



Corey Mitchell directs Theatre Charlotte musical production of 'The Color Purple'

THE VOICE OF THE BLACK COMMUNITY SINCE 1906

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AMAZING AERIAL AGENCY

An aerial view of Charlotte's urban core with I-77 bisecting Historic West End and uptown. City Council on May 11 voted to pull its support for a proposed public-private initiative to build elevated lanes along I-77 South from Center City to the South Carolina border.

Vote pushes I-77 South toll proposal to inflection point

Council decision to pull support likely assures do-over if state moves forward

Herbert L. White
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Charlotte City Council has voted to apply the brakes to I-77 South toll lanes. The panel voted 6-5 Monday to withdraw support for the project, a setback for the \$3.2 billion public-private initiative that extends from Center City to the South Carolina border. As a result, the council member Ed Driggs, the city's representative on the Charlotte Regional Transportation Planning Organization, is required to reverse position on the project. The vote "represents a major shift in the conversation around the proposed I-77 South toll lanes project and reflects the growing concern many residents and

community leaders have expressed over the past several months," said Shannon Binns, founder of Sustain Charlotte. "While this vote does not end the discussion around the project, it is an important acknowledgment that the community deserves a more thoughtful process before decisions of this magnitude move forward." Council members Malcolm Graham, Renee Johnson, J.D. Mazuera Arias, LaWana Mayfield, Joi Mayo and Victoria Watlington voted for reversal. Driggs, Dimple Ajmera, James Mitchell, Kimberly Owens and Dante Anderson opposed the motion. Monday's vote is a severe blow to the project as Charlotte's proportional rep-

resentation - 41% - on the regional planning board carries more weight. Mecklenburg County, whose voting member is Commissioner Leigh Altman, and the town of Matthews, represented by Mayor John Higdon, have previously voted against. The project has been subject to criticism over concerns of a lack of transparency by the state Department of Transportation, environmental impacts of elevated lanes and displacement in historically Black neighborhoods. The Brooklyn community's razing in the 1960s to make way for the I-277 loop gave opponents a historical focal point for their argument. Please see **VOTE** | 2A

The end of Lyles era, and start of speculation

Council tasked with weighing candidates for interim mayor

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Charlotte Mayor Vi Lyles resignation from office next month comes at a crucial point for city government. Lyles, the first Black woman elected to the city's highest office, today announced she will resign effective June 30 to spend more time with family, closing a three-decade run in local government as a bureaucrat and elected official. Lyles, who was first elected mayor in 2017, was elected to a fifth term last year. "Serving as Charlotte's mayor has been the honor of my life," Lyles said in a statement. "I am proud of our record navigating various challenges, strengthening our economy, investing in our neighborhoods, and building a foundation for Charlotte's continued success during a time of rapid growth. Now, it is time for the next phase of my life, to spend more time with my grandchildren and for someone new to lead us forward."



Lyles

Before becoming mayor, Lyles was elected to a pair of terms on City Council, including election by her colleagues as mayor pro tem from 2015-17. She previously was on city staff as budget analyst, budget director, and assistant city manager. "Her tenure has spanned some of the most consequential years in our city's recent history: navigating a global pandemic, witnessing a social uprising, advancing long-term transit investment, and shepherding Charlotte's rapid growth. Please see **MAYOR** | 2A

Voters drop their lawsuit over NC Senate districts

By Lynn Bonner
NC NEWSLINE

Two Black voters challenging two N.C. Senate districts have dismissed their federal lawsuit in light of the U.S. Supreme Court decision that further weakened the Voting Rights Act. State Rep. Rodney Pierce (D-Halifax) and Moses Matthews were suing Republican legislators over their decision in 2023 to redraw districts in the eastern and northeastern part of the state, saying they diluted Black voting power in violation of the Voting Rights Act. The lawsuit contended that Republican legislators broke up "Black Belt" counties. The new map prevents Black voters from electing candidates of their choice in Senate District 1 and Senate District 2, the lawsuit said. Pierce and Matthews appealed to the 4th Circuit Court after U.S. District Judge James Dever ruled in legislators' favor last year. Dever had earlier denied a request to block the use of the districts in the 2024 election. Lawyers for Pierce and Matthews filed a notice of dismissal Monday. In a statement, Pierce said the U.S. Supreme Court's Voting Rights Act decision left "no path open to us to protect the voting rights of Black citizens in my part of the state." Acting on a redistricting case out of Louisiana, the court weakened the VRA's protections for minority voters. Challengers to election districts must now show they were drawn to intentionally discriminate against minority voters. The April 29 Louisiana v. Callais decision has set off a wave of congressional redistricting action in southern states as Republican legislatures look to erase VRA-compliant districts that elect Democrats and redraw them to favor Republicans.



NATIONAL AFRICAN AMERICAN GUN ASSOCIATION

Robert F. Williams (left), a Monroe native and civil rights advocate who urged armed resistance against racial terrorism, is among the notable figures and events in the city's history celebrated by A Few Good Men Inc.

Monroe Black history advocates pay homage to the underappreciated past

By Charles K. Harris
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

Black Panther leader Huey Newton credited him for sparking the Black Liberation Movement. When local and national media ignored injustices surrounding the 1958 "Kissing Case," he successfully drew international attention. In 1957, alongside some 50 other armed men, he gave the Monroe Ku Klux Klan a dose of their own medicine that sent them scrambling. Please see **MONROE** | 2A

Malcolm X was a pen pal. He dined with Fidel Castro and was an honored guest of Mao Zedong. The man was Monroe native Robert F. Williams and if you haven't heard of him, you aren't alone. Despite having one of the most colorful lives born of the Civil Rights Movement, Williams has been largely forgotten by historians. Williams is just one thread woven into the fabric of Monroe's significant African American history. Please see **MONROE** | 2A

Cold winter led to higher energy bills and more calls for help

By Greg Childress
NC NEWSLINE

After a multi-week cold snap this past winter, Carol Hardison, CEO of Crisis Assistance Ministry in Charlotte, braced for a surge in requests for help paying higher utility bills. After seeing spikes in their own bills, longtime donors began calling the nonprofit to ask how they could help. "The donors knew they could absorb the spike, but they started thinking about the people here," Hardison said. The nonprofit that Hardison oversees provides emergency assistance to families facing financial crises. It and others across the state are seeing increasing demand for financial assistance in the wake of a widening affordability crisis. Near-record gas prices, higher food costs, higher home energy costs and stagnant wages are stretching many household budgets to the breaking point. A cold snap in January and Feb- Please see **COLD** | 2A



Hardison

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Vote pushes I-77 toll proposal to critical point

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A Dec. 5 letter signed by a coalition of 24 mobility, environmental and community advocates urged state Transportation Secretary Daniel Johnson to scrap the plan, citing economic inequality and Charlotte's legacy of transportation projects cutting through historic Black neighborhoods that displaced thousands of families, businesses and schools as part of a federal urban renewal campaign.

