



THE VOICE OF THE BLACK COMMUNITY SINCE 1906

# The Charlotte Post

WEEK OF MAY 7, 2026

VOLUME 52 NUMBER 33

WWW.THECHARLOTTEPOST.COM

\$1.50



TROY HULL | THE CHARLOTTE POST

Last week's Supreme Court decision to gut Section 2 provisions of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 opens the door for states to create party gerrymanders that limit representation of communities of color. The impacts will be most profound in southern states like North Carolina.

## Voter suppression in NC has green light with court ruling

*Kneecapping Section 2 of Voting Rights Act limits Black representation*

By Herbert L. White  
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North Carolina's Black voters are at risk of marginalization after a U.S. Supreme Court decision opens the door to partisan gerrymandering as a proxy for race. The court last week voted 6-3 in *Louisiana v. Callais* to permit the drawing of congressional and legislative districts as partisan gerrymanders without regard for Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which bars laws resulting in reduced opportunities for racial minorities to elect their preferred candidates. The lawsuit was filed by white Louisiana voters who sued the state to block the addition of a second majority-Black

congressional district. Louisiana, where Black voters make up one-third of its electorate, was required by the VRA to draw new lines, which left the state with four majority-white districts. In response, Louisiana Gov. Jeff Landry last week suspended primary elections in order for the Republican majority legislature to redraw the map. "It's significant that this ruling will apply to this year's midterm elections, all while democratic norms and institutions erode under executive overreach, weak judicial enforcement, and constant assaults to civil rights," said Kristin Powell, executive director of Oakland, California-based Black Futures Lab. "We

must call out these injustices, as it is clear that they want to keep Black people boxed out of power, and take us back to the times of Jim Crow — creating one set of rules for themselves and one set of rules for us." In North Carolina, which has petitioned for and defended gerrymandered districts since the 1990s, VRA-connected lawsuits are part of the state's political landscape. Black voters make up 22% of the electorate. "I think there's a real distinct possibility" minority representation will be impacted with Section 2 curtailed, Davidson College political science professor said. Please see **VOTER** | 2A

## Ruling reshapes power on state and local levels

By Anna Claire Vollers  
STATELINE

The U.S. Supreme Court's new decision gutting a key provision of the federal Voting Rights Act clears the way for state officials to drastically reshape not only Congress but also state legislatures, county commissions, city councils and even local school boards. The ruling, released last week in a case called *Louisiana v. Callais*, dismantled

some of the final guardrails protecting the electoral power of Black, Hispanic and other racial minority voters that had been enshrined in the Voting Rights Act, a landmark 1965 federal civil rights law that bars racial discrimination in voting access. The 6-3 decision all but nullifies a provision called Section 2 that required states to draw electoral maps to give racial minority voters the opportunity to

elect their chosen candidates. And while intense national attention on the case's fallout has focused on the U.S. House as the 2026 midterm congressional elections loom, the new ruling also applies to state legislative districts and maps for county or municipal elections. Those localized changes are just hovering further down the road. Please see **ELECTORAL** | 2A

## Bill puts cannabis on the ballot

*Proposal supports voter input on state constitution change*

By Herbert L. White  
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North Carolina lawmakers have introduced a bill that would let voters decide whether to decriminalize small amounts of personal and medical cannabis. Senate Bill 1072, sponsored by Democrats Caleb Theodros (Mecklenburg), Kandie Smith (Greenville) and Paul Lowe (Forsyth) propose constitutional amendments to allow for limited amounts of marijuana for recreational use, as well as medical cannabis for people with qualifying conditions. The bill, which must be approved by both chambers of the General Assembly, would go on the November general election ballot. "It's not only about cannabis but allowing voters to make the decisions themselves," said Theodros, whose district includes west Charlotte. "All this bill would do is introduce two different amendments and allow voters to make the decision." Bills filed by lawmakers from both parties to legalize marijuana use in North Carolina have been shot down in the General Assembly since former Rep. Kelly Alexander of Charlotte first proposed it in 2009. Since then, support has grown but failed to garner enough backing to become law. Please see **BILL** | 2A



Theodros



Smith



Lowe

## Post Foundation honors Malcomb Coley with Luminary Award

By Ellison Clary  
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

Malcomb Coley, whose name is synonymous with help for the left behind or left out, is The Charlotte Post Foundation's 2026 Luminary Award recipient. Since arriving in Charlotte with accounting firm EY in 2013, Coley has championed a litany of philanthropic causes, with emphasis on uplifting marginalized communities. Growing up in public housing in Goldsboro, Coley's family benefitted from United Way agencies. That shaped his outlook. "It was in my DNA that I will always give back," he said. After joining EY in 1990, "the first thing I did was get involved with United Way. Here, I continued that journey." "Malcomb Coley is a champion of people who need



Coley

Please see **COLEY** | 2A

## 'Do your jobs!' Teachers flood into Raleigh with message for lawmakers

By Brandon Kingdollar,  
Claytin Henkel and Laura Leslie  
NC NEWSLINE

Thousands of educators, advocates and allies converged on Raleigh last week, demanding higher pay for teachers, more state support per student, more childcare funding, and more funding for special education. The May Day rally crowd, dressed in red, nearly filled Halifax Mall, the open area behind the state legislative building, before setting out on a march around the capitol two blocks away. The protest, organized by the North Carolina Association of Educators, comes as North Carolina lawmakers continue to wrangle over the state spending plan. They were unable to agree on a budget in 2025, leaving teachers and state employees

without raises and schools without extra classroom funding. The state ranks 46th in the nation for average teacher pay, lower than any of its neighboring states. It is the only state in the nation where teacher pay is projected to fall in 2026. Earlier in the week, when asked about the rally, Republican legislative leaders said they agreed with the need to increase teacher pay but said there's no agreement yet on how much. They were dismissive of the rally itself, pointing out that the legislature isn't scheduled to hold any meetings Friday, and criticizing decisions by many school districts to close for the day. Without a state budget, school districts have been forced to reduce funding for local programs, including

Please see **TEACHERS** | 3A

Gov. Josh Stein signed a bill last week approving \$319 million in Medicaid funding, ending months of uncertainty over the program's future. More than 3 million North Carolinians rely on Medicaid for health care. Without a state budget, N.C. Health and Human Services Secretary Dev Sangvai warned the program would run out of money by the end of May. Stein urged state lawmakers to supply adequate recurring funding next year to keep the program stable. "For months, the status of Medicaid in North Carolina has been in unnecessary jeopardy," Stein said before signing the document. "I'm relieved to say that the bill that I will be signing will provide certainty and care that the people and the providers of this state need and deserve." House and Senate lawmakers voted nearly unanimously to pass

Please see **STEIN** | 3A

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# Voter suppression has green light with ruling

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fessor Susan Roberts said. ... "I believe fervently in the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and I think that the last Supreme Court decision, the Shelby decision, pretty much took away one of the core things of the Voting Rights Act, and that is the preclearance that in states that had a disproportionate turnout for Black voters, Hispanic voters were added and such that they were subject to preclearance."

Conservatives hailed the decision as a win for removing race as a consideration in the political process.

"This ruling ends a legal catch-22 that forced states to choose between complying with the Constitution or defending themselves from lawsuits under conflicting interpretations of the Voting Rights Act," said James Quarles, director of advocacy and engagement at Washington-based Heritage Action For America. "States now have long-overdue clarity to draw maps that reflect real communities — not arbitrary racial targets."

