



HERBERT L. WHITE | THE CHARLOTTE POST

Charles Osborne, right, owner of Golden Cleaning Services in Charlotte, speaks in support of legislation to curb predatory towing practices at a July 30, 2026, news conference at the Government Center. State Rep. Laura Budd (D-Mecklenburg) said she plans to introduce legislation in the next General Assembly. Yazan Humaideh, owner of SIP City, a victim of predatory towing, and state Sen. Caleb Theodros (D-Mecklenburg), along with Rep. Laura Budd were at the press conference.

Charlotte lawmakers press for predatory towing legislation

Sen. Caleb Theodros and Rep. Laura Budd support statewide guidelines

By Herbert L. White

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Charles Osborne's brush with predatory towing left him angry.

Osborne, owner of Golden Cleaning Services, said his pickup truck was towed from his Dilworth apartment complex when the leasing office issued him the wrong parking permit. He was charged \$1,180 to recover the vehicle – which was towed less than 5 miles.

"I'm not saying every towing company's bad because I think if you park illegally somewhere, block a fire hydrant, or you're not where you're supposed to be, and you're not abiding by laws or ordinances, there should be consequences," he said. "But the emotional damage that you have to go through

when you're doing the right thing, it borderline feels unfair, and you're doing what you're supposed to. You're paying a premium rent. You're paying for a reserved spot, and I was charged \$1,180 for someone's else mistake. I think it's diabolical."

Predatory towing happens across North Carolina as weak state rules allow operators to charge exorbitant fees with little risk of legal repercussion. But lawmakers aim to introduce legislation that establishes a statewide operator database, sets guidelines on pricing, arbitration to settle disputes and record tow and boot information.

"This is about a small number of bad actors, and when they break the rules, almost nothing happens," said state Sen.

Caleb Theodros, who represents west Charlotte. "There are stories from Raleigh, Greensboro, Fayetteville, and from small towns where there is only one operator and no recourse at all."

Yazan Humaideh, owner of SIP City in Plaza Midwood, said he recently parked outside a private office on Central Avenue on business. When he returned, a boot was on his vehicle, and the tow company driver demanded \$275. When Humaideh protested and insisted he was legally parked, the driver became hostile and threatened to raise the price. When police arrived, Humaideh said an officer told him law enforcement didn't have authority to intervene.

"How did the tow truck companies get

Please see **LAWMAKERS** | 2A

Elections bill OKs purges, audits

HB 958 extends state auditor's authority over rolls and ballots

By Herbert L. White

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A bill passed last week by North Carolina lawmakers rewrites voting laws that increase voter purges and automatically audits election results.

House Bill 958 mandates audits of local elections in all 100 counties and use of government records to disqualify early or absentee votes of people who die before Election Day. State Auditor Dave Boliek, who the Republican supermajority authorized to supervise the State Board of Elections upon his election in 2024, has faced criticism for appointing political allies to the panel instead of elections professionals.

Republican county board chairs – who are appointed by Boliek – have also alleged undue influence to change early voting periods and polling sites to make the process more difficult for students and communities of color that tend to vote for Democrats.

"You cannot audit yourself," Sen. Val Applewhite (D-Cumberland) said in a statement. "This bill lets the very politician who appoints the people who run our elections to then turn around and audit the boards he himself staffed. That is not even close to appropriate oversight. That is a grown man grading his own homework and then asking all of us to trust the grade he gave himself."

HB 958 directs use of federal and state databases to identify dead or ineligible individuals on voter rolls and cuts early voting for primaries from 17 days to 10. The bill also



Boliek

Please see **NC ELECTIONS** | 2A

South Carolina puts Black voters in driver seat for 2028 primary

By Kevin Harris

ATLANTA TRIBUNE

The Democratic Party's decision to elevate South Carolina as the first 2028 presidential primary provides Black voters with an historic opportunity.

Black voters will play a leading role in determining which presidential candidates gain momentum and which campaigns collapse before most Democrats even have a chance to vote in the primary.

Candidates seeking the 2028 nomination will now have to organize in Black communities early. They will need relationships with local leaders, churches, civic organizations, historically Black colleges and universities, small businesses and rural communities.

Their records will be scrutinized on voting rights, health disparities, education, economic mobility, criminal justice and the survival of Black institutions.

Black voters will vote based on which candidate speaks directly to their concerns, rather than on a political calculation about who is most electable after Iowa and New Hampshire have already picked over the candidates.

With South Carolina, Democrats are now moving the nominating calendar closer to Black voters who are actually the party's center of gravity.

This decision reflects nearly two decades of election results showing Southern Black voters have been central to selecting Democratic presidential nominees despite being placed later in the nominating process.

Barack Obama's 2008 Iowa caucus victory established

Please see **SOUTH** | 2A

« APPRECIATION »



JIM BLACK VIA FACEBOOK

Jim Black, a presence in Charlotte media as a photographer and public affairs director in print, radio and television, died July 26 at age 78.

‘Truly one of a kind:’ Broadcaster and photographer Jim Black dies

By Herbert L. White

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Jim Black, a longtime figure in Charlotte broadcasting and print media over three decades, died July 26 in Waxhaw at age 78.

Funeral service was Aug. 2 at 1:30 p.m. at Alexander Funeral Service, 1424 Statesville Road. A GoFundMe campaign to raise \$11,000 for funeral expenses has been launched.

As of Aug. 3, more than \$3,700 was raised.

Mr. Black was a presence in local media, combining skill as a photographer, easy speaking style and self-deprecating humor (he referred to himself as "the Black Jim Black" when greeting friends). He was a photographer at WSOC-TV during a time of widening diversity in broadcasting,

Please see **ONE** | 2A

Essence founder Jonathan Blount dies

By Charles K Harris

FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

aJonathan Blount, a Monroe native, civil rights activist and co-founder of Essence magazine died July 20 after battling cancer. He was 80.

Although he moved away from Monroe decades earlier, the impact of his life still resonates with residents.