"The highway cut a swath through nearly every one of Charlotte's historically Black communities along its length — starting in the Historic West End with Biddleville, Oaklawn Park, McCrorey Heights, Dalebrook, and parts of Wesley Heights and Seversville, then continuing south to Wilmore and into the West Boulevard and

South Tryon corridors that served Black Charlotteans pushed out of other parts of the city," the signatories wrote.

In addition to the toll lanes, NCDOT proposes 13 interchanges and several retaining walls as part of the 11-mile project, which would slice into Frazier Park in Third Ward and stop a planned extension of Irwin Creek Greenway through McCrorey Heights that would bar neighborhood access to the Irwin Creek corridor — originally prohibited by I-77.

"We believe this moment creates an opportunity to pursue a more independent and comprehensive evaluation of alternatives and to continue a broader public conversation about what kind of transportation future Charlotte wants to build," Binns said.



CITY OF CHARLOTTE

Charlotte Mayor Vi Lyles, the first Black woman elected to the city's top office, will resign on June 30 to spend time with family.

Mayor Lyles to resign June 30

Continued from page 1A

City Council member Victoria Watlington said in a statement. "That work matters, and it will endure."

During Lyles' tenure, Charlotte continued its run of growth and job creation in addition to launching new initiatives to produce economic equity in historically underinvested communities. The Corridors of Opportunity program was launched to encourage new development as well as pumping new investment in the city's affordable housing fund. The Mayor's Racial Equity Initiative, a public-private collaboration launched in 2021, invested \$250 million to address inequities and remove barriers to opportunity through digital equity, investments in low-wealth neighborhoods and Johnson C. Smith University as well as corporate commitment to advancing leadership from communities of color.

"Vi Lyles will retire with an honorable and distinguished legacy of service to the people of Charlotte," said U.S. Rep. Alma Adams, who represents the city in Congress. "As a mayor, a council member, and a city employee before either she always put the City of Charlotte first and led with integrity and honor throughout her tenure. Our city is eternally grateful for her steadfast leadership and passion for our community."

The next step is for City Council to elect an interim mayor to serve the remaining 18 months of Lyles' term. State law mandates the candidate must be from the same party of the outgoing mayor, which means a Democrat will succeed her. Council can back a sitting member of the panel, but history suggests it will get behind someone not connected to the board but with previous experience. In 2013, the council elected former council member Patsy Kinsey to stand in for Anthony Foxx when he left to join the Obama administration as transportation secretary. A year later, state Sen. Dan

Clodfelter, a former council member, was elected after Patrick Cannon was indicted on federal corruption charges.

As mayor, Lyles backed initiatives to expand public transit, including a successful 2025 voter referendum that committed the city to a 1% bump in the local sales tax from 7.25% to 8.25% that is projected to generate a projected \$19.4 billion over 30 years.

Lyles also drew her share of criticism as mayor, including pushing for Charlotte to host the 2020 Republican National Convention. Charlotte, a reliably Democratic city, won the bid but the convention was scuttled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. More recently, the Trump administration and Republican state lawmakers took the city to task for public safety lapses, which resulted in House Bill 307, or Iryna's Law, which includes a measure to revive the death penalty by removing barriers that have prevented executions. The bill, named after Iryna Zarutka, who was stabbed to death last year on a Lynx Blue Line train. The law requires the review of death penalty appeals within two years of filing, and bars continuances unless a judge declares extenuating circumstances in a case.

Community pushback against the proposed I-77 South toll lanes and demands for a moratorium on data center construction are also testing city government's leadership. Those outcomes will be for her successor — Lyles didn't recommend or endorse anyone — and council to oversee.

"I am very proud of my record as mayor, but I also firmly believe that true leadership includes knowing when it is time to let the next generation of leaders take over," she said. "By leaving early, the voters will have more time to learn about their candidates. Our city is strong, our trajectory is positive, and now is the right moment for someone else to build on our progress from the past few years."

Cold NC winter led to higher energy bills and more calls for help

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ruary that brought freezing temperatures and higher heating bills didn't help.

"When the utility bill goes up and spikes, they come to us because there's not that kind of room in a budget that's paycheck-to-paycheck with the high cost of living here," Hardison said. "People think about having to pay rent, put food on the table, and sometimes utilities have to be sacrificed."

Gas and electric bills are generally higher in winter months, but the big surge in requests for assistance doesn't usually come until the spring, Hardison said.

"Sometimes it's late and then sometimes they're close to getting cut off," Hardison said.

Hardison shared 2025 data showing that 3,269 households asked the nonprofit for help with utilities during what she calls the "spring spike."

The average request for assistance at the nonprofit was \$514, Hardison said, but bills are usually higher. Clients often have \$300 or \$400 that they can contribute, which lowers the amount of assistance needed.

Data for 2026 weren't readily available, but the nonprofit projects the need for assistance will be \$109,000 higher this year than the \$548,000 it distributed from March-June 2025.

"People were coming in with oxygen tanks who didn't have electricity," Har-

dison said. "People were coming in who had been without electricity for a couple days. It's really been a challenge this year."

One of the nonprofit's clients, Chanelle Durham, fell behind on her utility bills by \$2,300 in the fall and continues to struggle to catch up. Durham had \$1,000 to contribute to the delinquent bill. She received help from the nonprofit and a state agency to knock out most of the rest.

"I still have a balance right now of about \$300," Durham said. "There's no way I could use all of my money and put it on the bill to catch up and bring it to zero, which I would like to do, but I just can't afford to."

The single mom who

Monroe history advocates celebrate underappreciated

Continued from page 1A

ican history, but 30 years after his death, one organization is committed to ensuring these stories are told.

"There has historically been a gap in how local history is documented and shared, particularly when it comes to the contributions of Black leaders," said Eric Hall, president of A Few Good Men Inc., a nonprofit leading preservation of places and stories spanning Monroe's Black history.

"I want people to be knowledgeable of the [fact] that the city of Monroe made a difference. And we have some great people from here who made a difference," said fellow A Few Good Men member Robert Heath, who is also a Monroe native.

Their most recent endeavor, the production and printing of a historical marker guide brochure, is aimed at spreading the word to an even broader audience.

A Few Good Men Inc., founded in 1993, is dedicated to bolstering the African American community in educational, political and socio-economic spheres.