Section 5 of the VRA, a landmark law from the Civil Rights Movement, mandated pre-clearance, or federal approval, in nine states, primarily in the Deep South — to change their voting rules. Counties in six other states — including 39 in North Carolina — were also subject to regulation. The Supreme Court ruled 5-4 in the 2013 Shelby County v. Holder case to release all jurisdictions from Section 5.

"North Carolina has been pretty much the epicenter of redistricting cases for a long time," Roberts said. "The Supreme Court case wasn't a shock, but it was so wide ranging, and probably one of the most important things is [Justice Samuel] Alito said in his decision that any kind of racism that existed at the time of the Voting Rights Act there's no ongoing effect of societal discrimination. I think there are people that would disagree with that. I think there are people that would say there's still discrimination. ... We're not in a post-racial environment."

Said U.S. Rep. Alma Adams, a Black Democrat who represents Charlotte in District 12, in a statement: "Requiring proof of intent to discriminate in states with documented histories of racial voter suppression is not legal interpretation. It is judicial activism and willful blindness."

Two North congressional districts — the 1st and 12th — were drawn in 1992 to give Black voters more latitude in electing candidates of their choice in accordance with the VRA. District 1 — now represented by Democrat U.S. Rep. Don Davis, has been redrawn to favor Republican candidates, giving the GOP an anticipated 11-3 majority.



Roberts

"This recent Supreme Court ruling is part of a long assault on the Voting Rights Act of 1965," Adams said. "The Supreme Court has weakened an essential provision in the VRA used to protect the country from extremely biased racial gerrymandering. These protections weren't a favor; they were a debt this nation owed to Black Americans after centuries of terror at the ballot box."

State lawmakers who draw congressional lines, are also responsible for legislative maps. With Republicans holding sizable majorities in North Carolina's House and Senate, partisan gerrymandering as a proxy for race could be next.

"This is just an expansion of the policies that we've seen in North Carolina," said state Sen. Caleb Theodros, whose District 41 includes northwest Charlotte. "Nobody's going to look at the lines within North Carolina the past 20 years, whether they're for state senate or congressional lines, and determine that they aren't racist. As a matter of fact, the state Supreme Court found them to be racist, so we just see this as a step of the United States Supreme Court legitimizing some of the racist laws that we've seen locally. I think this is going to have a harmful impact."

"The Supreme Court didn't finish this in one day," Adams said. They chipped away at it in 2013 with Shelby County v. Holder. They weakened it again in 2021 with Brnovich v. Democratic National Committee. Now, they've done what the majority has wanted all along and rendered the VRA nearly impossible to enforce with Louisiana v. Callais.

Absent court challenges, federal and state legislation are the only way to remedy the Louisiana v. Callais precedent. That means electing officials willing to draw fair and representative maps.

"There's still a lot that the state can do," Theodros said, "because the state Supreme Court or the entire judicial system at the state ultimately determines, or has a big voice in how the state maps are in terms of the state Senate and state House, and the state Senate and state House are what draw the maps for the federal congressional districts."

Said Adams: "I am calling on Congress to pass the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act immediately," which would restore a modernized preclearance formula and strengthens Section 2 by making it easier to challenge discriminatory laws, such as restrictive voter ID requirements or purges, that disproportionately affect voters of color.

"We did not come this far to go back."

# Coley is 2026 Post Luminary

Continued from page 1A

a break to live a more productive and satisfying life," said Gerald Johnson, publisher of The Charlotte Post and president of The Charlotte Post Foundation. "Because of his hard work and generosity, the Queen City is a better place for all."

The foundation will honor Coley at an Oct. 3 banquet.

In Charlotte, Coley chaired the board of United Way of Central Carolinas as well as Charlotte Regional Business Alliance and was among those who created that organization from two legacy groups. He's also involved with the Charlotte Executive Leadership Council.

Coley led the Mayor's Racial Equity Initiative, which he calls "probably my proudest community-based charitable effort." After raising \$257 million, it catapulted Johnson C. Smith University into the top 10 of historically Black colleges and universities and championed six Charlotte corridors of opportunity, "working with corporations in showing there is a pathway to ensure that Black and Brown individuals have an opportunity to move to executive leadership roles in their organizations," he said.

Gene Woods, CEO of Advocate Health, sums up simply: "Malcomb adopted Charlotte. Charlotte adopted Malcomb. What a gift that exchange has been. As a founder of Bright Hope Capital, he has put real resources behind creating jobs and expanding opportunity — backing people with talent who haven't always had access to capital or support."

Coley joined Charlotte business titan Hugh McColl and Lloyd Yates, a former executive vice president at Duke Energy, to create Bright Hope Capital, an investment fund "to invest in Black and brown businesses," Coley said.

The fund's first investment was in RJ Leeper Construction, which McColl, former CEO of Bank of America, helped ex-city council member Ron Leeper form in the 1990s. Bright Hope uses RJ Leeper as an umbrella for industrial and commercial electrical groups, a concrete division and a firm that cleans construction sites.

"We try to create equity," Coley said. "It

gives inspiration to other people of color. We grew this company from \$30-something million to almost \$200 million in a relatively short period. Our aspiration is to grow up to \$350 million. For our portfolio, the goal is to be a \$500 million conglomerate of different businesses."

Bright Hope also operates in Wilmington, where Coley supports UNC Wilmington, where he earned bachelor's and MBA degrees. The firm also has a Raleigh office as well as initiatives in the Triad.

"We're the largest Black-owned business in Charlotte and the state of North Carolina," Coley said.

After a couple of decades with EY in Raleigh and Atlanta, Coley moved to Charlotte where he spent a dozen years before retirement in 2025. He was EY's managing partner for the Charlotte region and presiding partner for the Central region, which covers 22 states and 40 offices. The Charlotte area had 570 workers when he arrived; it had 2,200 when he left.

These days, his dual titles are managing partner at Bright Hope Capital and senior vice president for business development at RJ Leeper.

"I'm enjoying retirement," Coley said, "but failing at it. I'm probably busier now than I was the last 18 months at EY."

Keith Cockrell, president of Bank of America Charlotte, can vouch for that. "I actually talk to him less in his retirement," he said. "I haven't encountered anyone like him in terms of his commitment to serving others. Quite frankly, he has been an inspiration to me. He's omnipresent. He takes on causes that he believes deeply in and his commitment is broad and deep."

Through EY, Coley met his wife Tammy, an Asheboro native and chief transformation officer with an accounting software solutions firm. The Coleys have four adult children, all of whom earned degrees and lead successful lives.

Coley long enjoyed running but, at 61, he's mostly a walker. "I'm a country boy at heart," he said. "I enjoy fishing and hunting. I'm blessed at least once a year to go hunting with Mr. McColl at his ranch. It's one of the highlights of my year."

# Electoral power shifts

Continued from page 1A

"While everyone has been focusing on what this means for the power in Congress, there's a whole other sector of power that it changes," said Davante Lewis, an elected member of the Louisiana Public Service Commission and one of the litigants in a case that pushed Louisiana to create the congressional maps that were eventually struck down in the Callais ruling.

"This is a decision on who gets to serve on a school board, who gets to serve on a city council, who gets representation in the judiciary," Lewis said.

Electoral maps are typically redrawn every 10 years after a census, but the Trump administration has encouraged Republican-led states to redraw districts to favor the GOP, a controversial move that has prompted some Democratic-led states to retaliate with gerrymandering of their own.

"But after 2030, I think we're definitely going to see the impact of the Callais decision at the state level," said Travis Crum, a law professor at Washington University in St. Louis whose research focuses on voting rights, race and federalism.