"Mr. Blount had a profound impact on our community," said Eric Hall, president of A Few Good Men Inc., a Monroe-based nonprofit that advocates for local Black community. A large part of A Few Good Men's work has been preserving Monroe's Black history, particularly during the civil rights era, a period in which a young Blount was active.

Mr. Blount was born in October 1945 and adopted by Carrie Blount. Decades later, he reconnected with his birth family after publishing a plea in Jet Magazine.

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Please Recycle



Lawmakers press for predatory towing rules

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discomfortable to act the way they're acting right now?" Humaidah said. "I believe is the intimidation practices that have led to people just paying and not taking action or not speaking up, even afterwards. A lot of people don't do anything about that afterwards. But the other part to that is, I remember during the situation, the guy kept threatening to raise the price, and this happened in front of the police."

Rep. Laura Budd, who represents South Charlotte and Pineville, filed a bill last year that would cap towing fees and limit how far companies can move a vehicle. A new state commission would set price limits. Towing companies would also have to post signs, provide multiple forms of payment and log each tow in a statewide database.

The bill was pulled from consideration but Budd, who plans to file an upgraded bill in the next session along with Reps. Carolyn Logan (D-Mecklenburg) and Carson Smith (R-Onslow), believes there's enough bipartisan support in both chambers to pass legislation.

"It's really sad when law enforcement shows up and says, 'Yeah, the guy with the tow truck or the boots has more authority than we do,'" Budd said. "But that is because of the court cases that have come down, which is what has made this so difficult, but that's actually what's generated this incredible political will. "The problem we've run into is that

when you have zero balance in your General Assembly, in your legislature, and one party makes all the rules, you become the victim of horse trading, so no matter how good something is for the public, no matter how good it is for small business, economic development, and the like, it becomes the victim of, 'well, I'll give you this if you'll give me that.'"

Said Theodros: "At a bare minimum, we should start with any kind of common sense legislation that both sides should agree on, and I do believe that the weather over in Raleigh is going to become a lot better, especially after November, and so we're going to see a lot of political will on both sides of the aisle to pass any kind of common sense legislation around this."

In addition to pushing lawmakers to act, Theodros is encouraging municipalities to do likewise. Charlotte City Council passed an ordinance capping tow fees in 2011, but the North Carolina Supreme Court struck it down in 2014 as local overreach. Osborne, who paid the \$1,180 bill to recover his truck, said predatory towing is a hardship, especially for people of limited means.

"Families are struggling to put food on their tables, and then you have predatory practices with these towing companies," he said. "That's making it even harder. Those are the people that I feel sad for. That's my community that I'm mourning with dealing with these types of situations."



Budd



Logan



Smith



PAUL WILLIAMS III | THE CHARLOTTE POST

A bill passed by North Carolina lawmakers expands the authority of State Auditor Dave Boliek to audit elections and use federal data to purge the early or absentee ballots of people who die before Election Day.

NC elections bill OKs voter purges and automatic audits

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raises state independent political donation disclosure rules, expanding the threshold from \$100 to \$1,000.

Senate Democrats offered several amendments, including three by Mujtaba Mohammed, who represents a district in Mecklenburg County: restore early voting in primaries to 17 days; confirm the death of voters before removing them from the rolls and require nonpartisan staff to conduct audits. All were rejected by the Republican supermajority.

"House Bill 958 protects the power of those already in charge instead of protecting the power of North Carolina voters," said Sen. Caleb Theodros, a Charlotte Democrat. "This bill cuts primary early voting from 17 days to 10, eliminating a full week for people to cast their ballots. On Charlotte's west side, many residents work irregular shifts, rely on public transportation, or balance multiple jobs and childcare. For them, early voting

is not simply a convenience. It is what makes voting possible.

"The bill also creates a voter-purge process based on federal data known to contain errors. A database flag is not proof that someone is ineligible to vote, and a clerical mistake should not cost an eligible citizen their registration.

Said Senate Democratic Leader Sydney Batch of Wake County, who introduced an amendment to make drawing political districts an independent process: "This bill was never about election security. It is about job security for Republicans. We handed them five different ways to give these elections back to the voters, and they killed every single one. That tells you everything you need to know. The only thing this bill protects is the people already sitting in these seats, and trust me, no voter in North Carolina asked for this legislature to get a free pass in November."

'One of a kind:' Broadcaster, photographer Jim Black dies

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longtime friend and fellow photographer Greg McMurray said, and later transitioned to capturing still images as a freelancer at The Post in the 1980s and early '90s.

"I followed in his footsteps and everything," said McMurray, who like Mr. Black, worked at WSOC and The Post.

Mr. Black was also a force in radio as public affairs director at WGIV, Charlotte's first station dedicated to Black listeners and host of "The Black Rap," a public affairs program. Mr. Black was a proponent of engaging Black Charlotte through the power of radio, leading voter registration drives, food drives and health fairs to address chronic disease and raise awareness.

Mr. Black joined Big WAYS in 1978 during an era when Black on-air talent was novel at white-oriented stations. Although Big Ways was one of the Charlotte market's top-rated stations, he believed in authenticity.

"A lot of people I might go over to a predominantly white station, be swallowed up and get lost, but I believe I will mesh with the people over there," he told The Post in 1978. "I won't get lost."

Mr. Black, an Army veteran, spent 26 months in Vietnam before returning the U.S. in 1971. He recounted the combat experience as a chapter best left in the past.

"If you were a Vietnam veteran you would come home and you took your uniform off, and you didn't tell anybody except your friends or people in the service that you'd been in service," he told The Post in 2012. "I never took anything that was in the military out in public with me. I gave everything to my mom. I didn't even look at photographs that I posted [on Facebook] ... but I don't have any demons or anything."

Mr. Black, who grew up on Chicago's West Side, was spent his later years in Waxhaw, where he was a familiar presence through "Land of Waxhaw" - his photography initiative to raise the profile of the town's people and businesses.

"Mr. Jim Black was truly one of a kind," Snap Fitness Waxhaw posted on social media.

