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Happy New Year

Five Trailblazers To Follow In 2025

By: Jheri Worldwide
Staff Writer

As we step into 2025, our attention, clicks, and engagement are invaluable to the establishment. But who is really and truly worth our incalculable attention? These five dynamic individuals and organizations are poised to make significant strides in their respective fields, leaving a lasting impact on business, media, and our community. From entrepreneurial giants to innovative media platforms, these folks and their platforms represent the spirit of innovation, resilience, and social impact that will define 2025 and beyond. Their leadership, vision, and commitment to empowering communities are worth a follow as they continue to break barriers and redefine success, these are the five to follow in 2025:

1. Mellody Hobson: A powerhouse in the world of business, Mellody Hobson is the Co-CEO of Ariel Investments. Her insightful leadership and strategic vision have made her a sought-after advisor for Fortune 500 companies and a leading voice in promoting equitable practices in corporate America. Hobson's unwavering commitment to social impact and her ability to navigate complex challenges make her a true trailblazer in the business world. In a recent interview with Queen Latifah at The Economic Club of Chicago Hobson share this gem, "When you're really comfortable with yourself you'll share." Check out this impactful interview titled, 'Mellody Hobson, Co-CEO & President, Ariel Investments 12/17/24' for true insights on life, investments, and opportunities.

2. Don Peebles: A real estate mogul and entrepreneurial icon, Don Peebles is the Chairman and CEO of The Peebles Corporation, a leading real estate investment and development company. With a portfolio of landmark projects across the United States, Peebles has consistently defied expectations and shattered glass ceilings. The son of a secretary and auto-machanic, Peebles frequently shares his story of taking advantage of opportunity as he has climbed to the top of the business world. His visionary leadership and unwavering commitment to community development make him a force to be reckoned with in the real estate industry and beyond. As we anxiously await next steps on his "Affirmation Tower" Don Peebles is someone to watch in 2025. Check out his recent interview on Forbes for insightful updates.

3. Earn Your Leisure: This groundbreaking media platform, founded by Rashad Bilal and Troy Millings, has revolutionized financial literacy and entrepreneurship education of the culture. Through their weekly podcast 'Market Mondays', or contriversial takes on Wednesday's 'Blackout', and impactful events like InvestFest, Earn Your Leisure has empowered millions to take control of their financial futures and pursue their entrepreneurial dreams. With sponsorships and alignments like Fidelity, AT&T, Microsoft and others, their commitment to accessible education and community empowerment makes them a driving force in shaping

(See ***TRAILBLAZERS*** P. 2)

1. Mellody Hobson

2. Don Peebles

3. Earn Your Leisure

4. Sheila Johnson

New 2025 Laws Hit The Hot Topics

Artificial intelligence. Abortion. Guns. Marijuana. Minimum wages.

Name a hot topic, and chances are good there's a new law about it taking effect in 2025 in one state or another.

Many of the laws launching in January are a result of legislation passed this year. Others stem from ballot measures approved by voters. Some face legal challenges.

Here's a look at some of the most notable state laws taking effect:

Hollywood stars and child influencers

California, home to Hollywood and some of the largest technology companies, is seeking to rein in the artificial intelligence industry and put some parameters around social media stars. New laws seek to prevent the use of digital replicas of Hollywood actors and performers without permission and allow the estates of dead performers to sue over unauthorized AI use.

Parents who profit from social media posts featuring their children will be required to set aside some earnings for their young influencers. A new law also allows children to sue their parents for failing to do so.

Social media limits

New social media restrictions in several states face court challenges.

A Florida law bans children under 14 from having social media accounts and requires parental consent for ages 14 and 15. But enforcement is being delayed because of a lawsuit filed by two associations for online companies, with a hearing scheduled for late February.

A new Tennessee law also requires parental consent for minors to open accounts on social media. NetChoice, an industry group for online businesses, is challenging the law. Another new state law requires porn websites to verify that visitors are at least 18 years old. But the Free Speech Coalition, a trade association for the adult entertainment industry, has filed a challenge.

Several new California measures aimed at combating political deepfakes are also being challenged, including one requiring large social media platforms to remove deceptive content related to elections and another allowing any individual to sue for damages over the use of AI to create fabricated images or videos in political ads.

School rules on gender

In a first nationally, California will start enforcing a law prohibiting school districts from adopting policies that require staff to notify parents if their children change their gender identification. The law was a priority for Democratic lawmakers who wanted to halt such policies passed by several districts.

Abortion coverage

Many states have passed laws limiting or protecting abortion rights since the U.S. Supreme Court overturned a nationwide

(See ***NEW 2025 LAWS*** P. 12)

10 Tips To Help Change Your Relationship With Money

NEW YORK (AP) — With the end of 2024 around the corner, you might be reflecting on financial goals for 2025.

Whether you're saving to move out of your parents' house or pay off student loan debt, financial resolutions can help you stay motivated, said Courtney Alev, consumer advocate for Credit Karma.

"Entering a new year doesn't erase all our financial challenges from the prior year," Alev said. "But it can really help to bring a fresh-start mentality to how you're managing your finances."

If you're planning to make financial resolutions for the new year, experts recommend that you start by evaluating the state of your finances in 2024. Then, set specific goals and make sure they're attainable for your lifestyle.

Here are some tips from experts:

Change your relationship with money

Think about how you currently deal with finances — what's good, what's bad, and what can improve.

"Let this be the year you change your relationship with money," said Ashley Lapato, personal finance educator for YNAB, a budgeting app.

If you feel like money is a chore, that there's shame surrounding the topic of money, or like you were born being "bad at money," it's time to change that mentality, Lapato said.

To adjust your approach, Lapato recommends viewing money goals as an opportunity to imagine your desired lifestyle in the future. She recommends asking questions like, "What do my 30s look like? What do my 40s look like?" and using money as a means to get there.

Liz Young Thomas, head of SoFi Investment Strategy, added that it's key you forgive yourself for past mistakes in order to move into the new year with motivation.

Know your "why"

When setting your financial resolutions for 2025, it's important to establish the "why" of each, said Matt Watson, CEO of Origin, a financial tracking app.

"If you can attach the financial goal to a bigger life goal, it's much more motivating and more likely you'll continue on that path," Watson said.

Whether you're saving to buy a house, pay off credit card debt or take a summer vacation, being clear about the goal can keep you motivated. Watson also recommends using a tool to help you keep track of your finances, such as an app, spreadsheet, or website.

Budget, budget, budget

"After three years of inflation, your pay increases are likely still playing

(See ***RELATIONSHIP WITH MONEY,*** P. 2)

The Golden Years

By Judykay Jefferson

LIVING OUR BEST LIFE IN 2025

As 2025 rolls in, I'm feeling inspired to make this year one of the best yet. As an African American senior with a lifetime of stories, wisdom, and dreams, I'm thinking about how I can make the most of this beautiful phase of life.

We've worked hard, cared for our families, and made it through the ups and downs. Now it's time to focus on what makes us happy. Let me share some ideas on how we can thrive, connect, and truly enjoy ourselves this year.

Here are some ideas to make 2025 our best year yet:

Health First

Move Your Body: I've started walking more, and let me tell you—it's not just good for my legs; it's good for my soul. Whether it's strolling around the neighborhood, dancing to my favorite Motown hits, or trying a gentle yoga class, moving a little every day helps us feel young(er).

Eat Better, Feel Better: By this time in our lives we should have made some healthier adjustment to our diet: baked chicken instead of fried, a little less salt, and more veggies. It's about balance— keeping our hearts healthy and saving the fried foods for a treat.

Keep Those Appointments: I am not one to put off doctor visits. Recently I have seen every "ist" in the world; hematologist, neurologist, cardiologist, pulmonologist. So far, no bad reports. Regular check-ups, blood pressure checks, and even telehealth visits are a part of my routine now. Staying ahead of health issues gives me peace of mind.

Get and Stay Connected

I don't know about you, but I've realized how much I cherish my relationships. Family, friends, and neighbors—they're the heart of my life.

Pick Up the Phone: If you've been meaning to call that cousin you haven't spoken to in a while, do it. Better yet, try a video call. It's amazing how seeing a familiar face can brighten your day.

Get Involved: Churches, senior centers, and local libraries are gold mines for meeting people and trying new activities. Whether it's a Bible study, a book club, or a gardening group, there's something for everyone.

Share Your Story: I've started telling my grandkids more about my life—how things were when I was their age, the challenges I faced, and the joys I experienced. Seeing their eyes light up as they listen makes it all worth it.

New Hobbies

Who says we can't learn something new? It has taken me until my golden years to figure out what I want to be when I grow up. I am obsessed with baking, candy making, and Korean TV. I will take some culinary arts classes to up my game and I may even check out some Korean language classes.

Travel a Little: Even if it's just a day trip to a nearby museum or a weekend getaway, getting out of the house and exploring is refreshing. I'm planning for at least four trips in 2025 beyond going to Mississippi to see my family. I can't wait!

Stay Informed: I find that I have to monitor just how much news and world events I take in. That being said, I do want to keep up with what's happening around me and in the rest of the world, just in little doses.

Celebrating Our Heritage

As African Americans, we have a rich history and culture to be proud of. Let's celebrate it every chance we get.

Support Black-Owned Businesses: Whether it's a local bookstore, a restaurant, or a boutique, I love knowing I'm supporting my community.

Share Traditions: Teaching my family how to cook some of our classic dishes or sharing old photos is such a joy.

Attend Cultural Events: Museums, festivals, and concerts are great ways to stay connected to our roots.

Find Joy Every Day

This year, I'm focusing on gratitude and positivity. I start my mornings by thinking of three things I'm thankful for. It's simple practice and it sets the tone for my day.

I'm also making a point to celebrate the little things. A sunny day, a kind word, or a good laugh—they all add up to a joyful life. And when I feel inspired, I write down my thoughts, hopes, and dreams. It's a beautiful way to reflect and grow.

Leave a Legacy

Finally, I'm thinking about how I want to be remembered. Whether it's volunteering, writing my life story, or just being there for the people I love, I want to leave a positive mark on this world.

So, here's to 2025, my friends. Let's make it a year full of laughter, love, and learning. We've earned this time to shine—let's enjoy every minute of it!

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January 1, 1804 Marked Haiti's Triumph and Their Declaration of Independence

By Claudia Sutherland
Contributor

The Haitian Revolution has often been described as the largest and most successful slave rebellion in the Western Hemisphere. Enslaved people initiated the rebellion in 1791 and by 1803 they had succeeded in ending not just slavery but French control over the colony. The Haitian Revolution, however, was much more complex, consisting of several revolutions going on simultaneously. These revolutions were influenced by the French Revolution of 1789, which would come to represent a new concept of human rights, universal citizenship, and participation in government.

In the 18th century, Saint Domingue, as Haiti was then known, had become France's wealthiest overseas colony, generating more revenue for France than all 13 North American colonies for Great Britain. This wealth came largely because of the island's production of sugar, coffee, indigo, and cotton generated by an enslaved labor force. When the French Revolution broke out in 1789 there were five distinct sets of interest groups in the colony. There were white planters—who owned the plantations and the slaves—and petit blancs, who were artisans, shop keepers and teachers. Some of them also owned a few slaves. Together they numbered 40,000 of the colony's residents. Many of the whites on Saint Domingue began to support an independence movement that began when France imposed steep tariffs on the items imported into the colony. The planters were extremely disenchanted with France because they were forbidden to trade with any other nation. Furthermore, the white population of Saint Domingue did not have any representation in France. Despite their calls for independence, both the planters and petit blancs remained committed to the institution of slavery.

The three remaining groups were of African descent: those who were free, those who were enslaved, and those who had run away. There were about 30,000 free black people in 1789. Half of them were mulatto and many of them were wealthier than the petit blancs. The slave population was close to 500,000. The runaway slaves were called maroons; they had retreated deep into the mountains of Saint Domingue and lived off subsistence farming. Haiti had a history of slave rebellions; the enslaved were never willing to submit to their status and with their strength in numbers (10 to 1) colonial officials and planters did all that was possible to control them. Despite the harshness and cruelty of Saint Domingue slavery, there were slave rebellions before 1791. One plot involved the poisoning of masters.

Inspired by events in France, a number of Haitian-born revolutionary movements emerged simultaneously. They used as their inspiration the French Revolution's "Declaration of the Rights of Man." The General Assembly in Paris responded by enacting legislation which gave the various colonies some autonomy at the local level. The legislation, which called for "all local proprietors…to be active citizens," was both ambiguous and radical. It was interpreted in Saint Domingue as applying only to the planter class and thus excluded petit blancs from government. Yet it allowed free citizens of color who were substantial property owners to participate. This legislation, promulgated in Paris to keep Saint Domingue in the colonial empire, instead generated a three-sided civil war between the planters, free blacks, and the petit blancs. However, all three groups would be challenged by the enslaved black majority which was also influenced and inspired by events in France.