Effects across the South

Critics of the ruling say it will fundamentally dilute the voting and governing power of Black and other minority citizens up and down the ballot, particularly in the South. There, many of the seats held by Black elected officials are in so-called opportunity districts that were created after the Voting Rights Act to allow Black and other minority voters to elect their preferred candidates.

"On the congressional level, we're in this race to the bottom of redistricting, but when it comes to the state legislative level, we'll have to wait and see," Crum said.

In 10 state legislatures across the South, Republicans could gain more than 190 seats currently held by Democrats, most of them Black representatives in majority-minority districts, according to an analysis released in December by voting rights groups Fair Fight Action and Black Voters Matter Fund. At the federal level, one analysis from The New York Times found that Democrats stand to lose a dozen U.S. House seats across the South.

In the hours after the Supreme Court ruling, Republicans across the nation began calling for maps to be redrawn, particularly in states where courts had forced them to create districts where Black or other racial minorities made up the majority of residents.

"These lines should all be colorblind. You should never be basing a decision on race," said Arizona Republican state Sen. Warren Petersen, who's president of the state Senate and running for attorney general.

He told Stateline he believes both congressional and state legislative maps should be redrawn in Arizona — even if it takes litigation.

Mississippi Republican Gov. Tate Reeves called a special legislative session set for later this month, when he wants lawmakers to draw new election maps for Mississippi state Supreme Court districts. A federal judge in Mississippi will have to quickly decide whether to adopt a new map for some special elections scheduled for November.

Democrats, too, took action. In Illinois, lawmakers backtracked on a proposed constitutional amendment that would have directed lawmakers to consider race in drawing district lines, a provision taken directly from the Voting Rights Act. Instead, Illinois Senate President Don Harmon, a Democrat, told Capitol News Illinois that lawmakers want to learn more about the ruling before putting such an amendment on a ballot for voters to decide, to prevent unintended consequences that could undermine voting rights.

In many states, Republicans are focusing first on congressional redistricting.

Louisiana Republican Gov. Jeff Landry postponed his state's U.S. House primaries even though absentee voting has already begun. In Alabama, Republican

Gov. Kay Ivey called a special state legislative session aiming to move the state's May 19 primary in at least a handful of districts. Prominent Georgia Republicans were also calling for their state's political maps to be redrawn, though GOP Gov. Brian Kemp said in a statement that it's too late to do that this year.

And in North Dakota, the ruling leaves a tribal redistricting case in limbo. Tribes had used Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act to sue the state over a legislative district map the North Dakota legislature approved in 2021.

Gerrymandering for partisan advantage is legal at the federal level, though some states do have their own laws restricting or prohibiting it. In Florida, Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis is arguing the Supreme Court ruling invalidates voter-approved amendments that prevent the state from gerrymandering districts based on race or political party.

For most states, though, state officials can redraw maps explicitly to favor Republican voters, for example, so long as they don't state their intention to disadvantage voters based on race.

'Ripple like wildfire'

Critics of last week's Callais ruling also worry it will rapidly erode the pipeline that has made it possible for Black and other minority candidates to get elected to office.

"Now, state legislatures can draw maps where they are picking their voters instead of their voters picking them," said Lewis, the Louisiana commissioner. "They can dilute the power of Black and brown people serving in the state legislature, which means there's fewer people to fight a congressional map" that pulls voting power away from minority communities.

He worries that if Black Democratic state lawmakers oppose their white Republican colleagues in legislatures with GOP majorities, those colleagues could redraw maps to eliminate the Black lawmakers' seats, claiming they're doing it only for partisan reasons.

The diluting of minority voting power, he said, "is going to ripple like wildfire."

At the most local level, city councils and county boards typically draw those voting maps, but the ruling could be used to apply to them as well, said Crum, the law professor.

Arizona is one of a handful of states where an independent commission, rather than the state legislature, determines both congressional and legislative districts. Outside of a court order, it can't convene before the turn of the decade.

Petersen, the Arizona state senator, said he's prepared to litigate if the state's redistricting commission doesn't take action to redraw districts that he said are unconstitutionally drawn. He doesn't expect new maps before 2028, though.

"We've heard complaints from constituents that they don't like the way their district was drawn," he said. "We have some people here in Arizona that represent completely far-flung areas."

"I do think you'll get a better outcome on some of these legislative districts" by removing race-based districting, he said.

Lawmakers in some states have tried to guard against the loss of federal protections by introducing their own state-level voting rights bills. Nine states have their own versions of the federal Voting Rights Act, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures: California, Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, Minnesota, New York, Oregon, Virginia and Washington.

Lawmakers in at least 11 other states have introduced such bills this year alone: Alabama, Arizona, Georgia, Florida, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, New Jersey, Oklahoma, Rhode Island and Vermont.

The new Supreme Court ruling doesn't render those laws unconstitutional, said Crum.

"But people who are seeking to undermine those state Voting Rights Acts are certainly going to rely on some of the themes" of the recent ruling, Crum said. "You might see them try and replicate some of the moves the court made."

# Bill puts cannabis on the ballot

Continued from page 1A

Despite resistance in Raleigh, polls suggest North Carolinians are embracing the idea of legalizing marijuana, which Virginia did in 2021. A February 2025 Meredith College poll revealed 71% of residents support legalization for recreational use. A 2021 Elon University Poll found 54% of respondents supported legalization.

SB 1072 would place the measure on November's ballot as a referendum. If voters were to approve, lawmakers would be required to create laws governing possession.

"If you just look to see how effective the General Assembly has been, cannabis is something that's been in public policy discussions over the past 20 years," Theodros said. "For 20 years straight, the General Assembly has failed to introduce any kind of meaningful guardrails or true policy around it."

"I just point you to Medicaid expansion. There were 25-30 bills every year introduced in order to try to expand Medicaid and it wasn't only until a few years ago that we were finally able to do that in North Carolina. The idea that bills or policy ideas have been introduced previously and have failed is never an indication that the next one will continue to fail."

Under state law, marijuana possession carries criminal penalties. Bill proponents contend subjecting people to arrest, prosecution, and potential sentencing creates a two-tier justice system that historically impacts the poor and communities of color. In addition, it limits access for patients who could benefit from medical cannabis — an option that's available in most other states.

"When we talk about even the potential to legalize medical marijuana or even recreational marijuana use, we also need to go back and start to take a look at what has marijuana or the disproportionate application of the law, if you will, of marijuana laws have done to people," Theodros said.

"What has it done to their ability to get jobs after they're removed from jail or whatever the case may be. It's not my personal belief when it comes to the legalization of marijuana. It's not simply needing to just legalize it. It's to rectify some of those negative policies that we pushed in North Carolina and the United States in general."

## Stein signs \$319 million Medicaid funding plan

Continued from page 1A

House Bill 696, "Medicaid & HHS Adjust./Other Critical Needs," last week.

Three Democrats in each chamber voted against it, saying it would deny Medicaid coverage to 27,000 pregnant women and their children due to their immigration status. The group includes victims of human trafficking, green card holders, refugees and other immigrants with legal status, as well as undocumented immigrants who are pregnant or who have recently given birth.

Stein said he was concerned with that part of the bill, but noted the urgency of funding the program before it runs out of money.

"Depriving these vulnerable women and children healthcare converge is wrong," Stein said. "Fortunately, based on conversations we've had, I believe that it is the General Assembly's intention to fix this."

But that's not the only provision in the bailout bill causing concern. H696 also creates new copays for Medicaid at the maximum amount allowable by federal law.

