



On the marquee: Grammy-nominated R&B recording artist Ari Lennox at Skyla Credit Union Amphitheatre.

THE VOICE OF THE BLACK COMMUNITY SINCE 1906

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FINE PHOTOGRAPHY

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled 5-4 last week to reverse the 2006 capital murder conviction of Terry Pitchford, a Black defendant in Mississippi, after a state prosecutor was found to use peremptory to exclude Black jurors in a county that's 40% Black. Eleven white people sat on the 12-person jury that convicted Pitchford and sentenced him to death.

Supreme Court ruling a win for colorblind jury selection

5-4 decision in Mississippi case prohibits racial discrimination in picking jurors

By Herbert L. White
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The U.S. Supreme Court's decision to throw out a Mississippi man's conviction in a capital murder case struck a blow against racially exclusive juries - especially in the southern states like North Carolina.

Last week's 5-4 decision in Pitchford v. Cain reversed the 2006 conviction of Terry Pitchford, a Black man who was charged in the 2004 murder of Reuben Britt, a white shopkeeper. Eric Bullins, a 16-year-old who shot and killed Britt, pleaded guilty and was sentenced to 20 years in prison.

Pitchford, who was 18 at the time, went to trial in state court and was sentenced to death by a jury with one Black juror in a county where Black people account for 40% of the population. Pitchford v. Cain likely won't result in widespread sentencing reversals but reinforces the high court's support for jury diversity in capital cases, which historically have a disproportionate number of Black defendants who are sentenced to death.

"I think culturally it can have a lot of

teeth," said Noel Nickle, executive director of the NC Coalition for Alternatives to the Death Penalty. "What we do have is documentation of the tactics that North Carolina prosecutors have used over the years, and that have now been exposed. They had a cheat sheet to know exactly how they could use their preemptory strikes to eliminate black jurors without doing it blatantly, and so the Pitchford decision identifies, I think ... one of the jurors was late or something like that. We have cases here in North Carolina where jurors were excluded because of what they wore, the

Please see SUPREME | 2A



Nickle

City opens interim mayor portal

Qualified Charlotte residents can apply for the job until June 9

By Herbert L. White
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Charlotte's taking applications for its interim mayor job - no experience required.

Qualified residents can apply through June 9 at 5 p.m. to be considered for the position, which becomes vacant when Mayor Vi Lyles resigns on June 30. Lyles, the first Black woman elected to the city's highest office, announced in May she will resign to spend more time with family. Lyles, who was first elected mayor in 2017, was elected to a fifth term last year.

North Carolina statutes allow for council vacancies to be filled through appointment, and in cities where elections are conducted on a partisan basis, candidates must be a member of the same political party as the person vacating the position. As a result, applicants must:

- Be a registered Democrat
- Be a registered Mecklenburg County voter
- Be at least 21 years old
- Live within the city limits
- Be qualified to vote in City Council elections

After the application deadline, completed forms will be forwarded to council members on June 11, followed by in-person forums for candidates. Council members will make the appointment on June 22, followed by the swearing in on July 1. The appointee will serve until the winner of the November 2027 mayoral election is sworn in.

You can apply via online form at charlottenc.seamlessdocs.com or submit a completed application via email to cityclerk@charlottenc.gov. All questions must be answered for an application to be considered.

New to voting? It's quick, easy

By Jaslynn Vorachith
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

As election season approaches, it's time to prepare for voting.

For beginners, understanding the registration process and voter identification requirements can make voting less overwhelming. Michael Dickerson, director of Mecklenburg County Board of Elections, said the most important thing to do now is register.

"The thing that is most important is that you got to first be registered, and [you] can take care of all this stuff now before November or October, when you want to go out to vote," he said.

Step 1: Make sure you're eligible

There are four main requirements:

- You must be at least 18 years old by Election Day (16- and 17-year-olds can preregister in North Carolina)
- Be a U.S. citizen
- You can't be serving a felony sentence, including probation, parole, or post-release supervision

Please see NEW | 3A



Dickerson

Top Senior of the Year is anything but the shy type

By Herbert L. White
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There was a time when Maya McClain preferred the introverted life.

That was before Girl Scouts and Rosa Scarborough. McClain, The Post's Top Senior of the Year, was always an academic achiever. What she lacked, though, was confidence. Scouting was the stage Scarborough, as leader of Troop 569 at Friendship Missionary Baptist Church, used to build it - from group projects to public speaking.

"She would be well prepared for any presentation, but she was so timid that she would almost cry when she had to give it," Scarborough said. "I was sitting the back of the room and tell her, 'I can't hear you.' And I'll put my hand to my ears - 'I can't hear you' until she got out of shyness to the point that she was able to speak before large crowds.

"As a matter of fact, her last presentation, went international. That's how well she presented herself as a Junior Girl Scout not as a not as a Cadet Girl Scout. ... she did a civil rights project and she was so good, until somebody at the Girl Scout Council took it and ran with it, and it became an international presentation one Saturday morning on Zoom, and we had people all the way from Japan and Italy online listening to her project."

Those lessons proved valuable.

"I used to be really shy when I was a kid, but (Scarborough) Please see TOP | 2A



McClain



MATT LACZKO | THE CHARLOTTE POST

Charlotte City Manager Marcus Jones talks during an Oct. 3, 2025, press conference announcing new public safety initiatives on Charlotte Area Transit System routes and vehicles. The initiatives are in response to the Aug. 22, 2025, stabbing death of Iryna Zarutka on a Lynx Blue Line train in Uptown.

Transit leaders: CATS more secure after rollout of enhanced measures

By Herbert L. White
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Charlotte's transit authority reported improved safety on buses and trains over the first quarter of 2026.

Charlotte Area Transit System released updated data highlighting reduced crime and assaults across the transit system, reflecting the impact

of comprehensive security initiatives implemented over the past year. City leaders announced in October safety upgrades on CATS routes and vehicles in response to the Aug. 22, 2025, stabbing death of Iryna Zarutka on a Lynx Blue Line train in Uptown. DeCarlos Brown Jr. was

Please see TRANSIT | 2A

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Supreme Court ruling a win for jury diversity

Continued from page 1A

way they responded to the questions asked by the attorneys as they were seating the jury. So, it's no surprise that this has been how people have been sentenced to death.

"What's encouraging is that even Supreme Court justices that we might not have expected to join the majority decision get it that they too appreciate that this is not a jury of one's peers, this is not an application of justice when the punishment is the most severe possible."

North Carolina has 123 inmates on death row - the nation's fifth largest - but hasn't conducted an execution since Samuel Flippen was put to death by lethal injection in 2006. Since then, lawsuits over execution procedures and the Racial Justice Act - which has been repealed by the Republican-dominated General Assembly - stalled executions although there is no official moratorium.

The Supreme Court sided with Pitchford's argument that the trial court didn't analyze whether prosecutor Doug Evans violated the Constitution's prohibition against racial bias in jury selection when he used preemptive challenges to disqualify four Black jurors.

Justice Brett Kavanaugh wrote for the majority opinion joined by Chief Justice John Roberts, Sonia Sotomayor, Elena Kagan, and Ketanji Brown Jackson.

Kavanaugh, who was appointed to the court by President Donald Trump, quoted a 2019 opinion in which the court threw out the conviction of Curtis Flowers, another Mississippi inmate who was also prosecuted by Evans, that acknowledged "America's trial judges operate at the front lines of American justice" and "the job of enforcing" the court's 1986 *Batson v. Kentucky* decision found the use of peremptory challenges to disqualify potential jurors based on race violates the Constitution. Kavanaugh wrote the Mississippi trial judge "erroneously omitted" a key element of the *Batson* ruling.