Led by former slave Toussaint l'Overture, the enslaved would act first, rebelling against the planters on August 21, 1791. By 1792 they controlled a third of the island. Despite reinforcements from France, the area of the colony held by the rebels grew as did the violence on both sides. Before the fighting ended 100,000 of the 500,000 blacks and 24,000 of the 40,000 whites were killed. Nonetheless the former slaves managed to stave off both the French forces and the British who arrived in 1793 to conquer the colony, and who withdrew in 1798 after a series of defeats by l'Overture's forces. By 1801 l'Overture expanded the revolution beyond Haiti, conquering the neighboring Spanish colony of Santo Domingo (present-day Dominican Republic). He abolished slavery in the Spanish-speaking colony and declared himself Governor-General for life over the entire island of Hispaniola. Haitian control of Santo Domingo lasted until 1844.

By 1802 the Haitian Revolution had outlasted the French Revolution which had been its inspiration. Napoleon Bonaparte, now the ruler of France, dispatched General Charles Leclerc, his brother-in-law, and 43,000 French troops to capture L'Overture and restore both French rule and slavery. L'Overture was taken and sent to France where he died in prison in 1803. Jean-Jacques Dessalines, one of l'Overture's generals and himself a former slave, led the revolutionaries at the Battle of Vertieres on November 18, 1803 where the French forces were defeated. On January 1, 1804, Dessalines declared the nation independent and renamed it Haiti. France became the first nation to recognize its independence. Haiti thus emerged as the first black republic in the world, and the second nation in the western hemisphere (after the United States) to win its independence from a European power.

Relationship With Money—*CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1*

catch up to your monthly expenses, leaving you wondering where all the money is going," said Greg McBride, chief financial analyst at Bankrate. "Make that monthly budget for 2025 and resolve to track your spending against it throughout the year."

McBride said that you may need to make adjustments during the year as certain expenses increase, which would require cutting back in other areas.

"Calibrate your spending with your income, and any month you spend less than budgeted, transfer the difference into your savings account, ideally a high-yield savings account," he said.

Pay down outstanding debt

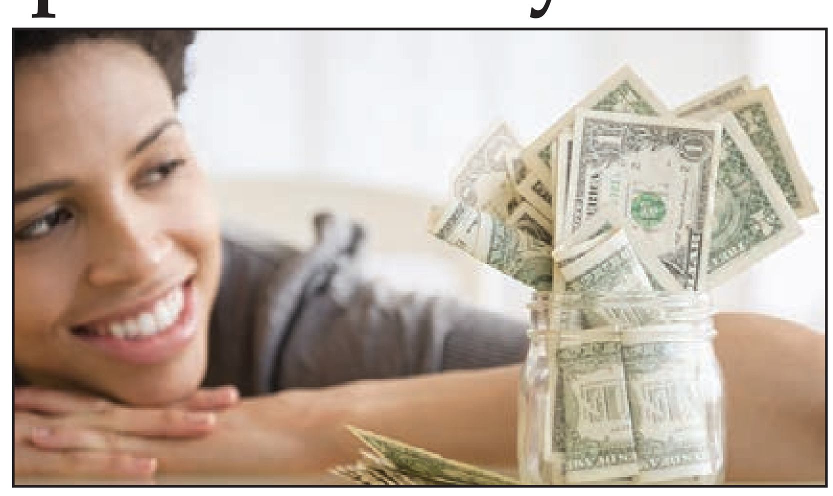
"Interest rates aren't likely to come down very fast, so you're still going to have to put in the hard work of paying down debt, especially high-cost credit card debt, and do so with urgency," McBride said.

Start by taking stock of how much debt you have now relative to the beginning of the year. Hopefully you've made steady progress on paying it down, but, if you've gone in the other direction, McBride encourages making a game plan. That includes looking into 0% balance transfer offers.

Take control of your credit card interest rate

"You have more power over credit card interest rates than you think you do," said Matt Schulz, chief credit analyst at LendingTree. "Wielding that power is one of the best moves you can make in 2025."

A 0% balance transfer credit card is "a good weapon" in the fight against high card APRs, or annual percentage rates, he said. A low-interest personal loan is an option as well.



You may simply be able to pick up the phone and ask for a lower interest rate. LendingTree found that a majority of people who did that in 2024 were successful, and the average reduction was more than 6 points.

Set realistic, practical goals

When planning for your financial resolutions, it's important to consider how you're going to make your goals sustainable for your lifestyle, said Credit Karma's Alev.

"It really is a marathon, not a sprint," Alev said.

Alev recommends setting realistic, practical goals to make it easier to stick with them. For example, instead of planning to save thousands of dollars by the end of the year, start by saving $20 a paycheck.

Even when your plans are achievable, there are times you'll get derailed. Maybe it's an unexpected medical bill or an extraordinary life event. When these situations happen, Alev recommends trying not to feel defeated and working to get back on track without feeling guilty.

Don't bury your head in the sand

"You can't manage what you can't see, so set a New Year's resolution to check your credit score monthly in 2025," said Rikard Bandebo, chief economist at VantageScore. "Be sure to pay more than the minimum on your credit accounts, as that's one of the best ways to boost your credit score."

Bandebo also advises student loan borrowers to make all payments on time, as servicers will begin to report late payments starting in January, and missed payments will affect borrowers' credit scores.

Automate savings, where possible

Automated changes, like increasing workplace 401(k) plan contributions, setting up direct deposits from paychecks into dedicated savings accounts, and arranging for monthly transfers into an IRA and/or 529 college savings accounts all add up quickly, McBride said.

Slow down

Your financial goals can encompass more than just managing your money better — they can also be about keeping your money safe from scams. A golden rule to protect yourself from scams is to "slow down," said Johan Gerber, executive vice president of security solutions at Mastercard.

"You have to slow down and talk to other people if you're not sure (whether or not) it's scam," said Gerber, who recommends building an accountability system with family to keep yourself and your loved ones secure.

Scammers use urgency to make people fall for their tricks, so taking your time to make any financial decision can keep you from losing money.

Focus on financial wellness

Your financial goals don't always have to be rooted in a dollar amount — they can also be about well-being. Finances are deeply connected with our mental health, and, to take care of our money, we also need to take care of ourselves.

"I think that now more than any other year, your financial wellness should be a resolution," said Alejandra Rojas, personal finance expert and founder of The Money Mindset Hub, a mentoring platform for women entrepreneurs. "Your mental health with money should be a resolution."

To focus on your financial wellness, you can set one or two goals focusing on your relationship with money. For example, you could find ways to address and resolve financial trauma, or you could set a goal to talk more openly with loved ones about money, Rojas said.

A Consumer's Guide To Buying A Franchise

FTC—When you buy a franchise, you may be able to sell goods and services that have instant name recognition, and get training and support that can help you succeed. But purchasing a franchise is like any other investment: there's no guarantee of success.

The Federal Trade Commission, the nation's consumer protection agency, has prepared this Guide to help you decide if a franchise is right for you. It suggests ways to shop for a franchise opportunity and highlights key questions you need to ask before you invest. The Guide also explains how to use the disclosure document that franchisors must give you — under the FTC's Franchise Rule — so you can investigate and evaluate a franchise opportunity.

A franchise enables you, the investor or franchisee, to operate a business. You pay a franchise fee and you get a format or system developed by the company (franchisor), the right to use the franchisor's name for a specific number of years and assistance. For example, the franchisor may provide you with help in finding a location for your outlet; initial training and an operating manual; and advice on management, marketing or personnel. The franchisor may provide support through periodic newsletters, a toll-free telephone number, a website or scheduled workshops or seminars.

Owning a franchise comes with defined costs, franchisor controls and contractual obligations.

Costs

In exchange for the right to use the franchisor's name and benefit from the franchisor's assistance, you will pay some or all of the following:

Initial Franchise Fee and Other Expenses

Your initial franchise fee will typically range from tens of thousands of dollars to several hundred thousand dollars and may be non-refundable. You may face significant costs to rent, build and equip an outlet and

(See *FRANCHISE* P. 3)

TRAILBLAZERS

Continued from page 1

the next generation of business leaders. I personally can say "Yes" to Ian 'The Master Investor' Dunlap who is a fixture in the EYL community. I highly recommending following EYL, you'll learn and earn likely by osmosis because some many details are dropped, you just have to take advantage of the information buy acting on it.

4. Sheila Johnson: A true Renaissance woman, Sheila Johnson is an entrepreneur, philanthropist, and entertainment pioneer. As the co-founder of BET and the CEO of Salamander Hotels and Resorts, she has consistently broken barriers and defied expectations. Her unwavering commitment to excellence and her passion for empowering women and minorities make her an inspiration to aspiring entrepreneurs and a leading voice in the hospitality industry. The Salamander Hotel collection now boasts six gorgeous properties each with their own spectacular elements from beaches, to golf courses, to access to world class cities. Shelia Johnson and her brand are highly worth your follow and a visit!

5. The Carolinian: Our historic newspaper, with its deep roots in the Black community of North Carolina and beyond continues to serve as a beacon of information, advocacy, and cultural celebration. Through our insightful reporting, community engagement, and commitment to amplifying marginalized voices, The Carolinian plays a vital role in shaping the narrative and empowering voices unamplified other places. As we continue to evolve and innovate, The Carolinian remains a powerful force for positive change and a testament to the enduring legacy of Black media. We encourage you to reach out to us with your stories, follow us on social media, and encourage your friends and families to subscribe!

Business & Finance

What Changes Should Small Businesses Be Aware In 2025

By Mae Anderson
Insurance Journal

For small businesses, the biggest change in the new year will be the arrival of a presumably more business-friendly administration in Washington. But there are other shifts owners should keep on their radar.

Among them: changes to state-level overtime and minimum wage rules, the delayed federal FinCEN registration, taxes on payments from third-party providers like Venmo and PayPal, and anything that might affect inflation, including tariffs.

The Small Business Administration is also ushering in a new leader, Trump loyalist Kelly Loeffler, assuming she's confirmed by the Senate.

"I think there a general sense that there is going to be obviously a pro-business administration on the regulatory side," said Karen Kerrigan, President and CEO of the Small Business & Entrepreneurship Council, an advocacy group. "But there could be some nuances specifically on, say, workplace or labor rules. But that's still to be determined."

Here's what small business owners should keep in mind in 2025.

INFLATION

Inflation remains a wild card for 2025. Inflation has retreated from its peak of 7.2% in June 2022, according to the Fed's preferred gauge, standing at 2.3% in October. Moves by the Federal Reserve and the incoming Trump administration are likely to swing inflation one way or another.

On last Wednesday, the Federal Reserve raised its projection for the inflation rate for 2025 to 2.5% from a prior estimate of 2.1% issued in September. The Fed also forecast just two rate cuts for the year, down from four. Sticky inflation and high rates could mean higher costs for both consumers and businesses.

Meanwhile, Trump has proposed a range of tax cuts — on Social Security benefits, tipped income and overtime income — as well as a scaling-back of regulations. Collectively, these moves could stimulate growth. At the same time, Trump has threatened to impose a variety of tariffs on imports and to seek mass deportations of migrants, which could accelerate inflation.

Either way, inflation is certain to remain top of mind for small business owners.

"What we've seen for the past two-and-a-half years is that inflation is the top concern for small business," said Tom Sullivan, vice president of small business policy at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. "When you're thinking about 2025, there is a significant question on whether or not the incoming president's policies are going to bring inflation down."

SBA CHANGES

Established in 1953, the SBA has been through many different administrations. The agency offers resources to small businesses and helps administer small business and disaster recovery loans. It played a crucial role during the pandemic, helping distribute small business aid.

Trump said he would nominate Kelly Loeffler, a former U.S. Senator from Georgia, as the head of the SBA, pending confirmation. She replaces Isabella Casillas Guzman, who has served as the administrator since 2021. A staunch Trump loyalist, Loeffler is also co-chair of his inaugural committee.

Loeffler hasn't made any statement about plans for the SBA.

"I wouldn't expect any sort of dramatic change or shifts in terms lending and some of those programs, I think that will happen over time," said SBE Council's Kerrigan.

STATE OVERTIME RULES AND MINIMUM WAGE CHANGES

While a national federal rule expanding overtime coverage to millions of Americans was blocked by a federal judge in November, several states still have an overtime threshold increase going into effect, and those aren't affected by the block.

Six states are raising their threshold for overtime pay: Alaska, California, Colorado, Maine, New York and Washington. For example, in Alaska, the state threshold to be exempt from overtime pay will rise from $48,796.80 in 2024 to $54,080 on July 1.

"Employers will need to be aware of those thresholds and make sure that they're complying with state law if they have employees in any of those states," said Tyler Yamnik, an employment attorney and human resources consultant for HR firm Engage PEO.