A coalition of 14 nonpartisan organizations representing patients with serious and chronic health conditions, including the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, urged policymakers to reconsider the copay amounts.

"Research has shown that even low levels of cost-sharing and copayments deter patients from seeking care," the coalition said in its statement.

H696 also includes some of the nation's most restrictive requirements for eligibility. Federal law requires a minimum one-month lookback period, which is the timeframe for checking work-requirement eligibility for benefits like Medicaid. But H696 requires Medicaid to verify three months of work eligibility before applicants receive approval.

"There may be people who are eligible for Medicaid that are denied benefits because of this longer lookback," Stein said.

Looking ahead, the program has a \$1 billion rebase, or increase in costs, for the upcoming fiscal year, according to Sen. Benton Sawrey (R-Johnston), co-chair of the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Medicaid.

That's larger than the expected surplus in the state budget.

With rising prices, Sawrey said Medicaid costs have increased by more than 90% over the past five years in North Carolina.

"House Bill 696 takes important first steps in giving our Medicaid partners important tools in order to manage that cost," Sawrey said. "I'm proud of the work that we did to get this across the finish line, but I don't have any illusions that this is the current solution that's going to fix everything going forward."

Josh Dobson, president and CEO of the North Carolina Health Association, said the law provides relief for providers in addition to patients. The funding supports the providers and teams who make healthcare possible.

Healthcare workers are stepping up while managing workforce challenges and significant financial pressure, he said.

"Through all of that, they continue to deliver high quality care in every single corner of North Carolina," Dobson said. "They stayed engaged, worked in good faith and helped move forward an approach that supports patients while strengthening the system for the long term."

The law also contains measures to target waste and abuse in Medicaid. The House Select Committee on Oversight and Reform grilled Sangvai and Attorney General Jeff Jackson earlier this month over allegations of fraud.

Some critics said the measure moved jurisdiction over fraud away from the attorney general to the state auditor's office, but bill sponsors said that's not the case.

Sangvai lauded the push for agencies to work together to identify and address cases of waste and abuse.

"One of the other opportunities that's come out of this process is collaboration in the state," he said.

Stein isn't worried about the potential power shift, he said, since the attorney general — a position he previously held — partners with the governor's office against Medicaid fraud.

"The government is really focused on it, because we want every healthcare dollar to go to make someone healthy," he said.

## Teachers demand more support from lawmakers

Continued from page 1A

ing special education.

Tennille Sims has spent the last three years working as a special education teacher in Wake County Public Schools. Her position was among those eliminated because of recent budget cuts. She attended the Friday rally to advocate for her students.

"My program is no longer there, nor the essentials classes, which is a big problem because a lot of parents are now saying, 'Well, what about my kids? What's gonna happen with my kids?' I don't have answers," Sims told NC Newsline.

Rally attendee Marie Delgado is a 25-year special education and preschool teacher in Guilford County. Her state Senate representative is Senate Leader Phil Berger (R-Rockingham). Delgado works with students with autism, developmental delays and other health issues. She said the lack of a state budget has left her program without needed funding.

"We serve about 900 special education preschool students, probably more than that, and we do not have enough funding for teachers or teacher assistants. We are working at both ends of the candles," Delgado said.

"I'm not doing this because of how much money I am being paid. I am doing it because our students deserve to have a good education," she added. "It would be great to be respected and honored for the work that we are doing, but it's not about that. It's about what our students need."

Rockingham County Sheriff Sam Page, the Republican who defeated Berger in the primary election earlier this year, was also in attendance at the rally. He said the state owes its educators competitive pay and a timely budget. He said his colleagues who are reluctant to pass pay raises need to remember that schools are "an investment in the future of the state."

"We're first in flight, we need to be first in education," Page said. "The biggest thing is, a lot of our teachers feel disrespected. They're underpaid, underfunded, and they need more support in the schools."

Justin Parmenter has been a seventh-grade language arts instructor in Charlotte since 2006. Parmenter made the trek to Raleigh on Friday because, he said, policy choices made by Republican legislative leadership have left teachers feeling undervalued.

He points to the loss of master's pay and longevity pay as one reason dedicated teachers feel their expertise is

being discounted.

"Certainly it's important to have beginning teacher pay be attractive," Parmenter told NC Newsline. "But at the same time, when you are 20 years into your career and you hit a long stretch with no raises at all, it's hard to feel valued as a veteran educator."

"Our veteran educators bring a ton of institutional knowledge. They're great at mentoring new teachers," he added. "Unless we make our veteran teachers feel valued and prioritize that, they're going to leave and find greener pastures."

Parmenter also wants public tax dollars to stay in public schools, a sentiment voiced by many speakers. North Carolina spent \$625 million on private school vouchers, also known as Opportunity Scholarships, in the 2025-26 school year alone.

The program now serves more than 106,000 students. Data has shown the program primarily benefits wealthy private school families.

Gov. Josh Stein's recommended budget would phase out the Opportunity Scholarship program. Parmenter doesn't think legislators will take that step this summer, but says they can at least increase accountability by requiring private schools that accept the vouchers to abide by the same rules required of public schools.

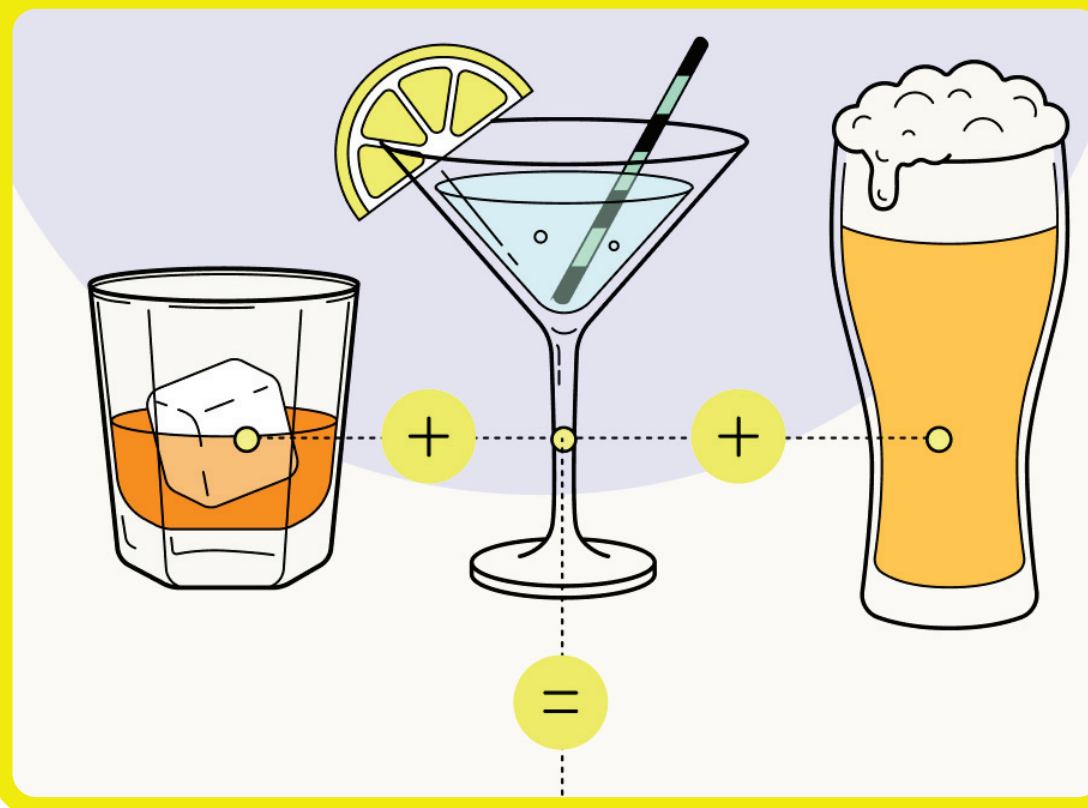
"Have a level playing field where all schools have to report test scores, provide transportation, and allow any student who has special needs adequate support to get the same education that everyone else is getting," Parmenter said. "Those are all things that public schools do for our children that private schools do not have to do."