"At Snap Fitness Waxhaw, we're more than a gym - we're a family. Mr. Jim was a cherished part of that family, and his presence will be deeply missed but never forgotten."

When death probe questioned, a second autopsy can be complex

By Amanda Watford
STAFF WRITER

After investigators ruled 31-year-old high school counselor and coach Kelsey Harris' death a suicide in 2021, her mother, Kellee, said she was not convinced the inquiry had answered the most important questions.

About a week before Kelsey died, police had arrested her boyfriend on a strangulation charge after Kelsey reported he attacked her, according to her mother and police records. After Kelsey was found dead of a gunshot wound to the head, the county medical examiner ruled her death a suicide.

"I just couldn't even believe that," Kellee Harris said.

Kellee Harris has since questioned whether investigators fully considered the assault report and other circumstances surrounding her daughter's death, including the bullet's entry and exit points and the authenticity of Kelsey's final text message to loved ones. She has spent years seeking additional information about the case and has joined other Oregon families in advocating for changes to how suspicious deaths are investigated.

"It's been the most aggravating, challenging thing I've ever done in my life, you know, is to try and get to the bottom of what happened," Harris said. "The system failed us every single step along the way."

For families who question an official determination about how a loved one died - whether from suicide, an accident, natural causes, during an encounter with law enforcement or while incarcerated or detained - the next step is often unclear. Independent autopsies have become a fa-

miliar part of some of the nation's highest-profile death investigations, most recently with the death of 18-year-old Nolan Xavier Wells, who died in Mississippi in early July.

Independent autopsies have often emerged from a deep distrust of official systems - particularly in cases involving Black victims killed by law enforcement, where families have questioned whether investigators treated their loved ones' deaths with the scrutiny they deserved. For some, an outside review represents a way to seek answers when they believe the initial investigation overlooked key evidence, moved too quickly or failed to account for their concerns.

But these reviews are not limited to police encounters; families have also sought independent examinations in cases involving domestic violence, disputed evidence and other circumstances where the official explanation remains contested.

Other high-profile cases include the deaths of Kendrick Johnson in 2013, Michael Brown in 2014, Tamla Horsford in 2018, George Floyd in 2020 and Patrick Lyoya in 2022. In some cases, the second autopsies reached conclusions that differed from or expanded on the initial investigation, while in others they provided additional medical evidence that became part of the public record.

Some families hire independent forensic pathologists. Others seek outside investigators, ask prosecutors to reopen cases or turn to advocacy groups for help understanding what happened.

Harris pursued nearly every avenue she could find. She consulted multiple independent experts to review the case, re-

Please see **DEMANDING** | 3A

South Carolina puts Black voters in driver seat for 2028 primary

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lished that a Black candidate could win in a predominantly white state. But Black South Carolinians solidified the coalition that carried Obama to the nomination and ultimately the presidency.

More than 530,000 votes were cast in the state's Democratic primary. Obama received approximately 295,000 votes, or 55%, compared with about 141,000 votes, or 27%, for Hillary Clinton. John Edwards, a former senator from neighboring North Carolina, finished a distant third.

The delegate result was nearly as decisive. Obama won 25 of South Carolina's pledged delegates, Clinton won 12, and Edwards eight. In other words, Obama left South Carolina with more delegates than his two leading opponents combined.

Exit polling explains how he did it. Black voters constituted roughly 55% of the primary electorate, and nearly eight in 10 supported Obama. He also won Black voters across age, income and educational groups, demonstrating that his appeal extended far beyond younger or more affluent African Americans.

Eight years later, Black voters in South Carolina delivered an even more lopsided result for Clinton.

In the 2016 primary, Clinton won approximately 272,000 votes, or 73.5%, while Bernie Sanders received about 96,000 votes, or 26%. Clinton won 39 pledged delegates to Sanders' 14, giving her almost three-fourths of the state's available pledged delegates.

Black voters accounted for roughly 6 in 10 participants in that primary. Exit polls found that Clinton won close to nine in 10 of them. Sanders performed substantially better among white voters and younger voters, but those advantages could not overcome Clinton's strength with the state's much larger Black electorate.

By the end of the primary season, Clinton had secured more than 1,800 pledged delegates even before automatic delegates were included in the count. Like Obama, Clinton's coalition was built through commanding victories among Black voters in the South.

Joe Biden arrived in South Carolina in 2020 with a campaign on the brink of failure. He had finished fourth in Iowa, fifth in New Hampshire and second in Nevada. Before South Carolina, Biden had won only 15 pledged delegates across the first

three contests.

Then Black voters changed the race. Biden won all 46 counties and captured 39 of South Carolina's 54 pledged delegates. Exit polls found that Black voters made up a majority of the electorate and supported Biden over Sanders by approximately 4-to-1.

A Biden campaign that had appeared close to collapse after New Hampshire had become the nomination frontrunner in less than two weeks.

From 2008 to 2020, Black voters were the constituency that crowned the eventual nominee. Only in Iowa with Obama did Black voters validate the choice of a white electorate that voted before them.

Each time afterward, Black voters changed course entirely and chose who they wanted as the Democratic nominee, selecting Clinton and Biden despite their early struggles.

But Democrats cannot confuse primary influence with general-election security in 2028. An earlier voice in the nomination process does not guarantee Black support in November. Democrats must still earn it, particularly among younger voters and Black men.

South Carolina provides an opportunity to hone in on what's broken and fix it before the general election.

Still, South Carolina is not a perfect representation of the Democratic coalition. The state has a relatively small Latino population, limited union density and few recent examples of Democratic success in statewide general elections. Nevada and other states can reasonably argue that they test different and equally important parts of the party.

But the traditional calendar wasn't representative, either.

Iowa and New Hampshire gave disproportionate power to electorates that were overwhelmingly white and rural. Candidates could spend a year discussing the concerns of those voters, survive through the opening contests and engage seriously with Black communities only after the field had already narrowed.

Putting South Carolina first reverses that sequence. South Carolina is a recognition that Black Democrats have more than earned our say.