Meanwhile, 23 states and 65 cities and counties have minimum wage increases set to go into effect in 2025, either Jan. 1 or later in the year.

Rich Kingly, CEO of Driveway King in Garwood, N.J., which renovates pathways and driveways, said he's watching the state-specific minimum wage changes.

"As we operate in multiple states, staying compliant with each state's rules and regulations is an ongoing challenge," he said. "As minimum wage rates rise, it adds to the financial pressures of running a business, especially in the face of fluctuating material costs and competitive pricing."

FINCEN REGISTRATION

A rule that would require millions of small businesses to register with an agency called the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network, or FinCEN, by Jan. 1 is currently temporarily blocked in court.

The registration is part of the Corporate Transparency Act, an anti-money laundering statue passed in 2021. Registering isn't difficult. The owners and part-owners of those businesses must register personal information with FinCEN, such as a photo ID and home address.

But small business groups say the regulation is too onerous. If it goes into effect, small businesses that don't comply could be fined up to $10,000. Businesses with more than 20 employees and more than $5 million in sales can qualify for exemptions.

Steve DiMatteo, CEO of e-commerce site Cleveland Vintage Shirts, said he had trouble tracking down information about the registration because government communication was lacking. He sought guidance from an X account that helps small businesses.

"My biggest concern stems from this experience — what other rules and regulations am I going to miss because of a lack of clear communication from the government, either at the state or federal level?," he said.

PAYMENT APP TAXES

Another regulation that has been on small businesses' radar for several years is taxes on payments via third-party apps like PayPal, Cash App, Venmo and similar platforms.

Traditionally, the threshold to report earnings from payments from third-party apps was $20,000 and 200 transactions. But the American Rescue Act drastically lowered that to $600 and over with no transaction minimum.

The regulation was delayed for the past two years, but small businesses paying taxes for 2024 will now be required to pay taxes on anything over $5,000 as part of a phase-in to eventually implement the $600 reporting threshold.

Three Predictions For How SMBs Should Prepare For Growth In 2025

Brock Blake
Forbes Contributor

There's a lot to be optimistic about in 2025. Small business owners have navigated an unprecedented last few years of bank collapses, a tepid funding landscape, and sky-high interest rates to pressure test their business plans. Yet, a new analysis from the U.S. Treasury Department affirms that "more than 70 percent of small business leaders expect revenues to grow over the next year, the most since the pandemic," as they remain a key driver of net new jobs domestically.

With favorable seas ahead, here are my three predictions about what small business owners should expect—and prepare for—to thrive in 2025.

Capital Will Be Put To Work

There's historically been a disconnect between small and medium businesses (SMBs) and lenders regarding access to capital, but things are starting to align.

It's an area close to my heart. For the last couple years, Lendio has fielded a quarterly SMB Lending Index report to gauge sentiment toward the current small business lending market. In September 2024, over 62 percent of the 1,000+ SMBs surveyed agreed that their access to capital met or exceeded the national average; while 24 lenders agreed that loan volume would increase over the next six months.

Loosened qualification requirements for business financing were further underscored by a September announcement from the Federal Reserve which spiked optimism in the market by slashing interest rates. Business owners who have made hard decisions over the past few years should be excited to explore what inventory, loan refinancing, workforce training, or other strategic growth initiatives they'll need to fund to generate more revenue.

With strong signals from the Fed, it's exciting to see the momentum of financial institutions loosening the purse strings to lend to Main Street America. In Houston, Amegy Bank has more than doubled its SBA lending volume in only one year after launching its new program.

I believe 2025 will be a key year in which the early adopters, the most innovative, and customer-focused financial institutions, will leverage cash flow and credit data to accelerate the decisioning of $50,000—$250,000 business loans. In Connecticut, Bankwell has announced their intention to focus on small dollar SBA loans — loans less than $150,000 through the use of technology.

Many signs also point to the incoming presidential Administration's benefit to the small business landscape. While there's a lot of chatter about tariffs, I don't believe prices will skyrocket, but a surge of overseas inventory could impact some individual small and medium businesses. I am optimistic that this will be a good long-term move for the economy.

Access To Capital Meets Other Services

Brands are beginning to compete for more business. One example is Lendio's partnership with Paychex—a payroll and HR company. In November, Paychex announced it had entered the small business lending market through its Paychex Funding Solutions product. Now, small businesses that use the company's payroll and HR services have a streamlined avenue to shop for various lending products to help fuel their growth. Dun & Bradstreet, the leading global provider of business decisioning data and analytics and partner of Lendio, is also offering capital for their small business customers.

These low-friction, high-impact solutions are a fantastic example of the holistic approach many service producers are launching to better serve their customers and keep more of their business.

Off To The Races

I've never claimed to have a crystal ball, but I'm more than cautiously optimistic about the year ahead for small and medium business growth. After a tough few years, it's time for these innovators and drivers of our national economy to get back on their feet. Armed with the knowledge of what to expect and some critical decisions to make, I'm confident they can do just that.

Buying A Franchise—*CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2*

to buy initial inventory. You also may have to pay for operating licenses and insurance and a "grand opening" fee to the franchisor to promote your new outlet.

Continuing Royalty Payments

You may have to pay the franchisor royalties based on a percentage of your weekly or monthly gross income. Typically, you must pay royalties for the right to use the franchisor's name, even if you are losing money. You may have to pay royalties for the duration of your franchise agreement even if the franchisor doesn't provide the services it promised and even if you decide to terminate your franchisee agreement early.

Advertising Fees

You also may have to contribute to an advertising fund. Some portion of the advertising fees may be allocated to national advertising or to attract new franchise owners, rather than to promote your outlet.

Franchisor Controls

To ensure uniformity, franchisors usually control how franchisees conduct business. These controls may significantly restrict your ability to exercise your own business judgment. A franchisor may control:

Site Approval

Many franchisors retain the right to approve sites for their outlets, and may not approve a site you select. Some franchisors conduct extensive site studies as part of the approval process and a site they approve may be more likely to attract customers.

Design or Appearance Standards

Franchisors may impose design or appearance standards to ensure a uniform look among their outlets. Some franchisors require periodic renovations or design changes; complying with these requirements may increase your costs.

Ashley Lamothe made history in 2011 when she became the youngest franchise owner in Chick-fil-A history at the age of 26. A graduate of Spelman College, an HBCU, Lamothe's story is an inspiration to aspiring entrepreneurs of all ages and backgrounds.

Restrictions on Goods and Services You Sell

Franchisors may restrict the goods and services you sell. For example, if you own a restaurant franchise, you may not be able to make any changes to your menu. If you own an automobile transmission repair franchise, you may not be able to perform other types of automotive work, like brake or electrical system repairs.

Restrictions on Method of Operation

Franchisors may require that you operate in a particular way. They may dictate hours; pre-approve signs, employee uniforms and advertisements; or demand that you use certain accounting or bookkeeping procedures. In some cases, a franchise advertising cooperative may require you to sell some goods or services at specific discounted prices, which may affect your profits. Or, the franchisor may require that you buy supplies only from an approved supplier, even if you can buy similar goods elsewhere for less.

Restrictions on Sales Area

A franchisor may limit your business to a specific location or sales territory. If you have an "exclusive" or "protected" territory, it may prevent the franchisor and other franchisees from opening competing outlets or serving customers in your territory, but it may not protect you from all competition by the franchisor. For example, the franchisor may have the right to offer the same goods or services in your sales area through its own website, catalogs, other retailers or competing outlets of a different company-owned franchise.

Contractual Obligations

Franchise contracts last only for the number of years stated in the contract. You can lose the right to your franchise if you don't comply with the contract. You won't have a right to renew unless the franchisor gives you that right.

Terminations

A franchisor can end your franchise agreement for a variety of reasons, including your failure to pay royalties or abide by performance standards and sales restrictions. Many franchise contracts will give you a chance to "cure" an occasional failure to comply (like making one late payment) but keep the right to terminate your franchise for other failures. If your franchise is terminated, you're likely to lose your entire investment.

Renewals

Franchise agreements may run for as long as 20 years. Renewals are not automatic. At the end of the contract term, the franchisor may decline to renew or may offer a renewal that doesn't have the same terms and conditions as your original contract. For example, the franchisor may raise the royalty payments, impose new design standards and sales restrictions, or reduce your territory. Any of these changes may result in higher costs, reduced profits or more competition from company-owned outlets or other franchisees.

Is a Franchise Right for You?

Before you invest in a particular franchise system, think about how much money you have to invest, your abilities and your goals. Be brutally honest.

CreditRich, A Black Woman-Owned Company Secures $100M Investment At $1B Valuation

Nationwide — CreditRich, the first Black woman-owned neobank, that allows users to round up their spare change to pay their bills intelligently and optimize their credit scores as fast as possible, announced today the historic opening of their $100 million Series B Round at the $1 billion valuation and welcomed Rudy Terrazas, Founder of GWA Funding, to their board.

This financing will strengthen CreditRich's self-reinforcing model to expand the number of qualified customers for financial products as well as their spending power. Offering a full-service payments platform as a pioneer of one-stop banking, CreditRich users can effortlessly manage their banking, credit reporting, and digital payments under one umbrella.

After setting up their CreditRich account, users can set up automatic payments for online billing, improving their payment history and ultimate creditworthiness. CreditRich's unique combination of fintech solutions makes it seamless for users to transition between financial accounts with maximum speed, ease, and security while relying on the peace of mind of CreditRich's AI.

Co-founded by HBCU alumni Angel Rich and Courtney Keen, in a traditionally male-dominated financial technology space, this accomplishment cements CreditRich as a disruptive powerhouse, delivering innovative tools for credit optimization and wealth-building, particularly for underserved communities.

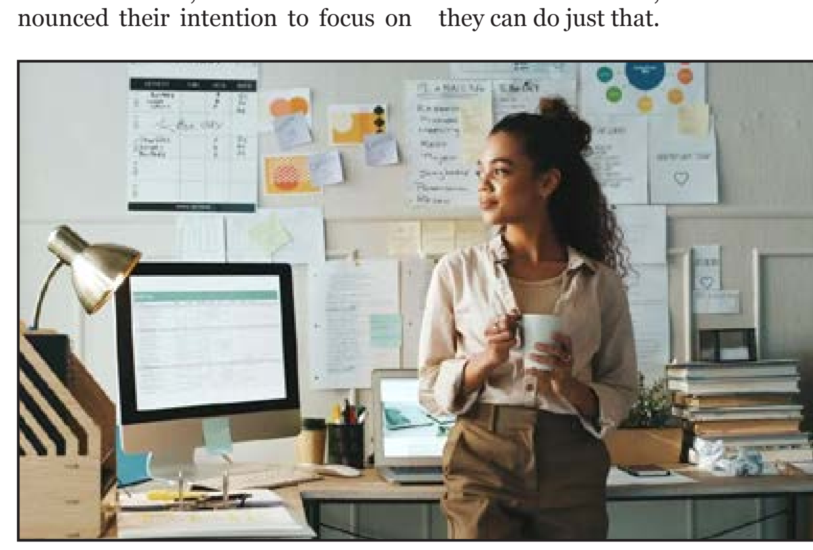
"We are thrilled to open this historic round, breaking ceilings not just for Black women entrepreneurs, but businesswomen everywhere who aspire to change the world," said Founder, Dr. Angel Rich-Jones who recently received an honorary Doctorate of Humanities from United Graduate College and Seminary International. "Rudy's support reinforces our vision of global expansion. We are grateful for his decades of wisdom and honored to share in his legacy."

This funding will allow CreditRich to further its goal of bringing financial access to the masses. According to Forbes, CreditRich previously gained prominence as the first Black company to form a strategic partnership with one of the major credit bureaus as well as the top credit scoring corporation. CreditRich has now formed a partnership with another credit bureau.

Additionally, CreditRich became the first Black woman-owned neobank and the second bank founded by a Black woman in history, in partnership with VISA to deliver CreditRich Visa Signature Debit and Credit Cards with the largest deal executed by a fintech company globally. CreditRich is excited to widen its breadth of credit offerings, payment solutions, and loans with the Series B.

This round marks a major milestone for Mrs. Rich-Jones less than 100 Black women founders have secured $1 million in investment funding for their companies, according to Digital Undivided.

Rich, the author of the bestselling book, History of the Black Dollar, added, "CreditRich is committed to harnessing our power to solve systemic issues like closing the wealth gap, and with Rudy Terrazas on board, we are ready to reach new heights in the payments industry."



Personal Finance

How Retirement Savings Will Be Changing During 2025

Yahoo Finance—Saving for retirement will get a modest boost in 2025 thanks to higher contribution limits and the phase-in of provisions stemming from the Secure 2.0 Act, which became law at the end of 2023.

