



JC Smith quarterback Damien Mazil is hitting stride as Golden Bulls go for sixth straight win

The Charlotte Post

WEEK OF OCTOBER 15, 2026

VOLUME 53 NUMBER 6

WWW.THECHARLOTTEPOST.COM

\$1.50



GARDNER-WEBB UNIVERSITY

The September firing of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools Superintendent Crystal Hill by the board of education sparked a series of leadership changes and allegations of financial impropriety that led to the launch of state and federal investigations.

‘Messy’ CMS drama leaves constituents angry and sour

Leadership changes and alleged impropriety draws rebuke and investigations

By Nikya Hightower

FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools' leadership is in chaos and its constituents want accountability.

The firing of Superintendent Crystal Hill and the launch of state and federal investigations into alleged financial irregularities have left the community with questions about its future. On Sept. 22, the Board of Education voted 5-4 to terminate Hill without cause.

The decision came after questions arose about district transactions with consultants and management of state and federal funds, which are now under investigation by state and federal authorities, including the State Bureau of

Investigation, State Auditor's Office and the FBI.

"Our kids deserve better," said Reniqua Brown, a CMS alumna and parent to two students. "The CMS employees deserve better. Our city deserves better. I feel like Charlotte is in a place of needing to be the example. This is not a little small Southern city anymore. We have a lot of industry here. We have people moving here. Charlotte has grown exponentially. It's growing every day. It's important that we get this together."

After firing Hill for convenience, the

board itself was transformed. Stephanie Sneed, who pushed for Hill's termination, stepped down as chair. Vice Chair Gregory "Dee" Rankin replaced Sneed as chair and Melissa Balknight, who stepped in for Hill when she was suspended during a seven-week internal probe, was promoted to acting superintendent.

"Dr. Balknight is a leader who can keep Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools on track to continue year-over-year growth in student achievement," Rankin said in a statement. "Her experience and historical knowledge will be in-

Please see **SCHOOL** | 2A



Rankin



Sneed

Foster care symposium highlights education among caregivers

By Cameron Williams

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Foster care can stabilize a child's life.

On Oct. 15, Fostering the Connection, in partnership with the Children's Home Society of North Carolina, is hosting the second annual State of Foster Care Symposium at South Park Church from 9 a.m.-12 p.m. Admission is free.

The symposium brings together community stakeholders, child welfare professionals, foster and adoptive families to provide resources for foster parents as well as necessary conversations about the realities of foster care.

"We are very excited," said co-founder Camille Maara said. "We did this last year, and we realized immediately how needed the conversation was. It was an incredible opportunity to get everyone into a room that has their hand somewhere in the foster care community. ... We want to bring awareness to what it means to be in the foster care community, what it means for our youth, because these children are going to grow up and hopefully be responsible members of our society."

Licensed foster homes are in short supply in Mecklenburg County, which had 67 for an estimated 400 children on any given day. As a result, many are forced into temporary arrangements while they wait for a home match.

Black children have historically made up a disproportionate share of Mecklenburg's foster care community - in 2017 it was roughly half despite representing a third of all children in the county. Another challenge is navigating education. According to Charlotte Center for Legal Advocacy, issues rang-

Please see **FOSTER** | 2A



HERBERT L. WHITE | THE CHARLOTTE POST

Mecklenburg County officials and local stakeholders broke ground on new construction at Latta Place in Huntersville on Oct. 12, 2026. The historic site will include a more inclusive story of enslaved and Indigenous people in addition to stewards of the former plantation.

Latta Place redevelopment initiative includes historical inclusion, balance

By Herbert L. White

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HUNTERSVILLE - Latta Place's future includes a more accurate and inclusive history.

Monday's ceremonial groundbreaking of new construction at the 16-acre Mecklenburg County-owned site includes reflection on its links to slavery as well as the stewardship of Indigenous people and landowners. Latta Place, a former plantation that has been closed since 2021, is scheduled to reopen to the public next

year.

"This is not a return to the past but a step toward a more honest, just and hopeful future for our beloved community and beyond," County Manager Mike Bryant said. "Mecklenburg County acknowledges that history does not belong to one particular group over another; it is shared. However, as we share this history, we all have a moral obligation and duty to share it in a way that is honest, sensitive, and unbiased. It is about long-

Please see **LATTA** | 2A

Early voting season kicks off

Mecklenburg County opens 25 polling sites

By Lynn Bonner

NC NEWSLINE

Elections officials across North Carolina are preparing for the 17-day early voting period that starts Oct. 15.

Citizens can vote in-person at locations in their counties. Those who missed the regular voter registration deadline can register or update their registration and vote at the same time at early voting sites. Voters who use mail-in ballots may return them at early voting sites.

Early voting has consistently been the most popular way to cast ballots in North Carolina general elections since 2016, Catawba College political scientist Michael Bitzer has found. Mecklenburg County - the state's largest in terms of population - has 25 early voting sites. Hours of operation are 8 a.m.-7:30 p.m. on weekdays; 8 a.m.-3 p.m. Saturdays and 1-5 p.m. Sundays. Oct. 31 is the final day of early voting.

The Post is sponsoring The Green Chair Civic Lounge Oct. 15 from 6-7:30 p.m. at Goodwill Opportunity Campus, 5301 Wilkinson Blvd. The nonpartisan forum co-sponsored by the Crown Jewel chapter of The Links, includes a question-and-answer session with Mecklenburg County elections director Michael Dickerson.

Wake County has 18 early voting sites, the most it has ever had for a midterm election, said Wake Elections Director Olivia McCall.

Delivery and setup of tables and voting booths at early voting locations started last week, she said.

McCall suggested voters check their sample ballots, which are available online at the North Carolina Board of Elections voter lookup site, to familiarize them-

Please see **EARLY** | 2A

US hemp restrictions could upend NC industry

By Trevon Spencer

NC NEWSLINE

Chris Karazin started Carolindica with his brother and a friend in 2019, making homemade CBD products in a kitchen while working other jobs to pay the bills.

