

## The Drug War Devastated Black And Other Minority Communities. Is Marijuana Legalization Helping?

ARLINGTON, Wash. (AP) — When Washington state opened some of the nation's first legal marijuana stores in 2014, Sam Ward Jr. was on electronic home detention in Spokane, where he had been indicted on federal drug charges. He would soon be off to prison to serve the lion's share of a four-year sentence.

A decade later, Ward, who is Black, recently posed in a blue-and-gold throne used for photo ops at his new cannabis store, Cloud 9 Cannabis. He greeted customers walking in for early 4/20 deals. And he reflected on being one of the first beneficiaries of a Washington program to make the overwhelmingly white industry more accessible to people harmed by the war on drugs.

"It feels great to know that I'm the CEO of a store, with employees, people depending on me," Ward said. "Just being a part of something makes you feel good."

A major argument for legalizing the adult use of cannabis was to stop the harm caused by disproportionate enforcement of drug laws that sent millions of Black, Latino and other minority Americans to prison and perpetuated cycles of violence and poverty. Studies have shown that minorities were incarcerated at a higher rate than white people, despite similar rates of cannabis use.

But efforts to help those most affected participate in — and profit from — the legal marijuana sector have been halting.

Since 2012, when voters in Washington and Colorado approved the first ballot measures to legalize recreational marijuana, legal adult use has spread to 24 states and the District of Columbia. Nearly all have "social equity" provisions designed to redress drug war damages.

Those provisions include erasing criminal records for certain pot convictions, granting cannabis business licenses and financial help to people convicted of cannabis crimes, and directing marijuana tax revenues to communities that suffered.

"Social equity programs are an attempt to reverse the damage that was done to Black and brown communities who are over-policed and disproportionately impacted," said Kaliko Castille, former president of the Minority Cannabis Business Association.

States have varying ways of defining who can apply for social equity marijuana licenses, and they're not necessarily based on race.

In Washington, an applicant must own more than half the business and meet other criteria, such as having lived for at least five years between 1980 and 2010 in an area with high poverty, unemployment or cannabis arrest rates; having been arrested for a cannabis-related crime; or having a below-median household income.

Legal challenges over the permitting process in states like New York have slowed implementation.

After settling other cases, New York — which has issued 60% of all



Operational lead Willie Morrow stocks shelves at Cloud 9 Cannabis as the store prepares to open, Thursday, Feb. 1, 2024, in Arlington, Wash. (AP Photo/Lindsey Wasson)

cannabis licenses to social equity applicants, according to regulators — is facing another lawsuit. Last month, the libertarian-leaning Pacific Legal Foundation alleged it favors women- and minority-owned applicants in addition to those who can demonstrate harm from the drug war.

"It's that type of blanket racial and gender preference that the Constitution prohibits," said Pacific Legal attorney David Hoffa.

Elsewhere, deep-pocketed corporations that operate in multiple states have acquired social equity licenses, possibly frustrating the

intent of the laws. Arizona lawmakers this year expressed concern that licensees had been pressured by predatory businesses into ceding control.

Difficulty in finding locations due to local cannabis business bans or in obtaining bank loans due to con-

tinued federal prohibition has also prevented candidates from opening stores. In some cases, the very things that qualified them for licenses — living in poor neighborhoods, criminal records and lack of assets — have made it hard to secure the money needed to open cannabis businesses.

The drafters of Washington's pioneering law were preoccupied with keeping the U.S. Justice Department from shutting down the market. They required background checks designed to keep criminals out.

"A lot of the early states, they simply didn't have social equity on their radar," said Jana Hrdinova, administrative director of the Drug Enforcement and Policy Center at Ohio State University's Moritz College of Law.

Many states that legalized more recently — including Arizona, Connecticut, Ohio, Maryland and Missouri — have had social equity initiatives from the start.

Washington established its program in 2020. But only in the past several months has it issued the first social equity retail licenses. Just two — including Ward's — have opened.

Washington Liquor and Cannabis Board Member Ollie Garrett called the progress so far disappointing, but said officials are working with applicants and urging some cities to rescind zoning bans so social equity cannabis businesses can open.

The state, which collects roughly half a billion dollars a year in mari-

(See **MARIJUANA** P. 2)

## Talking To Americans Reveals The Diversity Behind The Shared Opinion 'The Country Is On The Wrong Track'

If you pay any attention to politics and polling, you have likely heard that your friends and neighbors are not very happy with the direction of the country. You might not be, either.

One ABC News/Ipsos survey in November 2023 showed three-quarters of Americans believed the country was on the "wrong track." Only 23% believed it was headed in the "right direction."

And the survey was not an outlier. Poll after poll shows a sizable majority of the nation's residents disapprove of its course.

Have Americans — long seen as upbeat, can-do optimists — really grown dour about the state of the nation and where it's headed?