For retirees, there are also changes for Social Security and Medicare worth noting.

Here's a roundup of some of the key retirement-related changes to watch for in the new year.

Higher saver contribution limits

Employer-sponsored retirement plans come with sizable contribution limits — not that everyone can spare to set aside that much — and they're increasing slightly. For 2025, you'll be able to increase your annual contribution to your 401(k), 403(b), governmental 457 plans, and the federal government's Thrift Savings Plan to $23,500, up from $23,000.

The catch-up contribution limit, for those 50 or older, is holding steady at $7,500. There's an extra layer of icing for workers aged 60 to 63, thanks to the Secure 2.0 law — a higher catch-up contribution limit of $11,250.

"People at this life stage often have college funding in the rearview mirror, so if they're in the position to turbocharge their retirement plan contributions in advance of retirement, they should take advantage of it," Christine Benz, director of personal finance and retirement planning for Morningstar, told Yahoo Finance.

The contribution limit on individual retirement accounts (IRAs) will stick at $7,000, and the catch-up contribution limit for individuals 50 and over stays at $1,000 for 2025.

IRA deductions for singles covered by a retirement plan at work phases out for modified adjusted gross income (MAGI) between $79,000 and $89,000, up from $77,000 to $87,000. The deduction gradually disappears for married couples filing jointly between $126,000 and $146,000, up from $123,000 to $143,000.

Some good news for Roth IRA fans: The income limit range for contributing will increase to between $150,000 and $165,000 for singles and heads of household, up from $146,000 to $161,000. For married couples filing jointly, the range increases to between $236,000 and $246,000, up from $230,000 to $240,000.

Finally, the income limit for the Saver's Credit, a nonrefundable tax credit worth up to $1,000 ($2,000 if married filing jointly) for taxpayers who contribute to a retirement account is $79,000 for married couples, up from $76,500; $59,250 for heads of household, up from $57,375; and $39,500 for singles and married individuals filing separately, up from $38,250.

Healthcare savings accounts

How much you can contribute to

your health savings account or HSA — considered an important retirement tool by financial advisers — nudges up a hair.

The new 2025 annual limit for individuals will be $4,300, up from $4,150. For family coverage, the HSA contribution limit rises to $8,550 from $8,300 this year.

While these accounts are not meant to substitute for your traditional retirement account, HSAs offer a retirement benefit down the road thanks to their triple tax advantage. You put money in on a tax-free basis, it builds up tax-free, and it comes out tax-free for qualified healthcare expenses. That said, for now, "investing in a health-savings account — rather than spending from it — is the best way to harness the big tax benefits that come along with an HSA," Benz said.

One caveat: You must be enrolled in a high-deductible healthcare plan (HDHP) in order to contribute to an HSA. You can also open an account as a self-employed freelancer or business owner if you have a qualified HDHP.

Social Security benefits

The cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) increase in Social Security benefits next year will be small. The Social Security Administration (SSA) announced a 2.5% cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for 2025. That's down from 3.2% this year but in line with the 2.6% average over the past two decades.

Starting in January, the increase will add a little under $50 to the average monthly benefit of roughly $1,900.

Medicare premiums

Heftier Medicare premiums will take a bigger bite out of those retirement checks.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) announced that 2025 monthly Part B premiums will climb to $185, an increase of $10.30. And the annual Part B deductible, which most people must pay before their Medicare coverage begins, will rise by $17 to $257.

Social Security field offices: Call first

Starting Jan. 6, the SSA will require anyone who wants to speak face-to-face with a person to schedule an appointment.

Keep in mind that you can access many SSA services online if you have a My Social Security account. You can also call 1-800-772-1213, which connects you with automated services.

Customers who are not able to handle their business online or over the phone can call their local Social Security office or national phone contact to schedule an appointment. There are currently 1,200-plus field offices.

"We want to make clear that we will not turn people away for service who are unable to make an appointment or do not want to make an appointment," Dawn Bystry, SSA associate commissioner, wrote on the agency's website. "By scheduling appointments, we will aim to reduce wait times, streamline service delivery, and improve the overall customer experience."

Is your full retirement age here?

In 2025, the age at which you become eligible to claim 100% of the retirement benefit calculated from your lifetime earnings will arrive for people born May 2, 1958, through Feb. 28, 1959. That's known as your Full Retirement Age or FRA. Under current law, it will settle at 67 for people born in 1960 and afterward.

You can start collecting retirement benefits before your FRA, at age 62, but your monthly check will be permanently reduced, by as much as 30%.

If you can push back tapping your benefits from your FRA until age 70, you'll earn delayed retirement credits. Those come to roughly an 8% annual increase in your benefit for each year until you hit 70. The credits stop accruing at that point, but the heftier checks remain for the rest of your life.

Should Couples Have A Separate Or Joint Bank Account?

Bankrate—Disputing shared finances among couples can be a hard relationship dealbreaker. Even something as simple as deciding what kind of bank account to open can provoke disagreements, but it's important to consider how your bank account can support your relationship in the long run.

"Most couples hate to talk about money and will delay discussing their finances," says Gina Grippo-Martinez, wealth advisor at ALINE Wealth in the New York City area. "This can lead to some unfortunate surprises down the road," she says, especially around debt and spending levels.

On one hand, it might make sense to have separate accounts so that each partner maintains some financial autonomy. But doesn't a separate account damage the trust in a relationship with your significant other? It doesn't have to, say financial experts, who point to other benefits of separate accounts that can actually strengthen your tie.

Here's what you should consider to decide whether a joint account, separate account, or a blend of both, is right for your relationship.

Why have a joint bank account?

Some couples maintain a joint bank account because it may be a way to maintain their unity as a couple and can make it easier to monitor spending. Others set up a joint account simply because that's "the thing to do" and don't really consider the decision with much self-reflection.

"Foremost, it is a sign of unity, commitment and trust in your relationship and your partner," says Grippo-Martinez. "You are giving each other complete access and control over your money. That is a huge commitment."

A joint account also allows couples "the ability to jointly pay for living expenses and other expenses such as vacations, home projects, and expenses for children," says Skylar Riddle, CFP, financial advisor at Fort Pitt Capital Group in Pittsburgh.

Riddle also points to the ability to fund other savings goals, such as IRAs, and says "it creates unity regardless of income differences between the couple."

But those benefits of closeness can also create significant problems, and in some cases, that commitment could be more of a constraint than a harmonizer.

"Before joining your finances together, you were never accountable to someone else for your spending decisions," says Grippo-Martinez. "Now you have someone looking over your shoulder and reviewing the statements."

On top of that you need to be aware of your partner's spending habits so that money isn't unaccounted for. According to a 2022 study by CreditCards.com, almost one-third (32 percent) of coupled U.S. adults aren't fully transparent about their finances with their partners, with 15 percent saying they spend more than their partner would be okay with. Further, nine percent say they have a secret credit card, and nine percent say they have hidden debt.

But even if your situation isn't quite so drastic, fundamental differences in each partner's saving and spending habits can easily turn into major fights as one partner wants to take a vacation while the other wants

to save that money for retirement.

Still, financial disputes might be rooted in something other than having a joint bank account. What's key is communication. A 2024 study by Fidelity found that those who say they communicate well are less likely to report money as their greatest relationship challenge, and they're more likely to rate their household's financial health as excellent or very good.

Why have separate bank accounts?

Financial experts won't deny that joint accounts can have benefits for a couple, but for some experts those benefits can be maintained even with separate accounts. Plus, separate accounts may prevent uncertainties about each other's spending habits that occur with a joint account.

"If your views on saving and spending are too divergent, it may be best to maintain separate accounts so spending does not become a strain on the relationship," says Grippo-Martinez.

It's possible that separate accounts might give more freedom to each partner. They'll each have full control of their money and won't have to review statements to see who spent what. That privacy means that both partners have to be comfortable with their partner having the same degree of monetary freedom.

While separate accounts may alleviate some disputes, they may stoke others, such as if one partner is paying for all of the essentials and the other is not contributing, says Riddle.

In particularly demanding circumstances it could create some problems, too. "If you are paying a shared debt, you may have to first transfer funds to your partner's account," says Grippo-Martinez. "In the event of an emergency, your partner will not have access to your accounts."

But separate financial accounts don't necessarily mean a lack of commitment or closeness. It still requires a great deal of closeness and communication to help each other through financial hurdles and hardships, while not necessarily having complete access to the other partner's finances.

"It's not the fact that the money is separate or together, it is how you use the money collectively," says Riddle. "Keeping the money separate can actually increase romance because you are able to do things for the other person without the money coming from a joint account."

Try a combination of joint accounts and separate accounts

Fortunately, couples aren't forced into an either-or solution here. They can easily use a separate account for their personal spending and a joint account for their joint payments, such as rent or a mortgage, childcare, utilities and the like. You and your significant other can enjoy the benefits of both accounts, such as joint bill paying, without so much of the concern of differences in spending habits.

It's not uncommon for couples to have a blend of shared and separate accounts. More than one-third of couples (34 percent) reported in the CreditCards.com survey that they have a mix of joint and separate accounts.

With more bank accounts to manage, more coordination will be required to ensure that money is moved into a joint account for paying bills and other shared expenses each month. But that may also give room for both partners to be more communicative about their finances and work together to achieve that coordination.

How Are ETFs Taxed And Why Does it Matter?

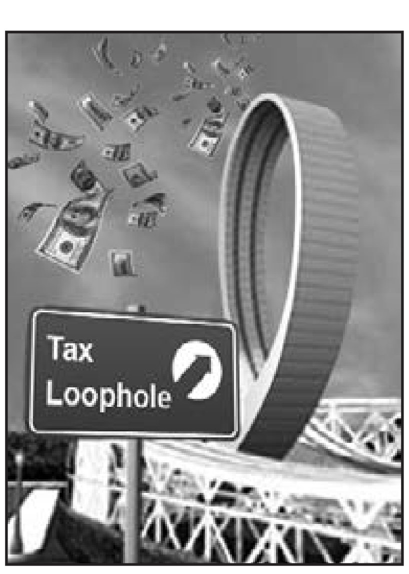
Investopia—The ease of buying and selling exchange-traded funds (ETFs), along with their low transaction costs, have made them popular with investors. They account for over 30% of the daily trading volume on U.S. stock exchanges. They are also more tax-efficient, which is integral to their appeal, especially when competing with mutual funds for your investment dollars. But how much of an advantage do they offer?

Investors need to understand this to strategize better using these funds in their portfolios. We'll begin by exploring the tax rules that apply to ETFs and the exceptions you should know. We also give you numbers from the most recent research on how much the tax benefit of ETFs is. Then, we will show you some money-saving tax strategies that can help you earn a higher return.

ETFs are often said to have better tax treatment than mutual funds because of their structure. They create and redeem shares using in-kind transactions, which aren't considered sales and, therefore, don't trigger taxable events.

This arises from a section of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code of 1986, Section 852(b)(6), which exempts the distribution of capital gains when the shares whose values appreciated are given in kind to redeeming investors—namely the market makers for the ETFs.

That's the overall structure behind ETFs. However, selling your shares in an ETF is a taxable event. Whether you have a long-term or short-



term capital gain or loss depends on how long you've held the shares. In the U.S., you need to hold an ETF for more than a year to benefit from any sale being treated as long-term capital gains. If you hold it for a year or less, it's considered a short-term gain, which typically results in a higher tax rate.

Financial advisors and websites often tout how ETFs are more tax-efficient than mutual funds. Studies show that this tax efficiency is a major part of their appeal to investors. However, while the conventional wisdom on this is everywhere, the data behind the claim is not. However, without specifics, it's hard to weigh this advantage against other investment options, including mutual funds.

Research offers a clearer picture of any advantages, but you might want to temper expectations should you anticipate eye-popping numbers. For decades, the tax benefits of ETFs have been among the stories on Wall Street. When mutual fund managers buy and sell securities within the fund, capital gains from these transactions are passed on to investors as distributions, which are typically taxable events, even if you don't sell your shares.

ETFs use a creation and redemption process that involves in-kind transactions, allowing them to avoid triggering capital gains taxes until investors sell their ETF shares. This makes ETFs more tax-efficient.

While there is a tax advantage to the creation and redemption structure of ETFs, there's reason to think any such differences between these assets have narrowed. For example, mutual funds have reduced turnover rates to compete with ETFs by cutting fees and the number of taxable events for shareholders. Although not always the case, lower turnover rates should result in more tax efficiency, especially for equities funds. In recent years, comparable passively managed index mutual funds and ETFs have had similar turnover rates.

A Villanova and University of Pennsylvania study puts the overall average annual after-tax advantage of ETFs at 0.92%.7 This may not seem like much, but those shopping around for minute differences in expense ratios and who know the power of compounding can see that it's significant. Indeed, the authors conclude it's enough to be "a significant driver of the capital migration by high-net-worth investors from mutual funds into ETFs."

