

# How to prepare your student for a healthy school year

By Herbert L. White  
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The start of another academic year is around the corner.

As families prepare their students for a new grade or the transition to a different school, health is part of the equation. The Post interviewed Tiffany Brown, school health director for Mecklenburg County Public Health, for the In Other Words podcast on what families should know in the runup to the opening of the new year. Responses are edited for brevity and clarity, and the podcast in its entirety can be found at thecharlottepost.com, The Post's YouTube channel as well as Apple Podcasts, Spotify and SoundCloud.

CP: What should parents be thinking about in terms of getting their student prepared for the start of the school year in two three weeks, depending on what school you go to?

TB: Summer has flown by, and so it is that time of year to begin preparing for the upcoming school year. I'm sure all the students are out of their routines, and so it's time to start getting them back into their routine. Start going to bed at an earlier time; no more staying up until midnight and 1 o'clock on the gaming systems and the tablets and start to get those bedtimes back (to) a decent time.

Also, limiting the screen time is another big thing. For me as a public health nurse, I think one of the big things is making sure that your students are vaccinated and ready to begin the school year with all the required vaccines ... and if they are requiring the health assessment for all students who are entering public school for the first time, they have to have a health assessment, make sure that you also have that as well.

CP: What is the thing that you can count on parents wanting to know at this time of the year as the school year is right around the corner?

TB: This is my 18th year in school health, so I've seen a lot of school years and so this time of year, parents want to know first who's going to be my student's teacher, and I think that's usually a big one. What is their schedule going to be? What is the year

Please see **HOW TO** | 2B

## Juice is loose at westside health bar

By Charles K. Harris  
for the Charlotte Post

Kimberly Wilkinson is more than happy to feel the squeeze.

At least when it comes to fruits and vegetables. Wilkinson owns Juice Box, a vegan health bar in Historic West End at 2020 Beatties Ford Road. The shop opened last month.

"I originally opened in NoDa...in 2016," Wilkinson said. "Foot traffic was amazing; word of mouth was even better."

Juice Box was thriving, but in 2019, Wilkinson noticed a shift in clientele. "I noticed more traffic coming from outside the neighborhood," she said. "NoDa's demographic changed."

A native of East Chicago, Indiana, Wilkinson has lived in Charlotte since moving here to attend Johnson C. Smith University. She graduated in 2009 with a degree in business marketing and lives in the Washington Heights neighborhood.

"I've always had a strong love for the West End," she said. "There's a lot of beauty in the history."

After determining a need to relocate, Wilkinson's decision was easy.

"I felt Juice Box would better serve the underserved, supplying the West End with healthier food options and food knowledge," she said.

Wilkinson began transitioning the NoDa space into a desert bar, Sprinkle, which offers specialty cocktails, mocktails, milkshakes, coffees, teas and signature desserts. Meanwhile, she discovered a prime

Please see **VEGAN** | 2B

### «RIDES

## Small but mighty Ford Maverick Lobo is a turbocharged quality transporter

By Winfred Cross  
for the Charlotte Post

The Ford Maverick is the company's smallest truck offering but it certainly isn't a lightweight.

It can carry five passengers and has a big enough bed to handle moderate loads. It gets small upgrades range wide, but the biggest news is the new Lobo trim.

The Maverick Lobo is a wink and a nod to the '90s when lowered-suspension small pickups roamed the streets. This trim gets a different grille with a painted accent bar and different LED headlights. Black door handles, roof and mirror accents match the painted black chrome wheels.

The Maverick has wide door openings that allow easy entry and exit. Once you get in you notice the stark, simple interior. There is lots of plastic – and I mean a lot. It goes with the budget truck theme, but the Lobo gets fake leather seats with fancy stitching. Lobo is embossed on the seats which is highlighted with lime green and blue stitching that actually makes the plastic stuff look a bit better.

The dash has an instrument cluster the features two large gauges for speed and rpms. Between the dials is an 8-inch productivity screen that holds a plethora of information. There is a new for 2025

larger 13.2-inch touch screen which has sharper graphics and quicker response. It has wireless Apple CarPlay and Android Auto. Most of the truck's controls are found in the menus but there are volume and tuning knobs and a few buttons to operate some functions.

The Lobo is powered by a 2.0-liter turbo-charged engine the makes 250 horsepower. It's mated to a seven-speed transmission that sends power to all four wheels. The engine has enough grunt to get the Maverick to 60 miles per hour in 6.6 seconds. If you are feeling really frisky, the truck has a Lobo driving mode. It's a closed-course setting that adjusts throttle



FORD MOTOR CO.

The 2025 Ford Maverick Lobo is the brand's smallest pickup, but a capable transporter.

response, gear ratios and handling characteristics to put those 250 horses to good use.

I didn't give that a try.

Nope, I simply took the Maverick cruising through the urban jungle. It handled the highway like a champ and was great in the

city. The 2.0-liter turbo actually had some growl and sounds a lot better than the hybrid engine. It never

Please see **SMALL** | 2B



GALILEE CENTER

A rocking chair heirloom donated by Galilee Center of East Charlotte board of directors chair Joanne Jenkins to the My-Baby4Me initiative helps volunteers soothe babies.

## Rocking hope: Heirloom cradles a new generation

Donation to Galilee Center of East Charlotte helps families in need

By Amy Clark  
and Kristen Anderson  
for the Charlotte Post

In a community grappling with infant and maternal health disparities, the Galilee Center of East Charlotte has welcomed My-Baby4Me to its family of offerings that "feed the mind, body, and soul."

The initiative provides education on healthy pregnancies and newborn care, along with nutritious food, essential resources, and a much-needed sense of hope — all shared through weekly gatherings of women walking a similar path.

During one of MyBaby4Me's first gatherings, Joanne Jenkins, chair of the Galilee Center's board of directors, saw a volunteer gently pacing the room with a crying baby. Her immediate thought was simple yet profound: "That baby needs to be rocked."

That quiet observation sparked a deeply personal act of generosity. Jenkins immediately thought of her heirloom bentwood rocking chair that had been used by four generations of her family. Originally purchased in 1994 to rock her grandson, who is now 6-foot-4, Jenkins felt a clear impression that God was telling her to "pass it

on."

With care, Jenkins polished it up with mineral oil, tightened the screws, and had it delivered to the MyBaby4Me playroom at Galilee Center.

"When you give things in love, you share a piece of your heart," Jenkins shared.

Now used by MyBaby4Me participants and volunteers, the chair represents far more than comfort. It's a symbol of community, legacy, and hope for mothers navigating challenging circumstances.

