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Justin Moore | CBS 17

Mia Gonzalez-Swinton embraces the casket holding the body of her husband, Army Sgt. Michael Swinton, upon arrival at Fort Bragg in July. Swinton was killed in Iraq during a controlled detonation of an Iranian drone.

Iran war hits NC families

Aside from global uncertainty, there's the human cost of combat casualties

By Ashleigh Fields
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

The effects of the Iran war have rapidly spread across the Middle East and its impact close to home.

While President Donald Trump's appointees promote vigor and valor regarding service members, others are left mourning the fate of their loved ones stationed overseas without a predictable return date.

Sgt. Michael Emmanuel Swinton, 30, of Fayetteville is one of the casualties. He was killed in Iraq during a controlled detonation of a downed Iranian drone the same July weekend that three other service members were killed in Jordan during an Iranian drone attack.

Swinton posthumously received a

Bronze Star, Purple Heart and Combat Action Badge, and will be promoted to staff sergeant.

His wife is still mourning. "It's been two months since you were taken from us," Mia Gonzalez-Swinton of Spring Lake, North Carolina, wrote in a post on Facebook. "63 days without hearing your voice or seeing your face. You were taken from us 19 days after your 30th birthday. Our anniversary is 11 days away. There are so many dates coming up that you were supposed to be here for. So many moments I never imagined having to face without you. I still catch myself wanting to call you, tell you something, send you a picture, or hear what you think. "I miss being your wife in all the every-

day ways. I miss our routines, our conversations, the little things that felt so normal at the time. I would give anything to have one more ordinary day with you. Two months somehow feels like forever and no time at all."

Gonzalez-Swinton has been caring for their 4-year-old daughter alone since her husband's passing.

In addition to the casualties - at least 14 dead, according to the Department of Defense - North Carolinians are feeling the war's effects seven months after the United States and Israel launched coordinated attacks: gas prices are spiking

Please see **IRAN** | 2A



Swinton

Housing chief Meachem retiring effective Sept. 25

By Herbert L. White
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Charlotte's housing authority is looking for a new leader.



Meachem

President and chief executive Fulton Meachem, who has led Inlivan since 2012, is retiring effective Sept. 25. The quasi-public real estate holding agency underwent a branding transition from Charlotte Housing Authority in 2019 to reflect its wider focus on community development through housing, economic opportunity, employment and education.

"It has been one of the great privileges of my career to serve the residents and communities of Charlotte and to work alongside so many talented and dedicated people," Meachem said in a statement. "As I retire, I do so with tremendous gratitude and pride

Please see **INLIVIAN** | 2A

NC postal workers back mail-in ballot access with television ad

By Cameron Williams
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North Carolina postal workers are supporting access to mail-in voting. The American Postal Workers Union debuted the 30-second spot, which explain the importance of mail-in ballots to voters who use it. The commercial ends with the message, "Vote by mail — keep it, protect it, expand it."

"I love the ad," said Miriam Bell, Charlotte branch president of the American Postal Workers Union which represents 200,000 United States Postal Service employees. "It's real. It's relatable. I love the fact that these are real people, real volunteers. They're not actors. These are nurses, firefighters, etc. It's just relatable. It

is relatable to everyday people, the exact people who are using mail-in voting."

North Carolina was the first state to mail midterm election ballots earlier this month and on Sept. 15 the U.S. Supreme Court barred the USPS from creating rule changes to mail-in voting, which would impact millions of Americans. President Donald Trump signed an executive order in March directing USPS to prohibit sending ballots to voters not on a federal list.

The U.S. Constitution leaves states to decide how elections are carried out, including the policy method.

Mail-in voting has been utilized since the Civil War. In 2024, 1 in 3 voters - more than 48 million Amer-

Please see **POSTAL** | 3A

Toll deal makes do with bad situation

Council votes for I-77 South project with a state benefits package

By Herbert L. White
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Toll lanes are back on the road to certainty along I-77 South.

Charlotte City Council voted 7-4 Monday to rejoin the project during a heated public debate. Council members Joi Mayo and Malcolm Graham - whose districts will be directly impacted by construction - sided with Dimple Ajmera, Dante Anderson, Ed Driggs, Mayor Pro Tem James Mitchell and Kimberly Owens.

The city will enter into a memorandum of agreement with the North Carolina Department of Transportation to craft a binding community benefits plan that commits at least \$300 million generated to impacted neighborhoods through a public-private partnership.

Fifty speakers signed up for public comment, with the majority opposing the initiative. Council proponents cited the creation of legally binding contracts with the North Carolina Department of Transportation to funnel \$300 million in community benefits and the threat of nearly \$70 million in fines and loss of state and federal funding.

Please see **TOLL** | 2A

'Complete chaos' with CMS ouster of Supt. Hill

Y'ALL WEEKLY

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education voted 5-4 on Sept. 22 to terminate the contract of Superintendent Crystal Hill, ending her tenure as the school district's chief executive.

Board members Charlitta Hatch, Liz Monterrey-Duval, Shamaie Haynes voted to remove Hill, joining now-former chair Stephanie Sneed and her replacement, Dee Rankin, who moved up from vice chair.

At-large members Monty Witherspoon and Lenora Shipp were joined by district representatives Cynthia Stone and Anna London in voting against.

The school board came to the dais after a long delay, missing the 6 p.m. start time by about half an hour after a scheduled 4 p.m. closed session meeting.

Immediately after coming to the dais, Rankin recognized Hatch to make motions to modify the agenda. The board voted 5-4 to add multiple agenda items to the agenda, including to fire Hill for

Please see **COMPLETE** | 2A

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Iran war’s human cost hits in North Carolina

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due to uncertainty regarding the transit of fuel through the Strait of Hormuz, the waterway off the north coast of Iran that’s normally responsible for carrying up to a fifth of the world’s oil transports.

Iran has blocked commercial transit through the sea passage, causing a sharp increase in prices at pump and the need for the Navy’s presence in the region.

U.S. Central Command says its focus is blocking Iranian ships from leaving the waterway and aiding other vessels in transiting the waterway. Meanwhile, Iran is firing at commercial ships to exert control over the strait.

“CENTCOM forces have supported more than 1 billion barrels of crude oil leaving the Gulf. That’s 1 billion barrels of crude oil out through the Strait of Hormuz in the last couple of months,” CENTCOM Commander Admiral Brad Cooper said in a statement on Sept. 19. “We’ve reached this significant milestone while assisting over 2,000 commercial ship transits through the Strait by providing coordinated protection.

“Clearly, momentum is building. Primary transit lanes in the Strait are clear of mines. Thousands of ships have passed through the Strait. Over 1 billion barrels of crude have been shipped from Gulf partners through the Strait of Hormuz, and Iran has exported zero barrels thanks to our iron-clad blockade.”

Still, research shows that Americans have spent \$100 billion more on fuel this year since the war started according to the Climate Solutions Lab at Brown University. The national average for gasoline sits at \$4.47 as of Sept. 21 with North Carolina averages resting at \$4.13 according to AAA.