"Our purpose is to serve the community through consistent and meaningful outreach by providing scholarships, supporting families, recognizing outstanding citizens, and creating opportunities that empower individuals," Hall said.

For decades the nonprofit has held fundraisers to offer annual scholarships to Union County high school students, as well as food drives and college tours. The nonprofit also hosts an annual Citizen of the Year banquet to spotlight an individual who has made a significant local impact. Recently, supported by A Few Good Men Inc, Heath has made efforts to spotlight extraordinary Black people from the past.

"Figures like Robert F. Williams played significant roles in shaping the community, but their stories were not always included in mainstream narratives," Hall said.

Another even more frequently overlooked civil rights activist is the late Dr. Albert E. Perry.

A Texas native, Perry moved to Monroe in the early 1950s and set up a family physician practice serving Black clients. He and Williams united in their desire not only to establish true racial equality but to imbue Blacks with a sense of confidence and pride as a people.

While neither man advocated wanton violence, they did support the notion of self-defense from racially motivated violence — a message not particularly popular with either side of the movement at the time.

"Both men were strong believers of self-defense and not turning the other cheek," Heath said. "During their time, the NAACP was not supportive of that type of language."

Heath feels that this more than anything contributes directly to why Williams and Perry's names are frequently missing from historical accounts about the Civil Rights Era.

"I believe that the mainstream media was scared to have strong Black men written about during that time," Heath said, adding, "and [even] now."

"As a result, many people have grown up without full awareness of their impact," concurs Hall, adding, "This is why our work is so important."

Heath, who knew Williams personally, and several Williams family members, recounts a conversation he had with Williams' son, John, when the younger Williams visited Monroe after his father's death.

"John said, 'There is nothing in Monroe that shows my father was ever even here,'" Heath recalled. "And I said, 'We've got to do something.'"

That was the launchpad for the tedious process of applying for a state marker to be placed in Williams' honor along Highway 74, close to where Williams was born in 1925.

With support from local librarian and historian Patricia Poland, Heath spent more than a year doing the research necessary for the application. The official marker was revealed in 2023.

That marker is one of the six historic sites featured in a new brochure produced by A Few Good Men Inc. dedicated

to drawing more interest to Monroe's unique history. Another site, linked to Williams and Perry, is a marker near what used to be Monroe's Lake Lee Park swimming pool.

The pool, installed in the 1930s using primarily federal funds, was off limits to Black people.

However, motivated by the Civil Rights Movement's momentum across the South, local Black teens, with support from Williams and Perry, led "wade-ins" in 1957 and 1961. Under unrelenting pressure to act, the all-white Monroe town council voted to permanently close the pool rather than integrate it in 1961.

In short order the pool was drained, filled with cement and covered with earth. Prior to marker's installation in 2022, visitors would be hard-pressed to find evidence it ever existed. For decades it has been part of the putting green at Monroe Country Club.

Another site the brochure highlights is the birthplace of Dr. Christine Mann Darden, who after becoming an aeronautical engineer, was the first Black woman to be promoted to the senior executive service at NASA's Langley Research Center.

The most recent marker, installed in 2025, is located on Branch Street where former police Chief James F. Sutton's birth home once stood. After serving in the military, Sutton, who was born in 1940, joined the Monroe Public Safety Department in 1967, rising through the ranks until his appointment as the first Black chief.

Also highlighted in the brochure is a bronze buffalo statue placed on Winchester Avenue to commemorate the segregated Winchester High School, which served Black students from 1923-66, when most of the building was destroyed by fire under suspicious circumstances just prior to court-ordered desegregation to begin.

Heath helped raise thousands of dollars for the statue primarily through former students. It was installed in 2015.

In 2021, a marker was placed in the 800 block of West Windsor Street to commemorate where the home and hospital once stood that were operated by Dr. John Massey, Monroe's first Black physician.

Born in South Carolina in 1866, Massey built what became known as the Quality Hill Sanatorium which opened its doors in 1912. It closed in 1939. Both buildings were destroyed by fire in 1985.

"The brochure was created to highlight African American historical...locations where influential individuals lived and where significant events took place," Hall said. "Our goal is to bring greater awareness to this history and ensure these stories are recognized and preserved."

"[We need this] for our young kids," Heath said. "We need documentation that we matter."

Heath, Hall and the other members of A Few Good Men Inc. hope the brochure will draw not just local interest but attract history lovers far beyond Union County.

While the production and printing of the brochures is a major accomplishment, this is not by any means the end of A Few Good Men Inc's endeavors.

Heath, who has become somewhat of a local historian since retiring from over 30 years in the Miami-Dade School System and moving back to Monroe, already has his sights set on another potential landmark.

"Personally, I'd like to see the citizens of Monroe support a statue of Robert F. Williams," he said. "It would take a lot of collaboration and finances, but why not?"

On the Net:

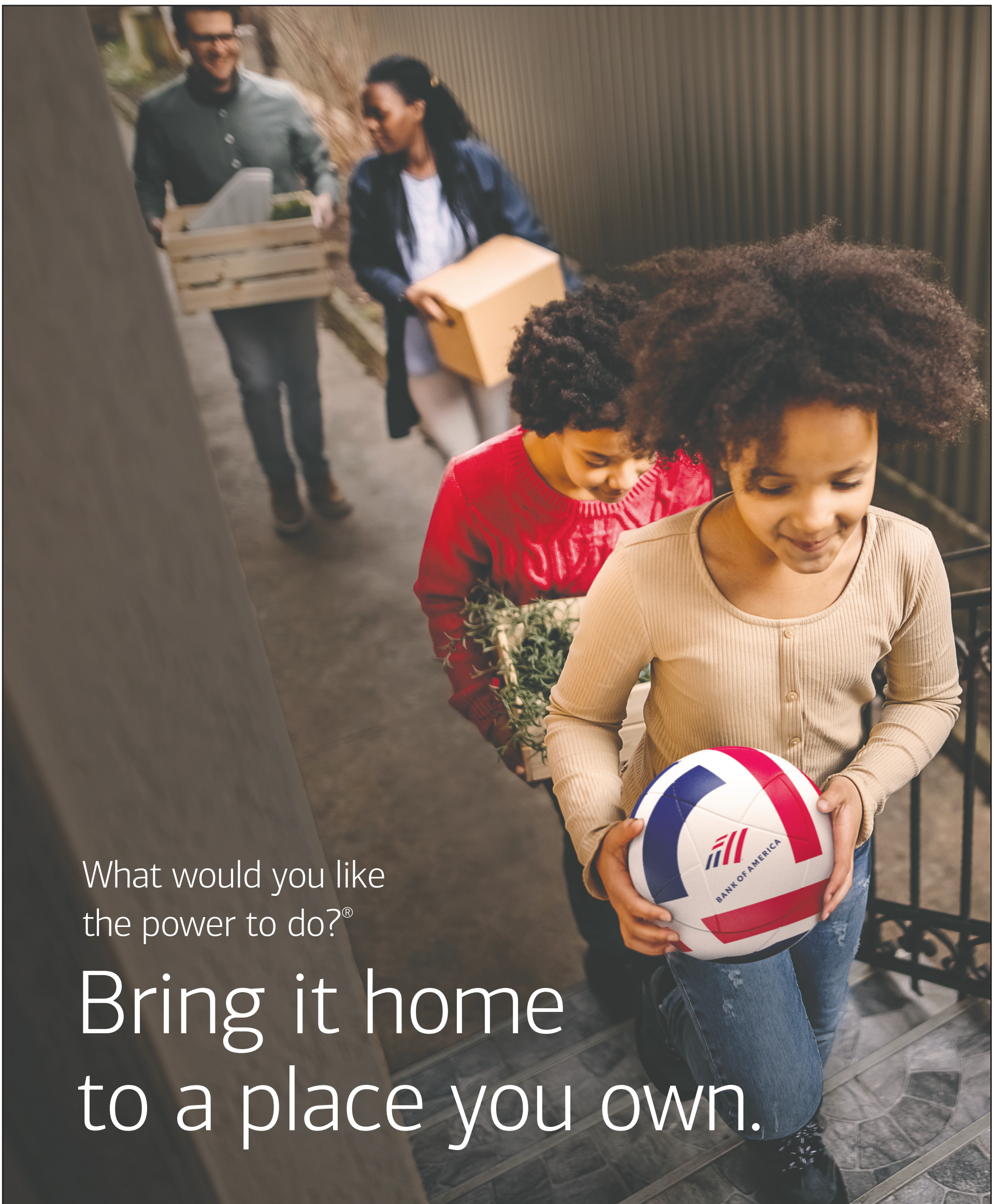
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Figures like Robert F. Williams played significant roles in shaping the community but their stories were not always included in mainstream narratives.



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Private HBCUs matter more now

Higher education finds itself in the crosshairs of a dual crisis: a legislative assault on the frameworks of diversity and a technological revolution that threatens to automate the very essence of human thought.

Across the nation, Predominantly White Institutions are scrubbing diversity, equity, and inclusion from their mission statements and grappling with artificial intelligence that renders the traditional classroom an alienating space of transactional data exchange. In this fractured landscape, private Historically Black Colleges and Universities must stand not as mere alternatives, but as bold value propositions. We are the necessary counter-friction to a world that is becoming increasingly calculated, curated, and cold.



JOSEPH JONES

The rise of generative AI has introduced a new form of student alienation. When education is reduced to the synthesis of information, the student becomes a consumer of outputs rather than a creator of meaning. Private HBCUs disrupt this technological displacement by doing what we have done for nearly two centuries: nurturing students in a loving, supportive environment that demands excellence because we first offer belonging. While the algorithm prioritizes efficiency, private HBCUs prioritize the person. We do not just educate students; we bring out the best in them by affirming their humanity before their GPA.

This is the work of soul socialization or cultivating identity, purpose, and belonging, a process that AI cannot mimic and PWIs, for all their resources, can rarely imitate. At private HBCUs, students are often known by name, mentored beyond the classroom, and connected directly to the surrounding Black community. It is the intentional cultivation of a student's internal moral and cultural compass. It is the communal recognition of shared history and the collective responsibility for a shared future. At private HBCUs, the soul is not a metaphor; it is the pedagogical center. It is found in the intentional mentorship, the rhythmic life of the campus yard, and the unapologetic celebration of Black life and culture. In a world increasingly governed by AI and social media, private HBCUs remain sanctuaries for Black students.

Furthermore, as state legislatures and conservative pundits attempt to erase the language of DEI from the American lexicon, private HBCUs must double down to counter. To us, DEI is not a corporate trend or a bureaucratic hurdle; it is our founding ethos. While our counterparts at PWIs are being silenced by anti-woke mandates that stifle the academic air, we remain an academic marron of freedom. Our faculty are free to write, research, teach, and publish on the uncomfortable truths of social justice. Whether investigating the nuances of race, the complexities of gender, or the politics of sex, private HBCU scholars operate in a liberatory space where the goal of knowledge production is not just tenure, but freedom.

However, to maintain this position, private HBCUs must fully embrace their Ebony League calling. This is not an imitation of the Ivy League's exclusivity, but an intentional commitment to a different kind of prestige: one rooted in community grounding. The declining trust in higher education as a pathway to economic equity stems from a perceived distance between the ivory tower and the community. Private HBCUs have the unique ability to erode this cynicism. We must recognize that Black colleges are Black communities. One cannot survive without the other; the health of the neighborhood is the health of the campus. By integrating our research into the surrounding streets, addressing local housing, health disparities, and economic revitalization, we prove that a degree is not just a credential, but a communal asset.

This grounding serves as a powerful rebuttal to the conservative backlash against higher education. While critics claim that universities are indoctrination centers, private HBCUs model a radical democratization. We prove that academic freedom and inclusive knowledge production are the bedrock of a healthy republic. We provide the blueprint for a university system that doesn't just produce workers, but citizens equipped to challenge the status quo.

Private HBCUs are a value imposition because they insist that education must be human-centered, justice-oriented, and community-bound. As the digital age engenders alienation, we offer social intimacy. As the political climate demands silence, we offer critique. We are the architects of a democratic future that refuses to leave the soul behind. In the face of rollbacks and robots, private HBCUs must remain vital, disruptive, and essential institutions in the American experiment. Both the college and the community are essential for the other to succeed; together, they represent the last, best hope for a truly liberated education.

Dr. Joseph L. Jones is executive director of the W.E.B. Du Bois Southern Center for Studies in Public Policy and associate professor of political science at Clark Atlanta University. He is author of "Black, Not Historically Black: Towards the Pan Black College and University."

'Main Street' bill hurts Main Street

In Washington, the name on a bill is often the opposite of what it does.

The Main Street Depositor Protection Act is the latest example. The name sounds noble. The math is not.

Here is what the bill would change. The FDIC is the federal agency that pays you back if your bank closes its doors. Today, it covers up to \$250,000 in each account. Most people never come close to that limit. Most small businesses do not either.

The bill would let the FDIC raise that limit as high as \$5 million for business checking accounts that pay no interest. That is not a small bump. That is twenty times bigger.