"I didn't even get a paycheck until three years ago," Karazin said.

Seven years later, the Raleigh-based company has grown into a multi-store hemp business with manufacturing operations and dozens of employees. New customers still walk through Carolindica's doors every day.

Now, a looming change in federal law is forcing Karazin to reconsider the company's future.

Beginning Dec. 11, federal restrictions will sharply narrow which hemp-derived cannabinoid products qualify as legal. Congress approved the new federal regulations in 2025 as part of the tax cut and spending measure known as the One Big Beautiful Bill Act.

Under the new law, the only hemp products that will be legal

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School district neighbors sour on ‘messy’ drama

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valuable in maintaining stability as the board searches for its next permanent superintendent.”

The board’s decision to fire Hill, along with the investigation that offered no public details before her reinstatement in August, raised concerns about district leadership, use of taxpayer dollars and the impact on staff and 138,000 students.

Duke Smith, a CMS alumnus who taught at Olympic High School for six years, said the controversies came as no surprise to him. As a student, he often heard his parents complain about district dysfunction.

“It’s disheartening because as a former teacher, I saw the effects of how it impacted inside the classrooms and how the district is not, or seems to be not focused on the priority, the things that need to be priority, which are those students and those teachers at those schools,” he said.

Brown said the way the events unfolded left her shocked, dismayed and disappointed.

“From that meeting where they initiated (Hill’s) firing to now where we’re seeing even more things come out, I just cannot believe that all of this has been going on in a school system,” she said, “for one, that’s so large and also in a city that you would think by now leads by example.”

Although there are differing views of Hill’s performance as superintendent, many are disappointed with how the situation has been handled and the lack of clarity, especially after the constant changes in leadership over the years.

“I’m not that big of an advocate for Dr. Hill, but she didn’t deserve what she got,” Smith said. “If you didn’t have anything, she should have went back to work. But being the fact that they fired her for convenience seemed to be more of a personal action rather than a professional one.”

Brown said the lack of transparency and answers have worsened the situation. With the community left looking for clarity, social media has

become a place for conversations and speculation.

“Everything just seems to be so secretive, and I think they’re trying to cover that up with quote-unquote personnel issues,” she said. “However, I think that there’s way more that they could have said. There was way more that they could have let on to the public.”

As investigations continue, calls for a new school board have become another topic of conversation.

“How do you expect to have a functional superintendent when it’s coming from a dysfunctional board?” Smith said. “You get what you give. And right now, I just feel like there needs to be some major overhaul in the CMS school board and taxpayers who really need to speak up. Regardless of what anybody says or what their intentions are, this board has failed the taxpayers of Charlotte-Mecklenburg.”

Brown said the school board has become a distraction from the work that needs to be done in the schools.

“Everything that comes out from this board now, it’s going to be looked at with a microscope, more so than before,” she said. “Whatever issues you probably had with the school, are kind of pushed to the side. Now, everybody’s got their issues with the board, so they’re under a fine-tooth comb now.”

Smith contends district leaders’ focus needs to be on preparing students for adulthood and setting them up for success.

“That requires a board that is focused on putting those students first and putting those families first and making sure they’re putting systems in place that are going to work and be beneficial for those families,” he said.

For Brown, the issue comes down to stability and long-term effects.

“I just feel like it’s going to get to a point where CMS is not going to be able to come back from this and then is that going to affect people wanting to come work in this district,” she said. “Are we going to lose out on potentially good teachers, or good principals, because they don’t want to work here, because it’s so unstable and just messy?”



LYNN BONNER | NC NEWSLINE

A crew unloads early voting equipment and tables at the John M. Brown Community Center in Apex on Oct. 12, 2026. This location has had among the highest early-voting turnout numbers in the state, Wake Elections Director Olivia McCall said.

Early voting kicks off across North Carolina

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selves with contests and ballot questions. Voters may print out and bring in their sample ballots to the polls to use as a reference as they mark the real thing.

Early voting turnout ebbs and peaks during the 17 days. The busiest days in Wake tend to be toward the end of the early voting period, McCall said, with the last day producing the longest lines. Early voting ends on Oct. 31. Hours around lunch time also tend to be busy, she said.

Mecklenburg voters can go to meck-boe.org for information on early voting sites, sample ballots and other information. Wake County voters can use readytovote.com, which also has bus routes to early voting sites, sample ballots, and other information.

On Election Day, voters must go to their assigned polling place. Same-day registration is not allowed on Nov. 3, and mail-in voters cannot hand-deliver their ballots to polling precincts on Election Day.

Setting early voting schedules came with some political turbulence this year, with Democrats and Republicans at both the state and county levels differing on locations and Sunday voting hours.

In Wake, Democratic and Republican

elections board members were initially divided over an early voting site at the Talley Student Union at the center of the main campus. Republican members pushed through their preferred alternative, a building at the edge of the main campus, the North Carolina State University Western Boulevard Business Services building.

Wake has Sunday early voting hours. Tables and voting booths were set up at the business services building last week, McCall said. The building has a good layout for voting equipment and ample parking, she said.

The business services building is about a mile from the Talley Center. Students who opposed moving the early voting site were worried about not having the time to fit in walking to the business services building with their class and study schedules.

Pack the Polls, the NCSU voter education and engagement project, is sponsoring a free shuttle service from Talley and Centennial Campus to the business services building from Oct. 21-31.

Herbert L. White of The Charlotte Post contributed to this article.

The Charlotte Post

Foster care symposium

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ing from frequent school changes to incomplete school records and accessing transportation to and from campus pose barriers to student achievement.