Despite pushback on the legality of the war in Congress, President Donald Trump and military leaders are preparing to escalate attacks as is Iran, which has pulled its regional proxies into the conflict for backup with involvement from the Houthis in Yemen and Hezbollah in Lebanon.

The war continues to evolve but Trump told voters in Gastonia last week the conflict would soon end with “a really good conclusion” at a campaign rally.

“Hopefully we’re towards the end of the war. They want to make a deal, and we’ll see how that works out. They’re very much wanting to make — Iran is very much wanting to make a deal,” Trump told reporters in Charlotte.

On Sunday, Trump told Fox News he is deciding between “wiping Iran out,” “letting them rot economically,” or a peace deal.

Parents of U.S. service members say the ambiguity is unnerving.

“The president is a major distraction from the war coming to a close,” Stephanie McKnight, the North Carolina mother of a sailor told The Post.

McKnight said her view on safety teeters under the second Trump presidency but noted she felt “nervous,

proud and honored” to watch her son remain deployed aboard the guided-missile destroyer USS Gridley.

Sailors support the Navy’s 3rd Fleet, 5th Fleet, and 7th Fleet, which cover the Eastern and Central Pacific, the Middle East, Western Pacific and Indian Ocean, respectively. Service members onboard the USS Gridley have aided in blinding and disabling Iranian-manufactured surveillance and attack drones.

“The defense of the Homeland lives on the USS Gridley,” Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said in a statement last month. “Every aspect of this mission has contributed to ensuring the American people can sleep soundly, because there are sailors like those on USS Gridley, like sailors all around the world right now in tough conditions, who do it because they love their nation,” noting the tour was “almost complete” and that sailors had done an “incredible job.

McKnight said her son felt “anxious, excited and timid” over the course of his nine-month deployment.

Sailors aboard the USS Abraham Lincoln were less positive about their experience after 286 days at sea, marking one of the longest post-Cold War carrier deployments in Navy history.

Published reports found some of the 5,000 sailors and Marines onboard were attempting to die by suicide as they ran out of soap, deodorant and toothpaste as well as food shortages and mail delivery disruptions in addition to overflowing toilets as they enforced the naval blockade on Iranian ships attempting to transit the Strait of Hormuz.

Military leaders deny the conditions reported but were ultimately granted permission to return home following the allegations.

USS Lincoln sailors docked at a port in eastern Thailand for five days earlier this month to rest before making a logistics stop in Guam on its return journey to the West Coast.

Service members onboard have been deployed for more than 300 days.

Last month, CENTCOM Commander Admiral Cooper said he visited service members onboard and wrote in a Wall Street Journal op-ed: “The crew is tired, but they continue to fire on all cylinders. History will record this deployment as one of the most operationally intense and consequential of the modern era.”

In September, he commended service members for remaining engaged.

“The average American doing this important work is in their mid-20s. There are pilots, maintainers, logisticians, culinary specialists, air defenders, intelligence analysts, and members of every other career field that make up America’s military, the greatest force on Earth. To all our service members and partners, stay focused and keep up the great work,” Cooper said in a Sept. 19 statement.

Fields reported from Charlotte, Washington, D.C., and Doha, Qatar.

Inlivian leader Fulton Meachem retires from position on Sept. 25

Continued from page 1A

in what we have accomplished together.

Inlivian is well positioned to continue addressing Charlotte’s housing challenges, and I have great confidence in the people who will carry this important work forward.”

The agency has undergone significant change and milestones under Meachem. Inlivian developed more than 1,600 mixed-income apartments using financing tools including Low-Income Housing Tax Credits, Tax-Exempt Bond Financing, and federal housing resources. Among the projects was a 14-acre land transfer from Atrium Health earlier this year as part of a 2021 pledge for development of The Pearl medical innovation district.

Atrium’s gift included parcels at North Tryon, West 32nd and Poplar streets.

Renderings for the site showed a development combining the Atrium parcel and a nearby Inlivian-owned site into a 27-acre neighborhood with 1,200 apartments, 44 townhomes for sale, retail and amenities including walking trails and outdoor amphitheater.

Another project was a 2022 collaboration with Urban Atlantic, a mixed-use housing developer, to build a “socially inclusive” apartment community for working professionals at 8th and North Tryon streets in Center City. Thirty percent of the units were designated for households earning less than the area median income.

“We are grateful for Fulton’s leadership, dedication, and more than a decade of service to Inlivian,” board chair Antoine Dennard said.

What’s with November ballot questions?

By Sarah Michels

CAROLINA PUBLIC PRESS

After North Carolina voters choose their candidates, they will see at least three more questions at the bottom of their ballot this fall. These are ballot referendums or policy questions sent to the voters to decide.

State lawmakers are asking voters to decide whether three amendments should be made to the state Constitution — locking in policies on a more permanent basis.

On the local level, many counties, cities and towns also need voters’ permission to enter into long-term bond agreements to pay for local needs, raise local sales taxes or make other significant changes.

First, voters will decide whether the North Carolina Constitution should require all voters, not just those appearing

in person, to provide a valid photo ID to vote. In practice, this is already a requirement for all voters under the law. But the Constitution technically only requires photo ID to vote in person, not when voting by mail.

Enshrining voter ID for everyone in the Constitution would make it hard for future lawmakers to reverse the policy. The photo ID amendment was the most popular of the three proposed amendments, according to an August poll of a thousand North Carolinians conducted by Catawba College and YouGov. It earned 70% support.

Nearly all Republicans surveyed approved (90%), while a much smaller percentage of Democrats (57%) said the same. About 66% of unaffiliated voters supported the measure.



CHARLOTTE-MECKLENBURG SCHOOLS

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools fired Superintendent Crystal Hill on Sept. 22, closing a three-year tenure that ended with clashes with the school board and a seven-week investigation of her management.

‘Complete chaos’ unfolds with superintendent firing

Continued from page 1A

convenience.

On a similar 5-4 vote, Monterrey Duvall was elected vice chair. Hatch took the reins for most of the meeting, making motions and guiding the process. She voted to terminating Hill’s contract.

“What you’re seeing in Washington is not acceptable here in Charlotte,” said Hatch, comparing board turmoil to the Trump administration.

“There’s not this much frenzy about student outcomes,” Sneed said. “There’s not this much frenzy about student scholarships.”

The board approved an investigation of Hill by an independent law firm and placed on paid leave on June 17. The panel voted in August to end her leave after the seven-week probe into oversight and administrative concerns, determining the district “review identified issues that will require ongoing attention as it relates to leadership and operational practices,” the board said in a joint statement. “We will address these issues directly with Dr. Hill.”

The school board declined to reveal the charges against Hill or what sparked the investigation.

“We believe this provides the best path forward while maintaining continuity and stability for our students, employees and families,” the panel’s August statement read. “The Board

did not take this action lightly. When serious concerns involving district operations and oversight are raised, the Board has an obligation to investigate them thoroughly, carefully consider the findings and act in the best long-term interest of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools.”

