterbacks at Central Connecticut State, Josh Jackson is embracing the opportunity to earn the starting role at Johnson C. Smith. "It ain't pressure, because I understand my abilities," he said. "It's just keep showing up, working hard every day with a great attitude, and the results, they figure it out for itself."

Thin résumé, big opportunity

JC Smith quarterback Josh Jackson embraces his chance to grab the starting job during spring drills

By Herbert L. White
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Josh Jackson has his opportunity to shine.

The Johnson C. Smith quarterback is in position to live up to the expectations that made him Tennessee's Mr. Football in 2022. After two years of sitting at Division I FCS Central Connecticut State, Jackson's making a fresh start with the Golden Bulls, who won last year's CIAA title and advanced to the Division II playoffs for the first time.

"It ain't pressure, because I under-

stand my abilities," Jackson said. "It's just keep showing up, working hard every day with a great attitude, and the results, they figure it out for itself."

Jackson isn't the first transfer quarterback coach Maurice Flowers has brought to Smith but is the least experienced. Two-year starter Tyrell Jackson played for Flowers at Fort Valley State. Kelvin Durham, last year's starter, made the



Flowers



Jackson

same lateral move from FVSU. Darius Ocean, who quarterbacked the Golden Bulls to an 8-2 record in 2024, played meaningful snaps at Western Kentucky, a Division I FBS program.

"There's a mix between Tyrell Jackson and Kelvin Durham" in Jackson as a dual threat, Flowers said. "I'd say Tyrell Jackson as far as the cerebralness and being a quarterback that just understands an offense. And

then the way he throws that football, arm strength of a Kelvin Durham. Kelvin Durham, he could make every throw, and Josh has arm strength like that. We've got a great plan for him to bring him along."

Jackson has a pair of kindred spirits in former quarterbacks Flowers and Tyrell Jackson as well as the entire coaching staff, which he praises for its connectivity with players.

"Just being a part of a program where not only is it quarterback friendly, but Please see **JACKSON** | 6A

Hough Huskies ready for Keep Pounding Classic

By Cameron Williams
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The Hough Huskies headline the 2026 Keep Pounding High School Classic.

It's the third straight year a Charlotte-Mecklenburg school is represented in the Carolina Panthers-hosted event, and the second in a row for the Huskies, who will square off against Cardinal Gibbons Aug. 29 at 8 p.m. Hough beat Rock Hill South Pointe 14-10 in the invitational last season.

"Defensively, (Cardinal Gibbons) be well prepared," Hough coach DeShawn Baker said. "Whatever they do, we'll make sure we have a game plan for and offensively. With teams like that, we just have to be physical. We have to be physical; make sure we execute on offense and make sure we do not turn the ball over or make stupid mistakes." Hough won the 2025 North Carolina 8A title and among the favorites to win another in 2026. Baker and his staff put together a tough nonconference schedule to prepare for the level of competition they would see in the playoffs.

Cardinal Gibbons finished the 2025 season 12-2 with losses to Mallard Creek and 7A runner-up. Please see **KEEP** | 6A



CHARLOTTE FC

Coaches from Indian Land, Northwestern, Cardinal Gibbons and Hough high schools were joined by Carolina Panthers coach Dave Canales for a press conference on the Keep Pounding Classic Aug. 29 at Bank of America Stadium.

Hornets turnaround season ends in right direction

By Cameron Williams
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The Hornets' best season in 10 years ended abruptly.

After winning their first play-in game in dramatic fashion against the Miami Heat, Charlotte couldn't match the physicality of the Orlando Magic in a lopsided 121-90 result that ended their hopes of making the playoffs for the first time since 2016.

Charlotte finished with a 44-38 record after starting the season 4-14. They picked up the pace in January when the Hornets went on a nine-game win streak from Jan. 22-Feb. 7.

"The first thing that comes to mind is that

progress was made," Hornets coach Charles Lee said. "The standards and the commitment level to trying to compete and trying to be together rose significantly. I think the players, in the offseason, set out to train a lot harder, be together a lot more and they had a mission coming into the season that they wanted to win more games."

Charlotte lost just 10 games after Jan. 22 and created a real buzz over the latter part of the season.

"They earned a lot more respect and started to change the narrative around this Charlotte Hornets basketball team," Lee said. "So, I am super proud of everything that [the players]

gave and them allowing us to coach them the way that we did. ... [I am] super appreciative of the whole staff for banding together throughout the year and just trying to be problem-solvers."

It helped to have LaMelo Ball and Brandon Miller healthy in 2025-26, with Miller playing 65 games a Ball 72 — the second most games he has played in a season since entering the league.

"Just staying in the weight room, treatment, just doing the whole nine," Ball said, adding another key to the season was establishing a team identity.

Please see **HORNETS** | 6A

Three Ascent players help Puerto Rico to W Championship

By Herbert L. White
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The Puerto Rico Women's National Team called up three Carolina Ascent FC players for a final CONCACAF qualifying match against Mexico on April 18.