State Republican party spokesman Matt Mercer called the event a "union-led stunt."

"Republicans are committed to quality education for all students and empowering families with the best education options. The left-wing special interests, like NCAE and the national unions, are not aligned with the vast majority of North Carolina teachers — those who want the best for their students and don't want to be used as political props," Mercer said in a statement.

Meantime, rally speakers on Friday sketched Republican lawmakers for policies that favor private school vouchers over public schools' urgent funding needs and raises for teachers whose pay ranks near the bottom of the nation.

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## The Charlotte Post

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Published weekly by The Charlotte Post Publishing Company Inc., 5118 Princess Street, Charlotte, NC 28269 (USPS #965500). Subscription is \$65 per year. Periodicals postage paid at Charlotte, NC. Postmaster: Send address changes to The Charlotte Post, PO Box 30144, Charlotte, NC 28230

# Apprenticeships offer a better way

America's student debt system is failing millions of people.

About 42.7 million borrowers owe more than \$1.6 trillion. More than 5 million have already gone more than a year without making a payment and are in default.

Another 4 million were already in late-stage delinquency when the U.S. Department of Education issued its warning last year.

People do not usually end up in default because they are reckless. They end up there because the payoff they were promised never arrives strongly enough or fast enough. Some cannot find steady work. Others find work that simply does not pay enough to carry the debt. That is what it looks like when a path to mobility stops working for too many people.

That is why apprenticeships matter.

They start with work, wages and skill, not a bill. They let people earn while

they learn. They connect training directly to real jobs and real employers. And they do not belong only to the old trades, important as those trades remain.

America still needs more electricians, welders, plumbers, carpenters, machinists and construction workers. We need people who can build homes, modernize the grid, maintain infrastructure and keep the physical country running. But apprenticeship is also being used in teaching, health care, public service, information technology and cybersecurity. Teacher apprenticeship has spread rapidly in recent years because states and employers are looking for better ways to fill essential jobs.

Several states are making real progress. Illinois has made meaningful moves, including a tax credit of \$3,500 per eligible apprentice, with another \$1,500 available when the apprentice or the employer is in an underserved area. North Carolina has built a substantial statewide apprenticeship system. Pennsylvania is putting more money into expansion.

That is real progress.

But Maryland is showing what it looks like when a state decides that apprenticeship belongs near the center of an economic mobility agenda. Gov. Wes Moore signed the RAISE Act and then launched a \$5 million incentive program to help employers hire and train more apprentices. His administration has made clear that apprenticeship is a way to grow the workforce and expand economic opportunity.

For most families, the question is simple: Does a path lead to upward mobility or not?

Too many young Americans were told that if they studied hard, borrowed what they had to and got the degree, they would move up. Too often, they are still struggling to get started.

The class side of this story is impossible to ignore.

The people most likely to get crushed by student debt are the people who had the least room for error to begin with. If your family has savings, a setback is still painful, but it is less likely to become a

crisis. If your family does not, one loan payment can throw off the rent, the groceries, the childcare or the car note.

That is why apprenticeships make so much sense. They let people build skill and income at the same time. They let people move forward without first mortgaging their future.

Of course, apprenticeships are not perfect. They have to be funded well. Employers have to take them seriously. Programs have to help people finish. But those are problems worth solving. They are better problems than telling another generation of young people to borrow first and hope it works out later.

Student debt has left too many Americans stuck. Apprenticeships offer a better road. Illinois has started down it. Maryland is showing how much farther states can go. The rest of the country should be paying attention.

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

## Celebrate and recognize the value of nurses

This week is National Nurses Week.

We step into this week with purpose and are proud to have been, for over 24 consecutive years, the country's most trusted profession, according to Gallup. As the 57th president of the North Carolina Nurses Association, I am proud to serve over 165,000 nurses working in all areas of healthcare.

Everyone knows a nurse. We all depend on nurses to keep us well and hold our hands during the heavy times of our lives. Nurses work hard to uphold the public's trust every single day, even in a world that makes that work increasingly difficult.

When you see a nurse, you know as family or interact with in the healthcare setting, tell them, "Thank you." Tell them how much you appreciate their dedication to the profession.

Your words can inspire them to continue making a difference in our North Carolina communities.

The North Carolina Nurses Association makes tireless efforts to support and advocate for nurses in our communities. We have made real progress, and we are clear-eyed about how much work remains. We continue to lead the way through advocacy for higher wages for nursing faculty, funding for professional degrees, access to care through the APRN workforce, RNs working to the top of their education and licensure, and the continued expansion of Medicaid.

Our collective progress is a source of pride and motivation for all of us as we work toward a stronger future for nursing.

And while we fight today's battles, we are not losing sight of what is coming. Artificial intelligence is already reshaping healthcare, and nursing is ready to lead that conversation, not follow it. Our goal is simple: use technology to expand how we care, while keeping the healing hands of the nurse exactly where they belong, at the center of it all.

The American Nurses Association has named this year's theme The Power of Nurses, and North Carolina's nurses prove that power every single day. At the bedside, in the classroom, in the boardroom, and in the halls of our legislature, your impact is undeniable. We see it. We celebrate it. And we are committed to making sure all of North Carolina sees it too.

If you are a nurse and not yet a member of the North Carolina Nurses Association, I encourage you to join us. We are 10,000 members strong and growing, working to be the largest voice for healthcare in North Carolina. Our collective advocacy has led to real policy changes that improve working conditions, funding, and patient care standards.

We are here to develop you professionally through education, provide networking opportunities, and give you opportunities to advocate on behalf of the profession for issues you encounter daily. As we grow in number, our voice grows stronger for our nurses, our communities, and our state.

Happy National Nurses Week. To every nurse in North Carolina, thank you for your service, your sacrifice, and your strength. The power you carry is real, it is recognized, and it is needed now more than ever.

*Bonnie Meadows MSN, APRN, ACCNS-AG is president of the North Carolina Nurses Association.*

## Wake school board votes to demolish historic Ligon

By Kylie Marsh

THE TRIANGLE TRIBUNE

The decision to tear down a historically Black school in Southeast Raleigh has damaged trust between the community and elected officials.

Despite public opposition, the Wake County School Board decided in March to demolish J.W. Ligon Magnet Middle School. The school was previously John W. Ligon Junior-Senior High School before becoming a junior high school after it desegregated in 1971.

The WCPSS decision reflects the contrast between current and future students and its alumni - two groups that look very different. The current Ligon School building does not meet standards set by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, WCPSS Superintendent Robert Taylor said during a work session.

"Little Blues" and community members from the surrounding Black neighborhoods expressed dissatisfaction with the decision. "There is a continuing sense of distrust," SE Raleigh resident and author Carmen Cauthen told The Tribune. "There is a sense of frustration, especially in this particular era, when we see so much of the political leadership dismantling the history of our country."

In November, alumni, parents, and public officials were presented with three options: renovate the existing building; demolish and build a new building; physically move the old building to make way for a new facility, then demolish the old one.