MyBaby4Me is an initiative of The Church of Jesus Christ of

Please see **ROCKING** | 2B



When you give things in love, you share a piece of your heart.

Galilee Center board of directors chair JOANNE JENKINS



## Plant a bit of shade to cool your space

By Melinda Myers  
for the Charlotte Post

Summer heat may have you seeking comfort from a nearby shade tree.

You immediately experience as much as a 15 to 20 degree drop in temperature and enjoy the relief it provides.

Bring this shady relief home by looking for ways to include trees in your landscape. First, monitor patterns of sun and shade on and around your home throughout the day and throughout the year as the angle and position of the sun changes. Observe the impact your home, neighboring homes, sheds and existing plantings have on the sunlight reaching your landscape.

Consider providing welcome shade where needed during the hottest hours of the day and weeks of the year. Look for opportunities to plant trees where you can make a difference in your comfort and money spent cooling your home.

Plant trees, if space al-

Please see **PLANT** | 2B



MELINDA MYERS

Norway maples providing shade and cooling the yards, sidewalk and street.



# Rocking hope: Heirloom cradles a new generation

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Latter-day Saints in collaboration with A Chance to Learn. Charlotte is the newest of the five cities hosting this initiative that offers free weekly classes, meals, transportation, and critical resources for new and expecting mothers.

“Every mom deserves to feel supported, seen, and safe during pregnancy and postpartum,” said LaToyia Dennis, CEO and founder of A Chance to Learn. “Far too often, women — especially Black and brown moms — face this journey alone. We’re here to change that.”

Classes are held Mondays at 11 a.m. and Thursdays at 5 p.m. at Galilee Center.

The initiative addresses a dire need in Mecklenburg County, where Black women face infant mortality rates two to three times higher than their white counterparts. In East Charlotte, the rate is 12.6 per 1,000 births, more

than double the national average.

“We are grateful to welcome My-Baby4Me to Charlotte,” said Bryan Jenkins, an area faith leader for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. “This collaboration offers vital support and encouragement — lifting and strengthening not only these dear women, but also their entire communities.”

For Jenkins, supporting MyBaby4Me is part of a spiritual journey. A former vestry member at St. Andrews Episcopal Church, she felt adrift when the church closed in 2013. She found healing by spending Sunday mornings in quiet devotion — “having breakfast with Jesus,” she called it. That was until a new opportunity arose: an invitation to serve at the Galilee Center.

“I asked God, ‘You want me to do what?’” she recalled. But drawing strength from her faith, Jenkins is glad she did.

# Vegan health bar makes the transition to West End

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space on Beatties Ford Road for a new Juice Box. While the digs might have changed, Wilkinson’s commitment to quality flavor and service hasn’t.

Juice Box’s menu includes smoothies, fresh juices, wellness shots, salads, toast and oxygen therapy, which has been around since the 1980s but its evolution into an alternative health niche business is relatively recent.

Customers are provided masks or nasal cannulas which administer air with a higher concentration of oxygen, often blended with pleasant scents. Proponents say oxygen “hits” can provide temporary boosts in energy, ease stress and relieve allergies and headaches.

Juice Box is unique in its offerings in the West End community. As such, promoting the concept and brand is not always easy.

“There’s a challenge in support and marketing,” Wilkinson admits. “Constantly (staying) engaged and relevant to consumers can be challenging.”

Wilkinson’s recipe has served her well. In addition to Juice Box, and Sprinkle, she also launched Members Only Tasting Room and Social on Central Avenue. She understands the value of local support to keep minority small businesses viable as well as a cohesive environment among neighborhood entrepreneurs.

“All businesses need the support of the community to withstand,” she said. “Locals can help the West End thrive by supporting the businesses [here]. Be intentional, know what businesses you can align with. Make a conscious effort to spend your dollars in the local businesses.”

Juice Box’s bottled juices are also available at Byte’s Cafe on the campus of Johnson and Wales University and Market Cafe on Trade Street. Distribution will soon be expanding to include area hospitals, grocery sales as well as Charlotte-Douglas Airport and Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools.

Expansion and popularity, however, are not just a matter of dollars and cents to Wilkinson.

“I create safe, healthy environments for the community,” she said.



# How to prepare your student for a healthy start to the school year

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going to look like? What is the rigor of this new grade level going to be as far as end-of-grade testing? Are they switching classes? How is my child going to handle this new grade level – the transition from first grade to second grade or from middle school to high school can be difficult, and so for a lot of parents and for students, it can bring some anxiety.

Really, making sure that students and parents are having these open conversations with schools, that you’re active in your school community, that you’re meeting with the teachers that you know your administrators at the school. If your child has a health condition that you’re meeting with your school nurse at the start of the school year so that you feel confident and comfortable that your child is going to be safe during those six or seven hours that they are at that school.

CP: Everybody is more aware, more sensitive now to mental health, as opposed to the physical part. What goes into trying to put families and students in the best possible position to succeed?

TB: I’ve seen discussion surrounding mental health has really changed over the 18 years that I have been in school health. It’s not as taboo anymore. We’re having open and honest discussions about it, so I’m really grateful as a health care provider that we feel more comfortable, especially in our community with having those discussions. ... You can’t heal something if you don’t discuss it, if you if you don’t talk about it, so I’m glad that we are having those discussions, but I do see that more of our students are suffering from anxiety,

from depression.

There’s social pressure. We have social media. We have imposter syndrome. We have children wanting to fit in with what they see on television and what they see online and I think also the rigor of academia has increased over the years, wanting to get into that perfect school and wanting to be on the varsity team and get that scholarship. When you have when all of those pressures compound, it can lead to anxiety, so it’s really important that families recognize those early signs and speak to their children, have open conversations about how they’re feeling.

CP: In terms of vaccinations, is there a difference in terms of the requirements for public school students as opposed to kids who go to private schools?

TB: The law ... is very clear, and it states that all students who enroll in a school in North Carolina, regardless of if that school is a public school or private school, charter or religious institution, they are required to receive the mandated vaccines and present a certificate of immunization to the school within 30 days of enrollment. So regardless of public or private, a student is required to present the certificate of vaccination.

There are two ways to exempt, and parents or guardians can speak with their schools or school nurses about if they meet the qualifications for an exemption for vaccination. But the expectation is that students do receive the vaccinations within 30 days of enrollment.

When we think about [vaccine] hesitancy, a lot of times we see speak about what has gone wrong, but

there’s so many things that have gone right with vaccinations. Look at what’s going on right now with measles. Measles was pretty much eradicated because of the vaccine, and now we’re starting to see cases of measles, which is a very highly contagious disease we’re seeing all over the country those cases start to return. It really does highlight more so the importance of vaccination, more so than not becoming vaccinated.