The answer, we think, is yes and no. Or, to be more direct, as the researchers who run the American Communities Project, which explores the differences in 15 different types of community in the United States, we believe the surveys are asking a question with no real mean-

ing in the United States in 2024 — a question that may have outlived its usefulness.

An 'astonishing finding' "Do you feel things in the country are generally going in the right direction, or do you feel things have gotten off on the wrong track?"

That question or one very much like it is well known to anyone who has glanced at a poll story or studied the data of a survey in the past 50 years.

These public opinion surveys, often sponsored by news organizations, seek to understand where the public stands on the key issues of the day. In essence, they tell the public about itself. Political parties and candidates often conduct their own surveys with a version of the "right direction/wrong track" question to better understand their constituencies and potential voters.

The American Communities Project, based at Michigan State University, uses demographic and socioeconomic measures to break

the nation's 3,100 counties into 15 different types of communities — everything from what we label as "big cities" to "aging farmlands." In our work with the project, we've found a strong reason to be skeptical of the "right direction/wrong track" question. Simply put, the divisions in the country have rendered the question obsolete.

In 2023, we worked with Ipsos to survey more than 5,000 people across the country in all those community types. We asked the survey participants what issues they were concerned about locally and nationally. How did they feel about the Second Amendment? About gender identity? About institutional racism? We found a lot of disagreement on those and other controversial issues.

But there were also a few areas of agreement. One of the big ones: In every community we surveyed, at least 70% said the country was on the "wrong track." And that is an astonishing finding.

Agreement for different reasons

Why was that response so surprising?

The community types we study are radically different from each other. Some are urban and some are rural. Some are full of people with bachelor's degrees, while others have few. Racially and ethnically, some look like America as it is projected to be in 30 years — multicultural — and some look like the nation did 50 years ago, very white and non-Hispanic. Some of the communities voted for President Joe Biden by landslide numbers in 2020, while others did the same for Donald Trump.

Given those differences, how could they be in such a high level of agreement on the direction of the country?

To answer that question, we visited two counties in New York state in January that are 3½ hours and several worlds away from each other: New York County, which is labeled a "big city" in our typology and encompasses Manhattan, and Chenan-

go County, labeled "rural middle America" in our work, located in the south-central part of the state.

In 2020, Biden won 86% of the vote in big metropolitan Manhattan, and Trump won 60% in aging, rural Chenango.

When we visited those two counties, we heard a lot of talk of America's "wrong track" in both places from almost everyone. More important, we heard huge differences in "why" the country was on the wrong track.

"If something don't change in the next election, we're going to be done. We're going to be a socialist country. They're trying to tell you what you can do and can't do. That's dictatorship, isn't it? Isn't this a free country?" said James Stone, 75, in Chenango County.

Also in Chenango County, Leon Lamb, 69, is concerned about the next generation.

"I'm worried about them training the kids in school," he said. "You got kids today who don't even want

to work. They get free handouts ... I worked when I was a kid ... I couldn't wait to get out of the house. I wanted to be on my own."

In New York City, meanwhile, Emily Boggs, 34, a theater artist, bartender and swim instructor, sees things differently as she struggles to make ends meet.

"We've been pitched since we were young, that like, America is the best country in the world. Everyone wants to be here, you're free, and you can do whatever you want," Boggs said. "And it's like, well, if you have the money ... I've got major issues with millionaires and billionaires not having to pay their full share of taxes, just billionaires existing ... It's the inequality."

A lifelong New York City resident, Harvey Leibovitz, 89, told us: "The country is on the wrong direction completely. But it's based upon a very extreme but significant minority that has no regard to democracy, and basically, in my opinion, is racist and worried about the color of the population."

## Caitlin Clark Signs 8-Figure Signature Sneaker Deal; Yet, No Black WNBA

By Hunter Gilmore

Pittsburgh Courier

Caitlin Clark is in talks to ink a deal with Nike for a signature shoe and it's sparked a discussion about the lack of Black women in the WNBA who have received similar opportunities. While the NBA and WNBA share similar player demographic statistics, with both leagues having a majority of Black players, the distribution of signature sneakers tells a different story.

In the NBA, signature sneakers are predominantly worn by Black athletes, reflecting the racial makeup of the league and the popularity of its stars. The NBA is 71.8% Black and 17.4% White. On the other hand, the WNBA is 70% Black and 18.9% White.

However, the WNBA, despite having a comparable demographic composition, lacks representation of Black women in the realm of signature footwear.

According to The Athletic's Shams Charania, the deal between Caitlin Clark and Nike will secure her a substantial sum close to \$20 million, trumping her WNBA rookie contract, which stands at \$338,056 over four years.



As a rookie player, she is set to make \$76,535 per year. Clark, like many other WNBA players, will expectedly make the bulk of her earnings through brand endorsements and deals.

Currently, the WNBA boasts four White players out of 24 who were All-Stars. Excluding Candace Parker, who is aligned with the ACE basketball shoe.