Supporters say the change will help small community banks and the small businesses they serve. I wish that were true. It is not.

The current \$250,000 limit already covers 99 out of every 100 bank ac-



BEN JEALOUS

counts in this country. A study by JPMorgan Chase found that the typical small business keeps about \$12,100 in its account on a normal day. The new limit would be more than 400 times higher than that.

So, who really gains from a \$5 million guarantee? Not the corner bakery. Not the family barbershop. Not the small farm down the road. The gain goes to the biggest depositors at the biggest banks. The bill even covers banks with more than \$100 billion to their name. Fewer than one in 100 banks in America are that big. No honest person would call them "small."

In other words, the bill takes the name of Main Street and hands the prize to Wall Street.

Here is the part that should worry every American. Insurance is not free. When the FDIC raises its guarantee, banks must pay more to fund it. When banks pay more, they lend less. When they lend less, the door closes hardest on the people who are already locked out.

Black-owned businesses are already turned down

for loans 39 percent of the time. That is more than double the 18 percent rate for white-owned businesses.

Hispanic-owned businesses face a 29 percent denial rate. These are the dreamers most likely to hear "no" when they walk into a bank. A new cost on lending will make that "no" come faster and louder.

The economy runs on loans. When loans dry up, the trouble spreads. The Great Recession of 2008 began exactly that way. The people who pay the highest price are never the wealthiest. They are the families with the least cushion to fall back on.

The bill does offer a small shield to community banks under \$10 billion. They would not pay the higher costs for ten years. That is a kind gesture. But the wider damage to the loan market will not wait 10 years to arrive.

There is one more problem. Deposit insurance works in part because it has limits. Limits force big depositors to pay attention to where they put their money. That attention keeps banks honest. Take

the limit away, and you take the watchdog away too. The taxpayer is left to clean up the mess.

The goal of helping Main Street is a good one. This bill is not the way to reach it.

If Congress wants to help small business, it should make loans easier and fairer to get. It should invest in the neighborhoods that banks have ignored for too long. It should knock down the doors that have stayed shut for Black and Hispanic business owners for generations.

And if big corporations want extra protection for their millions, they can pay for it themselves. The taxpayer should not be asked to insure the comfort of the rich while the dreams of working families go unfunded.

Read the name of a bill. Then read the math. The two should match. On the Main Street Depositor Protection Act, they do not.

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

How we fight modern-day Jim Crow

I asked my grandma "OG" what she thought about the right to vote, after the U.S. Supreme Court last week effectively stripped away the protections afforded by the 1965 Voting Rights Act.



PRESTON BLAKELY

Oralene Simmons, or as I call her, "OG," is an 83-year-old Black woman and civil rights activist from Western North Carolina. She told me she remembered a time when Black folk were asked to say how many bubbles were in a jar with water and detergent or how many beans were in a jar — as "tests" to be able to vote.

It tells you how relatively little time has passed before our nation's highest court decided the law that ensured all could vote wasn't necessary anymore.

Last year, I wrote about both of my grandmothers and their experience in Jim Crow America. These women existed in a system where voting was dangerous. When I wrote the piece, I talked about how far we have come.

We've come a long way, but we've again taken big steps back.

I am a janitor and the mayor of Fletcher, North Carolina. I have served as mayor since 2021, elected at 27 years old. My Grandma Pat was a bus driver who wanted dignity for blue-collar workers like her. When my Grandma Pat was born, she would have been sent to the back of the bus. But she decided she wanted a spot in the front, so she drove it.

OG was at the forefront of the Civil Rights Movement in Western North Carolina. She and I quite often find ourselves together, and we chat about the world.

Most recently, we discussed the Voting Rights Act and the recent U.S. Supreme Court decision. The Court's ruling on Louisiana v. Callais effectively finished the court's gutting of the VRA, an act that ensured the right to vote and that Black people, particularly in the South, received representation. As Justice Elena Kagan wrote in her dissent, the "[Voting Rights Act] was born of the literal blood of Union soldiers and civil rights marchers. It ushered in awe-inspiring change, bringing this Nation closer to fulfilling the ideals of democracy and racial equality. ... I dissent, then, from this latest chapter in the majority's now-completed demolition of

the Voting Rights Act."

I was incredibly curious about how my grandmother felt about all this after her lifelong fight for these rights. OG bluntly replied to my questions: "It is racial discrimination." I could sense the sadness and frustration in her voice. She reflected on the marches that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. led for our right to vote. I could only imagine so intensely fighting and winning this inalienable right in your lifetime, only for it to be pulled from under you.

OG talked about the barriers that prevented Black people from voting. The counting of beans or reciting the Constitution's preamble was a barrier to voting to make sure Black people weren't represented. Things that we can unequivocally say were wrong.

We may not be counting beans, bubbles, or reciting the preamble to vote today, but when protections weaken, power shifts. When it becomes more difficult to challenge systems, barriers still exist, even if more quietly. The Voting Rights Act was supposed to make sure Black people had representation and weren't discriminated against, no matter what.

The less obvious discrimination includes systems,

maps, and rules that may seem neutral but are often wielded against the less powerful.

OG said, "We've been here before." I think she said that because it doesn't have to look exactly like Jim Crow to feel familiar to her.

Progress is fragile. I worry about representation, our vote, and our democracy. I love this country, and I want it to love me back. I think OG feels the same. Our democracy is measured by whether every voice carries equal weight.

At the end of the conversation with OG, she said, "It's time for us to organize. It's time for us to mobilize. We've been here before, and we're still singing, 'We Shall Overcome.'"

I stand on the shoulders of giants.

My grandmothers lived through a time when their rights were denied. We, OG included, are living in a time where democracy is diluted sometimes quietly, sometimes loudly. OG's words were filled with frustration but gave me the sense that our responsibility is the same. We must continue to protect our democracy.

Preston Blakely is mayor of Fletcher, North Carolina, and co-host of the podcast "Do You Even Live Here?"

The short, fateful legislative session

"Lock up your daughters and horses, the legislature is back in town," a statement sometimes said in jest. Whether humorous or not it is notice that our lawmakers are back in session. The so-called "short session" has recently become anything but short; some have dragged on until the end of the calendar year.



TOM CAMPBELL

Don't get your hopes up this one will be short. The 2025 session was not highly productive and there are many, potentially controversial and explosive issues to consider. And let's not forget that legislative elections will take place Nov. 3. If the session hasn't concluded its work by late August incumbents will want time to go home and campaign. Regardless of when it concludes we predict this session will determine the fate of large numbers of people and issues.

None are perhaps more visible than passing a budget. There are several potential roadblocks standing in its way; none so large as the question of what Phil Berger are we going to experience?