CP: In terms of another favorite school activity, extracurricular activities ... talk a little bit about physicals and where things are in advice in terms of where to go.

TB: To participate in sports in the public school system, and I can only speak for the public school system, you are required to have a what they call a sports physical and it’s really important because we want to ensure that children are healthy and ready for physical activity, and it helps to make ensure that they’re able to enjoy the benefits of sports.

Sports have has plenty of benefits, such as fitness, teamwork and discipline, but we want to make sure that students are healthy and prepared for that and minimize their risk for injury, so during those visits, the provider can detect underlying medical issues such as heart conditions, asthma, high blood pressure, but also manage chronic conditions that the family and the provider already know of, and adjust medications accordingly during those visits. They also can provide health education about nutrition, hydration, sleep, hygiene and safe sports participation, so the sports physical is extremely important.

# Plant shade, cool your space

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lows, near those areas where you spend time outdoors.

Shading patios and decks makes them more inviting on a hot summer day. Deciduous trees that drop their leaves in winter allow you to soak up some welcome sunshine during the cooler months of the year.

Maximize the cooling benefits to your home by planting trees on the east and west side of your house. Shading the roof, walls and windows greatly reduces heat gain and energy needed to cool your home.

Since about 75% of the heat gain in a building comes through the windows, shading them can greatly increase your comfort and reduce money spent cooling your home.

Once again, deciduous trees provide needed shade in summer and allow warming sunlight into homes during the cooler months.

Don’t overlook paved areas near your home that greatly impact the air temperature. Shading paved drives and walks reduces

heat absorbed that is released back into the surrounding air. Lowering the temperature of the space around your home helps lower the indoor temperature.

Shading an air conditioner can increase its efficiency by as much as ten percent, reducing energy use and saving you money. If space is limited, consider planting a shade-producing shrub or vine trained on a trellis. Be sure to provide space around the unit for needed airflow.

Avoid underground and overhead utilities when planting trees. Tall trees that eventually grow into the wires or structures may interfere with utilities and power transmission, creating a real hazard. Improper placement results in pruning that ruins their beauty or requires removal, eliminating any benefit they provided.

Always call 811 as you plan new plantings and at least three business days before placing the first shovel in the ground. It can help reduce the risk of injury and avoid the inconvenience that can happen

when you damage an underground utility.

Consult your local university extension service and energy company for plant selection and placement recommendations for your area. Those living in wildfire prone areas need to also consider fire-safe landscaping practices.

No room to plant trees on your property? Consider joining the local tree board or other tree planting group. Adding trees to your community can help you and your neighbors create a healthier, cooler environment that everyone can enjoy.

Melinda Myers has written more than 20 gardening books, including the *Midwest Gardener’s Handbook, 2nd Edition* and *Small Space Gardening*. She hosts *The Great Courses “How to Grow Anything”* instant video series and the nationally syndicated *Melinda’s Garden Moment* radio program.

Myers is a columnist and contributing editor for *Birds & Blooms* magazine and her website is [www.MelindaMyers.com](http://www.MelindaMyers.com).



UNSPASH

Under the Big Beautiful Bill Act, students are barred from borrowing more than \$50,000 a year in unsubsidized federal loans for medical schools, which some critics will worsen the national doctor shortage.

# US student loan caps might worsen national doctor shortage

By Shalina Chatlani

STATELINE

Twenty-eight-year-old Michaela Bonner has been working 12-hour shifts as an emergency medical technician in Norfolk, Virginia, for the past four years, while attending and paying for college to finish her prerequisites for medical school.

But now that President Donald Trump’s signature tax and spending law bars students from borrowing more than \$50,000 annually in unsubsidized federal loans for medical school, Bonner is worried her dream of becoming a doctor is financially out of reach.

“I get told, ‘Well, we really need you. We have a physician shortage, and you’ve done all this work

leading up to this point,’ and that’s true as well, and it’s not that I want to quit,” Bonner said in a recent interview. “But there are no systems in place that I can rely on to support me now that I can’t take out the full cost of living through loans.”

The tax and spending law includes provisions that significantly alter the student loan process for higher education. The law halts current student loan repayment plans for loans that are granted on or after July 1, 2026. On that date, the law also terminates Grad PLUS loans, which have helped people pay for their higher education degrees and total cost of attendance. Current borrowers will be grandfathered in.

The federal law gives current borrowers enrolled in loan repayment plans for students based on income — such as those plans known as SAVE or IBR — until July 1, 2028, to switch to a new plan. Interest collection will resume Aug. 1 for students enrolled in the Biden-era SAVE plan.

At the same time, medical or law school students hoping to get unsubsidized federal loans — in which the borrower is responsible for paying the interest at all times rather than the government — will only be able to borrow \$20,000 per year, with a \$200,000 lifetime cap. Those seeking advanced degrees in areas such as history or philosophy have a \$100,000 lifetime cap.

Please see **US STUDENT** | 3B

# Small but mighty Ford Maverick Lobo is a turbocharged quality transporter

Continued from page 1B

really became intrusive, even under hard acceleration. Enough power was there to maneuver through any kind of traffic. I had enough power to pass and then some.

Negotiating fast-paced jaunts was a breeze and it always seemed exit and entry ramps were easy to reach without drama.

The Lobo’s suspension is sports tuned for better handling. You can corner aggressively and turn sharply without paying a price. The transmission reacts quickly but the standard paddle shifters will allow you to have a lot of fun.

The ride quality was surprising. It felt more car-like than truck-like. The 19-inch wheels didn’t seem to spoil a firm, but comfortable ride. The cabin remains relatively quiet on all surfaces. Wind and engine noise was minimal. The optional Bang and Olufsen 12-speaker audio system had lots of punch and clarity.

The Lobo trim comes with a lot of stuff, but a \$5,500 package added sunroof, up-

graded stereo, all-weather floor liners, spray on bed liner, acoustic windshield, Navigation, power sliding rear window and dual-zone climate control (which blew ice-cold in this unmerciful heat.

The tricked-out Maverick Lobo came to \$41,425. Destination charges were \$1,695. The as-tested price came to \$43,120. You could do fine with the base version for about \$33,000.

This may be the most fun you can have in a compact truck.