When one Twitter/X user commented that A'ja Wilson dropped a shoe last year, in reference to her collaboration with Nike for a fresh spin on the Cosmic Unity 3's, Jemele Hill responded, "That's not

considered a signature shoe. Her teammates even joked about her not having her own signature shoe yesterday."

All signature basketball sneakers in the WNBA belong to White players.

The exclusive list includes Breanna Stewart (Puma Stewie), Sabrina Ionescu (Nike Sabrina), and Elena Delle Donne (Nike Air Deldon).

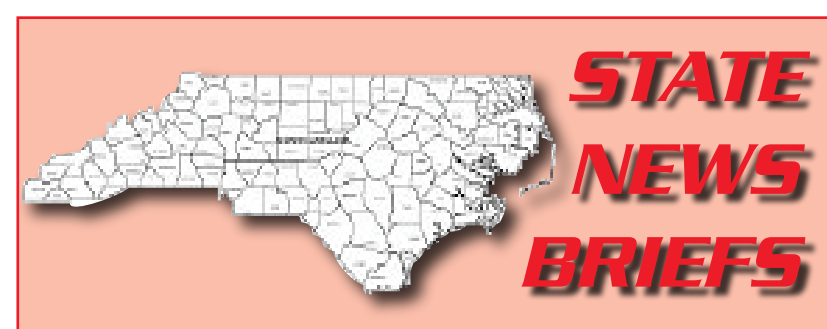
While talent and popularity are significant factors in securing such deals, it's essential to consider the broader implications of representation and opportunity. For instance, Maya Moore, one of the most suc-

cessful and celebrated players in WNBA history, never received a signature sneaker from Nike/Jordan brand. Similarly, A'ja Wilson, another standout athlete with multiple MVP awards, has yet to receive such recognition.

Furthermore, Jemele Hill also took to Twitter/X captioning a meme of a tired restaurant employee, "A'ja Wilson, who is a 2-time league MVP, 2-time WNBA champion, 2-time DPOY, a Finals MVP, a 5 time WNBA All Star, and a best-selling author, is probably somewhere like..."

The lack of signature sneakers for Black women in the WNBA may reflect underlying issues within sneaker companies, particularly concerning diversity and representation. Without adequate representation at decision-making levels, Black women athletes may continue to feel the brunt of being overlooked for signature shoe opportunities by industry giants.

As the WNBA's popularity and viewership grow, brands like Adidas, Puma and Nike have the opportunity to address this imbalance and provide more equitable opportunities for all athletes, regardless of race.



### SAU STUDENT GLOBAL LEADERSHIP FELLOWS INSTITUTE RECEIVES \$35K FOR ALL-EXPENSE PAID TRIP TO COLOMBIA IN MAY

RALEIGH, NC— Support continues to pour in for one of North Carolina's historically black colleges/universities (HBCUs), allowing students to go abroad. Saint Augustine's University's (SAU) Student Global Leadership Fellows Institute, a unique program recently concluding its third cohort, achieved a remarkable feat—a fully sponsored trip to Colombia for select students. Despite challenges, SAU's commitment to investing in student success and global opportunities remains uninhibited.

"We deeply value the contributions of our alumni and donors, who are instrumental in supporting our greatest asset, our students," expressed SAU Interim President Dr. Marcus H. Burgess. "The Student Global Leadership Fellows Institute is a testament to SAU's commitment to equipping our students with global perspectives and practical skills for the future."

Thanks to the generous donations from esteemed alumni and sponsors totaling \$35,000, students from the 2024 cohort received notification that they would realize their dream of going global. The Dr. Thelma Johnson Roundtree Educational Foundation and Durham Alumni Chapter of SAU significantly supported the students traveling to Medellin, Colombia. In addition, several pastors supported the global experiential learning excursion, such as Bishop Luther Brooks of Solid Rock Ministry International, Rev. George Green of Christian Homes Church, Rev. Dr. Jeffery Robinson of Juniper Level Baptist Church, and Rev. Charles Brooks of Popular Springs Christian Church.

"At SAU, we dedicate ourselves to preparing our students for global leadership in a competitive marketplace," affirmed Dr. Cindy Love, Associate Vice President of Professional Development & Enterprise Services. "Our

(See **STATE BRIEFS** P. 2)



STATE BRIEFS

Continued from page 1

partnership with industry leaders and academic experts ensures that students gain mentorship and exposure to real-world scenarios, fostering their development into versatile leaders.”

The four-session program ran monthly from January to April, featuring dedicated facilitators Dr. Judi Nazirah Rashid and Ms. La-Tasha Best-Gaddy, along with guest facilitators like Ms. Lisa Bamford, Mr. Shirreef Loza, Dr. John Galitos, and Dr. Keith Daniel, provided students with valuable insights into economic development and entrepreneurship through virtual interactions with peers worldwide. Students engaged in a transformative educational experience during each session that empowered them with global perspectives and practical skills.