"Diverse juries are a key component of a fair justice system: they deliberate more thoroughly, consider the evidence more carefully, and are less likely to be influenced by racial bias," Megan Byrne, senior staff attorney at the ACLU's Capital Punishment Project said in a statement. "*Batson* exists to help protect that ideal and serve as a safeguard against the exclusion of Black jurors, particularly in capital cases where jury pools are already less diverse because of death qualification. (The) decision properly rec-

ognizes that potential racial discrimination in jury selection deserves meaningful scrutiny and careful review. We are encouraged that the court has remanded Mr. Pitchford's case, and we hope the lower court will fully examine the evidence and ensure that *Batson* protections are meaningfully enforced."

Said Nickle: "This is at least encouraging, because the landscape here in North Carolina has not been friendly to *Batson* claims. We had an encouraging decision with Clegg in February of 2022 (the North Carolina Supreme Court voted 4-3 to overturn a robbery conviction after finding prosecutors unconstitutionally discriminated against a Black juror) but then in December of '23, it was a very disappointing decision (in *State v. Tucker* where the court ruled against a death row inmate who argued prosecutors disqualified Black jurors based on race).

"More than half of the 123 people on North Carolina's death row were sentenced by an all-white or a nearly all-white jury, and that doesn't just happen by accident. That's intentional systemic racism at work in our courts, and so my hope is that the Pitchford v. Cain decision will lead the way for at least more awareness, if not judicial response to the systemically racist application of the death penalty in our state and all across the country."



What's encouraging is that even the Supreme Court justices that we might not have expected to join the majority decision get it that they too appreciate that this is not an application of one's peers, this is not an application of justice when the punishment is the most severe possible.



NC Coalition for Alternatives to the Death Penalty executive director
NOEL NICKLE

Top Senior of the Year Maya McClain far from retiring type

Continued from page 1A

borough) really helped push me out of my shell," said McClain, a senior at South Mecklenburg High School. "She would call it 'voluntold.' She always volunteered me for roles. Whenever she asked somebody to do something or have a speaking role at one of our Girl Scout events, I would always be the last one to raise my hand, and she would pick me. I'd always be like, 'Man, why is she always picking on me?' But then I realized she was just trying to get me to become more outspoken and out of my shell. That has really worked, and it's helped me grow into the person I am today."

Scarborough's mentorship was impactful. McClain, 17, who will enroll at North Carolina A&T State University in the fall, is confident, outgoing and an academic standout with a 4.58 grade point average. She's also a campus and community leader who shows no hint of the retiring, demure youngster. That background inspires her to help people who might be in a similar situation.

"Because I grew up that way, it kind of gives me a special perspective into what it's like to be in that kind of position, or what it's like to feel that way," she said. "I think the most important lesson I've been able to teach other people through my various activities in my community is that it doesn't take much to use your voice, and at the end of the day, people want to hear what you have to say if you have a message behind it."

McClain puts that confidence to work in the classroom by building relationships and advocating for herself as a student.

"I feel like it helps me because I'm able to make strong connections with my teachers, and I'm able to advocate for myself when I need help," she said. So, if I'm not doing well on a certain assignment, or maybe something's affecting my academic performance, I have those teachers' connections to kind of guide me, or I know that they're there for me because they know me personally as a student."

Said Scarborough: "Even though she's very smart, very intelligent, very polite, she's very humble. The fact that she has the ability to do well, she does not brag about what she can do and what she knows. She likes to help those who are

having a little bit of difficulty to do what she needs. She makes it sound simple to somebody else."

Beyond the classroom, where McClain is in Advanced Placement and honors course, she's involved in extracurricular activities beyond academics. Among them: a toy drive at Paw Creek Elementary School, a service project in Belize as well as UNICEF, a United Nations agency that provides humanitarian and developmental aid for children in over 190 countries.

"I believe I'm a well-rounded individual, because not only do I like to focus on my academics, but I like to be very involved in my community and school," she said. "... I like to do different community service clubs, such as those within school, because I feel like it's a way to meet new people while also doing something good to help others outside of school. ... I'm also a lifelong Girl Scout. I love scouting. It's such a strong sisterhood, and it's another great way I like to get involved in my community."

McClain, who also considered offers from Wake Forest and Howard universities as well as UNC Chapel Hill is the second straight Top Senior of the Year to pick A&T, where she plans to study biology.

"My dream is to become a pediatrician, so I'm going to be doing biology on the pre-med track, and then later I'm going to go into med school."

McClain is looking forward to her college experience - it's another opportunity to grow academically, socially and as an advocate.

"Me and my parents (Tamara and Ernest) have been talking a lot about school, as well as some of me and my friends who are already in college," she said. "They've been giving me advice. What I'm most excited for about college is one - obviously the freedom, the freedom to be away from my parents and to start making my own choices and doing my own things. But I think another thing I'm excited for about college is being able to meet new people, and I want to get very involved in school. I want to participate in different organizations and to lead community service projects."

Said Scarborough: "The person that you talk to is just as delightful as she sounds."

Transit leaders: CATS more secure after safety upgrades

Continued from page 1A

charged with murder as well as a federal charge of committing an act causing death on a mass transportation system. He has pleaded not guilty.

"The data shows the security enhancements we have implemented are taking hold and yielding meaningful improvements," CATS Interim CEO Brent Cagle said in a statement. "While we recognize safety and security is a continued moving target, CATS today is in a very different place than it was three years ago. We remain firmly committed to the safety of our employees and customers."

A consolidated contract with Professional Security Services and increased partnership with Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police, deployment of off-duty officers and Mecklenburg County Sheriff's deputies, CATS reported improvements in passenger and operator protection. Among the changes in the first quarter of 2026 compared to 2025:

- 69% decrease in crime on the Blue Line
- 67% fewer bus operator and passenger assaults

- No assaults recorded for operators or passengers that required a medical response
- No passenger-on-passenger assaults, a reduction from three a year prior

CATS also cited new safety protocols since WeDriveU assumed management of bus operations in 2024 that have improved security, including:

- Radio controllers with real-time video access to vehicles and undergo enhanced training to ensure rapid deployment of emergency services.
- Expanded announcements notify passengers that audio/video recording is ac-

tive and that aggressive behavior toward operators will result in criminal charges.

- Average response time for bus communications to capture a call fell to 35 seconds, with bus-originated calls taking priority over schedule alerts.

- Additional protocols for high-level events ensure on-duty lead controllers coordinate responses to threats of violence immediately.

- Operators are equipped with overt and covert emergency buttons as well as real-time coaching to manage disruptions.

"Our proactive safety and security measures are delivering tangible results, and seeing systemwide crime numbers drop is a major step forward," CATS Chief Safety and Security Officer Eric Osnes said. "We will keep building on this momentum, adjusting our strategies in real-time to protect our community and stay ahead of the curve."

Enhancements have also been made to reporting functions for customers, such as an integrated Text-a-Tip line - (704) 251-6402 - for riders to report problems. CATS-Pass app also has an updated report a problem button for better visibility and new signage has been added to request support listed as well as overhead audio announcements.

CATS is also looking ahead with a dedicated fare enforcement unit and partnering with Central Piedmont Community College and UNC Charlotte to develop AI-driven security technologies. Those enhancements are part of the proposed FY2027 operating and capital budgets as well as the integrated Public Safety and Security Plan.

Uninsured rate for children at the highest level in nearly a decade

By Clayton Henkel

NC NEWSLINE

The share of children in the U.S. under age 6 who were uninsured increased 23% between 2022 and 2024, according to a new report from Georgetown University's Center for Children and Families.