Kevin Harris is a Democratic strategist who has advised more than 100 campaigns and ballot measures, including the past five presidential elections.

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Demanding a second autopsy can be complex

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quested investigative records, including crime scene photos and other materials, repeatedly asked local investigators and prosecutors to take another look at the evidence, and ultimately became an advocate for changes to Oregon's death investigation laws.

Linn County Sheriff Michelle Duncan told Stateline that investigators stand by their determination that Harris died by suicide. Duncan said she and the county district attorney have met with Kellee Harris and outside experts who have questioned the investigation and believe the crime scene was staged, but said those experts did not visit the scene in person.

"All of the evidence points to, unfortunately, a suicide," Duncan said. "I feel really awful for the mother who is probably wanting to hang on that her daughter would not do that, but there is no evidence of anything but a suicide."

The United States has no single death investigation system, and the options available to families can vary widely depending on where a death occurs.

A Stateline analysis of state death investigation systems found that 20 states and Washington, D.C., use centralized medical examiner systems, while nine states rely primarily on local coroners. The rest use a mix of state and local officials. In most places, death investigations are handled at the county level, where families may encounter different officials, including sheriffs and justices of the peace, procedures and resources.

A 2025 report from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine found that the nation's medicolegal death investigation system is fragmented and lacks the

resources, uniform standards and oversight needed to ensure consistent cause- and manner-of-death determinations.

Independent autopsies may provide another expert interpretation of evidence, identify unanswered questions or help families understand how investigators reached a conclusion. But they are not guaranteed to produce a different answer, and they can be expensive or difficult to obtain.

Death investigations, explained

Death investigations in the United States do not follow one national model. States rely on a mix of medical examiner systems, coroner systems and hybrid models that can vary significantly in structure, resources and oversight.

In a medical examiner system, deaths are investigated by physicians, typically forensic pathologists, who are trained to determine a person's cause and manner of death. Medical examiner offices often employ investigators, forensic technicians and other specialists.

Coroner systems operate differently. Coroners are often elected officials, and the qualifications required for the position vary by state. In some jurisdictions, coroners are physicians with medical training; in others, they may not have a medical background and may rely on forensic pathologists or outside experts to perform autopsies and help determine the cause of death.

"When you have so many systems that are varied across the country, there's going to be some nuances in those systems," said Dr. Michelle Jorden, the president of the National Association of Medical Examiners. Jorden also is a practicing chief medical examiner in northern California.

Those differences can affect everything from who examines a body to what

resources are available when families have questions about an official finding.

For families, the system can feel opaque. A death certificate may list a cause and manner of death, but relatives may not understand what evidence was considered, who made the final determination or whether there is a process for requesting another review.

"All you want is answers and information," said Iva Rody, the chief operating officer at the National Center for Victims of Crime. "The system itself just kind of sets us up for not being able to truly be transparent and communicate well."

Rody said some of that difficulty stems from the way investigations are structured. Law enforcement agencies often limit what they share while an investigation is ongoing to protect evidence, witnesses and the integrity of the case.

Policing experts say investigations can also take months or years to complete depending on the complexity of the case, available evidence and the need for additional forensic testing or interviews. But those delays can leave families feeling shut out of a process that directly affects them.

"They want answers, and they want them based on the way they've been conditioned to expect them. That's just not consistent with the reality of how investigations roll out," said Matt Irvine, a retired detective and law enforcement instructor with 29 years of experience.

Irvine said public expectations are often shaped by TV shows and movies that portray forensic results and case resolutions as happening much faster than they do in real life.

For some families, a lack of information or communication with local au-



Nolan Xavier Wells, center, with his parents, Christine Wells-Wonsley and Elmore Wonsley. After Nolan's death in early July during a boat trip with a group of white friends, his parents commissioned an independent investigation with the help of civil rights attorney Ben Crump.

thorities can become a reason to commission independent investigations.

Second autopsies

Independent investigations, which might include a second autopsy, may confirm the initial findings, identify information that was overlooked or provide families with a better understanding of how investigators reached a conclusion.

But forensic experts caution that a second autopsy is not designed to automatically replace an official investigation or prove that an initial finding was wrong. In many cases, the first examination provides the most complete opportunity to document evidence before it is altered or no longer available.

"The first autopsy is more than likely going to be the most valuable autopsy," Jorden said. "That's where the autopsy exam is most complete."

The goal of an independent investigation or autopsy is not always to produce a different conclusion, but to provide another examination of the evidence. In some cases, that review can still leave families with unanswered questions.

That was the case this summer for Nolan Xavier Wells.

The 18-year-old Mississippi college student's family's legal team commissioned an independent forensic review after questioning the circumstances surrounding his death. Wells, who is Black, was found dead two days after he disappeared during a July Fourth boat trip to Horn Island off the coast of Mississippi with a group of mostly white friends.

Roger Mitchell, an independent pathologist and former chief medical examiner for the District of Columbia, conducted a second autopsy and classified the cause and manner of death as "undetermined" pending further investigation.

This means that Mitchell determined there was not enough evidence to confidently classify the death as natural, accidental, a suicide or a homicide.

Mitchell wrote that the most significant limitation of the independent review was the inability to directly examine the airway and lungs for evidence of water or the stomach for gastric contents, in part because internal organs had been

"rightfully" removed in the first autopsy and that the trachea was missing. Mitchell wrote that he "cannot rule out injury to the neck as a contributor or a cause of death." He added, however, that a toxicology report hadn't come back yet, and that questions remained about the circumstances that led to Wells entering the water.

The Mississippi State Medical Examiner's Office conducted its own autopsy but has not yet released the results.

"We have more questions than answers at this time," said civil rights attorney Ben Crump, who is representing Wells' family, when announcing the results of the independent autopsy. Wells' family and legal team declined Stateline's interview requests.

Trust, transparency, accountable

Some researchers who study public trust in institutions say confidence in an official death investigation is shaped not only by outcomes, but also by whether people believe the process was transparent, whether they were treated fairly and whether they had a meaningful opportunity to understand how decisions were made.