BEN

JEALOUS

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

## Please stop trying to kill Donald Trump

On April 25, one Cole Allen allegedly charged a security checkpoint outside the Washington Hilton ballroom where many of the nation's most prominent politicians, journalists, and entertainers were gathered for the White House Correspondents Dinner, bearing both arms



THOMAS

KNAPP

and ill will toward some or all of those inside - almost certainly including President Donald Trump.

I've been in that ballroom. I've also been outside the exit, mere feet away, where there's a historical plaque commemorating the attempted assassination of Ronald Reagan, by John Hinckley, in 1981. I was there even as Donald Trump was too, campaigning for the support of several thousand anti-government extremists at the 2024 Libertarian National Convention. At which event, it's worth noting, no one tried to kill him (that I know of, anyway).

Allen was quickly taken down after shooting a Secret Service agent (whose bulletproof vest fortunately stopped the bullet). It seems unlikely that he'll get much enjoyment out of his future lifestyle. And whatever the reasons for his resort to attempted political assassination, the attempt almost certainly didn't serve his desired ends ... and wouldn't have even if he'd been successful.

This is not the part where I clutch my pearls about the evils of "political violence." There's no creature on Earth more violent than a politician, albeit usually at arm's length and behind a wall of security to insulate him or her from negative consequences.

Politics IS violence, and I don't see how shooting a politician is inherently any more immoral than, say, ordering the murder of an 8-year-old American girl (Nawar Anwar al-Awlaki) or the bombing of a school in Iran, both of which Trump himself bears responsibility for. But it's probably no LESS immoral, either.

I'm no pacifist. I fully support violence in immediate self-defense of one's own life or the lives of innocent others, and you won't find me shedding any tears for those who, having overseen and ordered non-defensive violence, eventually pay the ultimate price for their misdeeds.

But when considering an attempt to kill someone, even if the target arguably deserves to die, the likely consequences of one's own actions are worth considering.

If Donald Trump - or any other president - dies at the hands of an assassin, two such consequences follow as night follows day. First, that president becomes a martyr. His party and/or movement become stronger, not weaker. Some of the things he or she was trying to accomplish become far more likely to happen through a process of lionization and memorialization.

The assassination of John F. Kennedy arguably resulted in (to name two big things) passage of the Civil Rights Act and the moon landing. Both things might have happened anyway, but his death put them on rails.

Second, the regime that president led opportunistically uses the assassination to expand its police and surveillance powers and clamp down on dissent. Especially the varieties of dissent associated with the assassin's persona.

If you happen to be "anti-Trump," the LAST thing you should want is for him to die violently in office.

Or, for that matter, even non-violently. If he has a perfectly ordinary fatal coronary tomorrow, he'll still get the "martyr effect" (and a certain sub-set of his supporters will forever suspect foul play regardless of the evidence).

Absent revolution, which

seems unlikely in this country and at this time, taking out figurehead politicians empowers rather than enervates their supporters, cronies, and hangers-on.

Don't like Trump, personally or politically? Your best bet is to persuade others to agree with you and start building sentiment and infrastructure for better times ... then wait him out. His time will come without your violent assistance.

*Thomas L. Knapp is director and senior news analyst at the William Lloyd Garrison Center for Libertarian Advocacy Journalism. He lives and works in north central Florida.*

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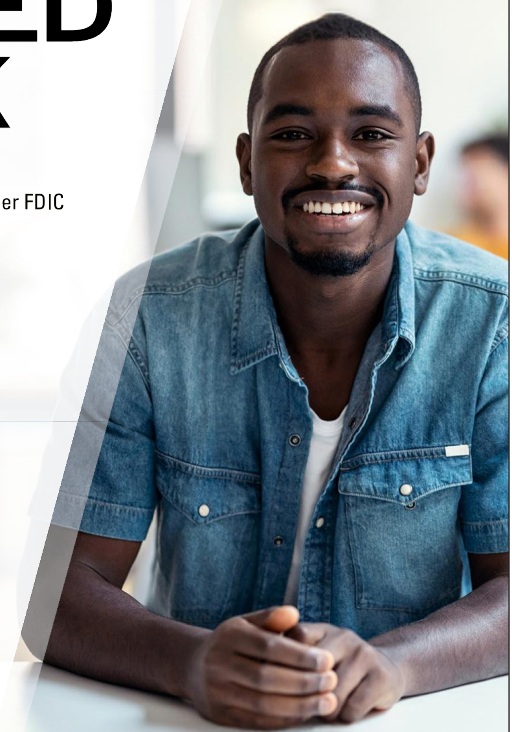
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# Sports

THURSDAY, MAY 7, 2026



HERBERT L. WHITE | THE CHARLOTTE POST

Johnson C. Smith offensive line coach Kevin Thompson is surrounded by the Gold team at the annual Gold-Blue spring game on April 25. The Golden Bulls, who won the 2025 CIAA title and advanced to the NCAA Division II playoffs for the first time in school history, open the 2026 season Aug. 29 at Benedict, which also earned a playoff berth.

## ‘It’s great to have expectations’

*With summer break on the horizon, JC Smith turns its attention to building another winning campaign*

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

Vincent Hill wants to go farther. Johnson C. Smith’s All-CIAA linebacker is certain the Golden Bulls, who posted the best season in school history in 2025, can do better in 2026. That means a fourth straight winning campaign – which would be a first. Perhaps back-to-back CIAA titles. Winning a playoff game? Without a doubt. “The mindset for the spring and carrying over to the fall is to finish,” Hill said. “It’s always going to be the finish. You have to finish. It’s not about how you start, it’s how you finish and right

now, we’re just trying to build up our roster, get everybody on the same accord, getting that chemistry and that camaraderie right. It’s really a big factor that I think helped us in the fall last year.”

Winning has brought increased interest to JCSU. Last month’s Gold-Blue game drew about 500 fans to McGirt Field for a Saturday afternoon scrimmage to close spring drills. In addition, 40 high school recruits were on campus to talk



Hill

with coaches and check out facilities. And on the field, there’s recognition that nothing will be given.

“It’s great to have expectations,” coach Maurice Flowers said. “That means that you’ve done some good things, and our young men know it. We just we don’t talk about it a lot. It’s just known that we want to play football at a high level, and for the spring, it really goes to the growth of the program.”

It helps to have a winning résumé.

The Golden Bulls are coming off the greatest season in program history with a 10-2 record, their first CIAA title since 1969 and a berth in the Division II playoffs. Although Smith lost to Frostburg State in the first round, it’s incentive to move forward in 2026 despite losing more than 30 seniors from last year’s roster.

“Every team is different,” said Flowers, who is going into his fifth season. “But what I will say at this point, right now, is in the years that we’ve been here we’ve ended spring, we probably have the least amount of question

Please see **EXPECTATIONS** | 6A

## Rise of sports analytics goes beyond numbers



CHRIS CHOW | UNSPLASH

Analytics has gone from a curiosity to an effective tool in all sports, including baseball where radar guns are as prevalent as statistical data.

By Gwen Peace  
UNC MEDIA HUB

Cleveland Guardians scout John Manuel remembers a time when analytics had little meaning in the world of baseball.

In fact, when technology started to develop there was often pushback against its use, in favor of more traditional methods.

“Scouts in 1981 were like, ‘I don’t need a radar gun. I can just eyeball it,’” Manuel said.

But slowly, the usefulness of the technology began to outweigh the old-timers’ pushback.

Scouts across the country started to recognize that using tools like radar guns and tracking analytics like pitching speed were useful in identifying future talent for their teams.

Sentiments were shifting.