Berger has been the primary force in legislative decision-making in recent years, but is now a lame duck, having lost his primary election. Will Berger be more accommodating, wanting to leave office by polishing his legacy so as to be remembered kindly, or will we see the more defiant Berger, insistent on getting his way?

If past is prologue, expect the latter option. It is commonly accepted that our state would likely have passed a budget last year but for Berger's steadfast insistence on issues, most especially on tax cuts. Lawmakers had agreed on cuts in personal income tax rates from 3.9% to 3.4% starting this July and that agreement would have carved off another one-half percent for the year beginning in July 2027, but there was a provision that if conditions warranted, the 2.99 percent rate would be postponed. A consensus budget forecast has predicted that such a cut would result in a structural deficit of \$2.8 billion for the fiscal year beginning next July. Berger insisted that deficit wouldn't happen and held fast on the further tax cut. The House, the governor and a host of others believed the forecast accurate and wanted to delay the cut. On

session opening House Speaker Destin Hall said that real progress is being made toward getting a budget passed. If so, we might get an insight on the Berger question.

Any budget would have contained pay raises for our teachers and state employees, but there were significant differences between Berger's Senate and the House on how much to increase pay. Teachers and state employees are extremely unhappy... and they vote, as incumbent legislators are aware. There were other points of disagreement, including whether to build another children's hospital. The Senate urged its passage, the House demurred, saying the state already have enough and could use the money elsewhere.

But then there was Trump's Big Beautiful Bill, which took an axe to Medicaid payments to states. Our Department of Health and Human Services says North Carolina's Medicaid account will run out of money in May unless a \$319 million hole is plugged, impacting some 3.1 million residents. On opening day, it was announced an agreement had been reached to fund Medicaid, however unanswered is funding for the coming fiscal year.

The BBB bill also transferred the administration and financial responsibility of SNAP benefits to local counties. They want the estimated \$52 million cost paid by the state. Some legislative leaders say the state doesn't have the money, obviously not true since the state has billions in reserves.

Simultaneously, legislators are considering a constitutional amendment on November's ballot which would restrict how much and how quickly cities and counties could raise property taxes. This amendment might be popular with homeowners, but you can expect full court opposition from cities and counties. Up to 40 percent of their revenues come from property taxes and these restrictions could put locally elected officials between a rock and hard place. On one hand they face increasing costs for everything; on the other potential restrictions will impact how to pay them.

The bottom line is that perhaps more than normal we will watch closely what happens in this short session and encourage you to do the same.

Tom Campbell has covered North Carolina public policy issues since 1965. Contact him at tomcamp@ncspin.com.



UCLA ATHLETICS

Former New Haven quarterback Parker McQuarrie, a four-star recruit who spent two seasons at UCLA, has transferred to Johnson C. Smith, where he'll compete against Josh Jackson for the starting job. Jackson is a transfer from Central Connecticut State, an FCS program.

JC Smith's new QB contender

Addition of former UCLA recruit Parker McQuarrie opens the door to competition for starting job

By Herbert L. White
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Johnson C. Smith's starting quarterback derby is now a two-man race.

Parker McQuarrie, a transfer from New Haven (Conn.) who spent two years at UCLA, has signed with the Golden Bulls, where he'll compete with Josh Jackson for the starting spot. Jackson, a transfer from Central Connecticut State who finished spring drills as the incumbent, was the lone quarterback on the roster after Andrew Attmore and Trooper Floyd transferred.

McQuarrie, a four-star recruit at St. Paul's School in Concord, New Hampshire, before signing with UCLA, will get his chance in summer camp with a

program that posted a school-best 10-record, won the CIAA title and earned the school's first Division II playoff berth.

"He was really about just really wanting to get opportunity to compete and to win," coach Maurice Flowers said. "That was something that came out in a lot in our conversations - he just wanted to have an opportunity to compete and that goes right down our alley. He wasn't looking to be promised anything about the starting job. He just wanted to be able to come in and compete and help us win some games by whatever means necessary."



McQuarrie

McQuarrie and Jackson are similar in several respects. Both are physically imposing - McQuarrie is 6-foot-7, 235 pounds; Jackson 6-5, 215. Both have two years of eligibility. They also lack collegiate game experience, but Flowers believes he can maximize their potential in an offense that averaged 33.6 points per game last year.

"In any position, and especially the quarterback position, you'd love to have a guy that's played a lot," he said. "But if you look at the programs where these guys have come from, they're coming from programs that have done very have done well.

Josh is coming from Central Connecticut State. They just won their conference championship and went to the (FCS) playoffs. They've got established quarterbacks already on the roster. ...

"And now you have Parker, who was at UCLA when Chip Kelly was there (as coach), so you know they're going to have an influx of top-rated quarterbacks. He was a four-star [recruit] coming out of high school. ... So those people don't just throw around offers."

"The quarterback position is unlike any in sports and to be able to walk into a situation and simply just start and say, 'OK, let's go win' those situations don't happen very much most of the time," he said. "They happen at a re-

Please see QBs | 6A

“[The district] has to invest in what is important. That has not necessarily been in our favor. Then last year we talked about doing a strike. To me, I'm like why should we have to do a strike to get someone's attention? At the end of the day, this is a calling and we want to be supporting the kids.”

Mallard Creek High football coach KENNEDY TINSLEY

CMS coaches want district to increase stipend



MATT LACZKO | THE CHARLOTTE POST

Garinger High football coach Jupiter Wilson said Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools' inaction on improving coaches' stipends leaves district programs at a disadvantage compared to neighboring districts and states.

By Cameron Williams
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Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools isn't increasing coaches' allowances.

For the eighth straight year, stipends remain \$5,000 annually. Since the last raise in 2018, North Carolina's cost of living has increased over 30%. Stipends don't include extra pay for the postseason or offseason player workouts.

"I think the word that comes to mind is just disappointing," Mallard Creek football coach Kennedy Tinsley said. "I think we as coaches try to do things the right way. Obviously from the teaching profession side of things, teachers should be valued and respected more but coaches as well. And it is tough to see other states and even other areas within this state value their coaches more than we're valued. I don't have all the knowledge of budget numbers and things like that, but I know what we as coaches do for kids and families."

Messages left with the school district for comment were not returned.

Tinsley has been Mallard Creek's coach since 2020, the year after Michael Palmieri left for a head coaching job in Georgia. Palmieri, who won three state championships with the Mav-

Please see COACHES | 6A

SWAC's winning through its ingenuity

SWAC Commissioner Charles McClelland is getting immense satisfaction from telling his NCAA colleagues "I told you so."