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JONATHAN BLOUNT VIA FACEBOOK

Jonathan Blount, who went from civil rights activism in Monroe as a teenager to co-founder of Essence magazine, died July 20 at age 80.

Essence magazine founder Jonathan Blount dies

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Prior to leaving Monroe in the mid-1960s, Mr. Blount took an active, and at times dangerous, part in Monroe's civil rights struggles.

"His firsthand experiences became an important part of Monroe's civil rights legacy and continue to educate and inspire future generations," Hall said.

In 2022 a historical marker was placed at the former site of the whites-only swimming pool where Mr. Blount as a teenager picketed alongside civil rights pioneer Robert F. Williams and other students in 1957 and 1961. Shortly thereafter Mr. Blount was a passenger in Williams' car when Ku Klux Klan members rammed his car and attempted to push it down an embankment along Highway 64.

Mr. Blount called Williams as one of the "most courageous" people he'd ever known, and an inspiration he carried with him for the rest of his life.

While Mr. Blount was one of the four original founders of Essence magazine in 1970, his career and commitment to the Black community extended well beyond founding the first magazine marketed to Black women.

After relocating to the Orlando, Florida, area, Mr. Blount helped launch several other Black-oriented publications while tirelessly advocating for diversity in mainstream media and as a consultant in the advertising industry. He was also a vocal advocate of preserving and revitalizing Orlando's historical Black Parramore District.

At the 2022 marker unveiling, Mr. Blount spoke of the importance of preserving Monroe's rich Black history and his hope was that such markers would make an impression on young people.

"All the things that you now enjoy did not come about haphazardly or accidentally, it was because there were people who were committed and risked [their lives] in order to make it happen," he told The Charlotte Observer.

"Jonathan Blount was more than a witness to history; he helped shape it," Hall said. "His courage during the Civil Rights Movement, his vision in helping establish Essence magazine, and his unwavering commitment to preserving Monroe's history have left a lasting legacy.

"His life serves as a reminder that ordinary people can accomplish extraordinary things through courage, conviction, and service."

Predatory auto loan exploitation

By Charlene Crowell
BLACK PRESS USA

Nearly 92% of American households rely on a personal vehicle to manage their daily lives. Consumers shopping for a vehicle in May learned that the average cost of a new car was \$49,307, and that used cars averaged \$25,918, according to Cox Automotive.

But the high price of vehicles is not the only financial challenge confronting Black and other consumers of color. Discriminatory and predatory practices in the sale and financing of cars, including predatory lending, have pushed millions of buyers into longer and higher priced loans.

A study by the National Fair Housing Alliance found that non-white test shoppers were given more expensive financing 62.5% of the time compared to white testers with equivalent or worse credit. Similarly, another recent independent study by the Century Foundation concluded that Black, Hispanic, and American Indian borrowers are given higher interest rates on auto loans across all credit tiers. Research published by the Federal Reserve found Black borrowers disproportionately pay the highest interest rate markup, resulting in more than \$3,000 in additional interest over the life of the loan.

A report by the Center for Responsible Lending found that the terms of predatory loans as well as dealers and lenders conspiring to drive up costs – not the consumers' willingness to pay – made delinquency and default more likely. These tactics limit alternatives borrowers can pursue to lower their payments. This conclusion came through a series of consumer focus groups with subprime credit scores, most of whom are Black, reeling from the effects of predatory loans.

High-pressure tactics, misleading claims about vehicle features or conditions, and aggressive up-selling of overpriced add-ons and services together obscured the true cost of the vehicle and prevented consumers from making informed decisions. Beyond the sale, dealer financing exposes consumers to interest rate markups, hidden fees, and unaffordable loan terms.

Nicole, a Black woman in her early 50s who lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota shared her personal story of urgently needing a vehicle as she went through a separation.

A full-time employee at a nonprofit organization focused on ending homelessness, she earns less than \$50,000 a year. She took out a loan for \$19,000 with an interest rate of 24% and a 48-month term. In addition to the inflated price of the vehicle, the dealer included a \$2,000 warranty and the lender rolled over a previous loan for a repossessed vehicle that significantly increased the total financing.

Shortly after the sale, Nicole discovered the car lacked heat and had a failed engine, fuel pump, and water pump — all undisclosed problems requiring costly repairs that were not fully covered by the warranty. She owes more on her car than it's worth but still needs a way to get to work. Making payments has been a struggle and on a few occasions, the car has been taken away.

"You pay that and nothing, nothing ever changes," Nicole shared. "And even when it reports on the credit bureau, it says that I'm still past due, like, 31 payments, and they've come, they've taken the truck. I pay when I'm past due, and they give it back to me. So, it's a vicious cycle."

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THURSDAY, AUGUST 6, 2026



CAROLINA PANTHERS

Panthers running back Jonathon Brooks, left, and defensive tackle Cam Jackson meet during training camp on July 17, 2026, at the Atrium Health Training Facility.

Different look for Cam Jackson

Carolina Panthers defensive tackle is more confident – and sporting a new number – in second season

By Jeff Hawkins
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

Cam Jackson looked different. The Carolina Panthers second-year defensive tackle remains massive, but the 6-foot-6, 328-pounder appears to be going about his NFL training camp business differently, with his new No. 99 jersey. The 2025 fifth-round draft choice attacked assignments differently throughout spring and summer offseason training activities and early stages of camp. More confidently. Some of his returning teammates no-

tice the difference.

"Jaycee [Horn] was talking to me the other day and he just said I was way more focused," Jackson said following last week's third training camp practice. "I'm really just coming in, locked in, coming out here and doing my job, competing."

But differently, Dave Canales said. The coach noticed changes in the sophomore.

"Just being comfortable in the system, understanding how we want cer-

tain plays to be executed," he said. "He's a big, powerful man and pair that up with the knowledge of where (he's) going to be. The more he starts to anticipate what's happening before the snap, the better he'll perform. So that's what I'm expecting from here for Cam is to just keep dialing into the concepts."