“Why wouldn’t you use a radar gun?” Manuel said. “Why wouldn’t you want more precise information? So, every time there’s been a new tool to evaluate players, there’s been resistance to change in baseball. Now, there is so much data.”

It didn’t come all at once. It was a gradual buildup year after year. And then in 2015, it exploded.

Major League Baseball released StatCast, a

Please see **RISE** | 6A

## SWAC hits television gold for sports

SWAC Commissioner Charles McClelland was full of surprises last month.

The biggest was the announcement of a collaboration among the four NCAA HBCU conferences to form their own Black College Football Poll, Black College All-American Teams and postseason awards.

The fact that the SWAC released the news several hours before the other conferences meant that it was spearheading the new endeavor, which has been well received among HBCU fans and alumni. The most common response was “what took so long?”

But before the partnership revelation, McClelland discussed the future of one of the top FCS conferences in the nation at the SWAC Men’s and Women’s Golf Championships in Birmingham, Alabama.

He sat between broadcasters Santoria Black and Charles Bishop and talked for over an hour on where SWAC Nation is, how far it’s come and where it’s headed.

One of the biggest moves the conference made was the launch of SWAC TV streaming service on Aug. 1. McClelland said even he is surprised at the response.

“It’s grown exponentially fast. We’ve had to revise our strategic plan simply because it’s taken off faster than what we thought it would,” he said. “Our corporate partners want to double down on SWAC TV, and we’ve been actively working with some third parties to bring in some additional media partners, and it wasn’t planned that way.”

McClelland said the launch was perfect timing. Sports is one of the few industries where the pushback against Diversity, Equity and Inclusion hasn’t affected sponsorships or adver-

Please see **SWAC** | 6A

## Carolina Ascent on the road to another postseason

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

Carolina Ascent FC is 2-for-2 in Gainbridge Super League postseason berths.

The Climbers (13-7-6, 45 points) clinched their second playoff appearance with a 1-0 win against Dallas Trinity FC at the Cotton Bowl. Carolina, which extended its unbeaten streak to eight matches and includes seven wins, plays at Tampa Bay Sun FC Saturday.

Rylee Baisden’s header in the 89th minute was the game-winning goal, which was backed by goalkeeper Sydney Martinez’s seven saves to nail down her 10th career Super League clean sheet a day after interna-

tional match duty for Puerto Rico.

“I’m just happy I could come off the bench and make a difference,” Baisden said. “To be able to win with this team on the road, come home with three points, and get into playoffs means everything.”

Said Carolina coach Philip Poole: “This is a very difficult place to come and to get three points, so I’m really proud of the group. “We were under pressure for long periods of the game, but even with that pressure, I still think we had the best three chances of the game. We didn’t take the lead early and we heaped some pressure on ourselves, but to show a level of resilience, to stay in it, and get the job

done was really satisfying for the group.”

Dallas controlled possession early to put Martinez under pressure that forced her to make three saves in the first 20 minutes. Dallas nearly broke through in the 39th minute when Heather Stainbrook had a good look, but her shot was deflected wide of the post.

Trinity continued its attacking pace in the second half, but couldn’t break Martinez, who denied Lauren Flynn at the back post in the 68th minute off a corner. Carolina struck 21 minutes later when outside back Addyson Merrick drove down the flank into the box to unleash a cross Baisden banged home.

Please see **ASCENT** | 6A

## Climbers’ Martinez: 24 hours, 2 matches for club and country

By Steve Goldberg  
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

On a cool, dry, and breezy evening, Sydney Martinez walked out to the pitch of Estadio Nemesio Díez in Toluca, Mexico, with her Puerto Rico national teammates in the penultimate match of Group A qualifying for the 2026 CONCACAF Women’s Championships. They were one of 29 teams across the region competing for just six spots, with the USA and Canada already qualified. Both Puerto Rico and Mexico were undefeated in their previous three games, but only the winner would advance to the tournament finals in Texas, beginning in November.

Twenty-two hours and 1,000 miles later,

she made a similar procession with the Carolina Ascent before their kickoff against Dallas Trinity at the Cotton Bowl.

CONCACAF W Championship qualifier

The thinner air of Toluca, which sits at 8,700 feet above sea level – 1,500 more than Mexico City and a mile and a half higher than Charlotte – meant shots would come faster and perhaps dance more than she was accustomed.

Puerto Rico was good, but Mexico was better by far, easily the third-best team in the confederation after the USA and Canada. So the shots came, early and often, a seemingly nonstop barrage of 44 strikes, 29 from inside the box, across the 90 minutes.

Martinez, 26, was in demand between the posts, making 15 saves on the 20 shots that were on target. A total of six found the net, including an unfortunate own goal headed in by one of her defenders.

“Every time we play Mexico, it’s a battle,” she said. “It’s always busy. I think every time we play, I get at least 15 to 20 saves.”

In any other group, Puerto Rico, captained by Martinez’s Ascent teammate Jill Aguilera, might have made the CONCACAF finals, but it wasn’t to be this year. Another Ascent player, Maria Tapia, 18, also played 87 minutes on the wing.

“Mexico, U.S., Canada, they’re all up there,”

See **MARTINEZ** | 6A

## SWAC TV pays off

Continued from page 5A

tising dollars.

"It was a godsend that we shifted to media when we did because we've been able to hold on to (sponsors) because of the media," he said. "We should be announcing some major additions in the future."

Let's be honest: if it's Black, folks think second class.

SWAC TV is as professional and well-run as anything I've watched on ESPN or Fox Sports. That's what Corporate America is seeing. And who can tell our stories better than us?

Football and basketball have gotten the most airplay, with volleyball and soccer, and conference championships "sprinkled in." McClelland said the plan is to have all 12 institutions and every sporting event - 2,080 to be exact - streamed by Year 3.

So far, SWAC TV has 2.5 million unique viewers, 580 million impres-

sions and 55 million minutes watched in less than nine months. But the marriage hasn't been one long honeymoon.

"I thought you would just be able to plug it up and start a network; that's not necessarily the case," McClelland said. "The first few weeks of football, I wanted to quit. I wanted to fire everybody. Had to go to some counseling sessions."

Football is the SWAC's golden goose. The conference board of directors recently voted to eliminate non-Division I and DII teams starting in 2027. This means no more Virginia-Lynchburg or teams with "Christian" in their name.

"We will no longer play games that don't count," McClelland said. "More competitive games are going to shift schools' thought processes. Our fans are key and center to all that we do and all we can become."

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

## Expectations at JC Smith: 'Get with it or get gone'

Continued from page 5A

marks as far as position goes. At every position, we think we're probably almost two deep that we feel good about. It doesn't guarantee wins, doesn't guarantee a CIAA appearance or anything like that. What it does guarantee is that we have young men on campus that know our system, know our philosophy, and they've got a lot of experience in this system."

Hill, who earned All-CIAA in his first season at Smith, certainly does. He's the unquestioned leader of a unit that ranked eighth nationally last year in fewest points allowed (17.25 per game) and 21st in total defense (304.3 yards) but adjusting to change, notably in the secondary, where every starter is new.

"We're just taking on the mindset of we're not rebuilding, we're reloading," he said. "It's not necessarily where we have to get things together, it's just about reloading the gun. [Defensive coordinator Barry] Tripp has that standard, and he doesn't lower that standard for anybody. You get with it, or you get gone and you're going to get with it because he's very enthused."

Quarterback Josh Jackson, a redshirt sophomore transfer all but wrapped up the starting job, which led to freshman challengers Andrew Attmore and Trooper Floyd moving to the transfer portal.