Defender Jill Aguilera, goalkeeper Sydney Martinez and forward Maria Tapia suited up for Puerto Rico in a 6-0 loss to Mexico in a clash between the top two teams in Group A. Both sides won all three of their group stage matches before the head-to-head meeting, but Mexico led Group A on goal differential.

Despite the loss, Puerto Rico advanced to the federation's W Championship in November along with Jamaica and Haiti.

All three Carolina players were major contributors for Puerto Rico during the qualifying stage. Aguilera has scored nine goals in three matches, which ranks among the tournament's top scorers.

Martinez earned a clean sheet in her first appearance of the qualifying stage against Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Tapia scored her first international goal as well as a pair of assists in two appearances.

Crown Legacy signs Ayovi

Crown Legacy FC signed forward Michael Ayovi to an MLS Next Pro contract through the 2027 season.

Ayovi, a 20-year-old Ecuador native, previously played with Independiente del Valle, primarily with the second team. He totaled 19 appearances with Independiente del Valle's reserve squad, C.D. Independiente Juniors in Liga Pro Serie B, with an assist in 357 minutes since his 2023 debut. The forward played with Independiente's U-20 side last season, scoring a goal in 124 minutes.

WSSU raises its profile in the CIAA

By Jeff Hawkins
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

Winston-Salem State is having some season.

First, women's basketball ended its campaign nationally ranked with a regular season title and a CIAA championship, plus an NCAA Tournament run to the Sweet 16 under a first-year coach.

Then, the Rams recruited Virginia Union men's coach Jay Butler away from his alma mater. Butler coached the Panthers for 11 seasons with a 372-239 career record.

Oh yeah, women's coach Tierra Terry also left VUU for WSSU, which is her alma mater. When is the last time two HBCU head coaches left for the same school?

Then, the Rams won their second straight CIAA flag football championship. Whether you're a fan of the sport or not, plenty of people are. It's one of the fastest growing high school sports for girls. Then, WSSU was in a neck-and-neck battle with Fayetteville State for the CIAA golf crown before the Broncos pulled away in the final round.

And let's not forget new football coach and alumnus Tory Woodbury's debut season is just a few months away. WSSU fans are frothing at the mouth. The success of any athletic department, especially at HBCUs, is to have an invested and supportive chancellor or president. And if her first name happens to be Bonita Brown (one "t" or two, it doesn't matter), well, then she's a genius.

"White Shadow" For those of us over 25, any white coach at a predominately Black school is going to be dubbed "The White Shadow" in honor of the 1978-81 TV show.

See **WINSTON-SALEM** | 6A



BONITA BEST



TROY HULL | THE CHARLOTTE POST

Josh Jackson, a transfer from Division I FCS Central Connecticut State, is in an unfamiliar position at Johnson C. Smith as the oldest candidate competing for the starting quarterback job. Quarterbacks coach Tyrell Jackson, a Golden Bull from 2022-23,

Jackson embraces his opportunity at JCSU

Continued from page 5A

it's coach friendly, coach-to-player friendly as well ... that's new to me," Jackson said. "I (have) never been at a program where you can walk into the office and have close communication with the coaches. You can reach out to the coach and call. I came from an FCS school [where] everything was all business. Not saying it isn't all business here, because it is, but at the same time, at the end of the day, I just like the family camaraderie, the brotherhood."

The opportunity to earn the starting position was a draw as well. At Central Connecticut State, Jackson, who is 6-5, 215 pounds, bided his time behind older teammates. At Smith, there's possibilities to impact an ascendent program.

"I would be lying to you if I said that wasn't a big X factor, because who wants to go to fall camp, or who wants to wake up early in the morning and work out every day to not play?" he said. "After a great season by the Golden Bulls, the opportunity to play and compete for a starting job was definitely a huge thing coming in as one of the oldest guys in the room."

"As long as I've been in college, I've always been the youngest guy in the room, so that was definitely appealing to me."

Flowers praised Jackson's attitude

and attention to details as part of his mental approach to offense.

"He's a worker," Flowers said. "He'll look at ... film, and he'll come back and he won't make the same mistakes next practice. That's what we've seen from him."

Jackson won't have to carry the offense as much as steer it. Every starting lineman from 2025 returns as well as tailback Bobby Smith and receivers Brian Lane, Reggie Daniel and Reggie Brigman. The veterans know the system, which produced a school record average of 40.3 points per game in 2025. It's Jackson's job to fit in.

"It helps with the quarterback and his confidence having all five offensive linemen coming back, having experienced tight ends coming back," Flowers said. "It helps having a group of receivers that come back that really is not a new group. And then you got to look at the tailback position."

Said Jackson: "It gives me a high hope, but it makes me work harder, because I got a lot to learn," he said. "Being a new guy coming into a new offense, into a new system isn't just bread and butter. You've got to put in day work. I've got to sit up at night and watch film with these guys. These guys that been here, that have been vets. I've got to come in early and showcase myself, because at the end of the day, I've got to earn a respect from these guys."