More fluid in second season

With injuries to Tereshawn Wharton (neck) and Bobby Brown III (hamstring), Jackson lined up fourth on the depth chart early in camp, behind Derrick Brown, LaBryan Ray and Jared Harrison-Hunte. Ray was designated re-

serve/retired on Tuesday.

When comparing himself this summer to his rookie self, Jackson acknowledged that he no longer practices with such hesitancy. His actions appeared more fluid.

"I think coming in my rookie year, I'm learning, just trying to get things down. I was the same way when I was at Memphis, my first year (in 2020), just a freshman, hesitant. But coming into this year, I'm more confident in what I'm doing. I for sure see how I'm moving different. I go home and watch film. I'm moving way quicker than what I

Please see **A DIFFERENT** | 6A

Golden Bulls open preseason camp with national aspirations

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

There's no looking back at the best season in Johnson C. Smith football history. The Golden Bulls, who went 10-2 in 2025 – the program's first campaign with double-digit wins – won the CIAA title for the first time since 1969 and earned a berth in the Division II playoffs for the first time. They also finished the season nationally ranked for the first time at No. 18. The goal in 2026 is to improve, which means becoming a national contender. "You have to finish," All-CIAA linebacker Vincent Hill said in April. "It's not about

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

There are major changes on the roster with more than 30 players graduated or transferred, but an experienced core is still intact. The offense returns five preseason All-CIAA picks, including three linemen. Hill is the captain



Hill

of a defense that was among the nation's best in 2025 – ranked eighth nationally in fewest points allowed at 17.25 per game and 21st in total defense (304.3 yards).

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



Flowers

With preseason camp underway, here's what to watch for in the days leading to the Aug. 29 opener at Benedict:

Spoils of winning

CIAA coaches bestowed recognition on the Golden Bulls as individuals, naming six to the preseason all-conference team.

The offensive line earned high praise with Jamari Mason, Marcus Andrews and Robert Early named to the unit. Running back Bobby Smith and receiver Brian Lane were among the skill position players lauded and Hill earned a spot on the defensive team. Smith, Hill, Mason and Lane

Please see **GOLDEN** | 6A

MLS shows how all-star events should be done



MATT LACZKO | THE CHARLOTTE POST

Nashville SC midfielder Hany Mukhtar, left, celebrates with LAFC forward Son Heung-Min after Son's goal in the MLS All-Stars' 4-3 win against Liga MX All-Stars July 29, 2026, at Bank of America Stadium. Son, who scored twice, was named most valuable player.

The MLS All-Star game did not disappoint.

As a reporter still in early days of a career, this was my first chance to cover an all-star game in any sport. MLS does it right.

We've gotten to the point where most major professional leagues' all-star events are watered down from what they once were. The NBA's All-Star Weekend is most entertaining for the three-point and dunk contests now because in the game itself there is no defense and the winner at times will score over 200 points.

The NFL, I shouldn't even get started on that. Its Pro Bowl consists of what is now called the Pro Bowl Games. It culminates in a 7-on-7 flag football game.

Are you kidding me? Flag football. I'm sure these types of events are replacing what we all traditionally knew due to the possibility of injuries, hard hits or fouls. Just go back to 2007 when NFC defensive back Sean Taylor leveled AFC punter Brian Moorman on a fake punt. While Moorman wasn't hurt, the hit raised eyebrows.



CAMERON WILLIAMS

Please see **MLS** | 6A

MEAC chief Stills not 'on crack'

You knew it was coming. As soon as MEAC Commissioner Sonja Stills said those four words, you knew it was going to hit the fan.

"... Ivy League of HBCUs." The first response came through a tweet asking if the Commish was "on crack."

Other people sent screenshots comparing the two leagues' SAT, ACT and GPA scores.

However, there also were supporters who agreed with Stills. I mean, if you don't think you're all that and a bag of chips, who else will? But, c'mon folks. Nobody can seriously believe Stills was comparing SATs, ACTs or GPAs when she made the statement. She was referencing the quality of research the institutions are producing like North Carolina Central opening the first AI institute at an HBCU. And remember, she said "of HBCUs," not the entire nation.

SWAC Commissioner Charles McClelland calls his conference the best in all of FCS all the time and nobody blinks. It's fun hearing HBCU commissioners talking smack. The conferences have been dismissed for far too long. Ignorant corporate America has finally realized what we all

Please see **MEAC** | 6A



BONITTA BEST

Youth baseball invitational a showcase for west Charlotte area

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

A youth baseball showcase will bring together west Charlotte communities and competitors. The Carolinas Metro Reds Invitational Aug. 7-9 will be held at Southview Recreation Center and Stick Williams Dream Fields is a collaboration with Renaissance West Community Initiative. The three-day showcase will bring together athletes, families, coaches, and community supporters for competition, connec-

tion, and a celebration of youth baseball in the region.

The Aug. 8 event at Southview Community Recreation Center, located at 1720 Vilma St., starts at 11 a.m. Admission is free admission with registration on Eventbrite. For information, go to MetroReds.net.

"This invitational is about baseball, but it is also about exposure, discipline, teamwork, and hope," Morris Madden, a retired Major League pitcher and Carolinas Metro Reds, founder

and executive director said in a statement. "We are excited to partner with RWCI to create an experience that uplifts youth and brings the community together."

The invitational is free and will feature baseball, food trucks, vendors, community blood drive and family activities. Lawn chairs are encouraged.

For RWCI, a community-based nonprofit focused on building a collaborative neighborhood through quality housing, education, wellness, and opportunity,

the invitational is an opportunity to engage families and invest in young people.

"At RWCI, we believe strong communities are built by creating meaningful opportunities for young people and families to come together," CEO Tiffany Capers said. "The Carolinas Metro Reds Invitational reflects the kind of partnership and community investment that helps young people thrive."