We see less of a difference between index mutual funds and similar ETFs. Using a method giving them bottom-line results supposing all investors are from the highest tax brackets (thus amplifying potential differences between the two fund types) and data from the 1990s to 2017 (which cuts off some of the recent movement of mutual funds toward more ETF-like turnover on average), they found the annual average tax burden of a passively managed ETF was 0.37% against 0.84% for a mutual fund.

Other studies show more of a convergence. For example, Derek Horstmeyer, a professor of finance at George Mason University, pulled data on ETFs and mutual funds with similar holdings, choosing pairs with the same objectives within the same mutual fund families. While not a large sample—he and his colleagues used 10 matched pairs in each of six asset classes—it's not too broad either, giving you macro figures on all ETFs and mutual funds in a way that isn't very actionable.

The data showed that ETFs provide an extra 0.20% post-tax performance compared with their mutual fund counterparts. The differences varied across asset classes, ranging from 0.33% for international equity funds to 0.03% for fixed-income funds.

Going Back To Work In Retirement May Cost You

Katie Brockman

The Motley Fool

Retirement can be incredibly expensive, and it's not uncommon for older adults to continue working in some capacity later in life. In fact, a whopping 75% of workers expect to work for pay in retirement, according to a 2024 report from the Employee Benefit Research Institute.

However, working while collecting Social Security can affect your benefit amount. The average working retiree could see their checks slashed by around $239 per month, and depending on your income, most of your benefit could even be withheld. Here's what to expect heading into 2025.

If you continue to earn an income after taking Social Security and you're under your full retirement age (FRA), your wages will be subject to the retirement earnings-test income limit. When your income surpasses this limit, your benefits will be reduced in the years leading up to your FRA.

To determine whether your benefits will be reduced, you'll first need to know your exact FRA and your income for the year. Your FRA will depend on your birth year, but it's between ages 66 and 67 for everyone.

There are two income limits: one for those who will be well below their FRA in 2025 and a second for workers who will reach their FRA in the next year.

(See **WORK IN RETIREMENT**, P. 12)

Real Estate and Housing

State Taxes: What You'll Pay In 2025

North Carolina is moderately tax-friendly to residents over 65. Social Security income is not taxed, and there are no inheritance or estate taxes. Its flat income tax rate, scheduled to gradually decrease until tax year 2026, places it in the bottom third of states.

How is income taxed in North Carolina?

North Carolina has a flat income tax rate, which means residents pay the same individual income tax rate regardless of income level.

Under recent tax changes, North Carolina's individual income tax rate will decrease every year until it reaches 3.99 percent for tax year 2026. The rate for tax year 2024 was 4.5 percent. That decreased to 4.25 percent for tax year 2025.

Are pensions or retirement income taxed in North Carolina?

Most retirement income is taxed as individual income. For tax year 2024, the rate was 4.5 percent.

North Carolina cannot tax certain retirement benefits, such as the North Carolina Teachers' and State Employees' Retirement System and the North Carolina Consolidated Judicial Retirement System, if a retiree qualifies. Certain military retirement pay also is not taxed for qualified military retirees.

The AARP Retirement Calculator can help you determine if you are saving enough to retire when — and how — you want.

What about investment income?

Capital gains from investments are taxed as individual income. For tax year 2024, capital gains were taxed at the flat state income tax rate of 4.5 percent.

Does North Carolina tax Social Security benefits?

No, but you may pay federal taxes on a portion of your Social Security benefits, depending on your income. Up to 50 percent of your benefits will be taxed if you file an individual tax return and make $25,000 to $34,000 in total income — or if you're a married couple filing jointly and make $32,000 to $44,000 in total income. Up to 85 percent of your benefits will be taxed by the federal government if your total income is more than $34,000 individually or $44,000 as a couple.

AARP's Social Security Calculator can assist you in determining when to claim and how to maximize your Social Security benefits.

How is property taxed in North Carolina?

The average property tax rate in North Carolina was .82 percent of a home's assessed value in 2021, according to the Tax Foundation.

Property taxes vary widely by county in North Carolina. The lowest median property tax paid was $701 in Bertie County, while the highest was $3,784 in Orange County, according to 2021 data from the Tax Foundation.

Your property taxes are locally assessed and collected by counties. Your home's appraised value and the tax rate set by counties and municipalities are used to calculate your property taxes. More information on how your property taxes are calculated is on the North Carolina Department of Revenue (NCDOR) website. Information on how to appeal your home's appraised property value can be found on the state's website.

Counties also tax motor vehicles and personal property such as machinery and office furniture.

What about sales and other taxes?

Sales tax: North Carolina's sales tax is 4.75 percent and municipalities can add up to 2.75 percent in local sales tax, for a combined average sales tax rate of 7 percent, according to the Tax Foundation.

Exemptions: Groceries, except for candy and soda, are exempt from state sales tax, but a 2 percent local tax is charged. Other examples of sales tax-exempt items include prescription drugs and some medical supplies.

Gas and diesel: The motor fuels tax, which includes gasoline and diesel, is 40.4 cents per gallon and is charged instead of sales tax.

Vehicle tax: Counties tax motor vehicles. You pay your annual vehicle registration renewal fees and vehicle property taxes at the same time to the Division of Motor Vehicles under its Tag and Tax Together program. The Division of Motor Vehicles then gives the amount you paid in property taxes to your county.

Alcohol: North Carolina levies a 62-cents-per-gallon excise tax on beer and a $1-per-gallon excise tax on wine, in addition to sales tax. Liquor is only sold in state-run stores, and additional excise taxes are not charged. Excise taxes are paid by the vendor, but some or all may be included in the retail price.

Lottery: North Carolina taxes all lottery winnings at the state's 4.25 percent income tax rate for tax year 2025.

Will I or my heirs have to pay inheritance and estate tax in North Carolina?

No, there is no inheritance or estate tax in North Carolina.

Energy Efficiency Rebates

In 2023, the U.S. Department of Energy released its program guidance for the Homeowners Managing Efficiency Rebates (HOMES) and Home Electrification and Appliance Rebates (HEAR) programs, which together allocate over $208 million to North Carolina to provide energy efficiency rebates.

In March 2024, DEQ applied for the planning grant funds for the home energy rebates programs. DEQ is using these funds to complete the applications and the state rebate program design.

In Summer 2024, DEQ completed the applications and required program design blueprint for the implementation funds. DEQ continues to work to implement the NC Home Energy Rebate Program and is aiming to launch the program in early 2025.

Frequently Asked Questions

Question 1: Are home energy rebates from the Inflation Reduction Act currently available?

No. DEQ is working to design and implement a program that makes rebates accessible to North Carolina residents. In July 2024, North Carolina submitted the applications for the U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE) Home Energy Rebates (HER) and Home Electrification and Appliance Rebates (HEAR) programs. In August 2024, the state submitted additional program design blueprints to DOE and is awaiting feedback. In September 2024, DOE approved North Carolina's applications for federal funding. DEQ is now working to launch the program by early 2025.

Question 2: What is the timeline for program rollout?

DEQ knows it's important to start the Home Energy Rebate Program quickly so North Carolina residents can access the rebates. DEQ aims to launch the program and begin accepting applications in early 2025. The timeline for the NC Home Energy Rebate Program is designed to meet all the important rules and standards from the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE).

Question 3: How will the rebate program work?

How to Apply: DEQ will launch the program in early 2025. Materials provided after the program launch will include detailed information on everything residents need to know so they can apply. The application process will include the ability for applicants to apply online, via phone, and U.S. mail. Information such as income or participation in existing income-qualified programs (to determine income eligibility) and energy usage from utility bills may be needed to apply. Once eligibility is determined, the applicant can reach out to an eligible contractor to assess the home's energy needs and develop a plan for upgrades and rebates for DEQ's review and approval.

How to Access Rebates: Rebates will be submitted, processed and reimbursed through contractors. Contractors will be reimbursed once the project invoice and other required post-installation documentation is submitted to and approved by DEQ.

Some people might want to purchase and install appliances or do the work themselves. But, to get the rebate, a qualified contractor or installer must do the work.

Question 4: Will rebates be available to residents who purchased home energy upgrades before the program started?

DEQ will follow the U.S. Department of Energy guidance on retroactive rebate eligibility. DOE requires that states provide rebates for eligible whole house energy savings retrofits that began on or after August 16, 2022. These projects would need to comply with state and federal program requirements to be eligible, including income-eligibility and using a contractor in the Qualified Contractor Network. Rebates offered through the Home Electrification and Appliance Rebates are not available retroactively.

Projects completed before the programs officially launch may not comply with the guidelines established later on. For all of these reasons, residents are encouraged to wait until the North Carolina Home Energy Rebate Program has been established and review the program requirements before making purchases to ensure the best chance of qualifying for the rebates.

Question 5: Who is eligible for the Home Energy Rebate Program?

A North Carolina resident's eligibility is primarily based on their annual income and household size. If your income falls within a certain range for your area, you may be eligible for the program. Additional tools to support eligibility determination will be available soon.

Home energy rebates are available to both owners and renters of single-family homes or multi-family buildings. If a resident is enrolled in certain existing federal assistance programs, such as the Low-Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP) or Medicaid, they may be eligible for the Home Energy Rebate Program without needing to provide additional income information. Households with incomes below 80% of the Area Median Income (AMI) may be eligible for a larger rebate amount.

Renters will need to coordinate with their landlord for approval to participate in the program. Owners of multi-family buildings can apply for rebates for the whole building or for just some of the apartments as long as eligibility is met by over 50% of the tenants.

Question 6: What factors determine how much money a household can get for home energy rebates?

The money available for home energy rebates varies depending on factors including:

Per-household rebate limits established by the law and program administrators,

What technology or technologies are being installed in the home,

Whether or not the project has estimated energy savings, and how those energy savings are calculated,

The household's Area Median Income (AMI), and

The total project cost.

Area Median Income is determined by the Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) each year. You can use the HUD portal to view AMI by county and number of family members. Here is another tool that provides AMI calculations by state, county and up to the 150% AMI limit by number of family members.

Question 7: Will the Home Energy Rebate Program integrate with existing home energy benefit programs, e.g., LIEAP or WAP?

Yes. DEQ will allow people who are already participating in existing home energy programs like the Low-Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP) or the Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) to participate in the Home Energy Rebate Program, as long as they meet the Program's eligibility criteria. People who are on the waitlist for WAP are eligible to apply for this program. However, double counting rebates from different federal grants to cover the same upgrade is not allowed.

Holiday Week Brings Higher Rates

The holiday season isn't prime time for the housing market. Fewer people buy and sell homes in the winter months, leading to a decline in home loan applications.

Furthermore, mortgage rates have reached their highest levels in weeks. Following the Federal Reserve's third interest rate cut at its December policy meeting, the average 30-year fixed rate jumped back up to its November high of around 7%.

Though the Fed influences the direction of overall borrowing rates, it doesn't directly control the mortgage market. Mortgage rates are driven by investor expectations and move with the yield on the 10-year Treasury, with numerous factors affecting the bond market. For mortgage rates to reverse their upward trend, bond market investors would have to be convinced that the economy is cooling.

Until there's proof that inflation is easing and the job market is softening, mortgage rates will stay elevated in the near term. The Fed is projecting a slower pace of rate cuts over the course of 2025, which will likely keep average rates somewhat volatile, fluctuating between 5.75% on the low end and 7.25% on the high end, according to HousingWire's 2025 forecast.

Why are mortgage rates higher after the Fed's rate cut?

The recent surge in longer-term Treasury yields and home loan rates was due in large part to the Fed's newly updated Summary of Economic Projections, outlining expectations for just two 0.25% interest rate cuts in 2025, down from four previously.

To maintain maximum employment and contain inflation, the Fed assesses economic data to determine whether to raise or lower its benchmark short-term interest rate. Investors care about the Fed's future outlook for rate adjustments because it determines their trading strategy and risk assessment.

This month, markets heavily weighed Fed Chair Jerome Powell's concerns about inflation reigniting and President-elect Donald Trump's tax and tariff proposals. Powell conveyed a more conservative tone about future policy changes: "When the path is uncertain, you go a little bit slower."

Taking cues from "a more hawkish Fed," prices in the bond and stock market quickly plunged, according to Matt Graham of Mortgage News Daily. Hawkish monetary policy tends to be more restrictive, relying on higher interest rates to keep inflation in check.

Though the Fed pivoted to cutting interest rates back in September, it's wary of easing them too quickly only to see progress on inflation stall or reverse course entirely. Experts say the Fed is likely to hold off on additional reductions until March or even later.

Where are mortgage rates going in 2025?

Although experts optimistically predicted rates would fall close to 6% by the end of 2024, projections have changed significantly. Fannie Mae now expects average 30-year fixed mortgage rates to hold above 6.5% until early 2025.