The report released on Monday found that 220,000 additional babies, toddlers and preschoolers were uninsured in 2024, the most recent year for which data is available.

Texas, North Dakota, Arizona, Wyoming, Idaho, Arkansas, Florida, and Oklahoma have the highest rates of uninsured children under 6 nationwide.

North Carolina's uninsured rate for children in this age group was 4.2% in 2024, below the 5.3% national average. The state had 30,800 children who were uninsured, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

Joan Alker, executive director of the Center for Children and Families and a research professor at the Georgetown McCourt School of Public Policy, says North Carolina made two decisions during the Cooper administration that benefited thousands of children who would have otherwise lost coverage.

Alker says after the COVID-19 pandemic when states were "unwinding" Medicaid continuous enrollment, North Carolina moved slowly and deliberately.

"They were also one of two states in the country - North Carolina and Kentucky - that put a longer hold on their disenrollment for children," said Alker. "Going fast was really a risky approach, like Idaho took, but going very, very slowly and taking the time to do it right was something that North Carolina and Kentucky did, and that was a good choice."

Elisabeth Wright Burak, a senior fellow at Georgetown University and a lead author of the report, says North Carolina was also one of just a handful of states that applied to the Centers for Medicare

& Medicaid Services for a 1115 waiver, allowing for continuous coverage for children up to age 6.

"Before it sunsets in a few years, we're hopeful that it will protect a lot of young children in North Carolina," said Burak. "We'll have to watch."

Federal law requires that all states provide children at least 12 months of continuous coverage under Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program.

Alker said North Carolina's decision to formally expand Medicaid in December 2023 also provided a "welcome mat" effect, with newly eligible adults seeking healthcare coverage for their children as well.

But Alker worries that nationally, the numbers are now moving in the wrong direction.

Two million fewer children are enrolled in Medicaid and CHIP since Trump took office, said Alker. When child enrollment in Medicaid and CHIP goes down, the uninsured rate for children goes up.

The Congressional Budget Office estimated recently that the number of children covered by Medicaid will decline by 3 million over the next decade as cuts from H.R. 1 - the One Big Beautiful Bill Act - take effect.

Some Republican lawmakers and President Donald Trump have said Medicaid expansion is unsustainable. They say the cuts to coverage in the 2025 spending package were needed to offset the cost of tax cuts.

But Alker says lawmakers focused on affordability issues should see health coverage for children as an issue of economic security.

"It's a great investment of our taxpayer dollars," said Alker. "Winding up in the emergency room with a broken arm or an asthma attack can really bankrupt a family at a time when they're already facing such high costs. That's why even one month of a child being uninsured is too many."

Racial wealth gap widens as workers of color lack retirement

By Kevin Hardy

STATELINE

The racial wealth gap is widening as many workers of color go without retirement savings.

The median wealth gap between Black and Hispanic families and white families expanded by about \$50,000 between 2019 and 2022, according to research from The Pew Charitable Trusts. The typical white family had \$240,000 more wealth in 2022 than the typical Black family and \$223,000 more than the typical Hispanic family.

Much of that disparity is caused by white families saving more for retirement than members of other racial and ethnic groups, Pew said. Retirement savings, not home equity, is the largest driver of American household wealth, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

To help close the racial wealth gap and ensure more people save for retirement, Pew has been advocating for the creation of state and city-sponsored automatic retirement programs to help cover the more than 50 million Americans who don't have retirement plans through work.

Those programs, called automatic In-

dividual Retirement Accounts, or IRAs, have been growing in popularity: More than 1.2 million workers across the 15 states with active programs have collectively saved \$3 billion for retirement through state-sponsored plans, according to tracking from the Georgetown University Center for Retirement Initiatives.

Minnesota recently launched its auto-IRA program that aims to cover workers at all employers with five or more employees. Hawaii's program is set to launch this year, with Washington state starting its plan next year.

Those programs often capture lower-income workers who tend to be Black and Hispanic, said John Scott, director of Pew's retirement savings project.

"I think these programs are doing what they're supposed to do, which is really reaching those workers who have their access to retirement benefits cut off just by virtue of where they work," he said.

Auto-IRA programs require most employers without retirement offerings to set up payroll deductions for their workers, but do not require any employer match. Employees are automatically enrolled, but can choose to opt out, leading

Please see **RACIAL** | 3A

Racial wealth gap widens with retirement funding

Continued from page 2A

to higher participation rates than if workers were required to opt in to save with the plans.

Employees often contribute post-tax earnings to Roth IRAs, which means they can generally withdraw all or part of their contributions (but not investment returns) without penalties or taxes. That allows workers to not only start building retirement accounts, but to save up for unexpected or emergency expenses, Scott said.

That may also help states persuade workers to stay enrolled in automatic retirement plans.

Georgetown's tracking shows about 35% of California participants opted out of that state program, while more than 37% opted out of the Illinois program.

In addition to a formal survey, Pew hosted an online discussion to ask Black, Hispanic, Asian American/Pacific Islander, and Native American/Indigenous workers about their views on wealth. Many did not view wealth in terms of the classic definition of as-

sets minus debts. They instead prioritized financial security, which they saw as a more important goal than simply building wealth.

"What came through in these comments was that wealth to them is really security, and security in the sense of I have some certainty in my life about the income that's coming in and the bills that have to be paid," Scott said. "And I don't really have to wonder if I'm going to have enough at the end of the month after paying off everything that I owe."

While many people argue against allowing any withdrawals from retirement accounts before workers hit retirement age, Scott said more flexible programs such as the state-sponsored auto-IRAs provide workers with more security.

"You have to meet people where they are," he said. "And the reality is that if we're going to ask people to save for the long term, we need to help them build that resilience for the short term."

Black homeowners 'subsidizing gentrification' in North Carolina

By Kylie Marsh

THE TRIANGLE TRIBUNE

While homeownership is out of reach for many North Carolinians, skyrocketing property taxes are displacing longtime owners.

In some counties, owners of lower-priced housing are paying proportionately double compared to owners of more expensive homes, according to the Wake County Property Tax Justice Working Group.

"Nationwide, there has been a massive problem where Black folks, in particular, and other people of color are being undervalued when they go to sell or refinance their home," Rob Stephens, a member of the Working Group, said.

The coalition of organizations, including the NAACP, Men of Southeast Raleigh, Southeast Raleigh Promise, the North Carolina Housing Coalition and others, assembled in 2024. The group has worked across the Triangle to educate cost-burdened homeowners about local property tax relief programs and assist them in applying. On average, the Working Group helped homeowners save \$60,000 in property taxes.

During its first virtual gathering on May 14, group members discussed the inequities in property tax assessment, its impact on low-income homeowners, current relief programs and recommendations for expansion of those programs. "What we're seeing in transitioning and gentrifying Black neighborhoods is that the tax value is ahead of the actual value," Stephens said. "Black folks are subsidizing gentrification fundamentally."

Stephens presented slides comparing values between renovated homes purchased by investors and put on the market as short-term rentals and Airbnb versus homes owned by long-term Black residents. A five-bedroom three-bathroom home purchased and renovated by an investor in 2022 for \$350,000 was assessed at \$260,000, compared to a three-bedroom one-bath home owned by a Black resident valued at \$260,000 in 2024.

Stephens said the family who used to live in the five-bedroom home was displaced due to overdue taxes.

"What often happens is that city of Raleigh home repairs were being considered remodeled," he said.