MID-EASTERN ATHLETIC CONFERENCE

Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference Commissioner Sonja Stills was criticized for calling MEAC “the Ivy League of HBCUs.”

MEAC commissioner ‘Ivy League of HBCUs’

Continued from page 5A
knew long ago: the economic power of Black Americans is second to none. The biggest difference today is we're more selective on who we give that power to. Speaking of...
McClelland was his usual boastful self at the recent SWAC Media Day. He was especially giddy discussing the new kids on the block.
Quinn Gray Sr. takes over his alma mater at Florida A&M, while Pro Football Hall of Famer Marshall Faulk has Southern University fans circling their calendar on Dec. 12, the date of the Cricket Celebration Bowl in Atlanta.
“Those two coaches are going to make the league that much more difficult to be able to maneuver,” McClelland said.
Even Mississippi Valley State, the conference's laughingstock the last four seasons, got a shoutout from McClelland. Despite the Delta Devils' combined 6-40 record from 2022-25, they have played spoiler: defeating FAMU the past two seasons, upsetting Arkansas-Pine Bluff in 2023.
McClelland says their time is coming. “They have put more scholarships into the program, and their games have been more competitive,” he said. “It takes time to turn a program around.

We believe MVSU is getting ready to turn the corner.”
McClelland said the SWAC also aided a member in need. Florida A&M football is ineligible for postseason play due to APR violations. The conference office supplied a grant to help the university hire a compliance officer. The Rattlers not only took the grant but also the SWAC's compliance officer. Thank you very much.
ESPN deals
Both the MEAC and SWAC reached new multiyear deals with ESPN through the 2030-31 season, including an extension of the MEAC/SWAC Challenge and Celebration Bowl through 2032.
The deal includes nearly two dozen MEAC football games, women's and men's basketball tournament coverage, and regular season men's basketball games.
On the SWAC side, it's 10 regular season football games, the football championship game, women's and men's basketball tournament coverage, and four regular season men's basketball games.
Sigh. Ladies getting dissed in the regular season again, eh? The more things change...
Bonitta Best is sports editor at The Triangle Tribune in Durham.

A different look, attitude for Panthers’ Cam Jackson

Continued from page 5A
was last year.”

A win away from clinching the NFL South championship last December, the Panthers needed a lift. Trailing the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, 16-7, kicker Chase McLaughlin lined up to put the Panthers down by three scores with 5:18 left in Week 18.
Jackson worked his way through the line and blocked the 38-yard attempt. The Panthers scored on their next possession but lost.
“I feel like that was a big play,” Jackson said. “It wasn't no sack or nothing, but it still helped the team. Yeah, that felt good.”
In nine appearances last season, Jackson recorded nine tackles (two solo), one pass defended, and a blocked kick. Despite the Bucs' loss, the 8-9 Panthers earned the di-

vision crown via a tiebreaker.
Anticipates first sack
Jackson said he anticipates producing his first NFL sack in the No. 99 jersey Wharton generously traded with him. Wharton recalled his teammate's old look at Florida and the veteran wanted the number he had while playing – and winning two Super Bowls – with the Kansas City Chiefs.
“He asked me in the offseason, ‘Do you want 99?’ I was like, ‘Yeah. That was my college number,’” said Jackson, adding Wharton didn't ask for anything in return “When I came (to Florida) in 2023, I wore that and I just wanted to go ball out in it. He gave it to me like a big brother-little brother thing.”
“Yeah, that's cool, man.”

NFL odyssey leads Gill back to Panthers

By Jeff Hawkins
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

With about five minutes remaining in Super LV and the Kansas City Chiefs attempting a fourth-quarter rally, Cam Gill lined up on second-and-20, 37 yards from the end zone.
The Tampa Bay Buccaneers rookie read the snap and worked his way down the line of scrimmage, tracking Patrick Mahomes' movements. As the Chiefs quarterback roamed to his right, Gill identified an open lane and sprinted past guard Nick Allegretti. Meeting Mahomes at the same time as teammate Ndamukong Suh, Gill was credited with a half-sack and forced fumble on the 13-yard loss.
“When dreams turn into reality...” Wagner College Football posted on X moments after the Feb. 8, 2021, play by its alumnus.
The Chiefs' drive ended on downs two plays later. Four minutes and six seconds later, Gill, an undrafted free agent a few months earlier, celebrated an NFL championship.
He embraced the Vince Lombardi Trophy on the field at Raymond James Stadium.

Ring No. 1.
Gill's NFL odyssey, beginning during the COVID-19 era, endured a few shut-downs and several detours, but remains on track, returning to the Carolina Panthers for a third stint.
Added for preseason depth
Signed shortly after outside linebacker Nic Scourton suffered a season-ending knee injury during the first day of training camp on July 23, Gill effectively replaced the expected starter at edge on the 91-man roster.
After initially spending two seasons as a special-teams fixture with the Buccaneers, logging 460 snaps, Gill did not see the field in 2022 but returned the next season, dressing for 15 games with the Buccaneers before being released again after posting 2.5 sacks in 184 career defensive snaps.

Carolina general manager Dan Morgan signed Gill before training camp in 2024. Gill impressed the staff before suffering a broken hand and ankle injuries that led to an injury settlement and another release.
The Detroit Lions lured Gill to their practice squad, but Morgan came calling when injuries and ineffectiveness decimated the Panthers' linebacker room. Gill dressed for 10 games, collecting a career-best 22 total tackles (six solo) and four QB hits during 221 defensive snaps, before his end-of-season release. He spent 2025 on the Minnesota Vikings' practice squad.
An opportunity developed with the UFL's expansion Louisville Kings. Gill, needing a chance to put himself in front of NFL scouts again, turned the spring football gig into a record-breaking campaign, ending the regular season with 10 sacks. He also added one in the two-game postseason with the United Bowl championship.
Ring No. 2.
Gill was named the league's defensive player of the year and selected to the All-UFL team.