“Consequently, and through no fault of their own, these students are more likely to perform below grade level, be retained, or drop out of school altogether,” center researchers wrote in May. The four-year graduation rate of Mecklenburg public school students in foster care was 46% in 2025, compared to 60% for North Carolina.

In 2019 a report on race and poverty bias in the child welfare system showed five areas of disparity: the correlation between poverty and maltreatment; visibility or exposure bias; limited access to services; geographic restrictions and conscious or unconscious personal bias among welfare professionals.

Experts recommend several strategies to address those factors, including developing culturally responsive practices as well as recruiting and retaining foster families of color.

The symposium’s aim is to provide resources to caregivers and foster families to help them better understand the realities and challenges.

“We try to work within our community to make sure that our caregivers feel like this is something that they can do,” Maara

said. “Once they open up their homes and once they are officially licensed, so many of them are not knowledgeable about what they really just signed themselves up for, and so they figure it out. They’re learning at the same time as they have a placement, and so that’s where we’re seeing a lot of doors close. ... Our work is to make sure that once a caregiver says ‘yes,’ that they’re able to continue to say yes every day.”

Said symposium co-founder Nicole Hanks: “Ongoing support not just at the beginning when you’re starting to foster or when the kids come in your home,” Hanks said, “or at the end when you’re pulling your hair out. It needs to be consistent throughout the entire time, and that is continued education as far as what’s available, what resources are available, leaning on respite.”

Respite care is short term, temporary placement where a child stays with another licensed caregiver to give primary foster parents a break.

“So many people think that if you use respite then you are failing as foster parents,” Hanks said. “That is not the case at all. There are so many more challenges when it comes to parenting children in foster care, whether it’s special needs or extra needs, multiple doctors’ appointments and visitations and just trying to run your own household.”

Latta Place redevelopment initiative includes historical inclusion, balance

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term impact and benefits that this space will have for generations to come.”

Mecklenburg ended its contract with Historic Latta Plantation’s nonprofit operator five years when a Juneteenth event listing at the 19th century home site stirred condemnation across Mecklenburg. The listing for an event called “Kingdom Coming” drew rebukes for language the contractor used to describe stories from “the massa himself,” “white refugees” and Confederate soldiers while downplaying the suffering of enslaved people.

The redeveloped property will tell a more inclusive story of people and cultures that shaped Latta Place – slaves, native peoples as well as tenant farmers, and plantation owners. When it reopens, the site will include an interpretive trail, new visitor center and upgraded farmhouse. The county is collaborating with experts in historical interpretation to develop exhibits and programs. A steering committee of community leaders, histo-

rians, scholars, museum professionals, and Latta Place descendants, advised the county’s redesign and a master plan was approved in 2023.

“Our hope is that Latta Place will be a transformational destination — an educational experience that gives voice to the historical perspectives of all who lived on the site, bridges past and present, provides space for reflection, and is welcoming to all,” Deputy County Manager Leslie Johnson said. “We are here to turn the pages, from visioning and imagining to breaking ground for the cultivation of a new iteration of this historic cultural resource.”

Said Bryant: “The true measure of this moment will not bear fruit at the end of today’s event, nor will it be realized with the official reopening. As a community, we must remember that the true measure of today will be exhibited in actions of those that visit this space.

“It will be realized when our community has learned enough to ensure the dark history that was cultivated on this site and many other sites like it is never repeated.”

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are those with no more than 0.4 milligrams of THC compounds per consumer container, a threshold that could outlaw many products currently sold in stores.

The restrictions were originally scheduled to take effect in Nov. 2026, but Congress extended the deadline by a month.

One part of the law is still scheduled to take effect on Nov. 12. It excludes products that cannabis plants can't naturally produce, including synthetic cannabinoids, from the federal definition of hemp, classifying them as marijuana.

For Karazin, the impending bans on synthetic cannabinoids and THC mean he's rethinking the products the company can continue selling, how much inventory to carry and where to invest its money.

The federal restrictions follow years of rapid growth in the hemp industry, which proliferated after Congress legalized hemp production in 2018. North Carolina's market has grown into a roughly \$3 billion industry that employs about 16,000 people statewide.

But North Carolina hemp businesses are now preparing for the possibility that much of that market could soon disappear.

A business built around hemp

The federal changes could affect more than intoxicating products such as THC gummies and drinks. CBD products, which contain small amounts of THC and other natural compounds found in hemp, could also exceed the new limit.

The potential impact extends across the Triangle's hemp retail market.

A report by Raleigh Dispensaries, which maintains a database of hemp retailers in the region, found that 79 of 82 shops it tracked across seven counties listed at least one product category that would be affected by the restrictions.

Jake St. Peter, the founder, said his report suggested more than 90% of the shops could be affected by the changes, and he's been actively tracking how local businesses are preparing for the deadline.

"I think this is really going to be a serious blow to these businesses," he

said.

Some hemp businesses are already closing as a result. Bloom Collective in Raleigh announced its closure on social media by the end of the month, saying new hemp regulations are putting "pressure on small businesses."

Other retailers and farmers began preparing for the federal restrictions last year. Owners of Durham's Red-head Hemp said the limit could affect all of their inventory, while a Buncombe County farmer said his farm lacked the equipment to shift to THC-free products.

For businesses that depend on those products, switching to a different line of merchandise isn't straightforward.

Karazin said Carolindica is exploring supplements, functional mushrooms and other products that could offer alternatives if the restrictions go through as planned.

But he said many smaller hemp retailers won't have the same options.

"Most companies are retail, distribution and e-commerce," he said. "Those types of companies have no way of adapting at all."

The restrictions would reach beyond products sold on store shelves.

Farmers growing hemp for cannabinoid products could lose buyers if manufacturers reduce production. At the same time, merchandisers could have to find new markets for products or ingredients that comply with the federal law.