Pro:

- Bigger touch screen
- Lobo trim package
- 2.0-liter engine is a beast
- Lots of standard equipment
- Good towing capacity
- Great fuel economy even with up-graded engine
- Sporty suspension
- Sporty handling

Cons:

- Cramped interior
- Lots of hard plastic



# US student loan caps might worsen doctor shortage

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The average yearly cost of medical school for the 2024-25 academic year ranged from around \$42,000 to \$72,000, depending on whether the school was private or public and whether the student was a resident or nonresident, according to the Association of American Medical Colleges.

Some congressional Republicans say that students need to be working harder to pay for higher education, like medical school, on their own. Others say the caps put the onus back on colleges and universities to rein in the rising cost of tuition. But critics of this legislation say the loan caps are only going to harm students, especially from lower-income backgrounds, and will exacerbate physician shortages.

In recent years states have tried to ease physician shortages by implementing various policy solutions. Since 2023, at least nine states have made it easier for doctors trained in other countries to get medical licenses. States have also participated in interstate licensing compacts, allowing nurses and physician assistants to travel across state lines to work, so long as they are licensed in one state within

the compact.

For student loan relief, more than 20 states have enacted legislation to address student loan forgiveness, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures, a group that tracks states policies. Georgia passed a measure that will expand a cancelable loan program for physicians working in rural and underserved areas. Idaho also created the Rural Nursing Loan Repayment Program, offering nurses \$25,000 in forgivable loans after three years of service in a rural area.

McKenzie Richards, a health care policy fellow at the conservative think tank Cicero Institute who has been studying the pace of physician shortages, told Stateline that the national physician shortage could potentially exceed 100,000 by 2034. At the end of 2024 that projected number was closer to 64,000 physicians.

Richards said states will be looking toward more policy solutions should the student loan changes exacerbate physician shortages.

"We know what's going to be happening coming down the line in just five years, so I think policies that states can adopt to get out of this are really important to be looking at now,"

she said.

"The hope is that by capping [federal loans], it will encourage schools to lower tuition prices," Richards added. "Then maybe they need to be admitting more students, which would have a great downstream effect for getting more doctors through."

Other students will be in the same boat, said Lesley Turner, an associate professor of public policy at the University of Chicago and an economist.

"This is going to hit some students worse than others," Turner told Stateline. "Those [students] in more expensive programs tend to borrow more, and so for those students they will need to return to private student loans or other ways of financing their graduate education."

Many students were already questioning their capacity to go to medical school before the student

loan caps, said Shannon Jimenez, dean of the Arkansas College of Osteopathic Medicine.

"I expect that this bill, this cap, is going to push people out of primary care and into specialties to help pay off those higher interest rate loans," Jimenez told Stateline. She added that caps will likely deter students from lower socioeconomic statuses from going into primary care — important in places like Arkansas, where she says there is a "maldistribution of physicians."

"Many schools like us try to attract those students, because they're more likely to go into primary care and serve in underserved areas. So it's going to tie our hands in a lot of ways."

Large states and more rural states will feel the gaps more deeply, said Richards, of the Cicero Institute. Louisiana, for example, is projected to be

short almost 5,000 doctors from a variety of specialties by 2030, including close to 400 primary care doctors. Already more than a third of Louisiana physicians are close to retirement age — similar to the situation in neighboring Arkansas.

As for whether schools will just be able to lower tuition, Jimenez said, "it makes no sense."

"We still function in a somewhat market-driven economy and have to compete with other schools around us, so our cost is based mostly on what we have to pay our faculty, and that's not going to go down," she said. The annual cost of attendance at her school is between \$80,000 and \$85,000.

Bonner, the EMT, holds a political communications degree from Regent University and now is studying biomedical sciences at Old Dominion University.

She already has \$20,000 in loans, she said, and for the rest of college tuition, she has paid out of pocket. Since she's supporting herself, she hasn't been able to save much.

She'd planned to take the medical school entrance exam next spring, but now worries about how she'd pay for living expenses while attending. "Medical school scheduling doesn't allow for working, so you have to take out loans for living expenses," she said.

"A lot of people, I feel, would be panicked if you had worked for eight to 10 years of your life and found out that all the systems that you were banking on in a really academically challenging space are disappearing," Bonner said.

"I don't see a path forward for certain, but I'm fighting to make one."

## Sick? In Kennedy's view, it might be your fault

By Stephanie Armour

KFF HEALTH NEWS

On a recent weekday evening, Ashly Richards helped her 13-year-old son, Case, with homework. He did math problems and some reading, underscoring how much he's accomplished at his school for children with autism.

Richards has heard Trump administration officials suggest that food dyes and pediatric vaccines cause autism and ADHD. That stance, she said, unfairly blames parents.

"There's no evidence to support it," said Richards, 44, a marketing director in Richmond, Virginia. "As a parent, it's infuriating."

In their zeal to "Make America Healthy Again," Trump administration officials are making statements that some advocacy and medical groups say depict patients and the doctors who treat them as partly responsible for whatever ails them.

Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and agency leaders have attributed a panoply of chronic diseases and other medical issues — such as autism, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, depression, diabetes, and obesity — to consumers and their lifestyle choices, according to a review of 15 hours of recorded interviews, social media statements, and federal reports.

He said at a news conference on April 16 that autism is preventable and that rates are rising because of toxic substances in the environment, despite a lack of evidence there is any link.

"These are kids who will never pay taxes. They'll never hold a job. They'll never play baseball. They'll never write a poem. They'll never go out on a date," he said. "Many of them will never use a toilet unassisted."

The vast majority of people on the spectrum do not have those severe challenges.

The statements are more than rhetoric. These attitudes, ranging from judgments about individual behaviors to criticism of the chronically poor, are shaping policies that affect millions of people. The sentiments have been a factor behind decisions to cut Medicaid, keep federal insurance programs from covering anti-obesity drugs, and impose new barriers to covid vaccines for healthy people, say public health leaders and doctors. GOP lawmakers and federal health officials, they say, hold a reproachful stance toward chronic illnesses and the estimated 129 million people in the U.S. affected by them.

"This is at the heart of so much of our national problem with health," said Robert Califf, who led the Food and Drug Administration during the Obama and Biden administrations. "It's these two extreme views. It's every health decision is up to the 'rugged individual,' versus the other extreme view that it's all controlled by environment and social determinants of health. The truth is, it's on a continuum."

### The blame game

Self-reliance is a common theme among adherents of MAHA, an informal movement for which Kennedy has fashioned himself the figurehead that promotes medical freedom, skepticism of vaccines, and a focus on nontraditional medicine to treat disease.

Taking medication to manage diabetes? FDA Commissioner Marty Makary suggested on Fox News in late May that it would be effective to "treat more diabetes with cooking classes" instead of "just throwing insulin at people."