Since 2015, both the SWAC and MEAC faced criticism for instituting a bowl game in early December that crowned the HBCU football national champion. That game pits the MEAC regular season champion against the SWAC Football Championship winner for bragging rights and a nice fat check to take home. While it also denied arguably the best team in each conference an opportunity to participate in the FCS playoffs, it didn't eliminate all teams.

The conferences can still receive an at-large bid, though the road is a lot tougher. Only three teams have received a playoff berth since 2015: N.C. A&T (2016), Florida A&M (2021) and North Carolina Central (2023). All three lost in the first round.

The Celebration Bowl in Atlanta is just what the name implies: a weekend celebration of HBCU football, Black culture and pride. And did I mention the million-dollar-plus check both teams receive? On the other side, FCS and D2 playoff teams earn no money from the NCAA. In fact, the more games they win, the more out-of-pocket money they spend.

Yet HBCU fans and alumni continued to whine over how their team was playing in a

Please see SWAC | 6A

Lee gave the Hornets hope; franchise responds with extension

By Herbert L. White
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Two years into his tenure as Charlotte Hornets coach, Charles Lee - and his team - are in a better place.

The team and Lee last week agreed to a contract extension after he led Charlotte to a 44-38 record in 2025-26, a 25-win improvement compared to the season prior. The Hornets, who started 16-28 went 28-10 down the stretch to qualify for the play-in round and the largest turnaround in team history.

"I'm incredibly grateful for the opportunity to continue leading this team and building on what we've started here in Charlotte," Lee said in a statement. "I want to thank Rick [Schnall], Gabe [Plotkin] and Jeff [Peterson] for their support as well as my coaching staff and the players for their tireless work and dedication. I'm excited about the direction we're headed and our team's bright

future. Our players have shown a real commitment to growth, and I'm proud of the culture we're establishing together. We're just getting started, and I'm looking forward to the work ahead."

Schnall and Plotkin are the Hornets' owners; Peterson is the general manager.

"Charles has done an outstanding job establishing a foundation for who we want to be as a team," Peterson said. "From day one, Charles and his staff have prioritized player

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SWAC shows ingenuity

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"Black bowl" rather than the NCAA. What did Malcolm X say about "the white man's ice is colder?" Well, the white man wants some of the Black man's ice today because the landscape has changed.

"Everything that was a weakness for the SWAC in football has turned into a strength," McClelland said at the SWAC golf championships. "...We now have FCS conferences that want to play us. We have FCS conferences trying to get a bowl game like we have. They are now trying to emulate what we're doing because when they play in the FCS playoffs... the last team that won it spent a significant amount.

"They have to spend to participate and go to the national championship, where we go to the Celebration Bowl and make twice that much. And if you get the chance to host the SWAC Football Championship, you get another windfall."

Another change of opinion, McClelland says, is Week 0, which many FCS teams take advantage of for more media exposure and less competition since the power conferences start a week later.

Southern vs. Alabama State opens the

SWAC season in Week 0, and McClelland says fans couldn't be happier.

"People looked down on teams playing in Week 0, now it's a strength," he said. "People want to see a (SWAC) game with a big windfall rather than a SWAC team playing an FBS school, so nobody gets beat up early in the season. It is elevating our brand, and it's an important week for us."

There's also good news for basketball junkies as well.

The SWAC has won five of six First Four tournament games - an \$8 million windfall for the conference. Such success has fans wanting a straight ticket to the tournament on Thursday night instead. But McClelland isn't complaining.

"I would much rather go into Dayton (Ohio), play on that Tuesday or Wednesday and get that national recognition," he said. "Those games yield about \$50 million worth of impact through commercialization of those games. That's the reason why we're going to the First Four."

So, stop worrying about somebody else's ice; just make sure yours is cold enough.

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

QBs McQuarrie, Jackson have opportunity at JCSU

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building place. Now for us to have two those guys not having game experience, does it bother me or concern me? It does a little in just that it is going to catch them off guard. But heck, if you look at these guys, there shouldn't be too much that surprises them, because they've been practicing against FCS, FBS caliber competition every single day. You would think that they should not get surprised by much that they're going to see with us."

Flowers is leaving open the possibility of signing another quarterback, recalling his first two seasons when injuries forced him to start a fourth-string freshman at one point. He doesn't want a repeat.

"The way that we do business, we say we've got to have at least two for sure, because we know what it's like to be without a trigger man," he said. "For two years after we lost our starting quarterback, we were reduced to 3 yards and a cloud of dust, which is far from the way that we want to play football."

"We have outstanding running backs - yes, we want to run the football. Our receiving corps is very good. We have good tight ends but when you're able to spread the ball out and make a defense honest, that creates more problems. It's very important to us that we have quarterbacks that can enable us to play football, play offense the way that we want to play offense, and that is to be aggressive."

Jackson has a head start on McQuarrie in learning the offense, but Flowers is eager to see if that'll be the case on Aug. 29 when JCSU opens the season at Benedict. Either way, the goal is to give both a chance to break through.

"I would say Josh is the leader, because he has been there and learned and went through a spring, but both of these guys are hungry, and so for me, that really covers up some of the lack of actual playing experience on a team," he said. "When you've got guys hungry to prove themselves, they've been at places where they did not crack the starting lineup for whatever reason, now they've got an opportunity with us, and that's all you really want in life, is an opportunity to show what you've got."



Flowers

Coaches want a stipend bump

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ericks, said he was "definitely getting a pay raise" at his new job.

Most experienced high school football coaches in Georgia average over \$80,000 annually with some top tier coaches making over six figures. Joey King, Carrollton High's head coach, was the state's highest paid at \$219,000 in 2025.

"[The district] has to invest in what is important," Tinsley said. "That has not necessarily been in our favor. Then last year we talked about doing a strike. To me, I'm like, why should we have to do a strike to get someone's attention? At the end of the day, this is a calling and we want to be supporting the kids. So, it is like they are saying, 'we want y'all to be quiet and not make any noise so we can continue to set a poor standard.'"

Jupiter Wilson, Garinger High's football coach, took over in 2025 after coaching at Hickory Ridge in Cabarrus County. Before that, he coached in other states. He sees the disparity between CMS and other districts.

"Coming from Cabarrus County, I think my last year there, they gave a 20% increase," Wilson said. "Coaches who had 12 or more years' experience were getting close to \$10,000. You go over one county and for a coach that has been in the game for more than 10 to 12 years, you're going to \$5,000. That's a big decrease."

Wilson said he understands effort to increase the pay for teachers, but coaches need to be valued the same.