“I’m immensely proud of our students for completing this year’s cohort,” said Ms. Joyce Bannerman, Director of Testing & International Services Officer. “This trip represents an invaluable opportunity for our students to broaden their horizons, engage with diverse perspectives, and enhance their leadership skills in an international setting.”

The culminating session on April 13th showcased the students’ capstone presentations, focusing on research findings of economic growth studies in Durham. Among the accomplished individuals who received certificates are:

- Ariana White
- Demetris George
- Ashley Weekes
- Miles Beasley
- Andrea Diaz
- Cameron Moore
- Joevensky Seme
- Noah Wheeler
- Richara Bain
- Kevin Brewington
- Sthephanie Sierra Medina
- Ana Nunez
- Kristoff Stachan
- Naiylah Archer
- Zakiya Freeman
- Darryl McCaster

The program’s highlight awaits in May when students embark on an all-expenses-paid trip to Medellin, South America. This unique learning opportunity will see them participate in economic development workshops, engage with over 200 entrepreneurs, network with the University of Antioquia community, and immerse themselves in the vibrant local culture. It’s an experience that will undoubtedly shape their understanding of global leadership and entrepreneurship. In addition to the 2024 cohort receiving this unique experience, graduating seniors Ashley Weekes and Zakiya Freeman received internships in Colombia for the entire month with companies based on their majors and interests.

“It truly feels rewarding to be able to accompany other students and represent Saint Augustine’s University in Colombia as a student global leader. After so much uncertainty, I was beginning to lose hope that we would not be going any longer. Still, it truly brings joy to my heart that I and the student global leaders will have this experience,” said Ashley Weekes, a senior accounting major from Barbados who also served as the 73rd Miss SAU. “As an international graduating senior, I have been denied many opportunities within the past few months, hence receiving the opportunity to visit Colombia and intern. There is an experience that I know God needs me to experience. I truly appreciate all of the long hours put in to ensure we received funding for this trip, as without that, this would not have been possible.”

The Student Global Leadership Fellows Institute at SAU continues to defy expectations and provide enriching experiences for its students, demonstrating the institution’s resilience and dedication to fostering global leaders.

“This year’s Student Global Leader Fellowship Institute has been amazing. We’ve had an amazing group of individuals come in to teach, encourage, and uplift us to become the next generation of CEOs and entrepreneurs,” said Zakiya Freeman, a senior majoring in psychology from Atlanta, GA, who also served as SGA Vice President. “Along with the gems of knowledge instilled in me by this amazing institute, I have been blessed with the amazing opportunity to intern in Colombia for an additional two weeks. I can’t even fathom how ecstatic I am for this opportunity. I cannot only gain professional experience in a different country to build my resume, but I can represent the class of 2024 and my HBCU!”



Marijuana Legalization—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

juana tax revenue, is making \$8 million available in grants to social equity licensees to help with expenses, such as security systems and renovations, as well as business coaching.

It also is directing \$250 million to communities harmed by the drug war — including housing assistance, small-business loans, job training and violence prevention programs.

Ward’s turnaround is one officials hope to see repeated.

He started dealing marijuana in his teens, he said. In 2006, a customer pulled a gun on him, and Ward was shot in the hand.

A single father of seven children, he continued dealing drugs to support them, he said, until he was indicted in 2014 — along with 30 other people — in an oxycodone distribution conspiracy. He served nearly

three years in prison.

Ward, now 39, spent that time taking classes, working out and training other inmates. He started a personal training business after he was released, got a restaurant job and joined a semipro football team, the Spokane Wolfpack.

That’s where he met Dennis Turner, a Black entrepreneur who briefly owned the team. Turner had worked as a restaurant manager on cruise ships, for the postal service and as a corrections officer before investing his savings — \$6,000 — in a friend’s medical marijuana growing operation. They used the proceeds to help open a medical dispensary in Cheney, a small college town southwest of Spokane, that eventually became an adult-use marijuana retailer.

In Washington’s social equity program, Turner saw an opportunity to make Ward a business executive. The two joined Rashed Palmer, whose husband co-owns the football team, in launching Cloud 9 at a cost of around \$400,000. They picked Arlington, Washington — 320 miles (515 kilometers) away — because it’s a quickly growing city with limited cannabis competition, they said.

Ward “saw me as a guy that he looked up to, that did good business, was self-made and came out the trenches, and he just wanted to pick my brain,” Turner said.

Turner is working to open cannabis stores in New Mexico and Ohio through social equity programs in those states. He hopes one day to sell them for tens of millions of dollars. In the meantime, he intends to use

his businesses to support local charities, such as the Boys and Girls Club in Arlington and the Carl Maxey Center, which provides services to the Black community in Spokane.