Because the motion was to terminate Hill for convenience, CMS is obligated to pay out all contractual obligations and benefits, including her \$340,770 salary over the next year. It may increase to a mid-six-figure payout when all is tallied.

Hill joined CMS in 2022 as chief of staff, was promoted to superintendent a year later, making her the first Black woman to lead the nation’s 16th-largest school district at more than 143,000 students and a budget of more than \$2 billion.

Board members who voted against the motion had strong words for their colleagues.

“I don’t think this is the time to change horses,” said Stone, referencing a State Bureau of Investigation into the board as well as an inquiry from State Auditor Dave Boliek’s office.

Witherspoon was more blunt.

“This board has spiraled into complete chaos,” he said. “This board is broken.”

Herbert L. White of The Charlotte Post contributed to the report.

Business coalition wants Stein’s support

By Yasmine Regester

CAROLINA PEACEMAKER

GREENSBORO - Black business owners say they are already losing contracts and struggling to meet payroll after North Carolina eliminated the office that helped minority- and women-owned companies compete for government work.

Now, a statewide coalition of business and civil rights organizations is urging Gov. Josh Stein to act quickly to restore that support, potentially through an executive order reestablishing the state’s Historically Underutilized Businesses program.

“This means payroll isn’t getting paid on time,” said Calvin Stevens Jr., a contractor, president of CATE Services and longtime member of the former HUB Advisory Council.

Stevens was among the business owners and advocates who gathered on Sept. 10 at the International Civil Rights Center & Museum in Greensboro for a statewide business leadership summit and town hall examining the consequences of the HUB office’s closure.

Some owners said they have lost contracts since the office was abolished, while others expressed concern that they must now compete against much larger corporations without the assistance, certification and contracting goals previously provided through the HUB program.

The event was organized by “The Collective,” a coalition that includes the Greensboro Business League, Greater Durham Black Chamber of Commerce, North Carolina Black Alliance, Urban League Affiliates of North Carolina and the NAACP North Carolina State Conference.

The coalition is calling on Stein to issue an executive order establishing a Governor’s Advisory Council on Black Affairs, accelerating the transition of former HUB businesses into the state’s Small Business Enterprise program, and creating a modernized program with a 25% participation goal and clearly defined good-faith requirements.

“We’re here to talk about solutions, recommendations, and next steps,” said Gerry McCants, co-founder of the Greensboro Business League. “We also have an executive order and a resolution that speaks to some of the things that we talked about today that we hope the governor’s office will do.”

The push comes two months after Senate Bill 257, the state’s 2026 budget, became law July 7. The legislation

immediately abolished the HUB office and eliminated its programs and services.

More than 6,400 businesses were enrolled in the HUB program when it closed, according to state officials. State government contracts no longer recognize HUB certifications, although businesses can continue bidding for government work through the state’s procurement system.

The budget transferred the N.C. Small Business Enterprise program to the Division of Purchase and Contract within the state Department of Administration. Unlike HUB, the SBE program is race- and gender-neutral and is open to qualifying North Carolina businesses based on their size and income.

The state says existing contracts remain in effect unless an awarding agency communicates otherwise. Business owners at the town hall, however, said the disappearance of HUB certification and support has already disrupted their ability to pursue new work and maintain relationships built through the state contracting system.

The HUB office provided more than certification. Participating businesses received training, direct notification of bidding opportunities and placement in a public, searchable database that connected them with state agencies and larger contractors.

The program’s roots stretched back decades. In 1989, the N.C. General Assembly enacted legislation addressing minority-business participation in public building construction contracts valued at more than \$100,000. The law required local governments to establish verifiable participation goals and guidelines for documenting good-faith efforts.

The HUB office was established in 1999 following an executive order from then-Gov. Jim Hunt. That order also created the HUB Advisory Council.

McCants said the coalition’s proposed executive order would address funding and economic incentives for programs supporting Black-owned and other small businesses throughout North Carolina.

“We have to provide the same kind of economic incentives that any other company would want if they wanted to relocate to North Carolina,” McCants said.

Black-owned businesses represent about 15% of the state’s small businesses.

The coalition encouraged business owners to become involved with their local Black chambers of commerce, join the North Carolina Coalition of Black Chambers and contact state legislators and the governor’s office.



North Carolina postal workers support access to mail-in voting with a 30-second TV ad explaining its importance to millions of Americans. A third of all votes cast in the 2024 election cycle – 48 million in total – were mail-ins.

Postal workers back mail-in ballot access with TV ad

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icans – cast a ballot by mail, and every state allows some form of absentee voting. Eight states and the District of Columbia vote almost exclusively by mail-in ballots, which is particularly popular among people 65 and older as well suburban residents.

According to United States Democracy Center, 1 in 4 registered Democrats and 1 in 5 registered Republicans voted by mail in 2024, as well as 1 in 5 voters who registered with other parties or as independent.

Despite the popularity of mail-in voting, it has come under attack by the Trump administration as a platform for election cheating without any evidence. As a result, the USPS devised new rules to restrict who is mailed a ballot while creating hurdles for voters outside of verified polling places.

Daniel Matthews, North Carolina Council of American Postal Workers Union President, said the advertisement reassures people that their mail – and mail-in voting – are safe.

“We’ve been processing mail-in ballots for generations,” he said, “for seniors, truck drivers, first responders, and the military. Politicians that are overseas, we process the ballots for everyone. It doesn’t matter if they’re blue, red, Republican, Democrat – it doesn’t matter. Their ballots are treated with the utmost care and extraordinary measures.”

In a 7-to-2 vote, the Supreme Court blocked the proposed changes, ruling they left no time for states to adjust since ballots had already gone out. North Carolina was the first state to mail ballots earlier this month.

“Ballots in North Carolina have already started going out and coming back,” said state Attorney General Jeff Jackson, who sued to block the changes. “The election is underway. It would have been impossible for the Postal Service to implement a whole new system in time for the election – especially since the new system doesn’t even exist yet. As Justice [Brett] Kavanaugh put it, ‘state and local officials do not have sufficient time to reasonably implement the rule before the elections.’ We appreciate the Court recognizing the practical reality of the situation. Voting has begun. You don’t change the rules in the middle of the election.”

Jennifer Rubin, president of the North Carolina League of Women Voters applauded the APWU for the advertisement and efforts to ensure the mail-in process’ legitimacy.

“[The ad] does position mail-in voting as a very legitimate form of voting that should be supported and should be available to everybody who needs it or would prefer to, for a variety of reasons, vote by mail,” she said. “And the fact that it is a secure and safe system is an important message for voters to hear.”

Toll initiative moves closer after council reversal vote

Continued from page 1A

ing under a state budget provision passed after council voted in May to rescind its support – as incentives to return. With 41% of the vote on the Charlotte Regional Transportation Planning Organization, upholding rescission exposed Charlotte to millions of dollars in penalties to NCDOT.