"I know they're doing everything from a teacher standpoint, trying to get money," Wilson said. "From that standpoint, teachers feel like we're working hard, overworked and underpaid, and I think coaches feel the same way. I just want the same mindset as it relates to a teacher, where I feel like people are kind of behind them, the same needs to be about the coaches."

Wilson, who coached Garinger to its first win in several years at the beginning of the 2025 season, uses the catchphrase "things are going to change at the G." And while he is reshaping a program that didn't have much of a football culture, getting help from the district would go a long way.

"At a place like Garinger, I am trying to

set aside money to do things like pay for Ubers or meals or whatever the case may be," Wilson said. "I tell people all the time that I love what I do. I love what I do, and I do get paid to do what I do. I probably wouldn't be able to do what I do if we didn't get [a stipend] at all. But, then to say that you're probably going to get less than your counterparts who are 10 minutes away... that is a tough pill to swallow."

As of April, 22 CMS employees make over \$200,000 annually while coaches' compensation includes their teacher salary and stipend. Tinsley applauded Wilson and the mission he has embarked on at Garinger.

"If anybody knows Jupiter's situation, that is an elite CMS coach," Tinsley said. "Jupiter is doing things that anyone who is making \$200,000 isn't doing. They aren't adopting kids that have lost parents into their home. I am not downing anybody's job; all of them are important and our leaders need to get paid. I have no problem with that, but don't sleep on our coaches and people like Jupiter who is at a very challenging school. He has to pick up kids to go to practice. That is insane. When we have practice, 100 kids are ready to go. That man is driving around, picking up kids just to have practice. ... It is a calling for him, and really all of us."

Wilson admits he'd prefer a level playing field. Many CMS teams schedule out-of-state nonconference opponents for extra revenue, but facilities and coaches' pay in bordering states like Virginia and Georgia are often superior, putting CMS teams at a disadvantage.

"The expectation is for Charlotte schools to go out there and compete with out-of-state schools," Wilson said. "I think Tinsley went and played Buford (one of Georgia's top programs). Sometimes, though, you are playing with your hands behind your back in regards to what things look like from the pay perspective. And we put guys in the NFL here just like they do. Maybe not quite as many, but it would be nice to be on a level playing field."

"We'll continue to work and I know we will keep pressing [the district] just like teachers are pressing to do the same thing for them."

Hornets, Lee are benefit with extension

Continued from page 5A

development, creating an environment where each of our players are committed to getting better and continue to improve. He has built a team-first culture rooted in accountability, hard work and professionalism. I'm excited to keep working closely with Charles as we continue to build the Hornets for long-term success."

The Hornets' 2026 turnaround was closely watched across the NBA. They were first in net rating (plus-10.5) since Jan. 1, with a top-ranked offensive rating (120.7) and fifth in defensive rating (110.2). Charlotte led all teams in rebounding percentage (54.8%), was second chance points (19.0) and 3-pointers made per game (17.3) during that stretch.

Lee earned his first Eastern Conference

Coach of the Month award after the Hornets finished January 11-6 and tied for the highest point differential on the road (plus-151) in any month in NBA history. The Hornets ended the month on a six-game winning streak that extended to nine that matched the second-longest roll in franchise history and the longest since the 1998-99 season. Charlotte set a franchise standard with 10 consecutive road wins and tied an NBA single-season record with eight road wins by 25 points or more.

Also:

The Hornets will have a pair of first round picks in next month's draft, but neither are in a spot to land the anticipated cream of the rookie crop.

Charlotte landed the 14th pick - last among teams in the lottery - and 18th.



JEFF HAWKINS | THE CHARLOTTE POST

Patrick Payton, who played college football at Florida State and LSU, runs during a drill at the Carolina Panthers' rookie minicamp in Charlotte. Payton, an undrafted rookie free agent was 2022 ACC Defensive Rookie of the Year at Florida State.

Undrafted, but Patrick Payton eager to chase his NFL dream

By Jeff Hawkins

FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

Patrick Payton reflected when he passed a sign reading "First NFL practice: What would you say to your 10-year-old self?"

The former LSU and Florida State linebacker went a bit deeper with his thoughts as the Carolina Panthers' rookies and undrafted free agents made their way to the practice fields. The undrafted outside linebacker recounted when he first became attracted to football.

Moments before his first professional practice, Payton said, "In my mind, I was thinking about the 4-year-old. I was just telling myself, I remember watching TV: 'I want to be there ... I want to be in the NFL.'"

Payton has a shot. Along with 36 other prospects, Payton executed on-field drills, attempting to catch a coach's attention for a space on the 91-man roster.

"Excited to have all these guys come out here," coach Dave Canales said. "The greatest value in it is going through our drills where we have an apples-to-apples comparison: Do these guys fit with what we're doing.

We'll go through this camp and make some decisions on some of the guys not officially on the roster."

During 11-on-11 drills, Payton beat former Vanderbilt tackle Isiah Glass off the line of scrimmage to chase to quarterback Haynes King, who rolled in the opposite direction. Payton finished a step behind.

Payton, the 2022 ACC Defensive Rookie of the Year, broke out as a redshirt freshman with 31 tackles and five sacks in 13 games. As a junior, Payton recorded 44 tackles, 10 pass breakups and seven sacks to help the Seminoles to a 13-1 campaign.

With 33.5-inch arms, Payton has the measurables Carolina covets. At 6-foot-5, 260 pounds, he recorded a 4.65-second 40-yard dash at the NFL combine.

Hearing NFL draft buzz since his freshman campaign, Payton realized his game was too one-dimensional. Needing to improve as a run defender, he transferred to LSU for his final season.

"At Florida State, I was more of a run-around-the-tackle type of guy," Payton said. "When I went to LSU, I got with coach (Kevin) Peo-

ples, a great coach. He helped me with my run defense. Here, it's about technique and listening to the coaches."

Payton possesses a skill set the Panthers lack: straight-ahead, pass-rushing speed that created 36.5 tackles for loss in college. Carolina ranked No. 28 in sacks last season with 30.

General manager Dan Morgan invested heavily in the edge position by signing Jaelan Phillips to a four-year, \$120-million free-agent contract last March. Can Payton eventually earn a role at a cheaper price?

It may come down to his ability to stop the run. The Panthers yielded 123.3 rushing yards per game last season during their run to the NFC South title. In 2024, the injury-riddled unit surrendered an NFL-high 179.8 yards.

Odds often remain long for rookie minicamp invitees, but Payton embraced the opportunity.

"Everybody wants to be a drafted guy, but God sometimes puts you in a situation to test you to see if you really want it," he said. "I'm thankful. I want to show them I want it."

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