"A lot of room to get better, a lot of room to improve," said Jackson, who spent two seasons at Central Connecticut State, an FCS program. "You know, ups and downs. It ain't always easy coming into the offense and get acclimated immediately, but I've got a great coaching staff behind me that's willing to help me learn each and every day."

Despite a lack of game experience, Flowers is confident Jackson has the skill to succeed in an offense that averaged 33.6 points per game last year. Most of that group returns, including the entire offensive line, receivers Brian Lane, Reggie Daniel and Reggie Brigman as well as running back Bobby Smith.

"When you look at Kelvin Durham, you had a guy that had started three seasons and was the all-time leading passer in Fort Valley State history, and had some familiarity with us," said Flowers, who recruited Durham to FVSU. ... "We brought in a transfer in January that was not familiar with our system, so he went through a good growth process through the spring. Josh did, and we're looking from continued growth through the summer. It'll be fine."

Said Jackson: "We've got the weapons. That isn't even a question."

## Rise of analytics in sports

Continued from page 5A

centralized database full of information and statistics about every team and every player, all accessible to the public.

Players began chasing higher and higher numbers, spurred on by the tangible tracking of improvement made visible through the data. Scouts began relying more and more on what they saw on screens versus what they saw with their eyes.

Slowly, these new methods trickled down from the majors to the minors and into the college game, where the use of technology has surged in recent years. The shift reshaped player development, unlocking unprecedented performance gains, but also quietly introducing new risks.

In Chapel Hill, North Carolina baseball is embracing that change.

Ahead of the 2026 season, the team became the first college program to install a Trajekt Pitching Machine — a robotic device that can mimic any pitcher's throwing style for hitters to practice on through taking advantage of advanced analytics.

It wasn't a hard decision for the team to invest in the machine, despite its steep price tag of \$15,000 to \$20,000 per month.

"Anytime something comes out, we look at it technology-wise as, 'Can it make our players better?'" Tar Heels baseball coach Scott Forbes said. "And it was a no-brainer."

It's a tool that has already been widely adopted by most Major League teams because of the unprecedented amount of preparation it allows players to undergo before facing opponents.

And, according to North Carolina assistant coach and recruiting coordinator Scott Jackson, it gives the team a huge leg up.

"We get the exact shape of the ball, so our hitters will have a look at a pitcher's pitch speeds before they even get in the batter's box," he said. "We think it's the equivalent of maybe facing the starter for the third time."

The sentiment is shared by junior infielder Gavin Gallaher, who said the machine is helping develop the whole team, rather than just the starting lineup.

"It's a great tool that I think we utilize really well," Gallaher said. "I think that it's something that's going to benefit us extremely, especially early in the season and then later in the season it'll be huge for guys that aren't getting at bats every single day, for them to be able to get back there and still be able to face kind of that live pitching, even though it's not on the field."

The benefits are already showing, Forbes said. North Carolina is currently ranked second in the nation and has a record of 37-9.

The tool is helping players improve their techniques by giving them the chance to practice the same type of pitch over and over again without human error getting in the way.

Junior infielder Jake Schaffner noted that the machine took a little bit of getting used to, but once he got the hang of it he was able to work on fixing recurring problems with his swing that had been costing him hits.

## Ascent earn another playoff berth

Continued from page 5A

"It's a big deal for the players and the club to know we're in the postseason again," Poole said. "It's always one game at a time, one opponent at a time. Regardless, it's a good time of

the year and it's good to be above the line."

Ascent became the third team to clinch a playoff spot, along with Sporting JAX and Lexington SC. The win kept Carolina within a point of second-place Lex-

ington (12-3-11, 46 points) in the GSL table. The top four teams advance to the playoffs with Dallas holding the fourth spot over Dallas by a point.

rested.

"It was a very difficult game for Puerto Rico, and a very difficult game physically for Jill," Ascent coach Philip Poole noted. "So that made the decision with Jill. With Marti, it's a little bit different being a goalkeeper. We talked about plan A and plan B, and we had it planned all along."

It would be another busy night for Martinez as she faced 24 Dallas shots, 14 inside the penalty area. The Rincon, Georgia, native, who came to Charlotte from Brooklyn FC before the season, was a wall, saving all six on target.

## Martinez plays for club and country

Continued from page 5A

Martinez said. "They're all amazing teams, and they have the resources and everything. They're top-level teams. I mean, we're ranked like 70-something."

The USA is second in the most recent FIFA rankings, with Canada ninth and Mexico 27th. Puerto Rico is 77th.

Game 2 a fight for the playoffs

Twenty-four hours and 1,000 miles later, Martinez marched onto the pitch at the Cotton Bowl in Dallas with her Carolina Ascent teammates. Given the greater toll on her body as a field player, Aguilera was

### « SPONSORED CONTENT »



## Celebrating Financial Literacy Month

Charlotte's Chase community manager shares tips for strengthening financial health

JPMORGANCHASE

We all have financial needs and goals, whether it's dreaming of buying a new home, starting a business, or simply feeling more secure about your finances. No matter where you are on your financial journey, it's never too early - or too late - to get started.

This Financial Literacy Month, Shakeira Tennort, Chase Community Manager in Charlotte, shares ways to help strengthen your financial health journey—this month and all year round.

Q: Which areas should people focus on to improve their financial well-being?

A: To help strengthen any financial health journey, it's important to focus on four key areas: earning, protecting, spending and saving. Earning is about understanding your income and how it supports your goals. Protecting your money involves keeping it safe from loss, theft and overspending. Spending wisely helps you stay on top of bills and make progress toward your goals. And saving—no matter how small the amount—sets you up for future needs and opportunities.

Q: If someone wants to strengthen their financial health, what are the first three steps you'd suggest they take?

A: Start by getting clear on your goals. What are you working toward, and why does it matter to you? Next, create a budget so you can see where your money is going and make a plan for saving. Then, review your budget regularly and make adjustments. Every month is different and life changes, but staying flexible and aware of your budget helps keep you on track towards your goals.

Q: Budgeting takes practice, and many people are still finding what works for them. What budgeting framework do you recommend, and how can someone personalize it so it feels manageable?

A: There's no one-size-fits-all approach, but the key is to find a system you'll actually use. There are plenty of apps and tools available to help you track your spending each month and how that compares to the amount of money coming into your home. Once you have an idea of where your money is going, it's easier to adjust your spending habits so you can save more.

Q: Saving for different goals—like emergencies, retirement or big purchases—can feel overwhelming. How do you help people prioritize and consistently stay on track?

A: I remind everyone that every dollar counts. Even a small amount saved

from each paycheck adds up over time. I encourage you to set specific financial goals—such as building an emergency fund or saving up for a large purchase—and set a budget that supports those goals. If you fall short one month, don't get discouraged. Give yourself grace, adjust as you go, and keep moving forward.

Q: With costs on the rise, what small, sustainable changes have you seen make a big impact?

A: When your budget reflects your priorities, you're not just managing money—you're empowering yourself to make confident financial decisions.

Consider automating your savings so it happens without you even thinking about it. Include transfers to savings in your budget, just like you would a bill. This way, you'll be sure to put money away each month before it gets spent.

Watching your savings grow, no matter the amount, is a powerful way to build financial security and peace of mind.

The bottom line

You can take charge of your financial health by focusing on earning, spending, protecting, and saving money. Strengthening your financial health is a lifelong journey, and every step can help you feel more organized and confident as you work toward your goals. To learn more, stop by your local branch or visit [chase.com/financialgoals](https://chase.com/financialgoals).

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