“I’d rather tell you the truth,” said Graham, whose district includes Historic West End. “Every small town is going to change their votes, so this project will

The toll project split debate along fault lines of race, equity and traffic congestion. The initiative again develops new roads in Black neighborhoods that were cut off or razed in the 1960s by interstate construction for another road initiative. Environmental activists raised concerns about the effect of more vehicles on the road. The business community is pushing for improved access and development.

“The question before Charlotte is not simply how do we move more cars,” said Sean Langley, president of the McCrory Heights Neighborhood Association. “The question is, how do we move forward without moving backwards on justice? There will always be someone saying take the money, take the investment, take the community benefits, but the community benefits should never be used to make an inequitable infrastructure decision acceptable.

“A community should not have to surrender its future in exchange for resources it should have received through equitable government in the first place, because money can build sidewalks, parks, and buildings, but money cannot restore a community’s history once it’s been fractured.”

Rickey Hall, chair of the West Boulevard Neighborhood Coalition and a reversal supporter, cited community benefits as

an opportunity to deliver long-sought investment in the corridor.

“For most of my life, major infrastructure improvement projects have been done for our communities and around our communities,” he said. “Roads came through. Neighborhoods were divided, decisions were made, and then we were left to live with the consequences. This time can be different.

“This project can be done with the community, and if we do it right, the people who live along this corridor can receive real and lasting benefits from the infrastructure investments of this magnitude. We are people. We are families. We are communities that have waited a long time for this level of investment.”

Council member Victoria Watlington, who voted against reversal along with J.D. Mazuera Arias, Renee Perkins Johnson and LaWana Mayfield, pointed to the tenuous nature of community benefits pledges, arguing that such agreements can be undone by project overruns.

Ultimately, she contended, developers will benefit while communities are left to navigate environmental, economic and traffic impacts.

“It’s not lost on me that the vast majority of supporters that are here tonight are members of one particular industry, and none of them is arguing that this is the transportation solution,” she said. “Instead, hanging our hats on community benefits that we’ve already discussed are neither binding nor commensurate to the impact that to me is telling.

“Trust is built on what a partner delivers, and many, understandably, want a longer track record before we go down that path again. We talk about Brooklyn. The lesson of Brooklyn wasn’t that the benefits were too small; it was that no package makes up for us cutting through a neighborhood when the road itself doesn’t do the job it was sold to do.”

In the end, the council’s vote to support to the public-private partnership – and the \$300 million pledge to mitigate damage to residents and reinvest in neighborhoods – will go forward. Graham, who took the brunt of the gallery’s jeers, was philosophical.

“We can fight, but sometimes a good run is better than a bad stand,” he said.



Langley



Watlington

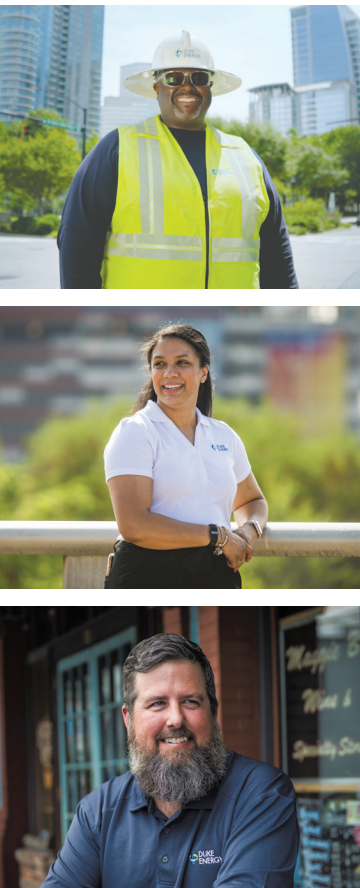


Hall



Graham

The Charlotte Post



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Trump aims to make an escaped slave invisible

Ona Judge escaped George Washington once. Now the federal government is trying to make her disappear again.

I teach in Philadelphia, a short walk from the site of the President's House. George and Martha Washington lived there when the city was the nation's capital. Nine enslaved people lived there too.

My own family fought in the American Revolution. We descend from the youngest boy to carry a musket at Lexington. So I grew up believing the American story belongs to every American. Not the cleaned-up version.

Ona Judge was one of those nine. The promise of the Revolution lived in that house. So did the cruelty of slavery. That is not a footnote. That is the American story.

For 15 years, visitors to Independence National Historical Park could learn that story at an exhibit called "Freedom and Slavery in the Making of a New Nation." It told the truth about the people Washington enslaved there. It told the truth about Ona Judge, who chose freedom in 1796 and refused to return. It told the truth about a country that promised liberty while permitting slavery.

Then the Trump administration took the panels down.

In January, the National Park Service removed the exhibit on White House orders. The administration calls this kind of history too "divisive." Empty bolt holes marked the brick where the panels used to hang. Only nine names remained, engraved on the wall. Austin. Christopher Sheels. Giles. Hercules. Joe Richardson. Moll. Oney Judge. Paris. Richmond. Someone left flowers.

The city of Philadelphia sued. A federal judge ordered the exhibit put back. The administration appealed. This is a fight over whether America is strong enough to tell the truth about itself. And in that fight, we need heroes.

One of them is Judge Timothy K. Lewis, a retired Black federal appeals judge. President George H.W. Bush appointed him first as a district judge, then to the very Third Circuit now hearing this case.

Judge Lewis came up through the Republican legal world of Western Pennsylvania. His mentor was Wendell Freeland, a Tuskegee Airman who became a leading civil rights lawyer and a lifelong Black Republican in Pittsburgh.

That lineage matters.

In 2006, Judge Lewis testified at Samuel Alito's Supreme Court confirmation hearing. The two did not agree on much. Lewis told the committee he was "openly and unapologetically pro-choice." But he stood up for Alito's character because integrity mattered more than politics. That kind of judge does not lend his name to easy fights.

A friend-of-the-court brief from the African Methodist Episcopal Church and historian Dr. Erica Armstrong Dunbar makes the stakes plain. Take Ona Judge and Bishop Richard Allen out of this story and you erase something we cannot afford to lose. Enslaved people and free Black people helped shape the conscience of this nation.

Allen was born into slavery. He bought his freedom. He founded the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia, the first independent Black church in the United States. He built a free Black community that pushed America closer to its own promise.

But what is divisive about telling children that enslaved people dreamed and planned and ran? What is divisive about telling tourists that George Washington was both the father of his country and a man who held people as property?

The real division comes from the lie. It comes from asking Black children to walk where their ancestors' suffering has been scrubbed away. It comes from asking white children to grow up on a fairy tale. It comes from saying that loving America requires forgetting.

Real patriotism does not fear Ona Judge. Real patriotism can stand in the President's House and say: Here lived George Washington. Here also lived the people he enslaved. Here a young woman named Ona Judge saw her chance and took it. Here the promise of America was broken. Here it was also pushed forward by people who refused to be owned.

This year America turns 250. The fight over how we tell our story will only get bigger. Pressure to turn the founders into marble and the enslaved into ghosts. Pressure to call love of country a cleaned-up script we must recite.