"If the Fed does end up only cutting twice next year, it's possible mortgage rates will stay pretty similar to where they are now," said Chen Zhao, head of economic research at Redfin.

Aside from the normal day-to-day volatility, mortgage rates will stay above 6% for a while. That may seem high compared with the recent 2% rates of the pandemic era. But experts say getting below 3% on a 30-year fixed mortgage is unlikely without a severe economic downturn. Since the 1970s, the average rate for a 30-year fixed mortgage has been around 7%.

Given a new administration, changes in the geopolitical outlook and a risk of inflation rebounding, forecasts could change again over the coming months. Future rate movement depends on an array of factors, including:

Trump's economic policies: Trump's proposals for tax cuts and tariffs are a big wild card for mortgage rates.

10-year Treasury yields: Average 30-year fixed mortgage rates closely track bond yields, specifically 10-year Treasury yields. If inflation and labor data continues to be strong, bond yields and mortgage rates will go up.

Geopolitical situations: Mortgage rates are also impacted by geopolitical events, including military conflicts and elections. Political instability can lead to economic uncertainty, which can result in more volatility with bond yields and mortgage rates.

Are You Getting All Your Property Tax Breaks?

Whether you live in the Appalachian Mountains, the Piedmont Plateau, or the Tidewater area of North Carolina, there's no escaping local property taxes. Under North Carolina Gen. Stat. § 105-289, individual counties in North Carolina have the power to manage and collect those taxes. Of course, like any homeowner, you want to make sure that you are not overpaying.

Fortunately, there might be ways to lower your property tax burden, including:

•appealing the valuation of your property (available to all North Carolina homeowners), and

•checking whether you meet certain qualifications under your local tax code, for example for elderly and disabled low-income residents.

If you qualify, you can seek tax relief using both these methods.

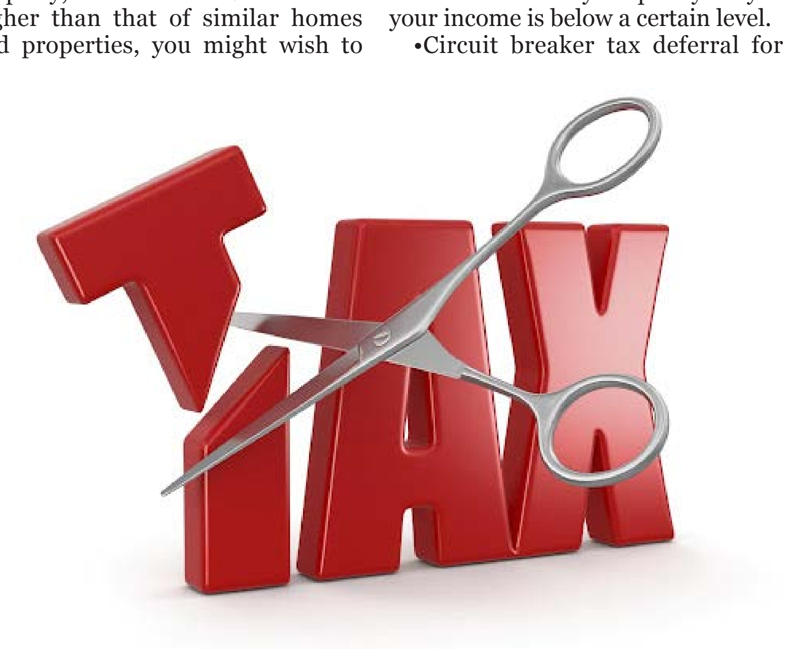
Appeal the Taxable Value of Your North Carolina Home

You might know that the North Carolina authorities compute your property tax by multiplying your home's taxable value by the applicable tax rate.

Consider this example. Dennis and Margaret own a home in North Carolina. The assessor has placed a taxable value of $200,000 on it. If the property tax rate is 1% in their county (it's ordinarily slightly less), Dennis and Margaret will owe $2,000 in property tax. However, based on research into assessed property values in their area, they appeal the $200,000 figure. The appeals board reduces their assessed value to $150,000. Now, they owe only $1,500 in annual property tax on their North Carolina home.

Sometimes, a county assessor might wrongly believe that a home is larger than it is, or be unaware of damage (such as defective roofing or leaky pipes) that reduces its value. Or perhaps the assessor ignored the value of similar homes in the area in overvaluing yours.

If you believe that the tax assessor has misjudged the value of your property, or if the taxable value is higher than that of similar homes and properties, you might wish to pursue an appeal.



Claim All North Carolina Tax Breaks to Which You're Entitled

North Carolina allows for reduced property taxes if homeowners meet certain requirements. Below is a summary of the chief programs in North Carolina. See also North Carolina Gen. Stat § 105-277.

•Homestead exclusion for elderly or disabled. If you are 65 years old or older, or you are permanently disabled, you are eligible for a partial exemption worth a minimum of $25,000, with annual adjustments for inflation. But you qualify only if your income is below a certain level.

•Circuit breaker tax deferral for elderly and disabled. Some North Carolina homeowners are eligible for a property tax deferment program. It places a ceiling on how much tax the owners must pay. The tax amount above the ceiling is deferred until a disqualifying event occurs—typically when the home changes hands. To get this tax break, you must be 65 years old or older and permanently and totally disabled. In addition, you must have lived in the home for at least five years, and have income below a designated level.

•Homestead exclusion for disabled veterans. A $45,000 exemption is available to a disabled veteran, or surviving spouse (who has not remarried). The veteran must first be certified as being totally and permanently disabled because of military service. If you take this exemption, you can't receive any other property tax break.

For More Information on North Carolina Property Tax Law

Although North Carolina laws set statewide property tax rules, your local government handles the administration and levying of the tax. Contact your county tax assessor for complete details on how property tax exemptions apply in your county. Be sure to ask about any forms you need to complete, and the deadline for filing them. To find contact information for your county tax assessor, explore the North Carolina assessors list posted by the state's Department of Revenue.

Health and Wellness

How A Medical Crisis Derailed Their Retirement Plans

By Noah Sheidlower
Business Insider

Vera Steward, 64, earned over $60,000 a year at the peak of her career. But since having a stroke at 48, she hasn't returned to work and is just scraping by.

She's one of many older Americans who shared with *Business Insider* in recent months how an unexpected medical crisis derailed their retirement plans and what they wish they'd done differently. As of publication, over 3,300 readers between the ages of 48 and 96 have responded to an informal online survey or emailed reporters about their biggest life regrets. This is part of an ongoing series.

While many medical diagnoses are unpredictable, dozens of respondents, including Steward, said they wish they'd been better prepared financially. Their regrets include not being more cautious with spending or savvier with investments when they were healthier, not prioritizing routine medical appointments, not factoring medical expenses into retirement planning, and not having robust insurance.

Eleven said in interviews that a medical diagnosis at the peak of their careers led them to retire early, and as a result, they rely on federal government checks to get by.

Steward is one of them, despite having a master's degree and working since she was a teenager. After her stroke almost 20 years ago, she began receiving slightly over $1,000 in monthly Social Security Disability Insurance; she now receives $1,688 in Social Security after cost-of-living adjustments. Nearly half of her benefits go toward rent, and she only receives $23 monthly in SNAP benefits to help buy food. Some months, she decides between getting a haircut or buying groceries, and she's relied on her daughter for financial assistance.

"I've always been middle class, and now I guess I'm no class," said Steward, who lives in Columbus, Georgia. "I'm in this house almost 24/7. The only time I leave is to go to the doctor. I have nowhere to go."

Anita Clemons Swanagan, 59, wishes she'd spoken up for herself more during her working years to be paid what she's worth. While employed at prisons and hospitals, she was on her feet all day often working 12-hour shifts — in addition to second jobs as a gig worker — so she could raise her three daughters.

Vera Steward, a 64-year-old woman who is dealing with the reality of a medical diagnosis while living on a fixed income. Rita Harper/BI

Swanagan injured her back and developed arthritis. She had a stroke at 45 and worked again for a decade until she had a second stroke in 2021, which affected her walking, speech, and cognitive functioning.

In addition to wishing she'd asked for better pay and more health accommodations, she said she could have done more to grow her wealth, such as saving more and giving less to others. She also wished she'd prioritized her health and took more time off while sick, but she said there's little use looking back on what might have been. She lives in her SUV in rural Illinois on $1,500 a month in Social Security before Medicare deductions.

"People think they have enough money, but all they have to go through is one major illness that could wipe out everything," Swanagan said.

Swanagan is one of dozens *BI* spoke with who are battling health conditions, unable to work, and relying on government assistance to keep them afloat. Because of their medical conditions, most rely on two federal programs colloquially called "disability": Social Security Disability Insurance and Supplemental Security Income. Many said it isn't enough to pay their bills.

SSDI benefits are based on your work history. In 2024, the average monthly payment was $1,537, with a maximum payment of $3,822 a month. SSI, which is allocated to people with disabilities and limited incomes, will be capped at $967 a month for an eligible individual in 2025.

Retirees' reliance on these programs has risen while the benefits have barely kept up with the cost of living. The average inflation-adjusted Social Security payment for disability insurance in December 1999 was $1,413 a month; at the end of 2023, it was $1,537, SSA data showed. While 3.2% of workers covered by Social Security in 1999 were disabled workers who received Social Security insurance, this rose to 4% in 2023.

And it's becoming more difficult to qualify for these benefits, said Steve Perrigo, the vice president of sales and marketing at Allsup, a company that represents people with disabilities. SSDI processing times have doubled over the past few years while approval rates have fallen to historic lows.

In fiscal year 2023, 61% of disability claims were rejected initially, while 85% were denied in reconsideration, according to Social Security Administration data and information provided by Allsup. About 45% of people are approved in hearings, which come after denials of an additional application and reconsideration.

Perrigo said he encourages clients to try to find work before, during, and after receiving benefits if they're able to.

"We see individuals who have to go through foreclosure and tap into their 401(k) and bankruptcies," Perrigo said of the long wait times to receive benefits.

For some, including Paula Mastro, returning to work isn't an option.

Mastro, who's 65 and lives on just under $1,100 a month in Social Security benefits, worked part-time in restaurants and catering jobs while raising her daughter and spent years as a full-time caretaker for her parents. She told *BI* she regretted working odd jobs that didn't provide a pension and not contributing to a 401(k). She also said it was a mistake to not properly document some of her income on tax forms, which hurt her Social Security allotment.

In 1991, Mastro received about $200,000 in a divorce settlement, most of which she spent on a home and car. She said often lived paycheck to paycheck and didn't prioritize investments.

Mastro developed back problems in the late 1990s after a car accident and was diagnosed with fibromyalgia over a decade ago. Earlier this year, she developed an inflammatory skin disease that prevented her from returning to work.

She said that last year, her public assistance covered only a fraction of her medical expenses, putting her thousands of dollars in debt. She lives in a low-income condo she inherited from her sister and barely has anything in savings.

"You expect in your golden years to be traveling, going on vacation, bringing your grandchildren to the theater," Mastro said. "I didn't do any of that because I couldn't. I should have saved up for retirement."

Jan Lovell, 73, said she should have learned more about finances during and after her marriage. Lovell, who lives in Warren, Michigan, was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in 2005. As the disease progresses, it further complicates her financial planning.

Lovell spent 25 years as a church secretary, earning a modest salary. She only contributed about 5% to her 401(k) and let her husband handle most of her finances. An unexpected divorce in 2004 put Lovell into "float through life" mode, during which time she didn't have a financial plan and did what she could to pay her bills. Over her career, she accumulated seven retirement funds she never combined, totaling $160,000.

She went through a foreclosure in 2010, and she worked for another decade until retiring in January 2020.

She lives off about $3,300 monthly gross income from Social Security pre-deductions and a pension, but medical expenses, such as contributing $3,500 for a wheelchair, have put a dent in her wallet. After a recent hospitalization, she's planning to move to a senior living facility that she expects will deplete her savings by 2027.

"Most places I've looked at now are $3,000 a month for a 400-square-foot unit, which is twice the cost and half the square footage of a regular apartment," Lovell said. "The 'assistance' is an additional charge, depending on needs, and I'll likely need the most expensive level, at about $2,000 a month."

D. Duane MaGee, 78, thought he prepared well for retirement, but after losing thousands in the 2008 market crash, he regretted putting too much faith in the market — and hasn't touched investments since.

MaGee made six figures as a manager at Ford. He retired in his early 50s as the plant shuttered. He'd saved money throughout his career, though not enough. To compensate for his reduced income, he worked in security at a hospital and in hotel management.

His wife had a quadruple bypass surgery three decades ago, and he became her caregiver in between his work shifts. His wife's medications ate up a portion of their savings each month. The 2008 market crash erased nearly $80,000 of their limited retirement savings — much of which was his wife's inheritance from her mother — and he wished he had been more proactive about saving while at Ford.