NC lawmakers weigh additional restrictions

The federal deadline is not the only regulatory challenge facing North Carolina's hemp industry.

State lawmakers have also debated legislation that would impose the same THC limit on hemp products as under the federal law, and would also ban the sale of even low-level hemp consumables, including CBD products, to people under 21.

The state Senate passed the measure last summer, saying it would be a backstop in case Congress decides to revise or delay the new federal law.

However, the House declined to take up the proposal during its August session under conflicting pressure from hemp businesses and law enforcement. House Speaker Destin Hall, R-Caldwell, said lawmakers need more time to consider the issue.



FILE PHOTO

Hattie Massey Leeper, known in the broadcast industry as "Chatty Hatty," was a pioneering deejay at WGIV radio in Charlotte. She died Oct. 13 at age 98.

Broadcast pioneer 'Chatty' Hattie Leeper dies at age 98

By Herbert L. White
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Hattie Massey Leeper, a trailblazing radio broadcaster at Charlotte's WGIV-AM, died Oct. 13 at age 98.

"Chatty Hatty," as she was known professionally, was the first Black woman radio announcer in North Carolina and helped WGIV to new heights in bringing R&B music to Black audiences. She was also a concert promoter who booked acts like Sam Cooke, Aretha, James Brown, Patti LaBelle and the Jackson 5.

"Our grandmother was a trailblazer who believed in the power of her voice to connect people, celebrate music, and create opportunities for others," Hatiya Dunlap, Leeper's granddaughter, said in a statement. "While generations of listeners knew her as 'Chatty Hatty,' to our family she was a woman of extraordinary determination, creativity, and faith. We are immensely proud of her contributions to broadcasting and the lasting legacy she leaves behind."

Born Sept. 4, 1928, in Edgemoor, South Carolina, Leeper was a 14-year-old student at Second Ward High School when she began started working at WGIV as a studio assistant. During an era of legal and social segregation that sidelined Black people to the margins, Leeper was a star at WGIV, where she became one of the top voices in southern radio.

As the only woman on the station's otherwise all-male deejay lineup, Leeper held her own with hall of fame station-mates "Genial Gene" Potts, "Rocking Ray" Gooding and "Hound Dog" Pete Toomey.

Long before satellite radio and corporate takeovers of stations, locally owned

outlets gave voice to communities and homegrown stars like Leeper who connected with them.

"[I]t's in your blood," she said. "You don't ever get it out if you're sincere, if you like what you're doing, and you didn't feel that it was tiring. It wasn't work. It was a fabulous thing to say, 'I'm on my way to WGIV - 1600 at the top of your dial - where listening is always worth your while.' You get off on stuff like that and every time you hit the airwaves, something new will come to you."

Over an 18-year run at WGIV, WRPL, and WAYS, Leeper introducing listeners to breaking musical acts as well as, promoting community events. She promoted and booked some of the most influential R&B and gospel artists of the era, including James Brown, Sam Cooke, Otis Redding, Aretha Franklin, Tina Turner, Patti LaBelle, and Smokey Robinson.

Long after hanging up her microphone, Leeper was still sought after for perspective on her career. In 2023, the Library of Congress' Radio Preservation Task Force hosted Leeper and other groundbreaking women of color as part of its Black Women in Radio Historic Collection and Oral History Project.

Such acknowledgments, Leeper told The Post, were always appreciated.

"It's amazing how the word-of-mouth spread," she said. "[I] don't go out looking for publicity. It's always referral. Somebody will say, 'Have you ever met that lady that talks a lot, that's on the microphone that lives in Charlotte? What was her name?' And then they'll say, 'Oh, yes, Chatty Hatty. That's it. Do you know how to get in touch with her?'"

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Published weekly by The Charlotte Post Publishing Company Inc., 5118 Princess Street, Charlotte, NC 28269 (USPS #965500). Subscription is \$65 per year. Periodicals postage paid at Charlotte, NC. Postmaster: Send address changes to The Charlotte Post, PO Box 30144, Charlotte, NC 28230

Why we urge voters to reject constitutional amendments

THE CHARLOTTE POST

The midterm election is bulging with top-of-the-ticket races that is basically a referendum on the Trump administration of national policy on the economy, military adventurism and common sense.

Below them are a series of constitutional referendums that if approved by North Carolina voters, would enshrine massive tax cuts for the richest residents and corporations, limit property tax levies and require voter ID for absentee and mail-in ballots. We see all three as dangerous overreach that should be rejected.

For starters, if Republican lawmakers are so certain that these ideas are smart policy, it should be codified in state legislation, not the Constitution. Bills passed by the General Assembly and signed by the governor – or by overriding a veto – gives voters an opportunity to hold state government to account. A constitutional amendment is inherently more difficult to undo and leaves no room for local and state government to adapt to changing needs.

While these amendments are appealing on the surface, further inspection reveals a scheme that will not lower taxes for most North Carolina residents or make casting a ballot easier.

Elections have consequences, and so will these referendums. Although their language is enticing – who wouldn't like lower taxes? – the reality is these amendments will draw down the tax rate to dangerously low levels while trapping municipalities and state government with fewer avenues to raise revenue. To riff on an old parable, it's akin to allowing the fox to not only guard the henhouse but raid its contents with few options to compensate for the loss.

Here's why the amendments should be voted down.