People with Type 1 diabetes must take insulin because their pancreases don't produce it, according to the National Institutes of Health, which also notes that many with Type 2 diabetes "need to take diabetes medicines as well."

Taking birth control pills? Casey Means, President Donald Trump's nominee to be U.S. surgeon general, has said that's a "disrespect of life" for short-term gain and efficiency.

"We are prescribing them like candy," she said last year on "The Tucker Carlson Show," adding that birth control medications "are literally shutting down the hormones in the female body that create this cyclical, life-giving nature of women."

Have a child on ADHD meds? Calley Means, who is an adviser to Kennedy and is Casey Means' brother, said on the same show that Adderall is prescribed as the standard of care when children get a little fidgety because they're in sedentary environments with limited sunlight and eat too much ultraprocessed food.

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Mecklenburg County requests a Statement-of-Qualifications from interested engineering firms to provide Building and Envelope Commissioning Services for multiple upcoming projects. The firm(s) selected will serve as an independent (third party) testing and inspection agent(s) for Mecklenburg County during the construction of the project.

The Firm(s) selected must be NC licensed, qualified and have experience providing these services in accordance with ASTM, NC State Building Code, and Mecklenburg County Code Enforcement Standards.

A copy of the complete RFQ may be obtained by sending an official **Notification-of-Interest** via mail or email to: Steven Wallace, Mecklenburg County Asset & Facility Management, 3205 Freedom Drive, Suite 6000, Charlotte, NC 2820.8

Email:

Submittals must be received by Asset & Facility Management by **Tuesday, September 9, 2025, at 2:00pm.**

Upon request, this information will be made available in an alternate format for persons with disabilities by calling 980-314-2500.

**REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS  
Construction Manager at Risk Services  
for the  
ImaginOn Systems Replacements & Renovation**  
Mecklenburg County, North Carolina

The Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County is requesting the submission of Statement of Qualifications (SOQ) from interested firms for Construction Manager at Risk (CM@R) services for ImaginOn located in Mecklenburg County.

The Firm selected must be NC licensed, qualified and have experience providing these services in accordance with NC State Building Code and Mecklenburg County Code Enforcement Standards.

A copy of the complete RFQ may be obtained by sending an official **Notification-of-Interest via mail:**

**Mecklenburg County, Asset & Facility Management,  
3205 Freedom Drive, Suite 6000, Charlotte, NC  
28208 Attn: Becky Miller, AIA**

**OR Email: AFM.RFQ@mecklenburgcountync.gov**  
Submittals of Qualifications must be received by Asset & Facility Management by **Tuesday, September 16, 2025 at 2:00pm.**

Upon request, this information will be made available in an alternate format for persons with disabilities by calling 980-314-2500.

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LEGAL NOTICES



INLIVIAN NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

**ACTION:** Notice of public comment period and public hearing.

**SUMMARY:** INLIVIAN has released a draft of the *Amendments to the FY2025 Administrative Plan*

INLIVIAN is proposing amendments to its FY2025 Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Administrative Plan. The Administrative Plan outlines policies and procedures for the operation of the HCV Program in accordance with federal regulations. The proposed changes include updates to program policies to align with current HUD guidance, improve program operations, and enhance service delivery to participants and landlords.

**PUBLIC COMMENT:** The public comment period begins August 4, 2025, and ends September 3, 2025.

Written comments will be accepted via email at [tcouch@inlivan.com](mailto:tcouch@inlivan.com).

**PUBLIC HEARING:** The public hearing will be held virtually and via the phone on August 12, 2025, at 5:30 p.m. To join the public hearing or to sign up to speak on this matter, please contact the INLIVIAN Customer Service Call Center at 704-336-5183.

To access the draft plan in person, please visit the INLIVIAN Administrative Office located at 400 East Boulevard and all INLIVIAN/Blue Horizon managed properties (by request) beginning August 4, 2025.

To access the draft plan online, visit the INLIVIAN website at [www.INLIVIAN.com](http://www.INLIVIAN.com) under Housing Choice Voucher: <https://www.inlivan.com/housing-choice-voucher/>.

**REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION REQUESTS:** INLIVIAN is committed to providing equal access to this event for all participants and residents with disabilities. If you need a reasonable accommodation or sign language interpreter service, please contact our ADA/504/Language Department at 704-336-8413 to initiate a request. Please allow at least 3 business days to make the necessary arrangements. If you need a foreign language translator, please contact our ADA/504/Language Department at 704-336-8413. Please allow at least 5 business days to make the necessary arrangements.

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# What to know about public broadcasting funding cuts

By Audrey McAvoy  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The Corporation for Public Broadcasting, which helps pay for PBS, NPR, 1,500 local radio and television stations as well as programs like “Sesame Street” and “Finding Your Roots,” said Friday that it would close after the U.S. government withdrew funding.

The organization told employees that most staff positions will end with the fiscal year on Sept. 30. A small transition team will stay until January to finish any remaining work.

The private, nonprofit corporation was founded in 1968 shortly after Congress authorized its formation. It now ends nearly six decades of fueling the production of renowned educational programming, cultural content and emergency alerts about natural disasters.

Here’s what to know:

### Losing funding

President Donald Trump signed a bill on July 24 canceling about \$1.1 billion that had been approved for public broadcasting. The White House says the public media system is politically biased and an unnecessary expense, and conservatives have particularly directed their ire at NPR and PBS.

Lawmakers with large rural constituencies voiced concern about what the cuts could mean for some local public stations in their state. They warned some stations will have to close.

The Senate Appropriations Committee reinforced the policy change by excluding funding for the corporation for the first time in more than 50 years as part of a broader spending bill.

### How it began

Congress passed legislation creating the body in 1967, several years after then-Federal Communications Commission Chairman Newton Minow described commercial television a “vast wasteland” and called for programming in the public interest.

The corporation doesn’t produce programming and it doesn’t own, operate or control any public broadcasting stations. The corporation, PBS, NPR are independent of each other as are local public television and radio stations.

### Rural stations hit hard

Roughly 70% of the corporation’s money went directly to 330 PBS and 246 NPR stations across the country. The cuts are expected to weigh most heavily on smaller public media outlets away from big cities, and it’s likely some won’t survive. NPR’s president estimated as many as 80 NPR stations may close in the next year.

Mississippi Public Broadcasting has already decided to eliminate a streaming channel that airs children’s program-

Please see **WHAT TO** | 6B

## «BOOK REVIEW

# ‘Victory ‘45’ chronicles the road to ending World War II

By Douglass K. Daniel  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Most wars begin with a unilateral act. Americans fired “the shot heard round the world” in Lexington in 1775, the Germans invaded Poland in 1939, and the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor in 1941. To call off a war, however, the belligerents must agree to terms and conditions, a collaborative and convoluted process.