Another new social equity licensee is David Penn Jr., 47, who helped persuade Pasco, in south-central Washington, to rescind its ban. Penn, who is Black, was arrested on a crack cocaine charge as a teenager. In 2011, he was kicked out of his apartment after a marijuana bust.

A friend with two other cannabis outlets is financing Penn’s store. His location, a dirt-floored building next to a gas station, still needs to be built out. State grants will help, but won’t be enough.

“It’s like they’re giving you the carriage, but you need the horses to get this thing going,” Penn said.

Lama Rod Describes Himself As A Black Buddhist Southern Queen

ROME, Ga (AP) — Instead of traditional maroon and gold Tibetan Buddhist robes, Lama Rod Owens wore a white animal print cardigan over a bright yellow T-shirt with an image of singer Sade, an Africa-shaped medallion and mala beads — the most recognizable sign of his Buddhism.

“Being a Buddhist or a spiritual leader, I got rid of trying to wear the part because it just wasn’t authentic to me,” said Owens, 44, who describes himself as a Black Buddhist Southern Queen.

“For me, it’s not about looking like a Buddhist. It’s about being myself,” he said at his mother’s home in Rome, Georgia. “And I like color.”

The Harvard Divinity School-educated lama and yoga teacher blends his training in the Kagyu School of Tibetan Buddhism with pop culture references and experiences from his life as a Black, queer man, raised in the South by his mother, a pastor at a Christian church.

Today, he is an influential voice in a new generation of Buddhist teachers, respected for his work focused on social change, identity and spiritual wellness.

On the popular mindfulness app Calm, his wide-ranging courses include “Coming Out,” “Caring for your Grief,” and “Radical Self-Care” (sometimes telling listeners to “shake it off” like Mariah Carey). In his latest book, “The New Saints,” he highlights Christian saints and spiritual warriors, Buddhist bodhisattvas and Jewish tzaddikim among those who have sought to free people from suffering.

“Saints are ordinary and human, doing things any person can learn to do,” Owen writes in his book, where he combines personal stories, traditional teachings and instructions for meditations.

“Our era calls for saints who are from this time and place, speak the language of this moment, and integrate both social and spiritual liberation,” he writes. “I believe we all can and must become New Saints.”

But how? “It’s not about becoming a superhero,” he said, stressing the



Lama Rod Owens sits in the yard of his childhood home in Rome, Georgia, on Saturday, March 30, 2024. (AP Photo/Jessie Wardarski)

need to care for others.

And it’s not reserved for the canonized. “Harriet Tubman is a saint for me,” he said about the 19th century Black abolitionist known for helping enslaved people escape to freedom on the Underground Railroad. “She came to this world and said, ‘I want people to be free.’”

Owens grew up in a devout Baptist and Methodist family. His life revolved around his local church.

When he was 13, his mother, who owns a baseball cap that reads: “God’s Girl,” became a United Methodist minister. He calls her the single greatest impact in his life.

“Like a lot of Black women, she embodied wisdom and resiliency and vision. She taught me how to work. And she taught me how to change because I saw her changing.”

He was inspired by her commitment to a spiritual path, especially when she went against the wishes of some in her family, who — like in many patriarchal religions — believed a woman should not lead a congregation.

“I’m very proud of him,” said the Rev. Wendy Owens, who sat near her son in her living room, decorated with their photographs and painted portraits.

“He made his path. He walked his

path, or he might have even ran his path,” she said. “Don’t know how he got there, but he got there.”

A life devoted to spirituality seemed unlikely for her son after he entered Berry College, a nondenominational Christian school. It didn’t deepen his relationship with Christianity. Instead, he stopped attending church. He wanted to “develop a healthy sense of self-worth” about his queerness, and was dismayed by conservative religious views on gender and sexuality. He felt the way that God had been presented to him was too rigid, even vengeful. So, in his words, he “broke up with God.”

His new religion, he said, became service. He trained as an advocate for sexual assault survivors, and volunteered for projects on HIV/AIDS education, homelessness, teen pregnancy and substance abuse.

“Even though I wasn’t doing this theology anymore, what I was definitely doing was following the path of Jesus: feeding people, sheltering people.”

After college, he moved to Boston and joined Haley House, a non-profit partly inspired by the Catholic Worker Movement that runs a soup kitchen and affordable housing programs.

There, he said, he met people

across a range of religious traditions — “from Hinduism to Christian Science to all the denominations of Christianity, Buddhists, Wiccans, Muslims. Monastics from different traditions, everyone.”

A Buddhist friend gave him a book that helped him find his spiritual path: “Cave in the Snow,” by Tibetan Buddhist nun Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo.

The British-born nun spent years isolated in a cave in the Himalayas to follow the rigorous path of the most devoted yogis. She later founded a nunnery in India focused on giving women in Tibetan Buddhism some of the opportunities reserved for monks.