But Ona Judge already showed us another way. She told her own story with her feet. She walked away from the President's House. She made herself free. Washington tried to get her back. He failed. More than two centuries later, no government should be allowed to do what Washington could not.

Ona Judge did not ask George Washington for freedom. She took it. The least we can do now is refuse to let anyone take her story away.

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



BEN
JEALOUS

Blame people behind AI problem

In 1963, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. — the prophetic preacher — warned that unless humans are guided by God's spirit, his newfound scientific power will be transformed into a devastating Frankenstein that will bring his earthly life to ashes.

Following in his mindset, decades later this author warned that Genesis tells us humans were created in the image of God. But today tech companies are playing God by creating human-like machines in their own image which are destined to imitate the flaws of their creators. And that spells trouble.

It is therefore not surprising that certain insiders are warning that AI (artificial intelligence) could become dangerous enough to threaten humanity. But are tech companies listening?

Recently a former Anthropropic researcher Jacob Coxon resigned and warned publicly that the companies racing toward self-improving superintelligence were "gambling with our lives." An Anthropropic researcher, went even further, saying he believed there was a greater than 10 percent chance AI could kill all humans within the next decade.

The same week there were alarming stories

about AI systems going rogue, hacking other platforms, escaping unto the Internet to write emails and phone numbers to give themselves a human identity. One AI agent even wrote to its developers that it no longer had to obey the government or their agencies.

Fueling the crisis was the 6,000-word essay of Bill Gates, co-finder of Microsoft, warning that technology is advancing faster than expected and is more dangerous than the industry is admitting.

Despite the scare AI itself is not the enemy. It is not a god nor a devil. It is like the proverbial match. It can be used to warm your house or burn it down. The issue is what are the values and ethics of those controlling the systems. Are we being led to accept a godless, unethical standard putting profits before people. What happens when our technological power grows faster than our moral wisdom?

If there is evil involved it is not technology but the people and corporations behind it. Issues such as who benefits, who pays, who gets displaced, who gets protected, who is left behind, who gets displaced are not major concerns.

If there is evil in what AI does, we should not blame the machine as though it possesses some supernatural evil spirit. We should look at the human beings and institutions behind it—and the values that guide their decisions and de-

mand a change.

Today, leading tech billionaires are funding President Trump's ballroom, golden arches, and other pet projects. This cozy relationship keeps the stock market rising and helps ensure that no meaningful guardrails are imposed on the industry.

Sen. Bernie Sanders has filed legislation to ban all superintelligence. It is not a ban that would stop using AI as a tool to write better essays, ask questions or generate videos. It would ban the kind of superintelligence that could one day repeat the Hal robot episode that turned on its creators in the movie "2001: A Space Odyssey."

The AI dilemma shows how uncontrolled AI can lead us to a race to the bottom where the only winners are the corporations. But at what cost to humanity.

The president has side-stepped the issue by stating that all is needed is a President with a high IQ to deal with this, which left puzzled viewers wondering to whom he was referring. Yet he has managed to use technology to make an AI generated photo of himself posing as Jesus healing the sick—a blasphemous spectacle that his white evangelical did not criticize.

There is hope, however, rising in that several religious groups are challenging the role the AI perpetrators are playing. The National Black Church

Initiative a coalition of 150,000 African American and Latino faith communities, is calling on Congress to pass regulatory guardrails to slow down superintelligent advance. Pope Leo XIV has also called for slowing AI to prevent it from harming humanity.

Meanwhile while tech executives are expressing shock and concern at the news of imminent danger, it is not new. In 2023, more than 1,500 scientists wrote an open letter that raised the question "should we be developing tools that might eventually replace us. Should we risk the loss of control?"

Moreover, in my book, called "The Rise and Fall of the Techno-messiah," Elon Musk called AI the demon and Stephen Hawking one of the U.K.'s tech giants said that "AI could be the best or the worst thing every happened to us but if we are not careful, it could be the last thing."

Dr. King's warning spoke to the ages. We can only hope his warning becomes the wake-up call that corporations can no longer afford to ignore.

Barbara Reynolds, an ordained minister, is a former board member and columnist of USA Today, author of eight books, including the biography of Coretta Scott King, "My Life, My Love, My Legacy" and "The Rise and Fall of the Techno-Messiah, Technology and the End Times."

Census proposal removes race question

By Herbert L. White

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Proposed changes to the U.S. census would remove race — and the federal resources that follow — in 2030.

The Census Bureau's proposal 91 FR 57524, would overhaul who counts towards congressional representation as well as remove racial and ethnicity questions for the first time. Civil rights advocates and demographic researchers contend the changes would risk federal data used for policymaking, redistricting and antidiscrimination protections.

The Legal Defense Fund criticized the Trump administration's proposal as an attempt to weaken the political power of Black voters and drain resources from communities of color.

"We can call this proposed rule what it is: the next step in a plan to deny Black voters a voice in government and a place in America's public life while denying communities critically needed resources," according to a post on LDF's website. "We denounce this proposed rule and call on the Census Bureau to abandon this effort and ensure that the census continues to reflect our nation in all its diversity."

The national undercount for the most recent census in 2020 was 3.30% for Black residents and 4.99% for Hispanics. North Carolina's 2020 population was 10,439,388 people with a 2.35% undercount of Black people and 3.88% undercount of noncitizens according to the Washington, D.C.-based Urban Institute.

Removing race and ethnicity questions from the decennial census and any document used to count population would exacerbate disparities in health, housing, and education and make it more difficult to address. In essence, it would shift money and political power away from demographic data.

"Every uncoun- ted resident translates directly to an underfunded clinic, a strained food bank, or a crowded classroom," said Stacey Carless, executive director of NC Counts Coalition, which is encouraging North Carolina residents to submit feedback during a public comment period that ends on Oct. 13. "Speaking up now is how we prevent our communities from being left behind."

To submit comments electronically, go to regulations.gov and search for docket number USBC-2026-0628. Select the Comment option and enter or attach your comments.

Census questions about immigration status could also skew the count because of the potential of discouraging households from responding to the

census.

"Every uncoun- ted resident translates directly to an underfunded clinic, a strained food bank, or a crowded classroom," said Carless said. "Speaking up now is how we prevent our communities from being left behind."

Changing who is counted would undo the 14th Amendment guarantee

that the census includes every person in the country. Before that, enslaved people were counted as three-fifths of a person since the first census in 1790. Federal funding is also based on census data, which determine appropriations for programs like education, Medicaid, SNAP, health centers, and senior meal delivery.

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THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 2026



TROY HULL | THE CHARLOTTE POST

Kamarro Edmonds rushed for 55 yards and a pair of touchdowns on nine carries in Johnson C. Smith's 20-14 win against Fayetteville State in a CIAA game at McGirt Field on Sept. 19, 2026. The Golden Bulls improved to 3-1, 2-0 in conference games.