In the popular imagination, World War II concluded in 1945 with the deaths of Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini in Europe, and the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan. As historians James Holland and Al Murray chronicle in their finely detailed book “Victory ‘45: The End of the War in Eight Surrenders,” those events alone were not capable of halting the colossal military might unleashed over the previous six years.

Consider how the ultimate aim of the Allies — unconditional surrender as set in a joint declaration — contrasted with the Nazi blood oath calling for a “1,000-year Reich or Armageddon.” President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill, meeting in Casablanca in January 1943, outlined the strategic, political, and moral clarity necessary to fight a global conflict. By spring 1945 Hitler and his supporters were rotting in his Berlin bunker.

Please see **VICTORY** | 6B



KONSTANTINOS HASANDRAS | UNSPLASH

If you’re curious about the source of your music, lyrics and album art, you can go to the source by going directly to the artist or a third-party service to determine authenticity.

# Is that song AI-generated? Some things to check out

There are methods to determine if your tunes are original or artificial

By Kelvin Chan  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

LONDON — Is it The Velvet Underground or Velvet Sundown?

The fictitious rock group, Velvet Sundown, which comes complete with AI-generated music, lyrics and album art, is stoking debate about how the new technology is blurring the line between the real and synthetic in the music industry, and whether creators should be transparent with their audience.

Computer software is widely used in music production, and artificial intelligence is just the latest tool that disc jockeys, music producers and others have added to their production pipeline. But the rise of AI song generators such as Suno and Udio is set to transform the industry because they allow anyone to create songs with just a few prompts.

While some people do not care whether they’re listening to AI-generated music, others might be curious to know.

If you encounter a new song that leaves you wondering whether it’s 100% made with AI, there are some methods that could reveal how it was created.

### Do a background check

If you’re wondering who’s behind a song, try some old-fashioned detective work.

The “most obvious cues” come from “external factors,” said Manuel Mousallam, head of research and development at streaming service Deezer.

Does the band or artist have social media accounts? Lack of a social presence might indicate there’s no

one there. If they do exist online, examine the kind of content they post, and how long it goes back.

Is there any sign that the artist or band exists in real life? Are there any upcoming concerts and can you buy a ticket for a gig? Is there footage of past concerts on YouTube? Has an established record label released their singles or albums?

Try going to the source. Song creators often — but not always — publish their generated tunes on the Suno or Udio platforms, where they can be found by other users.

The catch is that you’ll have to sign up for an account to get access. Users can look up songs by track name or the creator’s handle, and browse genres and playlists. But it can still be difficult to spot a song, especially if you don’t know the name of the song or creator.

### Song tags

Deezer has been flagging albums containing AI-generated songs, as part of its efforts to be more transparent as it battles streaming fraudsters looking to make quick money through royalty payments.

The Deezer app and website will notify listeners with an on-screen label — “AI-generated content” — to point out that some tracks on an album were created with song generators.

The company’s CEO says the system relies on in-house technology to detect subtle but recognizable patterns found in all audio created by AI song generators. The company hasn’t specified how many songs it has tagged since it rolled out the feature in June, but says up to 18% of

songs uploaded to its platform each day are AI-generated.

### Song scanners

There are a few third-party services available online that promise to determine whether a song is human-made or generated by AI.

I uploaded a few songs I generated to the online detector from IRCAM Amplify, a subsidiary of French music and sound research institute IRCAM. It said the probability that they were AI-generated ranged from 81.8% to 98% and accurately deduced that they were made with Suno.

As a cross-check, I also uploaded some old MP3s from my song library, which got a very low AI probability score.

But a handful of results shouldn’t be taken as a sign of overall accuracy. “The AI detector can make mistakes. It is recommended to verify the results,” the detector warns.

The drawback with IRCAM’s tool is that you can’t paste links to songs, so you can’t check tunes that you can only hear on a streaming service.

There are a few other websites that let you both upload song files and paste Spotify links for analysis, but they have their own limitations. When I tried them out for this story, the results were either inconclusive or flagged some AI songs as human-made and vice versa.

### Check the lyrics

AI song tools can churn out both music and lyrics. Many serious users like to write their own words and plug them in because they’ve discovered that AI-generated lyrics tend to be bad.

Please see **IS THAT** | 6B

## «MOVIE REVIEW

# ‘The Naked Gun’ misses mark by a long shot

By Dwight Brown  
BLACK PRESS USA

### The Naked Gun

2 stars

“The Naked Gun” is shooting blanks. Not all the time. But some of the time. There was something so fresh and funny about police detective Frank Drebin in 1988’s “The Naked Gun: From the Files of Police Squad!” He was an oddball, thickskulled dufus. A character Canadian/American actor Leslie Nielsen played completely deadpan and locked and loaded for comedy. Drebin became a bumbling idiot that audiences loved.

They howled at him so much the film became a trilogy. Nielsen was a dramatic actor (“The Poseidon Adventure”) whose career veered towards outrageous comedy when he starred in “Airplane,” arguably the funniest film ever made. But “The Naked Gun” series took him to comedy heaven to live among the greats.

The Oscar-nominated and very serious actor Liam Neeson (“Schindler’s List”) took his career down a different path too. He became an action film star (“Taken”) who was laconic and deadly: “I will look for you, I will find you, and I will kill you.”

Maybe after all the dramas, thrillers and action movies, he needed some comic relief, too. Not a bad idea. Not a bad performance. He’s comical consistently on screen, even when the rest of the film loses its way.

A bank is being robbed in broad daylight. Cops, who’ve surrounded the



PARAMOUNT PICTURES

Liam Neeson stars in “The Naked Gun” as police detective Frank Drebin, a role made famous by Leslie Nielsen in the 1980s franchise.

building, are trying to create an action plan. Some little girl, in a plaid skirt with big brown eyes who might be on recess from a local Catholic school, skips along down a sidewalk next to the building.

She looks a lot like Jenny Ortega from the Netflix horror series “Wednesday.” She saunters into the bank, where everyone is affright, except for the robbers. All eyes turn to her. But she isn’t who they think she is. Next thing you know, a weird detective named Frank Drebin (Neeson) is fighting the

bad guys.

It isn’t long before Frank’s boss Chief Davis (CCH Pounder) is chewing him out and warning him to stay off a case involving a suicide that might be a murder. But Frank is moved by the victim’s sultry sister Beth (Pamela Anderson), who thinks there’s been foul play.