The repairs are an anti-displacement measure, like accessibility accommodations for aging and disabled populations. "Having a handicap-accessible shower does not increase the value of the house," Stephens said. "While they're nice renovations, they're not the marble countertops, open concept that developers are doing."

At the same time, some of the highest-priced homes in Raleigh are being undervalued. One home sold for \$5 million in 2023 was valued at \$4.2 million. Another sold for \$3.2 million had a tax value of \$2.2 million.

When this data was presented to the Wake County Tax Office, it conducted its own analysis, resulting in a reduction in the values of over 580 properties across six historically Black communities, saving those families \$500,000. Over 225 Southeast Raleigh residents were mobilized, filing around 75 appeals.

"We did not agree completely with some of the reductions, but it was a great precedent," Stephens said, "because now we can say this is something you can do everywhere." Getting this property tax relief is a way to protect generational wealth for Black families, he said.

"It's a tragedy that it's being sucked out of Black neighborhoods unjustly, and we know that's just the tip of the iceberg."

While Durham, Orange, Mecklenburg, Buncombe and Chatham counties all offer property tax relief programs as anti-displacement measures, Wake County doesn't. Stephens said this is why strengthening partnerships with the local tax office is crucial.

Sarah Stohler of Raleigh Village East, an

aging-in-place group, is one of the volunteers of the Working Group. "One of the things we've discovered is that maintaining your home is one of the greatest challenges to staying in your home as you retire," Stohler said.

There are a few relief programs available for homeowners above the age of 65 or completely disabled.

The Homestead Exemption can cut property taxes in half for those making less than \$38,800 annually. The Circuit Breaker exemption is also available to homeowners over the age of 65 or completely disabled, requiring only a percentage of their income to be paid in property taxes. It defers property tax payment for three years and has an income limit of \$58,200. The Disabled Veterans Exemption applies to all disabled veterans and has no income limit.

"The biggest problem is most people don't know about these programs, so we've got to be evangelical," Stohler said.

Income limits include joint income sources, and these programs are not available to everyone. Hudson Vaughan of the North Carolina Housing Coalition is another member of the Working Group. He says that expansion of the Circuit Breaker Expansion could impact more cost-burdened families with a few tweaks, like expanding eligibility to be based on area median income.

"There are some pretty clear state improvements that we've been advocating for," Vaughan said. For example, the Circuit Breaker exemption is heavily underutilized because of the deferment clause, requiring homeowners to pay the taxes after three years if they sell the home. On the flip side, if homeowners remain in their homes for 10 or 20 years, they are only required to pay those three deferred years' taxes.

Heirs of property owners are not eligible. Removing deferment, the age floor and allowing heirs are "pretty simple changes that would literally reach tens of thousands of families across North Carolina," Vaughan said.

At the state level, legislators are working on tax reforms, like a "levy limit," and a moratorium on property tax reassessment in nine counties. The levy limit, if passed, will need to be approved by voters through a ballot measure come November. But Vaughan said it's "a political trick."

While a limit on property taxes sounds good in theory, Vaughan says the levy limits would take more from low-income and working-class families, while giving big tax breaks on high-valued properties.

"This can hamstring local governments when deficit projections are significant," he said. "This can lead to significant cuts in public services, and increased reliance on fees and other less transparent revenue sources. This is not an option that North Carolina municipalities have," Vaughan said.

Families that are already cost-burdened will not benefit in the long run, compared to the Working Group's AMI-based relief proposals. "It will lower the overall property tax revenue increases year to year," he said, "but for an actual homeowner, especially a low- to moderate-income house, it will actually have very little savings."

To illustrate the point, Vaughan showed a table that compared the savings under the proposed levy limit to the Working Group's expansion recommendations. A single elderly homeowner living in Rochester Heights with an income of \$50,000 and a tax bill of \$2,200 would only receive \$175 in relief under the levy limit.

At the same time, the owner of a luxury building in North Hills would receive \$125,000 in relief, compared to \$0 under the Working Group's relief program.

"We are not going to be fooled. We want real relief," Vaughan said. "We want it to really reach folks in Wake County who deserve it, and this is not that."

New to voting here? It's a quick and painless process

Continued from page 1A

· Live in the county where you are registering and be a resident at least 30 days before Election Day

Step 2: How to register

· Register online, by mail, or in person:
· Register online through the North Carolina Department of Motor Vehicles website at ncdot.gov.

· By mail, you can access the PDF form using ncsbe.gov.

· In-person registration at DMV, public libraries, or Mecklenburg Board of Elections office.

· If you're out-of-state:

· Decide whether to vote in your home state or where you're currently residing.

· Request an absentee ballot if voting in your home state.

If you can't vote in person, you can request an absentee ballot to vote by mail. You must apply before Election Day and return it by the deadline for your vote to count.

"The first thing when registering to vote, they need to be aware of how to register to vote," said Regan Aduddell, second vice president of the League of Women Voters of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. "They need to know how to properly fill out the form, make sure they include their name properly, include their driver's license, Social Security number so that the voter registration form is accepted. Then, they need to know how to follow up and make sure that it has been processed properly."

"Once your voter registration goes through...that's what you want to really look for, is that you get that in the mail."

Aduddell said presenting a voter registration card is not required at the polls, but it confirms that the registration was successfully processed.

"You do not need the voter registration card to vote," she said. "That is simply proof that your registration went through, but you will need to bring an acceptable ID."

If you miss the registration deadline, you can still sign up during the early voting period where eligible voters can register and vote on the same day with proof of residence. Dickerson encourages people to register early whenever possible, noting that same-day registration is a longer process. You can also check your status online at vt.ncsbe.gov using the voter search tool.

Step 3: Forms of identification

You'll need an acceptable form of identification whether you're voting in person or by mail.

- North Carolina driver's license
- State-issued ID card
- U.S. passport
- Approved college or university student photo identification
- Photo identification card issued by a county board of elections

"Whether you're voting in person, whether you're voting by mail or whether you're voting early, North Carolina requires you to show a photo ID," Dickerson said.

If you need a photo ID card, the Mecklenburg Board of Elections offers them free of charge at its office located at 741 Kenilworth Ave., Suite 202, weekdays from 8 a.m.-5 p.m.

Step 4: Research before casting your ballot

After completing registration, review deadlines, locate your polling place, and learn about the candidates and issues that will appear on your ballot.

Reviewing nonpartisan voter guides and official election resources include:

- vote411.org — Personalized ballot information and voter guides.
- ballotpedia.org — Background information on candidates, elections, and ballot measures.
- vote.mecknc.gov — Official election dates, registration information, and polling locations.

Aduddell and Dickerson encourage voters that their voice matters and elections are secure.


"You need to trust the system, right now...go vote, follow to make sure your vote counts," Aduddell said. "Our election workers are working hard for us."

Said Dickerson: "I don't want to be having anybody afraid to go vote, and I want to take care of every voter that we can."


Important dates for 2026 elections in Mecklenburg County:

- Voter registration deadline: Oct. 9 by 5 p.m.
- First day of early voting: Oct. 15.
- Last day of early voting: Oct. 31.
- Last day to request an absentee ballot: Oct. 20 by 5 p.m.
- Absentee ballots mailed starting on Sept. 4.
- Election Day: Nov. 3.
- Absentee ballot return deadline: Nov. 3 by 7:30 p.m.
- Certification of election results: Nov. 13.

Before Election Day, check your voter registration status, polling location, and sample ballot through the Mecklenburg Board of Elections website, vote.mecknc.gov



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The Charlotte Post

The Voice of the Black Community

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State budget 'framework' is deeply flawed

Legislative observers who were eager to learn how Senate President Pro Tem Phil Berger would function during the legislative short session - his last - may have gotten answers to their questions in the joint announcement that the House and Senate had reached a "framework agreement" on key points of a new budget.