- The income tax amendment lowers the maximum personal and corporate income tax rate from 7% to 3.5% starting next year. Current state law already sets individual tax rate at 3.49% beginning in 2027, but the constitutional amendment blocks the General Assembly from raising either rate in the future without another constitutional amendment. We see this as a cynical attempt to hose working- and middle-class people while creating massive tax breaks for the rich and corporations. We see no good reason – or common sense, for that matter – for anyone to put extra income in the pockets of the wealthy at everyone else's expense.
- At a time when we can see and feel the impacts of economic challenges, North Carolina can ill afford the loss of tools that would address fiscal emergencies, much less the daily needs of a growing state. From education to roads and responders, we all depend on tax dollars to fund critical programs that benefit the state's residents.
- The property tax amendment would require limits on how much local governments can increase levies. There's no specification of limits, but it would pose major impacts on Mecklenburg County, where property taxes provide \$1.53 billion in fiscal year 2027 revenue – 59% of the total. Nearly \$1 billion, or 38% of Mecklenburg's budget goes to education and literacy including Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, Charlotte Mecklenburg Library, and Pre-K initiatives. Property taxes also pay for essentials like health and human services, public safety and parks.
- What happens when municipalities face unforeseen needs – or increased costs for services – but unable to raise revenue due to property tax caps? They likely won't get help from the General Assembly, where Republicans have shown hostility to funding municipal needs. Trump-enthralled Washington will be even less likely to help.
- Limiting counties' ability to raise money that pay for three-quarters of services mandated by state or federal governments will pose serious problems at home.
- The voter identification amendment would require all voters, not only those voting in person, to present photo ID before voting. North Carolina already requires photo identification for in-person voting and requires absentee-by-mail voters to include a copy of a photo ID or complete an exception form.
- Voter ID proponents are still looking for solutions in search of a problem. Federal and state law forbids non-citizens from casting a ballot, and people who aren't registered to vote obviously can't participate. This proposed amendment doesn't do anything to make voting more secure beyond current voter ID laws on the books, so why enshrine redundancy?

Men are problem, solution to assault

It feels like we all have heard this story before. As the world confronts yet another group of men accused of sexually assaulting an anonymous woman at a frat party at Cornell University, this is just the latest round of horrific allegations to make national news. While there is no one easy answer to this endemic issue, my mind returns to the moment in 2020 when I sat with eight men in Boston for a sexual assault leadership course I co-developed with another male activist. There were constant calls for men to address gender violence in community, and after looking around, I reluctantly accepted. My co-organizer and I were the only community organizers we knew who had experience addressing sexual assault in a mental health setting, and rather than constantly correct well-meaning misconceptions about addressing violence, I felt responsible to put that experience to good use.

Now, Jane Doe's alleged victimization renews calls for male intervention around sexual assault. People aren't stepping up. I understand why. It's the same reason I don't want to run that training again.

Few men believe they are capable of sexual violence, despite statistics that show how frequently these crimes occur. I frequently engaged in these kinds of difficult conversations with men and boys, as I was a therapist at the time. I wrestled with how to address the norms of adult sexuality young men navigate and young women survive, in a way where men created intervention without women demanding it.

I found something unexpected when I ran the workshop. Our info session stated: "We believe that all men are connected to sexual harm that happens in our communities regardless of whether we identify as having caused acute harm or not - and we also believe that men can be part of the process of addressing the root causes of this harm."

A prerequisite of attending the leadership course meant the men participating had to bring a story of sexually questionable, aggressive, concerning, or assaultive behavior. I brought one as well.

A disdain for women wasn't the predominant driving force behind the problematic incidents cited. The driving force is the gap in how men learn what consent is and its boundaries: we learn far too late, often focusing on how lack of consent affects others before we recognize it internally. Women's safety becomes the cost of that gap.

Reflecting on my youth, no man ever taught me how to say no. You can't reliably honor a boundary you have never learned to recognize in yourself. In that workshop, we got to the root of consent: what it meant for us, what it meant for those negatively impacted, and what happened if two people's definitions didn't align.

The stories made the space heavy, sat on my chest as men recounted the events, and rode my back as I walked out of the building. The questions asked and answers given were "the work" I believe all men should do. Holding that energy took weeks to release.

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Damien Mazil's comfort in Johnson C. Smith's offense has grown in compiling a 5-0 record as the Golden Bulls' starter. He accounted for five touchdowns, including a career-high four passing, in Johnson C. Smith's 49-6 win against Shaw on Oct. 9. Mazil completed 12-of-18 passes for a career-best 301 yards against the Bears.

JCSU's Mazil catches on, cashes in

QB's five-touchdown effort against Shaw shows next-level command of the Golden Bulls offense

By Herbert L. White
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Damien Mazil's unlocked J.C. Smith's offensive potential - and his own.

The Golden Bulls quarterback unleashed a career game Friday with five touchdowns in their 49-6 win against Shaw, including four scoring passes to four different receivers. Mazil, who ran his record as JCSU's starter to 5-0, completed 12-of-17 passes for a personal best 301 yards and punished the Bears for crowding the line of scrimmage to slow the Golden Bulls' (5-1, 4-0 CIAA) potent ground attack.

"It just goes back to trusting the system," said Mazil, a transfer from Wagner whose previous single-game high for scoring passes was two against Winston-Salem State and Bluefield State. "Getting here in the summer, I just tried to speed up my process of learning the offense. But as time goes and more reps happen in practice, I'd get more comfortable.

And these receivers - they make my job really easy. Getting them the ball, they



Mazil

make plays. It was just trusting the process and just taking it day by day, brick by brick, and trying to get better."

It paid off against Shaw (4-3, 2-3) with Smith rolling up 518 yards and touchdowns on seven of nine possessions, including the first six. The Bears dared Mazil to beat them through the air, and he obliged with a mix of short, intermediate and long passes for big gains.

Running backs Fabian Duncan and Kamarro Edmonds converted screen passes into scores from 45 and 24 yards respectively. Mazil connected on Reggie Daniel over the middle for a 57-

yard touchdown and topped the outburst with a 13-yard fade to Brian Lane in the third quarter to make the score 42-6.

Parker McQuarrie, who opened the season at quarterback, tossed his first touchdown pass as a Golden Bull with a 15-yarder to Christian Rutledge in the fourth quarter.