“When I started exploring Buddhism, I never thought, ‘Oh, Black people don’t do this, or maybe this is in conflict with my Christian upbringing,’” Owens said. “What I thought was: ‘Here’s something that can help me to suffer less. ... I was only interested in how to reduce harm against myself and others.’”

At Harvard Divinity School, he was again immersed in religious diversity — even a Satanist was there.

“What I love about Rod is that he’s deeply himself no matter who he’s with,” said Cheryl Giles, a Harvard Divinity professor who mentored him and who now considers him one of her own teachers.

“When I think of him, I think of this concept of Bodhisattva in Buddhism, the deeply compassionate being who is on the path to awakening and sees the suffering of the world and makes a commitment to help liberate others,” said Giles.

“And I love,” she said, “that he’s Black and Buddhist.”

Through Buddhism, mindfulness and long periods of silent retreats, Owens eventually reconciled with God.

“God isn’t some old man sitting on a throne in the clouds, who’s, like, very temperamental,” he said. “God is space and emptiness and energy. God is always this experience, inviting us back through our most divine, sacred souls. God is love.”

A Georgia Beach Aims To Disrupt Black Students’ Spring Bash After 2023 Chaos

TYBEE ISLAND, Ga. (AP) — Thousands of Black college students expected this weekend for an annual spring bash at Georgia’s largest public beach will be greeted by dozens of extra police officers and barricades closing off neighborhood streets. While the beach will remain open, officials are blocking access to nearby parking.

Tybee Island east of Savannah has grappled with the April beach party known as Orange Crush since students at Savannah State University, a historically Black school, started it more than 30 years ago. Residents regularly groused about loud music, trash littering the sand and revelers urinating in yards.

Those complaints boiled over into fear and outrage a year ago when weekend crowds of up to 48,000

people daily overwhelmed the 3-mile (4.8 kilometer) island. That left a small police force scrambling to handle a flood of emergency calls reporting gunfire, drug overdoses, traffic jams and fist fights.

Mayor Brian West, elected last fall by Tybee Island’s 3,100 residents, said roadblocks and added police aren’t just for limiting crowds. He hopes the crackdown will drive Orange Crush away for good.

“This has to stop. We can’t have this crowd anymore,” West said. “My goal is to end it.”

Critics say local officials are overreacting and appear to be singling out Black visitors to a Southern beach that only white people could use until 1963. They note Tybee Island attracts vast crowds for the

Fourth of July and other summer weekends when visitors are largely white, as are 92% of the island’s residents.

“Our weekends are packed with people all season, but when Orange Crush comes they shut down the parking, bring extra police and act like they have to take charge,” said Julia Pearce, one of the island’s few Black residents and leader of a group called the Tybee MLK Human Rights Organization. She added: “They believe Black folks to be criminals.”

During the week, workers placed metal barricades to block off parking meters and residential streets along the main road parallel to the beach. Two large parking lots near a popular pier are being closed. And Tybee Island’s roughly two dozen

police officers will be augmented by about 100 sheriff’s deputies, Georgia state troopers and other officers.

Security plans were influenced by tactics used last month to reduce crowds and violence at spring break in Miami Beach, which was observed by Tybee Island’s police chief.

Officials insist they’re acting to avoid a repeat of last year’s Orange Crush party, which they say became a public safety crisis with crowds at least double their typical size.

“To me, it has nothing to do with race,” said West, who believes city officials previously haven’t taken a stronger stand against Orange Crush because they feared being called racist. “We can’t let that be a reason to let our citizens be unsafe and so we’re not.”

Tybee Island police reported 26 total arrests during Orange Crush last year. Charges included one armed robbery with a firearm, four counts of fighting in public and five DUIs. Two officers reported being pelted with bottles, and two women told police they were beaten and robbed of a purse.

On a gridlocked highway about a mile off the island, someone fired a gun into a car and injured one person. Officials blamed the shooting on road rage.

Orange Crush’s supporters and detractors alike say it’s not college students causing the worst problems.

Joshua Miller, a 22-year-old Savannah State University senior who plans to attend this weekend, said he wouldn’t be surprised if the crackdown was at least partly motivated by race.

“I don’t know what they have in store,” Miller said. “I’m not going down there with any ill intent. I’m just going out there to have fun.”



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# Business & Finance

## A South African Advanced Manufacturer Will Establish U.S. Presence With \$9 Million Investment In Forsyth Co.

RALEIGH—Radél, Inc., a global manufacturer of electro-mechanical components, will locate a new state-of-the-art production facility in Forsyth County, creating 32 jobs, Governor Roy Cooper announced today. The company will invest \$9 million in Winston-Salem to establish a U.S. East Coast manufacturing operation.

"We're pleased to welcome another international advanced manufacturer to North Carolina," said Governor Cooper. "The state's investments in workforce training and education programs continue to pay off, bringing more jobs and private investment to the state and growing our global reputation as a great place to do business."