TOM CAMPBELL

Once again, it appears that Berger pretty much got his way. We say appears because there was nothing more than the announcement on key points. We're told the full budget won't be forthcoming until June and there's no telling what bad ideas will make their way into that document. But we got enough from the May 5 press conference to say that as things now stand it doesn't look promising.

Whoop de doo! Lawmakers finally agreed to give teachers and state employees pay raises. Last year, negotiations stalled when the House proposed a 2.5% increase for state employees and an 8.7% hike for teachers. The Senate had wanted a 1.25% increase for state employees with bonuses over the two years and 2.3% raises for teachers, again with bonuses each year. The "framework" calls for state employees to get a 3% raise and teachers an 8 percent boost.

When you factor in the cost of inflation over the three years since the last pay increases and the almost hidden revelation that raises would not be paid retrospectively (as is usually the case) but instead would be prospective, meaning increases would only begin in the coming July 1 budget year, the proposals aren't good enough. Teachers and State employees are rightfully grumbling about them. Lawmakers had to make employee pay more attractive because of the increasingly large number of vacancies in vital state positions.

Then there is the income tax issue. A major conflict erupted last year over personal income tax rates after the consensus revenue projections from the Office of State Budget and Management and the legislature's Fiscal Research staff projected a budget deficit if personal tax rates were cut further. Senator Berger boldly stated he didn't think the projections were accurate. Turns out Phil Berger was correct. The latest estimates, released last week, indicate that because of increased personal income tax collections, capital gains taxes, and strong corporate income taxes the General Fund revenues will grow by 3.3% and should generate an increase of \$713 million for the year.

Lawmakers must have had some advance warning of these new projections when they agreed to allow further decrease personal income tax rates. Beginning July 1, the current 3.99% rate will be decreased to 3.49% and will further drop to 3.45% in 2030-32. That's great news for all of us who pay income taxes, but armed with these positive projections, legislators then ventured into dangerous ground.

They caved into a longtime Berger desire to put a constitutional amendment on the November ballot to cap NC personal income tax rates at 3.5%. Currently the cap is 7%, a more reasonable ceiling. This is nothing but a run-on bill, a measure lawmakers know that voters will eagerly turn out and vote for. But here's the problem. When we passed the current 7% constitutional amendment cap, we had several years' experience with tax rates lower than 7%. We don't have that experience now.

While we hope it doesn't happen, past history shows that sooner or later our robust economy will stumble. How will state leaders generate the revenues needed to keep state functions running if their hands are constitutionally tied? Will they cut vital services? Will they be forced to increase other taxes? Or will they borrow money to pay the bills? It is lousy governance to put future leaders in a box.

But if this amendment is bad, the other three proposed amendments are worse. One would guarantee that North Carolina is a "right to work" state, something that isn't being challenged or needed. Another would guarantee a person's right to farm. And the worst of them all would put a cap on property tax increases our municipal governments can pass.

Property taxes have become a burden for many citizens and there's no question we need to have an open discussion about how best to meet local needs without sudden increases in property taxes. But once again we are tying the hands of city and county leaders and potentially forcing bad future decisions.

Constitutional amendments should be sparingly passed. Only 37 have been approved since 1971. None of these are necessary and are a shameless gimmick.

We haven't seen what else might be included in the rest of the typical 600-plus page two-year budget, but what we've learned so far isn't a great omen. Lawmakers have had two years to get this right. They need to do better.

Tom Campbell is a hall of fame North Carolina broadcaster and columnist who has covered North Carolina public policy issues since 1965. Contact him at tomcamp@ncspin.com

« OUR VOICES »

As Charlotte's Historic West End grows, safety absolutely comes first

The writer lives in Wesley Heights.

As a resident of Charlotte's historic West End, I've been around long enough to see changes come and go in nearly every direction imaginable.

Some have brought uncertainty, others have led to great opportunity, but all of them have made us into who we are today.

Like many residents, I have been wary of some of the redevelopments that have come in to reshape our neighborhoods. However, at the same time, we have also experienced unprecedented growth and an increased sense of community and safety. These positive changes are due in large part to the introduction of License Plate Reader technology in and around our neighborhood.

For many people, the question of public safety is one that quickly escalates into political debate, but it doesn't need to be that way. When I think of public safety, it isn't political. For me, it has always been a personal discussion.

When I think about public safety, I think about whether the families in our community feel safe going outside after dark, whether our neighbors feel comfortable walking to their cars, and whether the elders in our neighborhood can continue to enjoy the community with peace of mind. LPR helps make sure that all of that is achievable.

I know I feel safer today in Charlotte than I did years ago. I see it firsthand. More families outside playing together, neighbors

who stop to talk and develop relationships with one another, and a greater sense of community well-being altogether. We've developed a stronger sense of connection with one another - and that's what truly matters.

LPR cameras helped contribute to these changes. They have provided us with a greater sense of safety and security without the need of an increased police presence in our neighborhood. For years, people believed that in order to increase safety we also needed to increase a constant police presence, or that it would lead to a culture of aggressive law enforcement - LPR cameras have proven that these beliefs aren't true.

We can create a culture discouraging of crime

while still providing law enforcement with the data needed to respond and deliver justice when it's needed. These cameras help to identify stolen vehicles, connect cars to criminal activity, and provide useful information to investigations - all without disrupting everyday life for our law-abiding residents.

I believe safety and community go hand in hand. As the West End remains in headlines re: toll lanes and populations change, it's important that we continue to focus on building neighborhoods where people feel welcomed, respected, and safe.

For me, LPR cameras are helping us achieve just that.

Marshall Perkins
Charlotte

Resisting ICE about more than immigration

I can imagine the scene: Locked shoulder to shoulder, frightened passengers sweat, as the zip tied, kidnapped victims of immigration enforcement.



MARTIN HENSON

The idea that this could be me feels more real than it should, as the federal immigration raids continue to hit close to home in recent weeks.

Durham's Avondale Drive, Raleigh's Capital Boulevard and Charlotte's Central Avenue were central sites of these roundups toward the end of 2025; these are now marked as streets that have now betrayed the safety of all who live there. A quiet voice inside me reminds me that I am a "legal" citizen, with natural born citizenship, and I shouldn't need to care - but chattel slavery was legal once.

I fear that the time when the North Carolina General Assembly did not allow Black people to walk without a pass will come again. U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and other federal law enforcement evoke a shared racial terror in both Black and Latino communities, the type that reminds us that it is possible to morph the same state power responsible for slavery into im-

migration enforcement.

Back when white men were deputized to catch slaves, Black people lived in fear of being removed from their loved ones. The marauding bands of ICE agents exist to soothe a similar temperament, due to what sociologists call the "browning" of America society, which is becoming more diverse and has led to a lot of fear among many white people. I feel a connection between Black and Latino, two communities under siege by a system that loves our labor but hates our presence.

Last week, point-blank gunshots from an ICE agent took the life of an unarmed mother and poet named Renee Nicole Good in Minnesota. Good's death mirrors that of Heather Meyer in Charlottesville, Va., both who died in defense of communities of color.

All this as the Trump administration's stated reason for these actions - that violent, undocumented immigrants are ruining America - is based on fear and racism, not reality. The truth is 65% of people detained as of June had no criminal record, and around 90% had no convictions for a violent crime. Overall, studies show, undocumented immigrants have much lower crime rates than native-born Americans.

The search for "those who do not belong" is lit-

tered with the collateral damage of those who dare to protest, record, observe or are simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. Some never come home.