Keep Pounding Classic offers different challenges

Continued from page 5A

ner-up Clayton. Crusaders coach Steven Wright was grateful for the opportunity to be a part of the classic, as it is the first time they were selected.

"Coach Baker has done a great job since he's been there," Wright said of Hough, "but we're looking forward to the matchup. ... I think Charlotte's got a great reputation for football. They've been a standard bearer for the state for a long time, and I think Raleigh has made some huge strides over the past decade and is now making some noise of its own."

Hough returned several key pieces from last year, including rising quarterback Ethan Royal, who threw for 2,272 yards last season and 29 passing touchdowns. Royal added 14 touchdowns on the ground and 721 rushing yards.

"I just have to keep the main thing the main thing," Royal said. "At the end of the day, it's a game and it's a game that [my teammates and I] all love. Making sure to keep it in perspective keeps the pressure off my back."

Hough lost 26 seniors, including four-star defensive back and co-captain Samari Matthews, but Baker is confident Royal is ready to fill those shoes.

"If Ethan has any pressure on him, you'd never know it," Baker said. "He is cucumber cool. Like I said last year, he is never too high or never too low. Everybody follows Ethan's lead. ... I'm just excited for him. His recruitment is going well right now. I'm just happy to have him and see

where he lands in college. But as far as pressure, I'm not sure it will even affect him."

Upstate South Carolina showdown

In the 4 p.m. game, Upstate South Carolina foes Northwestern and Indian Land will face off.

Northwestern is fresh off a 13-1 season capped with a 5A state championship. Indian Land finished 2025 with an 11-2 record with their two losses coming against Northwestern 51-13 in the regular season and 51-19 in the playoffs.

This is Northwestern's second KPC. They dropped a one-score game to NCISAA power Providence Day in 2023.

"There's a buzz around our school and a buzz around our community about it," Trojans coach Page Wofford said. "We are very fortunate to be here, and I really feel like we are trying to hold up the standard and tradition of Northwestern football and Rock Hill football and our tradition there."

For Indian Land, which is making its KPC debut, coach Adam Hastings knows the challenge that Northwestern presents. He looks forward to embracing it.

"We're excited about the opportunity," he said, "and I'm excited for the people in our area. A lot of times when people hear the name Indian Land, they think it's a small little place that's a stop on Highway 521, and our goal has always been to expand the reach of knowledge of just how great of a community that we have and who we are."

Winston-Salem State raises its profile among CIAA peers

Continued from page 5A

That's just a fact.

Alabama State filled its men's basketball opening last week with Langston (Okla.) head coach Chris Wright. Langston, an HBCU, plays in the NAIA, the first national athletics association to admit Black colleges as members. Wright coached the Lions for four seasons and compiled a 121-21 record. Before that, he was head coach at Talladega, another NAIA HBCU, for four seasons.

Alabama State is a major step up for Wright and his family. The Hornets' facilities are 100% better, and the SWAC is a premiere HBCU conference.

Wright also etched his name in the conference's history books. He is the first white men's basketball coach in SWAC history.

Someone posted a video of the family arriving for his press conference on Tuesday. The joy on their faces was priceless. They

looked right at home.

Coaching countdown

Virginia Union announced its next men's basketball coach. Alumnus A.J. English takes the helm. English played under legendary coach Dave Robbins from 1986-90 and was the 1990 NCAA Division II national player of the year.

Jackson State removed the interim tag from Trey Johnson to make him the permanent men's coach.

That leaves Allen, Edward Waters, Kentucky State, Lane, Lincoln, (Pa.), Mississippi Valley State, North Carolina Central and Shaw.

The biggest question mark of them all is the Shaw women's opening. Who is doing the recruiting since the entire staff was fired? Shaw's website page for the coaching roster says the page no longer exists.

Make it make sense.

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

Hornets take a new direction

Continued from page 5A

"I think it was really important just finding [our] identity and figuring out what we were going to be about," Ball said. "I feel like that helped. It was really fun. [We have] a great group of guys. I love them all but anytime I am playing basketball and doing what I love, it's a blessing."

Lee said Ball helped elevate Charlotte, but heading into the offseason the plan

is to challenge him to take it a step further.

"He has to do it again this offseason and elevate everything that he did," Lee said. "Everything he did was great. He played 72 games, a ton in a row. ... Defensively the level he played at consistently was much improved."

"Offensively we saw a ton of big moments from him. I think the next step for him is being able to handle

physicality. I think that is just a global theme for our team."

Kon Knueppel was one of the NBA's best rookies this year and one of the top candidates for rookie of the year award alongside former Duke teammate Cooper Flagg. Knueppel averaged 18.5 points, 5.3 rebounds and 3.4 assists per game while shooting 47.5% from the floor and 42.5% from three-point range.

SPORTS CHARLOTTE

Podcast with a home team advantage