Radél, with headquarters in Johannesburg, South Africa, has been supplying high-quality electrical, electronic, and electro-mechanical components to its customers since 1996. The company displays a particular focus for serving the vehicle industry, including sectors such as railway locomotives, passenger trains, mining equipment, defense and heavy-duty commercial vehicles, and electric vehicles. The company's facility in Winston-Salem will help the company strengthen its presence in the United States



and ensure compliance with the free-trade agreement known as the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA). The Forsyth County site will focus on pioneering innovations in power electronic as-

semblies, which are tailor-made for electric motor generator units that are critical to the heavy-vehicle sector, as well as advanced regulators and converters designed for the high demands of the defense industry.

"We are thrilled to establish Radél's presence in North Carolina, reflecting our commitment to growth and innovation in the United States," said Francois Rademeyer, CEO of Radél. "The tremendous support

from the EDPNC and the warm hospitality of the local community have been instrumental in our decision. We look forward to expanding our operations, bringing cutting-edge technological advancements to the region, and contributing to the economic vitality of North Carolina."

"North Carolina attracts companies and investment from all around the world," said North Carolina Commerce Secretary Machel Baker Sanders. "We're enjoying this international momentum because companies like Radél recognize and appreciate both our existing workforce and just as importantly, the state's commitment to invest in the educational and training systems that keep North Carolina's talent pipeline strong."

While salaries will vary by job role, the average annual wage will be \$65,294, which exceeds the Forsyth County average of \$64,038. These new jobs will bring an additional \$2 million into the local economy each and every year.

A performance-based grant of \$75,000 from the One North Carolina Fund will help facilitate Radél's expansion. The OneNC Fund provides financial assistance to local governments to help attract

economic investment and to create jobs. Companies receive no money upfront and must meet job creation and capital investment targets to qualify for payment. All OneNC grants require a matching grant from local governments and any award is contingent upon that condition being met.

"I'm pleased to welcome another international company to Forsyth County and the Piedmont Triad region," said N.C. Representative Amber Baker. "We're proud that Radél is joining the strong advanced manufacturing cluster that's located in our region."

"Many people and organizations have been working behind the scenes to make today's decision by Radél possible," said N.C. Senator Joyce Krawiec. "I'm proud of their efforts and we'll continue to support this company and their employees as they grow in the Piedmont Triad."

Partnering with the North Carolina Department of Commerce and the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina on this project were the North Carolina General Assembly, the North Carolina Community College System, Forsyth County, the City of Winston-Salem, and Greater Winston-Salem Inc.

## African Development Bank Chief Criticizes Opaque Loans Tied To Natural Resources

LAGOS, Nigeria (AP) — The head of the African Development Bank is calling for an end to loans given in exchange for the continent's rich supplies of oil or critical minerals used in smartphones and electric car batteries.

"They are just bad, first and foremost, because you can't price the assets properly," Akinwumi Adesina said in an interview with The Associated Press in Lagos, Nigeria, last week. "If you have minerals or oil under the ground, how do you come up with a price for a long-term contract? It's a challenge."

Linking future revenue from natural resource exports to loan pay-downs is often touted as a way for recipients to get financing for infrastructure projects and for lenders to reduce the risk of not getting their money back. Such deals that have helped China gain control over mineral mining in places like Congo and have left some African countries in financial crisis.

The shift to renewable energy and electric vehicles has caused a spike in the demand for critical minerals, driving these kind of loans. That includes a China-Congo deal that strengthens Beijing's position in the global supply chain for EVs and other products as it taps into the world's largest reserves of cobalt, a mineral used to make lithium-ion batteries, in the impoverished central African country.

Adesina, whose Abidjan, Ivory Coast-based institution helps finance

development in African countries, said these arrangements come with a litany of problems.

He highlighted the uneven nature of the negotiations, with lenders typically holding the upper hand and dictating terms to cash-strapped African nations. This power imbalance, coupled with a lack of transparency and the potential for corruption, creates fertile ground for exploitation, Adesina said.

"These are the reasons I say Africa should put an end to natural resource-backed loans," Adesina said. He pointed to a bank initiative that helps "countries renegotiate those loans that are asymmetric, not transparent and wrongly priced."

Adesina said loans secured with natural resources pose a challenge for development banks like his and the International Monetary Fund, which promote sustainable debt management. Countries may struggle to get or repay loans from these institutions because they have to use the income from their natural resources — typically crucial to their economies — to pay off resource-tied debts, he said.

Adesina specifically mentioned Chad's crippling financial crisis after an oil-backed loan from commodity trader Glencore left the central African nation using most of its oil proceeds to pay off its debt.

A Glencore spokesperson did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

After Chad, Angola and the Republic of Congo approached the IMF for support, the multilateral lender insisted on the renegotiation of their natural resource-backed loans.