My thoughts muddle through this. I am safe, right? I am supposed to feel safe in my own home and my own country - right? As a Black man and a person who opposes the current regime, I don't feel safe.

Hearing about families in hiding creates a fearful sort of disgust in me. Even though I've never been a slave, the handcuffs I see on the detained victims of immigration enforcement seem more like the chains that survived the end of chattel slavery than the results of a border patrol sweep. The past lives in me.

About six miles away from Avondale Drive in Durham, N.C., sits the Stagville plantation, where in 1844, Paul Cameron forced 114 enslaved people to walk "the trek," 500 miles from Durham to his family's new plantation in Alabama. Uprooted from their homes, split from their family, the slaves walked to an unknown destination.

I feel like a spectator in the immigration fight, yet over 150 years ago, Black people in Durham were once in the same position as the Latino community, fearing their loved ones being ripped from them.

Prevailing ideas of human value refuse the distinction marking a slave's journey from an immigrant's search for new opportunities. Denial of land, employment, and safety makes kindred spirits of dissimilar causes. The dehumanizing justifications for exploitation, the replaceability of "cheap labor" and the promise of freedom bind different modes of resistance together.

This logic appears again today.

It is an impossible choice the oppressed must navigate: enslaved people chose between flee, suffer or die; immigrants choose to hide or leave.

This convergence on the land that I have come to know brings fear, but it also brings hope. Chattel slavery ended because my ancestors made it untenable. On this land, we have seen the horrors of stripping people away from their families. It is more than my body telling me that I should resist; it is the history of the land, and my ancestors telling me that an immigrant and my forefathers are caught in the same fate, and we should fight for the justice everyone deserves.

Martin Henson, who lives in Raleigh, is an advocate and executive director of BMEN Foundation, which convenes Black men to address issues in their lives and communities.

Juneteenth celebration at Andrew Jackson's

This Juneteenth I will stand at the Hermitage and help celebrate Black music.

The Hermitage was Andrew Jackson's plantation, outside Nashville. I want to be honest about how strange that is.

I am descended from slaves and from the men who owned and abused them.



BEN JEALOUS

The men who denied them their God-given right to freedom. My family was enslaved by the Blands of Virginia. Richard Bland was the famous one.

He was a patriot before there was a country. He told the king and Parliament that a shackle chafes a man no matter how well you polish it. His young cousin Thomas Jefferson asked him to bring a bill to make it easier to free the enslaved. Bland did it. He was denounced as an enemy of his country. Then he went home and kept his thirty. He died still holding them.

That is my inheritance. My grandmother, Mamie Bland Todd, is the griot of our family. She carries two hundred years of it. Her great-grandfather Frederick was the only enslaved

man named in his owner's will, and the will was written to protect him. The man who owned Frederick was his own brother. That is how close the blood runs. Thomas Jefferson is my cousin. He wrote that all men are created equal. Robert E. Lee is my cousin too. He took up arms to keep my other ancestors in chains. I carry the blood of the man who argued for freedom and the blood of those he would not free. I resent his cruelty. I pray my children show his courage against the men who would be kings. That is the duality of this nation.

So, I know something about awkward ground.

The Hermitage is beautiful. A thousand acres. A white mansion. Gardens. The tombs of the seventh president and his wife. It is also a graveyard. More than 300 men, women, and children were enslaved there. Archaeologists are still finding their graves.

The land was Native land first. He signed the Indian Removal Act. He set the Trail of Tears in motion. Settlers' bones are in that ground. The bones of the enslaved. The ground is sacred for what is buried in it. It is stained for the same reason.

And we are going to sing on it.

Jackson owned the people there. He fathered no children, white or Black. Betty cooked for him, as her mother had before her. Her son Alfred was born on that land and lived there longer than any man. After freedom came, he stayed. They put "Faithful Servant" on his stone. But once a white man told him slavery had its comforts, and Alfred asked him, "How would you like to be a slave?" The man had no answer.

For a while that felt like trespass. Who brings a celebration into a wound? Black music was not made in spite of that ground. It was made on it. The field holler. The spiritual. The work song that timed a hoe. People who were called property made them, and the songs said they were not.

"Follow the Drinking Gourd" was a map to freedom. They sang it where the men who owned them could hear.

Juneteenth is the right day for it. Freedom came late, two and a half years after it was declared, to people who had been free in the eyes of God the whole time. The day does not pretend the delay away. It celebrates anyway.

So, I will go. I will stand where Jackson stood, and

where the people he enslaved stood. I will not soften either truth. I will say their names if they let me.

We are more curious now than ever about how we are joined. I have a cousin who descends from the people who owned mine. We are kin. The country is like that.

Nothing feeds the American need for unity and hope like the music made by enslaved people and their children. It is the truest thing this country has made. And we are still singing it.

So, this Juneteenth, on sacred and stained ground, we will sing. And we will remember the oldest truth Mamie Bland Todd ever taught me: our people were always free.

And - oddly, ironically, and even somewhat poetically - it happens to be the same lesson her own slaveholding forebear, Richard, helped teach both his young cousin Thomas and King George.

Freedom is inherent. It belongs to us from the beginning.

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

Sports

THURSDAY, JUNE 4, 2026



CAROLINA ASCENT

Carolina Ascent shook off a poor start to the season to finish second in the USL Super League after a 3-1 loss to Lexington SC in the final.

Better, but still short of the summit

Carolina Ascent take lessons from their late-season surge and loss in the USL Super League final

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

Carolina Ascent was a step shy of the summit.

The Climbers scored first in the USL Super League final but ultimately lost 3-1 to top seed Lexington SC in extra time. Mia Corbin scored the Ascent's goal in the first half, but Lexington equalized on McKenzie Weinert tally in the 72nd minute to force extra time. From there, finals MVP Regan Steigleder put the home team in front, followed by Addie McCain's insurance goal.

"I think we knew it was going to be a back-and-forth game against a good opponent," Ascent coach Philip Poole said. "Obviously, taking the lead right before halftime was great. We knew we were going to have to weather a storm

in the second half, and honestly, I thought we did that. To concede the equalizing goal with about 20 minutes to go was tough."

Carolina, the third seed, rolled into the final as Super League's hottest club with a 12-game unbeaten streak that included 11 wins, including seven in a row. Their regular season series - a win, a loss and a draw - suggested a closely contested game. It was until Lexington broke through after regulation.

Once we got into extra time, I felt like we still had enough in us to win the game," Poole said. "Unfortunately, they got the two goals. We knew the game was always going to be back and forth.

Two of the goals we conceded were very uncharacteristic for us, which is disappointing. It was an even game for the most part, and it hurts to come out on the wrong side of it."

Carolina's breakthrough came just before halftime when moments later when Lily Nabet won possession in midfield and connected with Mackenzie George on a pass. George's cross was headed clear, but Corbin settled the ball for a left-footed blast for a 1-0 advantage at intermission. Lexington, though, controlled much of the early play and held an 8-4 shot advantage before Corbin's tally.

Carolina almost doubled its advan-

tage in the 52nd minute on a free kick 25 yards away from Lexington goal. Jill Aguilera drove a dangerous shot on target, only to have Lexington goalkeeper Kat Asman deny her.

Lexington capitalized in the 97th minute when Regan Steigleder guided a header into the side netting for the go-ahead goal. They struck again seven minutes later when Nicole Vernis connected with Hannah White on a pass, who pushed the ball across goal for Addie McCain, whose touch bounced off goalkeeper Sydney Martinez and rolled into the empty net.