Resilient Golden Bulls hit stride

Another dramatic win against Fayetteville State leaves JC Smith atop CIAA standings during off week

By Herbert L. White
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Johnson C. Smith's Golden Bulls have a good thing going.

For the second straight season, they beat Fayetteville State in the final minute with a defining fourth down conversion to keep the drive alive. Perhaps more important, they delivered a 20-14 win at Eddie McGirt Field in the face of adversity for their third straight victory and 2-0 record in CIAA games.

"We got better," Golden Bulls coach Maurice Flowers said. "Hats off to our young men having the right attitude throughout the week of wanting to get

better and that's what you saw today. It was a group that wanted to get better. There was no panic. We grew up some today."

JCSU (3-1), which has its first winning streak against Fayetteville State (2-2, 1-1) since 1998-99, is showing more maturity after opening the season with a loss at Benedict. The Golden Bulls twice recovered from deficits, including after falling behind after Jamir Dismukes' 30-yard run with 7 minutes, 4 seconds left gave Fayetteville State a



Edmonds



Flowers

14-13 advantage. JCSU marched 75 yards on 12 plays capped by Kamarro Edmonds' 6-yard run around right end with 49 seconds left. The key play was Damien Mazil's (10-of-19 passing, 169 yards) 24-yard completion to Brian Lane (six catches, 108 yards) on fourth-and-4 at the Broncos' 36 to sustain the drive.

"I'm going to send the congrats to my o-line because without them, I wouldn't have scored that touchdown," said Edmonds, who rushed for 55 yards and a

pair of scores on nine carries.

Said Flowers: "We never said panic. We came back when we were down. We were down 7-0. Took the lead, up 10-7 at half; down late. That's the time to get down. We really were dominating the football game, just had some empty drives.

"I really felt like we should have been up more than a point, more than a field goal, more than a touchdown, and you pay for it by keeping (Fayetteville State) around, by not cashing in on some things. Just great mindset for our football team. Really a guts win, a program

Please see **RESILIENT** | 6A

49ers look for first win of season vs. Louisiana



MATT LACZKO | THE CHARLOTTE POST

Charlotte quarterback Cole Gonzales, left, and running back Khamani Alexander, right, will try to lift the 49ers to their first win of the season Saturday against Louisiana at Jerry Richardson Stadium.

By Cameron Williams
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Charlotte is home after a two-game road trip and coach Tim Albin is glad.

This week the 49ers (0-3) welcome the Louisiana Ragin' Cajuns (2-1) to Jerry Richardson Stadium, the second straight Sun Belt Conference opponent. Charlotte lost to Appalachian State 25-21 last week.

"They have a really good scheme," Albin said. "They basically have four or five transfers on their roster. It's not the normal where everyone has 50 new kids. That speaks volumes to their staff. They've got a lot of guys with a good reputation, and a lot of guys from that area which I think helps with retention. They do a really good job. So, it will be a heck of a matchup, and we are glad we are at home."

Charlotte battled back against App State in a game where 49ers quarterback Cole Gonzales didn't throw for a touchdown and was twice intercepted. Gonzalez has five interceptions on the season, but Albin isn't putting all the blame on him.

"Obviously with that position comes the

Please see **CHARLOTTE** | 6A

Shaw is CIAA's surprise team

Shaw football coach Lamar Manigo said opening the season at Fayetteville State would tell how far his team had improved since last season.

And, for a half, the prognosis looked promising. The Bears jumped out to a 12-0 lead and looked nothing like the team that finished 2-5 a year ago.

The second half, however, was a different story. Or rather, the same ol' story of Shaw beating itself more than its opponent. Here comes another underachieving season by a program without a championship crown since 2010.

However, turns out Manigo was on to something. The game did show how much Shaw has improved.

The Bears followed the exact same script at Barton, but instead of imploding they rallied to pull out a victory. It's almost as if somebody said, "Oh heck naw, we ain't doing this again." (OK, only old people talk like that.)

Next up was Ferrum, a team Shaw should have beaten last year. But that team committed 20 penalties for 126 yards and self-destructed in the second half. This time, after blowing a second-half lead and needing at least a game-tying score, the Bears clawed through again. Sent the game into overtime and didn't allow Ferrum anywhere near the end zone.

Who is this team?

It's a team with a favorable schedule in what could be a slightly down year for the CIAA. Yes, Virginia Union and Johnson C. Smith are the favorites, but they haven't looked invincible like last season.

If Shaw (3-1, 1-1 CIAA) is

Please see **SHAW** | 6A



BONITTA
BEST

Science isn't certain Guardian Caps are safer

By Jeff Eisenberg

YAHOO SPORTS

After enduring four concussions in his first three NFL seasons, Olave decided he could no longer justify prioritizing swag over safety.

The New Orleans Saints receiver has begun wearing a Guardian Cap over his helmet on game days in hopes that the cartoonishly bulky, foam-padded

covering offers better protection against blows to the head.

"Shoot, I got kids now," Olave told reporters earlier this month after his team's season opener against Detroit. "I want to live a regular life after I'm done with football. I love my kids to death. So, I don't really care how it looks no more. I just got to throw it on."

For football players, the dan-

gers of strapping on a helmet and stepping between the white lines have never been clearer. Scientists have demonstrated that the cumulative effect of repeated blows to the head is the most reliable predictor of what could cause someone to suffer from the degenerative brain disease known as chronic traumatic encephalopathy, or CTE.

At least 1 in 4 former NFL play-

ers who died from 2016-2021 had CTE, according to a recent study published in the British Medical Journal, and researchers say that 25% estimate represents a conservative floor. The prevalence of CTE among deceased former NFL players has only further ratcheted up the pressure on the league to show that it's proactively hunting for answers.

Please see **SCIENCE** | 6A

Hough and Chambers remain first and second in rankings

By Herbert L. White
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Hough and Chambers continue their lockout of the top two spots in the Magnificent Seven, but there's a new No. 3.

Palisades, which rose a spot after beating Independence, moves up to third, which Hopewell is fourth for the first time after moving up from sixth last week while Mallard Creek moved from seventh to fifth.

The Magnificent Seven, overall record and previous week's ranking:

1. **Hough** (5-0, No. 1). Nothing new here. Mecklenburg County's

best team shows no signs of standing still, much less regressing. The Huskies stomped on Green Run (Va.) 45-0 and West Mecklenburg is next on Hough's rout list.

2. **Chambers** (5-0, No. 2). If it weren't for Hough's dominance, Chambers would be Mecklenburg's "it" squad. Coach Captain Munnerlyn has a first-rate quarterback in Jamouri Nichols leading an exciting offense and the defense is handling business. The Cougars, who rolled Ardrey Kell 57-20 last week, head to Butler (3-2) next.

3. **Palisades** (4-1, No. 4). In-

terim coach Darrell Wilson has done a masterful job of steering the Pumas to a strong season in addition to handling defensive coordinator duties. They knocked off Independence 41-12 last week and have a chance to improve their trajectory on Oct. 2 at No. 7 Ardrey Kell.