“I made it a goal for myself when I had to do the spring league to get back to the NFL,” Gill said after the first Panthers' July 28 practice. “(Being back with the Panthers) means everything.”
“It's unfortunate (about Scourton's injury). I've been there myself. I battled injuries throughout my career, so I definitely feel for him.”
Prepping for Hall of Fame Game
With Phillips out for Thursday's game against the Arizona Cardinals, Gill is expected to play extended snaps during the NFL's preseason opener in Canton, Ohio.
“I'm still getting to know him, but he's a cool guy,” edge rusher Jaelan Phillips said of Gill. “I think he's done a good job adjusting to us. You know, dedicated ... high focus ... high energy.”

And more mature. Grizzled, perhaps, from his travels.
“I'm just older, you know, a little bit wiser,” said Gill, 28. “I just picked up little tips and tricks. Every year that you're in this league or any professional level, you have to grow. That's what keeps you on these rosters. I got the opportunity to come back here to a familiar place with familiar faces and system. I jumped right at it.”
Unlike most of his new teammates, Gill felt game-ready when the pads came on for the first time.
“I'm fresh off the [UFL] season, so it's not like I have to get in shape or anything,” he said. “I was excited to be back here.”
And eager to display his refined, record-breaking skills.
In 12 games with the Kings, Gill collected 48 tackles, including 14 that resulted in negative yardage. With the Panthers, Gill could battle veterans Trevis Gipson and Thomas Incoom for a rotational role, behind Phillips, Pat Jones II and second-year breakout candidate Princely Umanmielen.

Gill gave a “shout out to the Kings” for helping him earn a third opportunity with the Panthers, who are embarking on a second straight NFC South title.
“Anybody who's on the bubble or anybody that's been out of the league for a minute like myself, [the UFL] gave me the exposure that I needed and gave me the confidence,” he said. “That was the most since I played in college. I didn't play at all in 2025. Just to be willing to go out there and trust in my abilities and trust in my techniques ... it reminded me that I knew there was never any doubt that was in my mind that I couldn't do it.”
“It definitely felt good (and) proved me even more to myself that I'm the dominating player that I strive out to be.”

MLS puts on real all-star competition

Continued from page 5A

All that in mind, I watched how MLS conducted its all-star activities. There was a skills challenge — Charlotte FC defender Tim Ream won the passing contest at Truist Field — along with other events around the city leading up to the culmination at Bank of America Stadium.
Major League Soccer's best squared off with the Liga MX All-Stars in a game that was highly entertaining. Liga MX got on the board first to the surprise of many in the press box, including myself. Then LAFC forward Son Heung-Min — who was named MVP —

scored two quick goals to put MLS ahead.
At halftime the score was 3-1 MLS, and a capacity crowd was treated to a half-time show by Ciara, who performed some of her top hits. Fans had flashlights on their phones turned on, and even in the press box there were a few media colleagues getting into the concert.
The second half was back and forth, and Liga MX did provide a little scare in the 90th plus-one scoring to get just a goal back. But it was too late in the end.
While a final 4-3 scoreline is probably high for the av-

erage of 3.11 total goals scored in an MLS game, there was still defense, a few fouls had to be called, and the goalkeepers did make a handful of solid saves. There was no lack of effort, which gave the fans a great experience.
Kudos to Dave Tepper and everyone involved in getting the game to Charlotte. It was a great experience and during a World Cup year when soccer interest is at an all-time high, the Bank was electric — even on a Wednesday at 8:15 p.m.
Cameron Williams is a reporter at The Post.

Golden Bulls open preseason camp with national aspirations

Continued from page 5A
are holdovers from the 2025 all-conference squad.

New voices on the sideline
With winning comes change, even to the coaching staff.
Adjustments are necessary on the defensive side, where linebackers coach David Bowser earned a promotion to head coach at Albany State while defensive line coach Kevon Fly departed for the top job at Memphis East High in Tennessee. Former Winston-Salem coach Robert Massey, a Garinger High graduate who played cornerback in the NFL, steps in.
The biggest news on defense, though, is the retention of coordinator Barry Tripp, who was a finalist for the top job at Winston-Salem State. His presence maintains consistency for a unit in the midst of transition in the secondary.
“We're just taking on the mindset of we're not rebuilding, we're reloading,” Hill said. “It's not necessarily where we have to get things together, it's just about reloading the gun. Coach Tripp has that standard, and he doesn't lower that standard for anybody. You get with it, or you get gone and you're going to get with it because he's very enthused.”
Quarterback competition
Josh Jackson left spring drills as the clear-cut starter, but will that hold true on opening day?
Parker McQuarrie, a transfer from New Haven (Conn.) who spent two years at UCLA, was signed in May to add a fresh layer of intrigue over who will succeed All-CIAA Kelvin Durham, who set JCSU records for passing yards and touchdowns in his lone season on Beatties Ford Road.
Jackson and McQuarrie have thin college résumés, but Flowers has a knack for engineering success at the position. Jackson

has a head start on the first team job due to his spring immersion in the offense, but Flowers believes McQuarrie is capable of a credible push.
“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,” Flowers said in May. “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.”
No gamble after Proctor
Deandre “Biggie” Proctor emerged from modest expectation to All-CIAA receiver in 2025. His playing days are over, but JCSU is loaded at the position.
Lane, who grabbed 46 passes for 676 yards and five touchdowns to earn All-CIAA last year, returns, as does Reggie Daniel, who added six scores on 18 catches and Reggie Brigman, who caught 11 passes for 165 yards and two scores.

The Golden Bulls added UNC Pembroke transfer JaQuan Albright, who caught 64 passes for 895 yards and five touchdowns in 2025 as a redshirt junior.
Blending in the secondary
A couple of newcomers are pushing for starting jobs, led by cornerback Rossie Grimes a mid-year transfer from Eastern Kentucky who was All-SIAC at Tuskegee.
Another transfer, Marque Vereen (West Florida) is making a case to play opposite Grimes. Strong safety Tynan Tucker is the lone returning starter.



Lane



The Charlotte Post

SPORTS CHARLOTTE

Podcast with a home team advantage