"The second goal was very uncharacteristic for us," Poole said. "It's not a goal that we typically concede. The third goal came after we changed our shape and pushed more players for-

Please see **CAROLINA** | 6A



Corbin



Poole

This is more than a dream come true. I've done everything possible to be a part of this group, to help this group along, and I'm just really, really grateful to be sitting here and to have this honor.

US World Cup captain and Charlotte FC defender **TIM REAM**

Ream on US captaincy: 'More than a dream'



MATT LACZKO | THE CHARLOTTE POST

Supporters of Senegal and the United States national soccer teams gathered on May 31 for a pre-World Cup friendly at Bank of America Stadium.

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

Tim Ream's final FIFA World Cup has him in a familiar role.

The Charlotte FC defender will captain the United States National Team at the global soccer tournament, an announcement Stars and Stripes coach Mauricio Pochettino confirmed before the May 31 friendly against Senegal at Bank of America Stadium. At 38, Ream has worn the captain's armband 27 times - eighth-most among Americans - among 80 caps. No one else has worn the armband more often since Pochettino took over the U.S. program last year.

"This is more than a dream come true," Ream told reporters. "I've done everything possible to be a part of this group, to help this group along, and I'm just really, really grateful to be sitting here and to have this honor."

"At the same time, it's not going to change what I do or who I am, and how I help the group. So, thank you. It's the highest honor for me in this group, with this group for the World Cup, and I'm not going to take that for granted."

Ream's experience made him a front-runner



Ream

Please see **REAM** | 6A

Can the US national team make waves at the FIFA World Cup?

By Steve Goldberg
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

Can the Stars & Stripes make a wave in the FIFA World Cup?

While the United States is celebrating 250 years of independence this summer, the U.S. Men's National Soccer Team will be working to prove they can compete with the world's best in the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

The first test was last week, a 3-2 win against Senegal at Bank of America Stadium. The Americans will also play Germany on June 6 in Chicago before their World Cup opener against Paraguay on June 12 in Los Angeles.

Coach Mauricio Pochettino, who played for Argentina in the 2002 World Cup before

launching a successful managerial career that has included stints at his former La Liga club Espanyol, Tottenham Hotspur, Paris Saint-Germain, and Chelsea, has whittled his squad down to the 26-player limit for the tournament. This has been a work in progress since he was appointed as the national team boss in September 2024.

The squad is a mix of World Cup veterans and first-timers. Thirteen players were part of the U.S. squad at the 2022 FIFA World Cup, equaling the U.S. mark for the highest number of returnees between consecutive World Cups, the most since the 1994 and 1998 teams. Eight started all four matches in Qatar: Tyler Adams, Sergiño Dest, Weston McKennie, Christian Pulisic, Tim Ream, Antonee

Robinson, Matt Turner, and Tim Weah.

Charlotte FC in the World Cup

Charlotte's World Cup connection is center-back Ream, who is the oldest player on the squad at 38. Quietly efficient and dependable, Ream wasn't expected to have the role he did four years ago but he played every minute in helping achieve two clean sheets in four matches. An unquestioned leader on the squad, he has now captained the team 26 times in 80 caps, putting him eighth on the all-time captains list.

Luca de la Torre, who joined CLTFC before this season, was also on the U.S. roster in Qatar while playing for Celta Vigo in La Liga. Though he did not play during that tourna-

See **CAN** | 6A

Should Black athletes join fight?

SEC boycott idea opens necessary conversation

Frederick Douglass once said, "I would unite with anybody to do right and with nobody to do wrong."

Words to live by.

That means we will not stay silent when organizations dress up a bad deal as justice and ask Black kids to pay for it.

The fight started with the SCORE Act, a college sports bill meant to bring order to the chaos around NIL, transfers, athlete compensation, and conference rules. It had bipartisan support, including from some members of the Congressional Black Caucus who had voiced support for it, before politics swallowed the conversation. Then came the boycott demand.

The NAACP has urged Black athletes, alumni, and fans to put pressure on Southern schools over the fight on voting rights and redistricting. The CBC then reversed course on SCORE. Not because the basic college sports questions had changed, but because of anger over the Voting Rights Act fight and the silence of college athletics leaders.

Separately, Sens. Maria Cantwell and Ted Cruz, along with Sens. Eric Schmitt and Chris Coons, just introduced the Protect College Sports Act, which would let conferences pool their media rights under a new federally supervised structure. These are not small asks. They are demands that Black athletes in Alabama, Georgia,



TROY ROLLING

Please see **SEC** | 6A



US SOCCER

Weston McKennie, one of eight players to play all four games for the United States at the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, is back for another run in the 2026 tournament.

Can US make waves at FIFA World Cup?

Continued from page 5A

ment, he has 32 appearances for the national team with one goal and five assists.

Karol Swiderski represented Poland in 2022 while on the Crown's inaugural roster.

Put the ball into the net

The U.S. scored just three times at the 2022 World Cup but their two draws – 1-1 against Wales and 0-0 against England – combined with a 1-0 win over Iran were enough to get them into the knockout Round of 16, where they lost to the Netherlands 3-1.

To progress, they will have to be better on offense. The three strikers named to the squad – Folarin Balogun, Ricardo Pepi and Haji Wright – come in with solid success on the club level this past season, combining for 56 goals across all competitions.

Balogun (19 goals in 43 games) had a nine-match scoring streak for Monaco in the latter half of the French Ligue 1 campaign. Pepi (19 goals in 34 games) was the top scorer for champions PSV Eindhoven in the Dutch Eredivisie despite missing nine matches due to injury mid-season. Haji Wright's scoring (18 goals in 43 games) helped Coventry City to first place in the English Championship division and automatic promotion to the

Premier League.

Former Charlotte FC star Patrick Agyemang, who had 10 goals for Derby County in the Championship and had scored six times for the USMNT in 14 appearances, was considered a strong candidate for the team until suffering an Achilles tendon injury in early April.

The USA is in Group D with Paraguay (June 12 in Los Angeles), Australia (June 19 in Seattle), and Türkiye (June 25, Los Angeles).

Other U.S. national team news

Charlottean Taylor Suarez, the former Ardrey Kell High and Charlotte Christian player who turned 21 last week, has been named to the U.S. Women's U-23 National Team for two matches against Brasileiro Feminino Série A1 side SC Corinthians Paulista on June 5 and June 9. Suarez, who plays for Angel City FC in the NWSL, played for the U.S. in the 2024 FIFA U-20 World Cup and 2022 FIFA U-17 World Cup.

The full USWNT will also be in Brazil during this international break, and former Charlotte Latin and UNC goalkeeper will be with them once again. She now has 10 caps for the national team, which will play Brazil's senior women's team, hosts of the 2027 FIFA Women's World Cup, on June 6 and June 9.

Ream as US captain: 'More than a dream come true'

Continued from page 5A

to captain the U.S. squad since the start of the World Cup cycle. Although he's nearly twice the age of some teammates, Ream, who made his World Cup debut in 2022 in Qatar, is the roster's steady influence.

"I am so grateful that he's with us, because he was a great captain, not only on the field, if not maybe more important off the field," Pochettino said. "He has the experience, he has the capacity to be the leader that we want, the positive leader, acting and reflecting on the field and off the field."

Typically, captains are in the starting lineup, but Pochettino didn't commit such status to Ream, who is an elder as soccer careers go. His leadership,

though, is unquestioned and should he make it on the pitch will break Fernando Clavijo's record as the oldest World Cup player in U.S. National Team history.