At least 11 African countries have taken dozens of loans worth billions of dollars secured with their natural resources since the 2000s, and China is by far the top source of funding through policy banks and state-linked companies.

Western commodity traders and banks, such as Glencore, Trafigura and Standard Chartered, also have funded oil-for-cash deals, notably with the Republic of Congo, Chad and Angola.

Standard Chartered didn't immediately respond to an email seeking comment, while Trafigura pointed to its 2020 report called "Prepayments Demystified," which says that "trading firms are enabling production that would otherwise not be possible — thus underpinning economic growth, job creation and the generation of fiscal revenues in the countries concerned."

Adesina said there was no "fixation" on one country as being behind these types of loans when asked about criticisms over China's lending backed by oil; critical minerals such as cobalt and copper used in electric vehicles and other products; and bauxite, the main mineral in aluminum manufacturing, which has been used in China's recent resource-backed loan contracts with Guinea and Ghana.

"It is not about one country or the other; any country can exploit when you don't know what you are doing," he said, adding, "The capacity to negotiate at the country level, the capacity to plan, the capacity for debt management is very important."

Mao Ning, spokesperson for China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, told reporters last year that Beijing operates with the "principle of transparency and openness" in relations with Africa.

Congo has been looking to review the infrastructure-for-minerals agreement it signed with China in 2008 over concerns it gets too few benefits from the arrangement. That grants Chinese firms Sinohydro and China Railway Group a 68% stake in a joint venture for copper and cobalt with Congo's state mining company, Gecamines.

Last year, Congo's state auditor demanded China's infrastructure investment commitment be increased to \$20 billion from the original \$3 billion to match the value of the resources sold by the state under the deal. China rejected the auditor's report.

Adesina, a former Nigerian minister for agriculture, said the African Development Bank's new Alliance for Green Infrastructure in Africa aims to mobilize \$10 billion to help countries finance "bankable" sustainable infrastructure, including in the energy and transport sectors, which could limit the allure of problematic financing.

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F. Shane Eason

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## "I Have No Idea What We're Going To Do": Housing Shortage Leaves Renters Stymied

NCNEWLINE—Julia Stokes and her daughter moved into the Helen Wright Center, a Raleigh shelter for women experiencing homelessness, late last year after a family dispute left them without a place to live.

With a monthly income of just under \$1,900 — a combination of survivor's benefits for Stokes and federal assistance for the daughter who has cerebral palsy and uses a wheelchair — Triangle-area rents are well out of the reach for the 70-year-old caretaker.

"You tell me, because I don't have the answer," Stokes responded when asked if she knew of a place where one could live on her monthly income. "That's why this is so frustrating. I take two steps up, and two steps backwards."

A recent North Carolina Housing Coalition report found that 48% of North Carolina renters — 604,365 households — have difficulty affording their rents. As set by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, fair market rent in North Carolina is \$1,083 per month, 38% higher than it was five years ago. That amount would consume more than half of Stokes's income.

Stokes, who has been on waitlists for subsidized housing in Durham and in Butner for more than a year, is among a large and growing group for whom the price of housing is not just burdensome, but prohibitive.

The National Low Income Hous-



ing Coalition's recent report — The Gap: A Shortage of Affordable Homes — found that there are 326,751 extremely low-income households in North Carolina but only 130,930 affordable rental homes available to them.

That means there are just 40 affordable and available rental homes for every 100 extremely low-income households in the state. Seventy-one percent of extremely low-income renters in North Carolina spend more than half of their household income on housing.

"Our state and counties' need for affordable housing isn't going anywhere. It's growing," Stephanie Watkins-Cruz, director of housing policy at the NC Housing Coalition, said in a news release to share the report. "But it is disproportionately carried by those earning low or extremely low incomes. And this hurts the health, wealth, and resiliency of our communities. We need greater investment in housing to meet the scale of the true need."

Extremely low incomes are defined as those below the federal

poverty line or 30% of a local area's median income. The 2024 area median income for Raleigh is \$72,996. Thirty percent of the area median for Raleigh is \$21,898. Meanwhile, the federal poverty line for a family of two is \$20,440.

Stokes's income places her below the federal poverty line and well below the area median income in Raleigh. According to The Gap report, 31% of the nation's extremely low-income renters are senior citizens like Stokes. More than a third of low-income renters are also low-wage workers. Eighteen percent have a disability and 7% are students or single-adult caregivers.

Across the country, the authors of The Gap report found that there is a shortage of 7.3 million rental homes affordable and available to renters with extremely low incomes. Extremely low-income renters face a shortage in every state and major metropolitan area.

"I'm not the only one out here looking for affordable housing," Stokes said. "I know how hard it is, and there are many people out there looking for affordable housing, a place to stay."

Nationwide, the shortage of affordable rental housing is more acute than it was before the pandemic. Between 2019 and 2022, the shortage of affordable and available rental homes for extremely low-income renters increased by over 480,000.