The plotting by Dan Gregor (“Chip ‘n Dale: Rescue Rangers”), Doug Mand (“Chip ‘n Dale: Rescue Rangers”) and writer/director Akiva Shaffer (“Chip ‘n Dale: Rescue Rangers” and TV’s “Sat-

Please see **THE NAKED** | 6B



# Is that song AI? Some things to check out

**Continued from page 5B**

Casual users, though, might prefer to just let the machine write them. So bad rhyming schemes or repetitive lyrical structures might be a clue that a song is not man-made. But it's subjective.

Some users report that Suno tends to use certain words in its lyrics like "neon," "shadows" or "whispers."

If a song includes these words, it's "a dead giveaway" that it's AI, said Lukas Rams, a Philadelphia-area resident. He has used Suno to create three albums for his AI band Sleeping with Wolves but writes his own lyrics. "I don't know why, it loves to put neon in everything."

**No easy answers**

AI technology is improving so quickly that there's no foolproof way to determine if content is real or not and experts say you can't just rely on your ear.

"In general, it can be difficult to tell if a track is AI-generated just from listening, and it's only becoming more challenging as the technology gets increasingly advanced," said Mousallam of Deezer. "Generative models such as Suno and Udio are constantly changing, meaning that old identifiers - such as vocals having a distinctive reverb - are not necessarily valid anymore."

# What to know about public broadcasting funding cuts

**Continued from page 5B**

ming like "Caillou" and "Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood" 24 hours a day.

Maine's public media system is looking at a hit of \$2.5 million, or about 12% of its budget, for the next fiscal year. The state's rural residents rely heavily on public media for weather updates and disaster alerts.

In Kodiak, Alaska, KMXT estimated the cuts would slice 22% from its budget. Public radio stations in the sprawling, heavily rural state often provide not just news but alerts about natural disasters like tsunamis, landslides and volcanic eruptions.

**From Big Bird to war documentaries**

The first episode of "Sesame Street" aired in 1969. Child viewers, adults and guest stars alike were instantly hooked. Over the decades, characters from Big Bird to Cookie Monster and Elmo have become household favorites

Entertainer Carol Burnett appeared on that inaugural episode. She told The Associated Press she was a big fan.

"I would have done anything they wanted me to do," she said. "I loved being exposed to all that goodness and humor."

Sesame Street said in May it would also get some help from a Netflix streaming deal.

Harvard professor Henry Louis Gates Jr. started "Finding Your Roots" in 2006 under the title "African American Lives." He invited prominent Black celebrities and traced their family trees into slavery. When the paper trail ran out, they would use DNA to see which ethnic group they were from in Africa.

Challenged by a viewer to open the show to non-Black celebrities, Gates agreed and the series was renamed "Faces of America," which had to be changed again after the name was taken.

The show is PBS's most-watched program on linear TV and the most-streamed non-drama program. Season 10 reached nearly 18 million people across linear and digital platforms and also received its first Emmy nomination.

Grant money from the nonprofit has

also funded lesser-known food, history, music and other shows created by stations across the country.

Documentarian Ken Burns, celebrated for creating the documentaries "The Civil War," "Baseball" and "The Vietnam War", told PBS NewsHour said the corporation accounted for about 20% of his films' budgets. He said he would make it up but projects receiving 50% to 75% of their funding from the organization won't.

**Influence of shows**

Children's programing in the 1960s was made up of shows like "Captain Kangaroo," "Romper Room" and the violent skirmishes between "Tom & Jerry." "Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood" mostly taught social skills.

"Sesame Street" was designed by education professionals and child psychologists to help low-income and minority students aged 2-5 overcome some of the deficiencies they had when entering school. Social scientists had long noted white and higher income kids were often better prepared.

One of the most widely cited studies about the impact of "Sesame Street" compared households that got the show with those who didn't. It found that the children exposed to "Sesame Street" were 14% more likely to be enrolled in the correct grade level for their age at middle and high school.

Over the years, "Finding Your Roots" showed Natalie Morales discovering she's related to one of the legendary pirates of the Caribbean and former "Saturday Night Live" star Andy Samberg finding his biological grandmother and grandfather. It revealed that drag queen RuPaul and U.S. Sen. Cory Booker are cousins, as are actors Meryl Streep and Eva Longoria.

"The two subliminal messages of 'Finding Your Roots,' which are needed more urgently today than ever, is that what has made America great is that we're a nation of immigrants," Gates told the AP. "And secondly, at the level of the genome, despite our apparent physical differences, we're 99.99% the same."

# ‘Victory ‘45’ chronicles winding road to the end of World War II

**Continued from page 5B**

Holland and Murray use the bunker setting — depicted in the 2004 German film "Downfall" featuring a meme-able Hitler tirade — as the predicate for the multiple European surrenders to come. If rehashing Hitler's suicide, in April 1945, early in the book seems anti-climactic, "Victory '45" justifies itself by moving on to the unsung but equally dramatic tales of those who navigated the confusion of a war that was won but hardly finished.

The first significant capitulation began weeks earlier when two backstabbing rivals in the Nazi SS high command in Northern Italy separately schemed to save their own postwar skins. Their intrigues delayed the first of Europe's unconditional surrenders, limited to their sector, signed just a day before Hitler's demise. A recurring motif was the futile attempts by the Germans to only yield to the West in hopes of splintering the Allies and escaping Soviet vengeance.

While Holland and Murray include brief profiles of famous politicians and commanders as further European surrender ceremonies were staged and announced, "Victory '45"

finds its relevance and poignancy when it directs its focus downward. There, ordinary individuals journeyed to the intersections of triumph and despair, relief and revulsion.

Examples include the Jewish-American college student haunted by the atrocities at a slave compound in Austria seized by his Army unit. Those rescued included a Jewish-Czech teen who lied about his age to avoid extermination at Auschwitz and joined his father in surviving stints at multiple camps.

Liberation was punctuated by grief just days later in a makeshift hospital when his father died in his arms.

On the Eastern Front, a young female translator in Soviet military intelligence was integral to a search in Germany's devastated capital. Were the reports of the Fuhrer's death Nazi disinformation? She interrogated captured witnesses, attended the autopsy of the burned corpse, and was even given custody of the teeth that were eventually confirmed as Hitler's.

Not much further west, a bedraggled teenage German conscript who did escape Berlin's aftermath

lived on the run until captured by a Russian soldier who simply told him, "War is over! All go home!"