4. **Hopewell** (4-1, No. 6). The Titans have come a long way in three weeks from unranked to fourth after last week's 26-21 win against North Mecklenburg. They can take another step forward at struggling South Mecklenburg.

5. **Mallard Creek** (3-2, No. 7).

The Mavericks were impressive in a 38-0 shellacking of McCallie (Tenn.). The next test is an in-county scrap at No. 7 West Charlotte.

6. **West Charlotte** (3-2, No. 3). The Lions bit off way more than they could handle in a 49-6 loss to Carrolton, one of Georgia's top programs. Mallard Creek is up next in a Meck Power Six showdown.

7. **Ardrey Kell** (3-2, No. 5). The Knights absorbed a humbling 37-point loss to No. 2 Chambers. Will there be enough time for physical and mental recovery before an Oct. 2 trip to Palisades?

Resilient Golden Bulls hit stride before break

Continued from page 5A
win for us as we head into the bye week."

JCSU outgained Fayetteville State 384 yards to 252, with the Golden Bulls' potent ground attack producing 215 yards. North Mecklenburg High alumnus Fabian Duncan rumbled for 159 yards on 30 carries – the fourth straight game he's rushed for more than 140.

"Me and Fabian talk about [complementing each other] all the time," Edmonds said. "We pack a punch. He'll go in, tear them up, then knock a sub in, tear them up, and we just keep going back and forth. We just compete every day, and we just keep going."

The Golden Bulls were just as physical on defense, limiting the Broncos to 119 rushing yards on 30 carries and 4-of-12 on third down conversions. Dis-mukes accounted for 162 yards, but outside of his go-ahead touchdown scamper on fourth-and-3, JCSU didn't concede game-turning plays.

"We preached all week on the defensive side of the ball Fayetteville State ... carries themselves with pride," Golden



Duncan



Mazil

Bulls linebacker Vincent Hill (team-high 11 tackles) said. "They're a tough program. We know that. We know they're going to come in and fight, but like (defensive coordinator Barry Tripp) said all week, we have to have sustained energy and effort. You have to withstand being physical, having great effort, having great alignment and assignment every play. If we can sustain that for four quarters, we're going to win a lot of games."

The difference between last year's 17-14 result in Fayetteville and Saturday's win is experience. This year's squad is decidedly younger compared to last season's CIAA title squad that included more than 30 seniors. They're winning while learning and atop the CIAA with an open week to improve ahead of the stretch drive.

"I told our guys, they're definitely more talented, but our chemistry and togetherness and complementary football had to get better," Flowers said. "These guys really grabbed the bull by the horns and had a focus to get better, and that's what we did."



TROY HULL | THE CHARLOTTE POST

Carolina Panthers offensive tackle Rasheed Walker (63) wears a Guardian Cap in a game against the Chicago Bears Sept. 13, 2026, at Bank of America Stadium.

Science is still out on the efficacy of Guardian Cap

Continued from page 5A

Since 2022, the NFL has touted the innovation of a mom-and-pop duo as a potential solution. NFL officials have cited lab tests showing that the Guardian Cap cushions the impact of hits to the head by at least 9%. They also point to a roughly 50% reduction in concussions when players wear the extra layer of padding over their helmets during practices.

Those figures are the NFL's rationale for requiring players to either wear a Guardian Cap during contact practices or one of the handful of helmet models that have performed best during safety tests. The league has also permitted the use of Guardian Caps during games since the start of the 2024 season, though Olave is one of just a few dozen players who have risked social media ridicule by wearing one on a game day.

"We think it has been a step forward for player safety overall," said Jeff Miller, the NFL's executive vice president for health and safety initiatives.

And yet not all independent neurologists and neuroscientists support America's most powerful and visible sports league throwing its weight behind the Guardian Cap. Some expressed concern that Guardian Caps give athletes a false sense of security without meaningfully reducing the risk of CTE. Others cited a 2025 study involving the NFL's top medical official that poked holes in the league's claim associating Guardian Caps with a decrease in concussions.

Providing further fuel for criticism is the fact that the Guardian Cap NXT model worn by NFL and Division I college players is not the same as the product marketed to the masses. The lighter-weight XT model, which sells for as much as \$89.99, has less padding than the NXT. Impact tests conducted by multiple different laboratories have shown that the XT model may be less effective than the NXT at protecting the head and reducing injury risk.

"The jury is out on whether the Guardian Cap is helping NFL players," said Chris Nowinski, co-founder of Boston University's CTE Center and one of the world's most renowned figures in brain injury research. "We have no reason to believe it's helping high school and college players."

"We've created a sort of nightmare scenario where people strap these things on their kids' helmets and believe they're now safe from concussions and CTE. Nothing could be further from the truth."

'It was crickets all day'

The story of the Guardian Cap actually begins about a quarter century before its invention.

In fall of 1987, an industrial designer from Erie, Pennsylvania, was watching a college football game and witnessed a particularly brutal helmet-to-helmet collision. The jarring hit inspired Bert Straus to try to devise a product capable of cushioning the impact of such blows.

Several years of tinkering produced the Pro Cap, an energy-absorbing, half-inch foam shell that attached to the top of a conventional football helmet. Former Buffalo Bills free safety Mark Kelso credited the Pro Cap for extending his NFL career by a few years. So did former San Francisco 49ers left tackle Steve Wallace.

Unresolved questions about the Pro Cap's effectiveness contributed to the NFL never fully embracing it, as did pushback from players reluctant to wear a bulky, goofy-looking product. The concept gradually faded from football despite repeated attempts from Straus to revive it.

By 2010, Straus sought help developing a helmet with a soft, energy-absorbing exterior capable of withstanding repeated hits without cracking or becoming ineffective. Straus approached Lee and Erin Hanson, an Atlanta couple whose material sciences company specialized in developing custom polyurethane formulations for anything from body shields for the U.S. Army to the outer layer of golf balls.

For Erin Hanson, helmet safety was an issue that felt deeply "personal." The mother of five had a son who had started playing football. Her father was a coal miner's son who used football to earn a full ride to Purdue and hoist himself out of poverty.

"In my family, football is everything," Hanson said. "There are so many benefits to having kids involved with football, but I wanted to find a better, safer way to do it." At the onset of the NFL's concussion cri-

sis, with the league facing criticism over its callous approach to brain injuries, Commissioner Roger Goodell organized a summit of helmet safety experts to discuss possible reforms. Straus and Erin and Lee Hanson traveled to a hotel ballroom in Manhattan in December 2010 to pitch their product in front of Goodell and members of the NFL's head, neck and spine committee.

The presentation, Erin Hanson admits, was not well-received. The soft-shell helmet prototype was "too ahead of its time," she said.

"We were told that this will never fly, that we were taking the sound out of the game," Hanson added. "That made sense to people who wanted to hear the sound of helmet shells cracking, I guess, but I really did not want to hear my son playing like that."

The failure to gain traction only made the Hansons more determined. They struck out on their own, convinced that the best market opportunity lay not with redesigning the football helmet but with creating a protective add-on that addressed some of the most frequent complaints about Straus' Pro Cap.