"We have guys out there, so my plan is just give them the ball and let them do the rest," Mazil said. "Brian Lane, Reggie, even Fabian got one in there. ...

Kamarro also. Just getting the guys the Please see **JC SMITH'S** | 6A

Hubbard provides Panthers offensive options



TROY HULL | THE CHARLOTTE POST

Chuba Hubbard ran for a season-high 122 yards rushing and a pair of touchdowns in the Carolina Panthers' 32-26 win against Detroit on Oct. 4.

By Jeff Hawkins
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

Chuba Hubbard provided options for the Carolina Panthers.

Much-needed alternatives.

Capping the opening quarter of the NFL campaign night with a season-best 122 rushing yards and two touchdowns against Detroit, Hubbard snapped out of his early funk to help quarterback Bryce Young secure his first professional prime-time triumph and boost locker room morale during an idle week.

"We're trying to get our run game going," coach Dave Canales said after the 32-26 upset win. "We saw that happen today."

Hubbard saw to it with extra effort, moving up to fourth in franchise rushing with 3,992 career yards, passing Christian McCaffrey (3,980 yards). Hubbard forced seven missed tackles, resulting in 42 extra yards, and compiled 82 rushing yards after absorbing initial contact with a Lions defender, per Next Gen Stats.

"What I loved about Chuba ... was breaking tackles," Canales said. "Running with that attitude that we want to. It all starts

Please see **HUBBARD** | 6A

Morgan State a force in MEAC

Morgan State coach Damon Wilson had a look on his face like, "What's everybody so excited about?"

Well, maybe because the Bears pulled off another exciting football win against an FCS team and is off to their best start in 17 years. Maybe because the wins keep elevating the MEAC's stature in FCS circles despite having only six teams. Maybe because those of us who've followed Wilson since his Bowie State days know what a good guy he is and what he's capable of doing with the right personnel.

MSU fans had barely climbed down off the ladder after the win at Towson before approximately 11,000 fans. The Bears hadn't beaten the Tigers since 2009. Surprisingly, I didn't hear any critics with a flippant "Towson is having a down year" snide remark.

"First, you have to teach your team how to win, then teach them how to handle success and, then, the third phase is how to sustain that success," Wilson said at the MEAC teleconference.

After Towson, Morgan State took another road trip to Villanova, a Top 25 team that advanced to the FCS semifinals last season. The Wildcats haven't suffered a losing season since 2018. The Bears led the entire first half and most of the third quarter before Villanova took its first lead. Did they panic? Not this team.

The fourth quarter turned into a seesaw thriller. When the dust cleared, MSU was heading home with another W and another home crowd in shock.

The transfer portal hasn't benefited just FBS schools. Not everyone is looking for a bigger pond. Some just want to swim - regardless of the size. Wilson found a gem in two-time FBS transfer Cameron Edge, who's traveled from Maryland to Eastern Michigan to Morgan State.

Please see **MORGAN** | 6A



BONITTA
BEST

Short-handed Hornets juggling as the season nears

By Cameron Williams
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The Charlotte Hornets were run out of Spectrum Center in their preseason opener.

The Brooklyn Nets handled the makeshift Hornets 124-90 in a game where Charlotte's injury report mimicked a CVS pharmacy receipt for its length.

Charlotte was without projected starters Coby White (calf), guard/forward Brandon Miller (leg) and Kon Knueppel (hamstring). The Hornets were also without reserve forward Grant

Williams (hamstring) and rookie guard Cristian Anderson Jr. (ankle).

Given this reality, coach Charles Lee experimented with lineups and 15 players - all but two logged double-digit minutes. Former first-round draft pick Tidjan Salaün had a team-high 28 minutes but a team-worst minus-24 impact.

One bright spot was forward Liam McNeely, who finished the game with 14 points on 5-for-8 shooting and 4-for-6 from three-point range.

"Liam has had a really good offseason," Lee said. "He's had a really good training camp. When you take the totality of his work, he had some good moments today. He had some moments where he still can be better. The thing that I want him to focus on, no matter what is going on offensively, is how can he still be tight defensively? I thought that there were just some areas where there's too much slippage, too many layups, or not enough activity to get back on closeouts, and so that's where the focus has

got to be."

Center/forward Naz Reid had a productive 16 minutes, scoring 13 points and grabbing four rebounds. As a face-up stretch four, he can create mismatches.

"It just showed the versatility that we have with Naz," Lee said.

"The trust that we have in Naz to be a good playmaker. Sometimes those mismatch situations are there for you to score, but it's also just to create maybe some shifts in the defense, collapsing the defense around the paint. So, Please see **SHORT-HANDED** | 6A

Hough No. 1; Butler, West Charlotte tie for seventh in rankings

By Herbert L. White
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For the first time ever, the Magnificent Seven is an eight-team ranking.

Butler and West Charlotte join the hierarchy this week with a tie for seventh after Ballantyne Ridge's loss to Palisades. The Bulldogs and Lions, ironically, square off Friday with the winner no worse than third in the Meck Power Six behind No. Chambers and No. 4 Mallard Creek.

Hough remains No. 1 in the rankings for the eighth straight

week, followed by Chambers and Palisades. Here's the pecking order:

1. **Hough** (7-0, 2-0 Greater Charlotte 7A/8A; PW No. 1). No reason to disrupt perfection. The Huskies rolled Garinger 72-0 last week and probably could've added more. Next: at South Mecklenburg.

2. **Chambers** (7-0, 2-0 Meck Power Six 7A/8A; PW No. 2). Speaking of perfection means including the Cougars in any conversation. Ask Independence, a 47-0 victim, how good they are.

Next is a home date against North Mecklenburg.

3. **Palisades** (6-1, 2-0 Southwestern 7A/8A; PW No. 3). The Pumas have been impressive atop the conference. Next up is Providence.