Turning to the Pacific Theater, "Victory '45" examines the grim prospect the Western Allies faced in "unconditionally" conquering a warrior ethos in Japan, epitomized by their civilians' suicidal resistance to the Allied invasion of Okinawa. The necessity of the atomic bombings was proven by the attempted military coup staged by high-ranking Japanese holdouts who wanted to defy Emperor Hirohito's orders and continue fighting despite the threat of nuclear annihilation.

Not simply targeted to WWII enthusiasts, "Victory '45" illustrates for those with a broader historical interest the myriad challenges in bringing to heel the dogs of war. Brits Holland and Murray cannot be expected to quote Yankee baseball legend Yogi Berra, but their book deftly explains 80 years later why in war as well as sports, "It ain't over 'til it's over."

*Douglass K. Daniel is the author of "Kill — Do Not Release: Censored Marine Corps Stories from World War II" (Fordham University Press).*



GETTY IMAGES

Charlamagne Tha God was slammed by President Donald Trump for criticizing Trump's policy.

# Trump attacks Charlamagne Tha God after TV criticism

By Matthew Daly  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump on Sunday lashed out at radio host Charlamagne Tha God, saying in a social media post that the popular broadcaster "knows nothing about me or what I have done."

Trump's comments came a day after Charlamagne, whose real name is Lenard McKelvey, criticized Trump on the Fox News show "My View with Lara Trump." The show is hosted by the president's daughter-in-law, a former co-chair of the Republican National Committee.

Asked how he would rate Trump's presidency, the radio host said, "I wouldn't give it a good rating simply because the least of us are still being impacted the worst."

Trump said on Truth Social that Charlamagne, a native of Monck's corner, South Carolina, was a "dope" who voted for Democratic Vice President Kamala Harris.

Charlamagne said he personally will benefit from tax breaks approved in Trump's tax-and-spending law, but said, "There's going to be so many

people that's hurt by that bill."

"Anything that takes away Medicaid from people and will put people in a worse financial situation than they were previously in, I'm not for," he added.

Charlamagne also predicted that "traditional conservatives" are going to take back the Republican Party from Trump's Make America Great Again movement, citing controversy over Trump's refusal to release files related to disgraced financier and convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

"I think there's a political coup going on right now in the Republican Party that people aren't paying attention to," Charlamagne said. "I think this Epstein thing is going to be a way for traditional conservatives to take their party back. I really do. I think that they know this is the issue that has gotten the base riled up, the MAGA base isn't letting this issue go and for the first time they can probably take their party back and not [upset] the MAGA base. I think they're going to do that."

The Epstein case has dominated news coverage

in recent weeks after the Justice Department said it will not be releasing any additional documents from the Epstein sex trafficking investigation. The decision has infuriated online sleuths, conspiracy theorists and elements of Trump's base who had hoped to see proof of a government cover-up.

Officials have said Epstein killed himself in his New York jail cell while awaiting trial in 2019, but his case has generated endless attention and conspiracy theories because of his links to famous people, including Trump and other billionaires.

Trump on social media called Charlamagne a "racist sleazebag" and criticized his use of God in his professional nickname.

"Can anyone imagine the uproar there would be if I used that nickname?" Trump asked.

Charlamagne, who co-hosts a nationally syndicated radio show, "The Breakfast Club," told Lara Trump that his criticism of the Republican president was not new, adding that he "gave President Biden the same hell" when he didn't think the Democrat was doing a good job.

# ‘The Naked Gun’ misses mark

**Continued from page 5B**

urday Night Live") is serviceable. As if they were tasked with reviving a famously funny comedy franchise and given only one weekend to write it. Their recipe? String together satiric pop culture sketches and bits, showcase physical pranks, go heavy on sight-gag humor and then stir.

For a while what's on view is funny to watch. But somewhere, sometime, it all runs out of gas. Like there weren't enough comedy bullets in the chamber.

The storyline, thin as it is, involves bad guys doing bad things and Frank trying to unravel a mystery. In some cases, that alone would surely be enough to satisfy audiences who show up at theaters looking for a good laugh. But in this case, a bit more of thought-out script and wittier schtick would have helped this 85-minute film feel like every second had a comic purpose. Which isn't the case.

The dialogue is never as funny as the visuals, it lags. When Frank interrogates one of the bank robbers, as played by Busta Rhymes, whose timing is impeccable, the film gets its funniest lines. Frank brings up the crook's history and his past incarceration: "It says you served 20 years for man's laughter."

Without breaking his face, Rhymes corrects him, "You mean manslaughter." It's the film's most hilarious exchange and deftly shows how stupid Frank is. Wish there were more scenes of this caliber.

Many will debate which visual prank is best. But easily the most memorable image is Neeson with his leg up on a chair, manspreading and showing his strawberry print bikini underwear. The crotch shot and short plaid skirt are parody homages to Ortega on the streaming show "Wednesday".

Funny in itself. Funnier still if you know the correlation. Long after all the senseless fights, torn limbs and endless passing of coffee cups. Long after the faux heat sensor sequence that looks like folks

are having sex, noisy fart scenes and views of O.J. Simpson photos, that Neeson vision will linger. It's hard to unsee it. Seek psychological help if you must.

Neeson took a risk playing this loser. Safe to say he's pretty good at it and it looks like he's having fun. Anderson is fine as the woman of mystery, but you almost wish there was more to her character. A dimension that would make the plot a bit deeper.

Paul Walter Hauser ("Black Bird") as Frank's cherub-looking sidekick plays him well. Danny Huston sneers well as the bad guy and Liza Koshy is quite helpful as Detective Barns.

The production design (Bill Brzeski) and all sets are more suitable for TV than the cinema. Ditto the costumes (Betsy Heilmann and Maria Tortu) and blaring lighting (cinematographer Brandon Trost), which makes everything look fake. The musical score (Lorne Balfé) doesn't enhance much.

Perhaps a catchy playlist of today's top music awkwardly placed to make things feel more absurd might have been a better tact.

Editor Brian Scott Olds had a tough task. The script, as is, doesn't warrant an 85-minute length. But if the footage was any shorter, it wouldn't be fit for a theater run. And if it was any longer, it would only make the film's flaws more obvious. He did the best he could with what he had.

Better writing may have helped this OK satire become a really good one. Something closer to the feel of the original film, but likely never in the league of superior parodies, like "Airplane."

If filmmakers are looking for laugh-your-guts-out comedy, they will find some of that here. But since the humor is not consistent and sustained, it's like "The Naked Gun" is shooting blanks. Not all the time. But some of the time.

*Visit film critic Dwight Brown at DwightBrownInk.com.*