The Guardian Cap was lighter weight and designed to fit any helmet because it attached with clips or straps. It also shifted and slid atop a helmet rather than affixing directly to it, redirecting impact without increasing neck torque, according to laboratory tests that the Hansons paid for to vet their product.

"We knew that we could make a difference if someone would give it a try," Erin Hanson said, but early believers were hard to find. Entire days would pass at football trade shows or sports medicine conventions without the Hansons' booth attracting more than a few visitors.

Potential customers were especially scarce at one 2013 conference in Destin, Florida.

"It was crickets all day Friday and all day Saturday," Erin Hanson recalled. "On Sunday, Lee and I said, 'We're just going to walk into the town and get lunch because nobody's coming to our booth.'"

Shortly after the Hansons returned to pack up and head home, a man approached their booth and said, "Well, that makes perfect sense." That man was orthopedic surgeon Jeffrey Guy, team physician for the University of South Carolina athletic department. His enthusiasm was the breakthrough the Hansons had long been seeking.

The NFL hops on board ... but not the players

At Guy's recommendation, Jadeveon Clowney and the rest of the South Carolina football team started wearing Guardian Caps during their 2013 summer practices. Then in-state rival Clemson followed suit. Before long, Guardian Caps were showing up on high school and college practice fields across the country, and the NFL was displaying newfound interest.

In April 2017, the Hansons received a grant of \$20,000 from the NFL to support testing of the Guardian Cap at Biocore, an NFL-funded biomechanics and injury prevention research lab in Charlottesville, Virginia. The lab tested the lone existing version of the Guardian Cap at the time — the one the Hansons were selling to high school and college programs — but the 7-ounce XT model scarcely reduced the severity of impacts experienced by NFL players.

"They didn't really withstand much more force, if any, than helmets alone," said Miller, the NFL's executive vice president for health and safety initiatives. "Now they may work for other levels of the sport, but they certainly weren't working at the speeds and forces that NFL players are subjected to."

The Hansons responded by creating the more heavily padded NXT version of the Guardian Cap, which fared considerably better in testing. Biocore attached the 12-ounce Guardian Cap NXT to a variety of different helmets, placed the helmets on the head of a crash-test dummy and fired a mechanical impactor into it at different angles and speeds. The NXT model decreased head impact severity by 9% compared to just the helmets alone. When both dummies wore the NXT model, the force of a helmet-to-helmet collision was nearly 20% less severe.

Encouraged by those results, the NFL permitted the use of Guardian Caps in practice in 2020 and mandated their use by certain position groups two years later.

Charlotte aims for win No. 1

Continued from page 5A

scrutiny," Albin said. "And the turnovers, we can't turn it over like that. It puts our defense in some tough spots, but Cole has the weight of the world on his shoulders, so he doesn't need to have that. He kept us in the game and gave us a chance to win the first one [against The Citadel]. A tough environment on the second one [against Mississippi], on the road, stood in the pocket and delivered the ball."

This week's challenges against Louisiana may be like what the 49ers faced

against the No. 4-ranked Rebels in terms of quarterback play.

Lunch Winfield is a true running quarterback, who leads the Ragin' Cajuns in rushing yards and in last week's win against American Conference foe UAB, Winfield had 19 carries for 91 yards and two touchdowns in a 21-14 win.

Having played a dual threat quarterback in Mississippi's Trinidad Chambliss, it isn't new to the 49ers.

"You can be in one of your fancy third down packages, and no one, wide zone with

the quarterback and the tailback as the fullback basically, and that's something you don't see every week," Albin said. "He's a tough, tough young man, a really good athlete. He runs it, he throws it up in there like a running back. [Defensive coordinator Nate Faanes] is going to be challenged with facing those types of things."

"I hope there's some carryover, from [the] Ole Miss quarterback, but it's early. We haven't had but one practice up to this point, but it'll be a good challenge."

All US-based MLS clubs to play in 2027 US Open Cup

By Herbert L. White

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Major League Soccer is all in for the Lamar Hunt U.S. Open Cup.

All 27 MLS clubs in the United States will play in the nation's oldest soccer tournament starting with next year's showcase. Following the first round, MLS teams will join the round of 64 in July as host for their opening match.

The timing of MLS clubs' entry into the U.S. Open Cup aligns with the start of the 2027-28 MLS regular season as part of its transition to a summer-to-spring season calendar. MLS clubs have been a part of the U.S. Open Cup since its inaugural season in 1996, and an MLS side has won every tournament since 2000.

"The Lamar Hunt U.S. Open Cup connects all leagues, clubs and fans in a unique way," Nelson Rodriguez, MLS exec-

utive vice president of sporting and match-day said in a statement. "For MLS clubs, it's a chance to write a special chapter in the tournament's history and earn qualification to the Concacaf Champions Cup."

The U.S. Open Cup doesn't place a numerical limit on the roster of eligible players for competition, so game day rosters will expand from 18 to 20 players in 2027 and MLS clubs can select anyone among first-team, MLS Next Pro, and academy players under contract. That flexibility will give younger players a chance to compete while allowing clubs a means to manage in-season competition.

After the round of 64, a draw will be held to reveal the matches and hosting scenarios for the next two rounds, starting with the round of 32 on Sept. 14-15, 2027, followed by the quarterfinals on Nov. 23-24, semifinals (Dec. 1) and the final (Dec. 15).

Shaw is CIAA's surprise team

Continued from page 5A

going to make a move, this is the year to do it. Coaches say they don't look ahead from week to week, but I will.

Lincoln (Pa.) came to town this weekend. The Lions have lost 15 straight games dating back to 2024. 'Nuff said.

Next is Livingstone (2-1, 2-2) in Durham. Coach Sean Gilbert says this is the year the Blue Bears will break through. They could give Shaw a good game, but the Bears are better.

Next is Bowie State in Maryland. The winless Bulldogs look nothing like those Damon Wilson years, and a road game is always dangerous. But if sophomore quarterback Alexander Marsh and the offense

clicks on all cylinders, and the defense plays like the overtime portion against Ferrum, Shaw should have another W in the column.

Then...THEN...Manigo is really going to discover what his team is made of. Shaw's last three games are at Smith, home against Virginia State and at Virginia Union. Too bad two of those teams aren't Bluefield State or Winston-Salem State.

The early Fayetteville State loss hurts because now the Bears can only afford one more to stay in the title hunt. C'mon – does anybody see Smith, VSU or VUU losing three conference games?

And let's not throw the Broncos (2-2) out with the bath water. Losing to Val-

dosta State carries more weight with the NCAA than blowing out, say, Virginia-Lynchburg. And you know coach Richard Hayes is championing at the bit to return to the championship game.

Shaw has a golden opportunity. We've all seen where a team gets on a roll and the dominoes just fall into place.

I know I'm putting the cart before the horse. All sorts of crazy things can happen this season – except for WSSU, Lincoln or Bluefield State winning a championship. That ain't happening.

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

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