4. **Mallard Creek** (5-2, 2-0 Meck Power Six 7A/8A; PW No. 4). The Creek is rising fast as the playoffs loom, with a 38-21 win against North Mecklenburg last week. Independence is next on the menu.

5. **Myers Park** (5-2, 2-0 Greater Charlotte 7A/8A; PW No. 5).

Don't look now, but the Mustangs are on track to square off against Hough for the conference title.

6. **Ardrey Kell** (4-3, 1-1 Southwestern 7A/8A; PW No. 6). The Knights have been more on than off as they pursue the postseason. They take on Ballantyne Ridge at home Friday.

7. Tie - **Butler and West Charlotte** (both 4-3, 1-1 Meck Power Six). Very little separate these cross-county rivals, so let them settle it Friday on the Lions' campus.

Hubbard expands the offensive playbook

Continued from page 5A

off with pressing the blocks the right way, making sure he's cutting off the feet of the O-lineman.

"Chuba ran with violence tonight." Said Hubbard: "We talk all the time about breaking tackles, making guys miss, especially at the second level. We'll just continue to do that. Just appreciate coach obviously believing in us enough to run the rock."

Hubbard breaks out

To offset Young's dynamic start to his fourth season, offensive coordinator and first-year playcaller Brad Idzik remained committed to establishing a rushing presence. Despite enduring a pressure rate of 47.2%, Young entered Week 5 leading the league with 1,268 passing yards.

The injury-marred, makeshift offensive line drew criticism during the opening three games for failing to create continuous, clean passing pockets and rushing lanes.

Hubbard defended them, which could benefit from tackle Taylor Moton (blood clots) and utility lineman Brady Christensen (hamstring) returning.

"I always use the analogy, just chopping at the tree," Hubbard said. "We kept chopping, fixing the things, kind of figuring it out."

In 2025, the Panthers won their first NFC South title since 2015 despite a No. 27-ranked offense, lowlighted by their passing, which averaged just 179.3 yards per game. Through four outings this season, the Panthers (2-2) were fourth (405.8 yards per game), propelled by Young and the league's top passing attack (301.3).

If Hubbard can continue with effective, between-the-tackles runs with an occasional pitch outside, the Panthers could maintain their No. 3-ranked 30.3 points per game scoring average.

"It all starts off with pressing the blocks the right way and watching that

unit come together," Canales said. "Then all of a sudden the run game started to get going."

More specifically, Hubbard, who was voted a team captain, started to get going, generating four "explosive" runs of 10-plus yards against Detroit. Idzik unveiled a series of run-pass option plays, designed to limit Young's time in the pocket. From early returns, the alternate looks could remain on the books.

"The play-actions helped that for sure," Canales said.

'I think we're creating a style'

Hubbard's effort against Detroit marked the third time he collected 100-plus rushing yards and two touchdowns in a game. Only two Panthers, McCaffrey and Tshimanga Biakabutuka, have matched that feat. The trio trails only DeAngelo Williams, who did it eight times.

"I think we're creating a style," Hubbard said. "I attribute it to the receivers and obviously Bryce for opening it up for us and then the offensive line to do the rest."

For the Panthers' ground game to remain a viable option, Hubbard likely will need to remain healthy. Oft-injured backup Jonathon Brooks (groin) remains sidelined, leaving veteran A.J. Dillon as the main reserve.

Dillon was in a walking boot last week, but is not expected to miss Sunday's game against at Philadelphia. Second-year player Trevor Etienne (ankle) is projected to come off the injury list. Prospects Anthony Tyus III, who played on special teams during the previous two games, and Ahmani Marshall, a former Appalachian State standout, percolate on the practice squad.

"In the running back room, we talk about it all the time, breaking tackles, making guys miss, especially at the second level," Hubbard said. "Still a lot of stuff that we got to fix."

JC Smith's Damien Mazil catches on and cashes in

Continued from page 5A

ball and let them just do what they do. They're all athletes, and they just make plays with the ball in their hands."

Going into the season, JCSU focused on leaning into the ground attack with the CIAA's best offensive line and a bevy of capable running backs. With Mazil developing rapport with a dynamic receiver corps, the Golden Bulls are becoming more potent.

"Our passing game, it's just been getting better," coach Maurice Flowers said. If you look at it week by week by week, I'm not going to say we put extra attention on it. We don't. We just work in practice. We have our periods that [for] different things that we emphasize. We're not doing anything different. We're just getting better."

The statistics back up Flowers' observation. With Duncan on the cusp of 1,000 yards rushing (140 carries, 929 yards, nine touchdowns) after six games, the ground attack is one of the nation's best. Mazil not only doubled his passing touchdowns total with the breakout game against Shaw, he's com-



TROY HULL | THE CHARLOTTE POST

Reggie Daniel (0) was one of four Johnson C. Smith receivers to catch a scoring pass from Damien Mazil in the Golden Bulls' 49-6 win against Shaw.

pleted 55-of-94 tries for 983 yards since taking over for MaQuarrie.

Combined with his output the previous week against Bluefield State (10-of-13, 147 yards, 2 TDs) Mazil's stepping up in productivity.

"If you look at some of our past games, you'll see the passing attack is being more efficient, and it just comes from the hard work that we're putting in in practice, the emphasis that we're putting on," Flowers said. "It's coming from having the right focus and the right mindset to be coachable."

And unflappable. The Shaw game was moved up a day in anticipation of heavy rains spawned by Hurricane Isaias, but the Golden Bulls, who've won their last two games by a combined 100-6, were dominant in every phase.

"If they told us we had to play on Thursday, I think we would have been ready," Mazil said. "Honestly, nothing really changed for us. It was just a day earlier. Some things changed with our day-to-day routine just on a game day. But I think all of us were ready. We were prepared, and it showed."

Short-handed Hornets limited to makeshift preseason lineups

Continued from page 5A

I think he did a good job of reading those situations."