MaGee, who still cares for his wife, was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease six years ago. He gave up his retirement job shortly after the diagnosis, and they rely on about $62,000 a year in retirement income from Social Security and a pension. Meanwhile, rising inflation has made them even more cautious about spending.

"I don't know how I'm going to get savings now because we're getting a lot older now, and so we have things facing us now where we don't know where the money is going to come from," MaGee said.

Gardening Is For Your Body And Mind

Why does gardening seem to be so beneficial to health? It combines physical activity with social interaction and exposure to nature and sunlight. Sunlight lowers blood pressure as well as increasing vitamin D levels in the summer, and the fruit and vegetables that are produced have a positive impact on the diet.

Working in the garden restores dexterity and strength, and the aerobic exercise that is involved can easily use the same number of calories as might be expended in a gym. Digging, raking and mowing are particularly calorie intense; there is a gym outside many a window.

The social interaction provided by communal and therapeutic garden projects for those with learning disabilities and poor mental health can counteract social isolation. Furthermore, it has also been reported that the social benefits of such projects can delay the symptoms of dementia (an effect that might be partly due to the beneficial effects of exercise). Patients who are recovering from myocardial infarction or stroke find that exercise in a garden, using constraint therapy of a paretic limb, for example, is more effective, enjoyable and sustainable than therapy in formal exercise settings. For some patients, gardening can even lead to employment. There are also successful schemes that involve volunteers to help older people who cannot manage their gardens, with both the volunteer and the owner benefitting from the social interaction and from the produce and a shared interest.

Intelligent Health points out that the pandemic of physical inactivity is the fourth leading cause of premature death, and contributes to preventable physical and mental disorders. The Department of Health calculates that an increase of only 10% in average exercise by adults would postpone 6000 deaths and save $500 million annually.

Regular moderate intensity exercise may reduce the risk of dementia, mental health problems, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and cancer of the breast and colon, and in an Australian study, gardening was found to be more effective than walking, education or maintaining alcohol intake at moderate levels in protecting against dementia. It enhances self esteem and alters the EEG. Similarly, moderate exercise in leisure time is associated with increased longevity, regardless of weight, particularly if combined with exposure to natural scenes, although some studies have suggested that exercise declines with reduced cognition; a reverse causation bias.

Thankfully, high intensity exercise is not needed to obtain these benefits, which is perhaps as well given that the uptake of cycling- and gym-based exercise is poor in the older population, and that these activities can be expensive. Gardening or simply walking through green spaces could therefore be important in preventing and treating ill health.

Junk Food And Drug Use Cut Into Life Expectancy

Stateline—After large drops during the pandemic, life expectancy in the United States should recover to 2019 levels this year nationally and in 26 states — but not as fast as it should compared with similar countries, according to a new study.

Bad habits such as junk food, smoking and illicit drug use are preventing longer lifespans even as technology brings major progress in diseases such as cancer and heart disease, according to a new study by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington.

By 2050, U.S. life expectancy is projected to increase from 79.1 years to 80.4 years for babies born in that year, a modest improvement that would drop the United States behind nearly all other high-income countries, according to the study.

Poverty and inadequate health insurance are slowing progress in some states. Wealthier, more urban and better-educated states are doing better and are more likely to adopt policies that save lives, from curbing gun access to offering income supports for young mothers. Nine of the 10 states (all but North Dakota) with the longest life expectancies for babies born this year are dominated by Democrats, and all 10 have expanded Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act. All 10 states with the shortest life expectancies are controlled by Republicans (though Kentucky has a Democratic governor), and they include five of the 10 states that have not expanded Medicaid.

A Stateline analysis of data from the study shows how some states have risen, and some have tumbled, in terms of life expectancy.

In 1990, for example, New York and West Virginia were nearly tied at Nos. 39 and 41 among states' life expectancy rankings. But the two have since taken sharply different paths — New York rose to No. 3 in 2024 and is projected to have the longest life expectancy of any state by 2050, passing Hawaii and Massachusetts.

West Virginia outranks only Mississippi in 2024 and is projected to be last among states in 2050.

New York has benefited from good health care availability in New York City hospitals as well as state policies such as strict gun laws that have curbed suicides, and harm reduction policies to curb overdose deaths with supervised use sites and other controversial programs, said Brett Harris, president of the New York State Public Health Association and an associate professor in the University of Albany's Department of Health Policy.

Harris said she's not surprised that New York state, despite its ascent in life expectancy among states, would still drop from No. 33 to No. 41 by 2050 if ranked as a nation, according to the analysis.

"I think part of that is how individualistic we are in this country, the idea of always trying to get ahead, versus more of a community-based environment in other countries," Harris said. "Their social policies tend to be better for health outcomes. If you live in more of a family environment versus an individualistic environment, that builds in more support."

West Virginia's sparse population and rural poverty make it harder to get health care. It's also hard to get past community and political skepticism about health measures, said Brian Huggins, health officer for Monongalia County, West Virginia. Huggins has worked with other county health officials to advocate for stricter anti-smoking laws and to maintain school vaccination mandates in the face of opposition.

"It hurts to see West Virginia ranked at the bottom. We're a proud state," said Huggins, adding that life expectancy there also is hampered by lack of economic opportunity that drives young, healthy residents to move away. A plethora of concerns include a lack of sidewalks that make healthy walking more hazardous, and a dietary culture that does not include vegetables; both promote obesity.

Huggins also has seen conditions abroad. While stationed in Germany for the U.S. Army, he saw generous health provisions for Germans, such as two-week retreats with massages and sauna baths for those feeling stressed or burned out at work.

"Their goal in Germany is they want you back at work. Prevention and keeping a healthy workforce are their priority because that contributes to the economy," said Huggins. "On the other hand, they have built a tax system to support this. You pay like an 18% tax on everything you buy there.

NC Saw Progress In Health Insurance Coverage In 2024, But With Problems

NC Newsline - North Carolina reached significant milestones in health, with more people gaining insurance and some on track to have their medical debts forgiven.

Gov. Roy Cooper announced this month that more than 600,000 people had enrolled in expanded Medicaid. The state has been enrolling people in expanded Medicaid for a little more than a year and the pace of sign-ups is twice as fast as expected.

Cooper fought for Medicaid expansion for years. He started pushing for it even before he was sworn in as governor nearly eight years ago.

Over the years of debate, Medicaid expansion advocates estimated that 600,000 people would be eligible for insurance coverage under expanded Medicaid.

As the state reaches this milestone, challenges may lie ahead.

The state law expanding Medicaid has a trigger that would dissolve it if the federal government stops paying 90% of the cost. Health policy experts worry, with Republicans controlling the White House and both chambers of Congress, the federal government may reduce cost sharing.

Medical debt: Cooper and state Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Kody Kinsley enacted a plan allowing hospitals to collect increased federal payments in exchange for forgiving some patients' old debts and helping them avoid new debt.

All the state's hospitals signed on.

North Carolina has one of the highest percentages of adults who report having medical debt, according to the Peterson Center on Healthcare and KFF.

Cooper and Kinsley said the plan has the potential to erase $4 billion in debt for 2 million people.

Dental care: Despite this progress, the healthcare system is still failing to meet the needs of low-income residents and marginalized communities.

A state report said that Medicaid doesn't pay dentists enough to treat people who use it as their insurance.

Medicaid reimbursement rates for dental care haven't changed since 2008.

About 40% to 45% of active licensed dentists participate in the Medicaid dental program. Many are not accepting new patients, the report said.

In 2022, dental procedures comprised 14% of services to Medicaid beneficiaries. Around 2% of Medicaid payments went to dental providers.

Children and adults are living with untreated cavities. About 20% of kindergarteners untreated tooth decay, according to DHHS data.

Dental care can be hard to find in rural counties.

Ninety-four of the state's 100 counties have shortages of dental health care professionals. Four eastern counties have no dentist, according to UNC's Sheps Center for Health Services Research.

Maternal mortality: The state's maternal mortality review committee reported this year that 65 of the 76 pregnancy-related deaths in 2018 and 2019 were preventable.

The death rate for Black people was 1.6 times higher than for white people.

Some of the committee's recommendations for reducing maternal deaths centered on expanding the availability of doula services. Specifically, it recommended incorporating community health workers, doulas, and care managers into obstetrics care, and reimbursing doulas through Medicaid. Doulas offer support through pregnancy and labor. Some continue to work with families after babies are born.

More than half the births in North Carolina are covered by Medicaid.

An insurance company that operates Medicaid managed care plans published a report saying that pregnant women who use Medicaid and doula services are less likely to have cesarean sections and less likely to experience postpartum anxiety or depression.

Arts & Culture

Iota Iota Chapter Holiday Giving

The Iota Iota Chapter of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. did their annual Christmas projects on Saturday, December 21st. This is a special time of the year the chapter enjoys by giving back to the community. Uplift is our fourth cardinal principle. This principle truly comes alive during the holiday season. The first project of the Iota Iota Chapter began with the Omega C.H.A.M.P.S. mentoring program Annual Hats, Socks, and Gloves Donation to the Helping Hand Mission. The men of the Iota Iota chapter and the O.M.E.G.A Champs donated 234 hats, 432 pairs of socks, 340 pair of gloves and 212 scarves to the Helping Hand Mission on 623 Rock Quarry Rd in Raleigh. Our efforts contribute to the Helping Hand Mission of supporting people and families in need with these necessities, as we approach the winter season. Following the Helping Hand Mission, the chapter participated in Breakfast with Santa at the Tarboro Rd. Park Community Center. A donation was made to the center on behalf of the Omega C.H.A.M.P.S for $200 dollars. Annual Christmas Shopping Project at Wal-Mart, located on 4500 Fayetteville Rd. The Social Action Committee provided $100 gift cards to over 30 less fortunate children to shop for Christmas. The Walmart Raleigh-Fayetteville Rd. has been a long-time partner with the Iota Iota Chapter on this project to help further along our community service initiatives.

CARY CELEBRATES KWANZAA—About two hundred people attended the Town of Cary's Kwanzaa Celebration at the Cary Arts Center. The program featured the best in traditional Kwanzaa performers and presenters that embraced African culture through dance, drumming, storytelling, poetry and visual arts. *Mathias Bishop Photos*

Film Review: Tyler Perry & NetFlix - The Six Triple Eight

By: Jheri Worldwide
Staff Writer

"Six Triple Eight," directed by Tyler Perry, tells the empowering true story of the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion, the only all-Black, all-female battalion to serve overseas during World War II. This film was powerful on so many levels from the family connections, to the faith in oneself, and over all perseverence to get the job done and do it well! The unsung heroes will never beforgotten thanks to the artful eye of Tyler Perry and the power of Netflix. This highly effective portrayal of their struggles and triumphs brought honor and insight to all involved and all who have watched.

Without spoiling completely, the 855 women of the 6888th are tasked with clearing a massive backlog of mail in war-torn Europe, facing discrimination, challenging conditions, and the dangers of war. They were counted out from the very beginning before they left Georgia. Their arrival in England was a struggle, their interactions with US Military leadership were unsavory, despite the incessant challenges their eventual success in accomplishing their mission was rewarding.

Major Charity Adams played by Kerry Washington should sweep all the major film awards. Major Adams led with class, grace, and empowered the women around her. As the story moved forward the characters evolved and demonstrated their strengths and vulnerabilities while at war in truly inspiring and educational ways. The major themes included resilience, determination, sisterhood, racial prejudice, sexism, the impacts of war.

Beautifully shot and tastefully costumed, the authentic portrals of the women whom served this unit were truly convincing and emotionally charged. The ending was exceptional and emotional with an amazing piece by singer songstress H.E.R..

The 6888th's contributions and the challenges faced by Black women during this era deserved the highlight they were given. Such an inspiring story, with strong performances, historical significance, and a powerful message is a must watch for all ages and walks of life. Films like this remind us what the true impacts of war are; the loss, the devestation, the unknowns is war worth it? Have we learned from the mistakes of past generations? I highly recommend 'The Six Triple Eight' for all audiences.

CBS Series Makes History With First Black Soap Opera in 35 Years

Nationwide — Beyond the Gates is making history as the first Black soap opera in 35 years, set to debut on CBS on February 24. The show marks a major milestone in daytime TV, following the end of Generations in 1991.

The new series' first teaser was dropped on December 16, according to People. Set in a luxurious gated community just outside Washington, D.C., the drama focuses on the Dupree family, a symbol of Black excellence.

MICHELE VAL JEAN

The teaser highlights their power and prestige, with one character declaring, "Your family rules this community." Another adds, "This is going to make history. How awesome is that?"

The show stars Clifton Davis and Tamara Tunie as Vernon and Anita Dupree. Vernon, a former senator, is known for his gentle, humble nature, while Anita, once a singing sensation, complements him as the matriarch.