"It's important for us to translate to you and translate to everyone that, playing or no playing, he is the captain," Pochettino said. "It's not [that] now he's the captain, he's going to be sure on the starting 11, eh? It doesn't mean that. But importantly always [he] is going to be, with armband or without armband. He's the captain, and he's a great, great guy."

The U.S. are in Group D along with Paraguay, who they play June 12, followed by Australia (June 19) and Türkiye (June 25).

SEC boycott idea opens necessary conversation

Continued from page 5A

Tennessee, and Mississippi put their scholarships, their NIL earnings, and their professional futures on the line for a Washington fight that, when you look at the actual numbers, does not deliver what its backers promise. They are being asked to gamble their futures on somebody else's leverage play.

We will not stand by while that happens. Nobody should pretend college sports are perfect. The system is messy, and athletes deserve clear rules, real opportunity, and fair treatment. That is why Congress got involved in the first place. But the answer to a messy system is not to hand Washington a giant new lever over the conferences that are actually creating opportunity for Black athletes and families. Black families across the South know what these programs mean.

They have watched sons and daughters earn full scholarships, get access to elite training and medical facilities, national exposure, and for many, a path to a professional career that would not have existed otherwise. The SEC's revenue model, the one this legislation would pull apart and redistribute through a federal board, is what pays for all of it.

Now here is where it falls apart. The boosters behind the pooling idea have promised a windfall, somewhere between \$7 billion and \$9 billion in new revenue, depending on whose projection you believe. An analysis commissioned by the SEC and Big Ten says that number is a fantasy. And history backs them up.

After the Supreme Court struck down the NCAA's old game-pooling setup, the conferences tried a pooled arrangement once before, and it produced less money, not more. Schools pulled out, and the whole thing fell apart. So, Washington wants to "fix" college sports by taking money from the programs that built the strongest platform Black athletes have ever had, and betting it on a theory no broadcaster has ever

paid a premium for.

So, who actually benefits? Not the athletes. Not the programs. Not the families in SEC country.

The Congressional Black Caucus wants you to believe it has earned the right to make this call. Its members will tell you they have stood in the gap on voting rights, on criminal justice, on economic equity. We do not have to pretend that record is spotless.

The CBC has been wrong before, on crime legislation that devastated Black communities, on trade, on education, on Right to Life. Being right on Democrat politics does not make you right on every bill that comes along. History is full of well-meaning policy that delivered the opposite of what it promised.

The moral framing here is familiar. The policy underneath it is thin.

Douglass did not bow to institutions just because they claimed the mantle of justice. He asked the harder questions, he looked at outcomes, and he refused to let the language of liberation get used to dress up arrangements that served somebody else's interests. We are asking those same questions now.

When the NAACP calls for a boycott that puts kids' futures at risk over a media rights dispute, we ask who benefits from that pressure. When the CBC demands that a conference take its side on voting legislation as the price of political goodwill, we ask what that has to do with college athletics. When CBC members who once backed the SCORE Act now treat the same debate as a weapon in a separate political fight, we ask who pays the price.

The answer is not Washington. It is Black athletes, Black families, and Southern programs turned into collateral damage in a fight they did not choose.

We will not pretend those questions have comfortable answers.

Troy Rolling is president and CEO of Frederick Douglass Freedom Alliance.

Carolina Ascent's late-season run ends in Super League final

Continued from page 5A

ward because we urgently needed an equalizer. There was a change in our numbers and our structure, and that's the risk you take when you're chasing a game. Sometimes you roll the dice and it pays off, and sometimes it doesn't."

After overcoming a slow start to advance to the final, the Ascent had a near-perfect close. Although they came up short, Poole

applauded his team's memorable run.

"When you look at some of the distances our players covered and the fight, grit, and determination they showed, those are all huge factors in championship games," he said. "I couldn't fault the effort from the group. We'll reflect on it when the emotions settle down tomorrow and then begin the process of moving forward and preparing for next season."

Ascent more than sum of parts

By Steve Goldberg

FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

As one who has always leaned more into team sports, the part I appreciate most is collective effort.

The Carolina Ascent should be defined by one word.

Gestalt. A unified whole that is greater than the sum of its individual parts.

By their own admission, and my observations of this team's development over their first two seasons, nothing at this moment describes them better. It's more than selflessness. It's greater than sacrifice. It's bolder than commitment. Yet, it's the interaction of all those attributes made exponentially stronger through an inexact chemistry. It's what distinguished the Ascent in the run up to Saturday's final.

The concept, now widely understood as gestalt, dates to Aristotle and evolved over the centuries. That it can or should be applied to a successful soccer culture is quite appropriate, as the direct English translation of the German word means form or shape, two words which are commonly used in the sport. Form is how well you are playing, and shape being how organized a team is on both offense and defense.

The Austrian philosopher Christian von Ehrenfels gave the musical analogy that understanding a melody involves something more than the sum of individual notes. And that is where head coach Philip Poole is the composer, arranging the notes to create the optimum harmony for his side and the greatest discord for the opponent.

Until their loss to Lexington SC in the USL Super League final, the symphony was splendid with seven straight wins and 12 matches undefeated – just one draw – since late February. In this run, the Ascent have scored 20 goals, con-

ceding just four. But his notes are people with feelings and attitudes that can make the chemistry of composition far more complicated.

A pure example of the team-first mentality has been Taylor Porter. The team captain who played every minute of last season moved to the bench for the second half of this season with the addition of Lily Nabet and Shea Groom. Though that move may have taken away the armband, it hasn't changed her influence on the team.

"Talk about her impact on the greater good," said Poole. "You go from a captain leadership position, and you see there are some not-so-good examples of that throughout sport, right? But that's what leadership is. Someone like Taylor Porter who can put a team first."

"It's not even necessarily what she didn't do; it's what other players have come in and done. I think there's not many people who handle that situation as well as Taylor has. Even her minutes in this new role have been growing and growing, because she sees how important she is from a finisher standpoint, from a work rate standpoint, understanding our system and what it's like to be there. It's just putting the team first and ultimate leadership. She's done great."

Poole refined the music as necessary.

"We made a big call on a big change in goal, Sydney (Martinez) for Megan (McClelland), and Sydney's proved to be, at the moment, on form, just undeniably one of the most impactful players in the league," he said. "So, I think the goalkeeper change has coincided with the run, but I also think a little bit of focus, a little bit more dialed in. I think that, combined with the goalkeeper

change, has been important for us."

Another asset has been consistency, not something a coach always has control of, especially when it comes to injuries. Center back Sydney Studer, who was named to the GSL All-League Team this week, was knocked out for the season with a knee injury in March. Meaghan Nally stepped in to partner with Jenna Butler in central defense. Addisyn Merrick has come back from the injury that knocked her out last season to start at right back in the second half of this season.

"If you look at the last two years, I generally am a coach who has a fairly settled lineup, and we've had that again in this run," Poole said. "We've been fairly settled, not many changes, but you feel it from the players on the bench."

He says the Musketeer mantra, "All for one, one for all," extends beyond that to the players who aren't even on the gameday roster.

"To be fair, I think the mark of a squad and a team is you feel it from the players who aren't putting a jersey on if you're not in the gameday 18. I think we feel it right across the board."

"This year we have had a lot of newcomers in," said Audrey Coleman, whose minutes have changed this season. "I think it's about chemistry off the field as well as on the field. I really think we've hit that towards the end of the season, and everyone's just really coming together. We just really want to win as a team, and I feel like that togetherness is a big thing for us."

Forward Riley Parker, who assisted Mackenzie George on the game-winning goal in the semifinal, says it's about trust in the whole.

"I think all season we've seen people come off the bench and make an impact in the game, and I think that's what makes this team so special," Parker said.

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