Reid was an offseason acquisition as well as guard Grayson Allen, who had a team best plus-2 impact with 13 points on 4-for-6 shooting and 3-for-3 from beyond the arc in 14 minutes.

Still, the injuries can't be overlooked. Charlotte committed 25 turnovers and much of it can be attributed to White's absence. Without Miller and Knueppel Charlotte was lacking not only on offense but defensively from a physicality standpoint as well as communication.

"These are the cards we are dealt right now with some of the injuries," Lee said, "and we are trying to be mindful of how we're building up certain guys. There's going to be some moments where you don't want to push the envelope on somebody because they aren't ready for those extra minutes. So, we are just trying to be mindful as we continue to work through the preseason. Some of it is experimenting, but some of it is also just these are the healthy bodies that we have and we have to find a way to rotate them throughout the game."



NELL REDMOND | THE ACC.COM

Duke junior Patrick Ngongba II is one of the nation's top returning centers and a mature veteran presence on the Blue Devils' roster.

Duke eyes third straight ACC title

By Cameron Williams

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The road to the ACC basketball title still runs through Durham.

The beauty of a new season is that every team has the same chance — in theory — to win a championship. But Duke, which has appeared in four of the last five ACC championships and won three of the last four — including back-to-back in 2025-26 — is once again loaded with talented freshmen.

One key attribute to a Jon Scheyer-coached team is the mixture of young talent with veteran returnees to find the perfect combination. One of those returners is junior center Patrick Ngongba II.

Scheyer said that while he doesn't know what the numbers will look like from a points, rebounds and assists perspective, he feels Ngongba is the "best player on the team," from how he impacts winning basketball.

"I could not be more proud of the group that we have," Scheyer said. "Proud of these two guys next to me in Dame [Sarr] and Pat. I think they represent the core of how this team has been built. It's been built on guys making different decisions to come back. ... These two guys could have gone pro. Obviously any player could have transferred.

"The guys coming in could have gone somewhere else. They all chose Duke, and they all chose Duke with the understanding that we have to continue to earn and that we're not entitled to anything."

Ngongba has been a teammate to talented big men such as NBA players

Kahman Maluach in his freshman year and 2026 third overall draft pick Cameron Boozer. Now a junior, Ngongba aims to lead the younger players.

"Both [Maluach and Boozer] helped my game a lot," Ngongba said. "I think Kahman, more on the defensive side, watching the things that he would do. Then with Cam, offensively, his patience and poise, just him making the right reads and plays and stuff like that. With [the freshmen] I just try to give them as much knowledge as I may know and try to help them out whenever they need help."

The Blue Devils have the No. 2 recruiting class in the country — trailing only John Calipari's Arkansas Razorbacks.

Duke signed three ESPN 100-ranked players including No. 5 Cameron Williams (power forward), No. 17 Deron Rippey Jr. (point guard) and No. 29 Bryson Howard (small forward). The Blue Devils also brought in international five-star center Joaquim Boumtje Boumtje.

"They've been great to coach," Scheyer said. "I don't know if they're going to have an immediate impact at the level that we've seen. We've seen historic impact with our freshmen, but they're going to be contributors to winning."

"They're fortunate they have more experience in the building to look to where guys can help guide them. I think it's been great — there's no separation between freshmen and upperclassmen."

Can North Carolina challenge? North Carolina will look a lot different in 2026-27.

Coach Hubert Davis was

fired in March. Replacing him is Michael Malone, who coached the Denver Nuggets to the 2022-23 NBA title. Several players departed but a few like Jarin Stevenson elected to stay.

"I think coach Malone has done a great job," Stevenson said. "Very defense-minded, which I like. I take pride in my defense. I also like the fast style of play, so working from the defensive style, going into a fast style of play and transitioning there, that is very cool too. He's held everybody accountable and in check, so I think he's done a great job so far."

In a departure from recent North Carolina hires, Malone has no ties to the school but is balancing respecting tradition while putting his own imprint on the program.

"I think I mentioned the day I was hired, I have a tremendous amount of respect for the tradition and history of UNC basketball going all the way back to a guy like Frank McGuire and Dean Smith," he said. "And while honoring that and respecting that, at the end of the day I have to be true to myself, so we're going to go out there and play a brand of basketball that I think is going to allow us to have success, and more importantly, sustained success."

"Obviously, I was a part of — a small part of a championship team that we had in Denver in 2023, and we're trying to kind of simulate the culture, style of play, starting with defense, rebounding, playing up-tempo, and also most importantly, sharing the ball and being a team and being a team that plays for each other."

Morgan State a force in MEAC

Continued from page 5A

Edge has completed 70% of his passes, thrown for 1,156 yards, 10 touchdowns and two interceptions.

"He is one of the most knowledgeable quarterbacks I've been around," Wilson said. "When I met with him when he was in the transfer portal... he said, 'coach, I've been there (FBS), I just want to play ball.' He's getting everything he deserves right now."

And so is Bear Nation.

Moral victory
Coaches hate "moral victories." There's still an L in

the loss column. However, for Norfolk State, the loss to Robert Morris says so much more.

After scoring the game's first touchdown, the Spartans were outscored 27-3. Last year, the bus driver would have started warming up the bus.

"These players on the field care about losing, the players last year, some of them didn't," Vick said on the MEAC teleconference. "Some of them was just happy to have a uniform on. Some of them was just happy to say they played for Norfolk State."

Led by freshman QB Da-

Jean Golmond's three TD passes, the Spartans retook the lead with three minutes left. After a Robert Morris TD, Golmond had 1 minute 25 seconds to get NSU in field goal range.

The Spartans got close enough for a 52-yard attempt that looked good from the snap until it hit the crossbar and bounced back.

The entire team, including Vick, ran to console kicker Marco Peery. It's a new day in Spartan Land.

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

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