Their daughters include Dr. Nicole Dupree Richardson played by Daphnee Duplaiz, a successful psychiatrist and philanthropist with a complex personal life, and Dani Dupree played by Karla Mosley, a former model turned momager who left her career for love.

Beyond the Gates, which was initially titled The Gates, began production in November. It was written by Michele Val Jean, known for her work on General Hospital and The Bold and the Beautiful.

The show is expected to make a significant impact on broadcast TV, according to Sheila Ducksworth, president of CBS Studios' NAACP venture. She said, "This series will salute an audience that has been traditionally underserved, with the potential to be a groundbreaking moment for broadcast television."

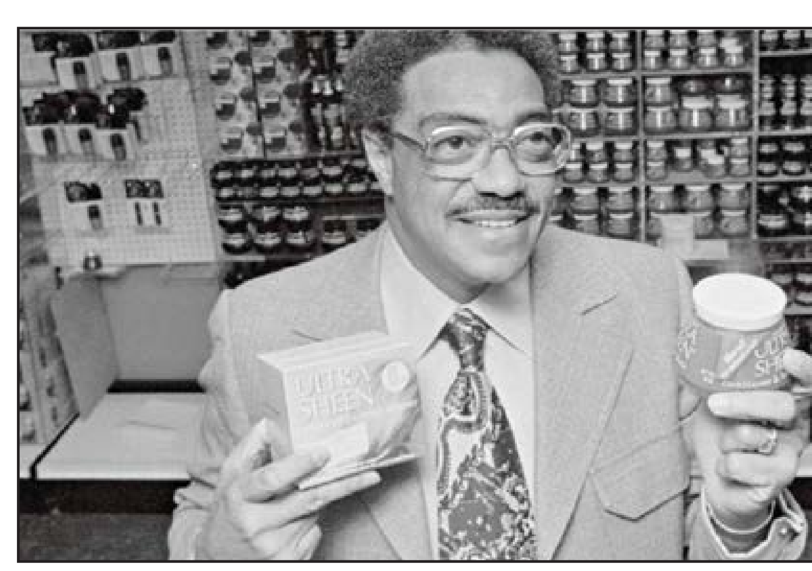
At Age 97, George E. Johnson Has Written His Life's Story

NEW YORK (AP) — As he approached his mid-90s, pioneering Black businessman George E. Johnson unexpectedly found himself determined — even called — to write his memoir.

Johnson's "Afro Sheen: How I Revolutionized an Industry with the Golden Rule, from Soul Train to Wall Street" will be published Feb. 4 by Little, Brown and Company. The book's title is named for one of the most memorable consumer items his Johnson Products Company developed. Founded in 1954, Johnson Products was the first Black-owned company to be listed on the American Stock Exchange and was also known for sponsoring the popular 1970s music show "Soul Train."

Johnson, 97, worked on "Afro Sheen" with the author-editor Hilary Beard. He hadn't thought of writing a book until three years ago.

"I had an epiphany on Sunday morning, November 21, 2021," he said in a statement released Wednesday by Little, Brown. "In that experience, I clearly heard five words: 'You must tell your story.' I believed it was the voice of the Lord. I made a 180 degree turn and immediately sought a writer."



RYSE ASSESSMENT CENTER SOFT OPENING ON JAN. 6

Durham, N.C. – The Durham County Resources for Youth Success & Empowerment (RYSE) Assessment Center will have its initial, soft opening on Monday, January 6, 2025. The Center, located at 2432 Broad St., provides a non-threatening, inclusive atmosphere for parents who are simply looking for information for their youth who are exhibiting social, emotional, or behavioral challenges. It is a community-focused program that connects youth and their families to a plethora of resources in Durham County.

During this opening, Center staff will offer screening and referral services without an ongoing case management component. Youth ages 10 to 17 and their families will have the opportunity to connect and work with RYSE Assessment Center staff to create a plan that aids their growth and meets their individual needs. Working with the center is voluntary and cost-free. The Center is not a service provider but a resource hub for Durham County residents to collaborate with local organizations.

The RYSE Assessment Center will be open for walk-in hours Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. – 5 p.m. Spanish language services are available at RYSE.

For more information about the RYSE Assessment Center, please visit the website https://www.dconc.gov/ryseassessmentcenter or contact RYSE@dconc.gov.

Church

Richard Parsons, Former Time Warner CEO, Dies At Age 76

By Marty Steinberg
CNBC

Richard Parsons, who helped Time Warner divorce from AOL after what was considered one of the worst takeovers in history, has died. He was 76.

His death was confirmed by Lazard, where he was a longtime board member.

Parsons became CEO of AOL Time Warner in 2002, replacing Gerald Levin, who stepped aside two years after the media giant's disastrous $165 billion merger with the upstart internet company.

As CEO and later chairman, he led Time Warner's turnaround, dropping "AOL" from the corporation's name and shrinking the company's $30 billion in debt to $16.8 billion by selling Warner Music and other properties.

"The merger did not work out quite the way many of us expected. The internet bubble burst and we had to fix the leaks," Parsons told The Independent in 2004. "It was not as monumental a task as many people thought, as the fundamental businesses of the old Time Warner — like publishing, the cable networks and movies — was running well."

He said that after the merger, AOL's business had collapsed and Warner Music Group was declining, along with the entire music industry. "So we sold our music business, as well as other nonstrategic assets, to strengthen our balance sheet and put in new management."

Parsons stepped down from Time Warner in 2007.

The Rockefeller connection

Richard Dean "Dick" Parsons was born into a working-class family on April 4, 1948, in Brooklyn's Bedford-Stuyvesant section and grew up in South Ozone Park in Queens, New York. He was a middle child among five siblings.

He attended public school, skipping two grades, and at age 16, the 6-foot-4 Parsons enrolled at the University of Hawaii, where he played basketball and met his future wife, Laura Ann Bush, whom he married in 1968.

After graduation, he returned to New York state to attend Albany Law School, moonlighting as a part-time janitor to help pay his tuition and finishing at the top of his class. During an internship at the New York state legislature, he developed ties to moderate Republican Gov. Nelson Rockefeller, who became vice president under Gerald Ford in 1974 in the wake of President Richard Nixon's resignation. Parsons became associate director of President Ford's domestic policy council.

"The old-boy network lives," Parsons told The New York Times in a 1994 interview. "I didn't grow up with any of the old boys. I didn't go to school with any of the old boys. But by becoming a part of that Rockefeller entourage, that created for me a group of people who've looked out for me ever since."

After Ford's defeat by Jimmy Carter in the 1976 election, Parsons returned to New York and joined the law firm of Patterson, Belknap, Webb & Tyler in 1977, as did his friend Rudy Giuliani. Parsons and his wife and three children moved to Rockefeller country, Briarcliff Manor in Westchester County. Coincidentally, his maternal grandfather had been a groundskeeper on John D. Rockefeller's nearby estate, Kykuit.

Parson's clients included Rockefeller's widow, Happy, and the Dime Savings Bank of New York. In 1988, he accepted an offer to head Dime Bancorp, which had been struggling through the savings & loan crisis after aggressively approving high-risk mortgages as housing prices crashed. In 1989, it posted a $92.3 million loss. By the end of 1993, after ordering massive layoffs, Parsons helped the bank complete a $300 million recapitalization. In 1995, he helped engineer Dime's merger with Anchor Savings, creating one of the nation's largest thrift institutions.

Parsons joined the Time Warner board on the recommendation of Rockefeller's brother Laurance. He became president of Time Warner in 1995.

As a Rockefeller Republican, Parsons considered himself a fiscal conservative and a social liberal. Parsons worked for Giuliani's campaign for New York mayor but kept a behind-the-scenes profile. "I didn't want to be positioned as the Mayor's Black guy," he told the Times a few years later.

Giuliani put him in charge of the mayoral transition team in 1993 but Parsons turned down an offer to become deputy mayor for fiscal affairs. His relationship with Giuliani later soured after the mayor tried to pressure Time Warner Cable to carry the then-fledgling Fox News Channel in New York.

Two years after stepping down from Time Warner, Parsons became chairman of Citigroup in 2009, helping to stabilize the banking giant in the wake of the financial crisis. In May 2014, he was named interim CEO of the Los Angeles Clippers after the NBA banned owner Donald Sterling for life because he had made racist remarks."Like most Americans, I have been deeply troubled by the pain the Clippers' team, fans and partners have endured," Parsons said.

Parsons played down race as a factor of his success.

"For a lot of people, race is a defining issue. It just isn't for me," he told the Times in 1997. "It is ... like air. It's like height. I have other things that I'm focused on."

Denzel Washington Gets Baptized At 70

Nationwide — Denzel Washington was recently baptized in a ceremony at a New York church a few days before he turns 70 years old. He was also granted a minister's license, allowing him to officiate at religious services and pursue ordination in the future.

The Oscar-winning actor, currently starring in Gladiator II, was baptized on Saturday at Kelly Temple Church of God in Christ in Harlem, according to EURweb. The service, streamed on Facebook, showed Washington in a white robe being immersed in the church's ritual pool, where he received his baptism certificate.

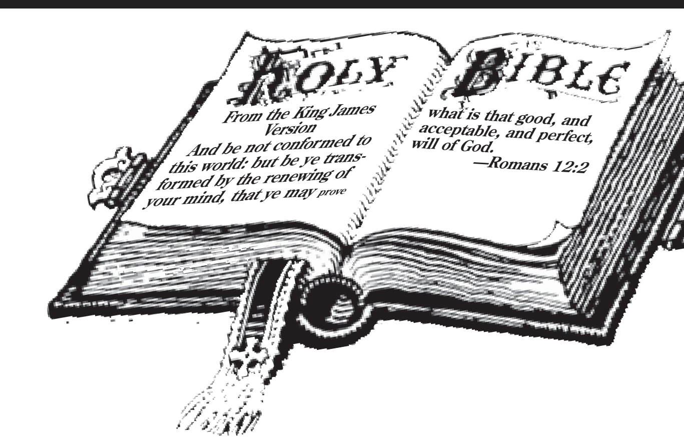
Washington's early life was shaped by his strong Christian upbringing, with his father serving as a Pentecostal minister. Though he attended church as a child, Washington's personal faith grew later in life. He now attends the West Angeles Church of God in Christ in Los Angeles.

Washington called the baptism his "greatest accomplishment," and shared an emotional message about faith during the service.

"It took a while, but I'm finally here... If [God] can do this for me, there's nothing He can't do for you. The sky literally is the limit," Washington said.

Meanwhile, the event gained attention on social media. Many praised his decision to hold the ceremony in a modest church, while some questioned the speed at which celebrity ministers are granted such responsibilities.

SERMON of the WEEK



TIS THE SEASON TO BE JOLLY
By Mother Belinda McKoy

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace."

Isaiah 9:6 NIV

Ecclesiastes 3:1 reminds us that there is a time and season for everything. Seasons come and go, and we can't control their arrival or departure. From the hurricane season to the cold winters and warm summers, we know they are coming, and there's nothing we can do to change that. However, how we navigate these seasons is up to us. If we remember that life isn't always as bad as it seems, we might find comfort in knowing that things could be worse or someone else may be in a more challenging situation.

So, if you're feeling down, remember: This is the season to be jolly. "Jolly" means being full of happiness, joy, and good spirits. Some might wonder, "How can I be joyful in tough times?" But let's look at the bigger picture. It's not about the decorations, the presents, or the food. It's about the deeper joy we can have in Christ.

Isaiah 9:6 describes the birth of Jesus, a child born to bring peace and joy to the world. His birth is why we celebrate. Matthew 1:21 confirms that He came to save us from our sins, and that is reason enough to be joyful.

We don't have to wait for Christmas to feel joy. Psalm 100:1-2 calls us to serve the Lord with gladness and to come before His presence with singing. God is good, and His mercy is everlasting. When we reflect on all God has done for us, our hearts overflow with gratitude. As the old saints would say, "When I think of the goodness of Jesus, my soul cries out hallelujah!"

This joy we speak of doesn't depend on material things. It's not about the gifts we receive or how our homes are decorated. It's not even about the turkey and pecan pie, although we do enjoy them! These things are fleeting. As Nehemiah 8:10 says, "The joy of the Lord is my strength."

John 10:10 reminds us that Jesus came so that we might have life more abundantly. His purpose is not to condemn but to heal, to give us a reason to rejoice and to fill us with His joy. In this season, we can sing along with the song: "I've come to give you life, I've come to give you joy, more abundantly."

The joy we experience is not from the world but a gift from God. The world didn't give it to us, and it can't take it away. When we think about all that Jesus has done for us, we can't help but rejoice. John 3:16-17 tells us that God loved the world so much that He gave His only Son so that we might have eternal life. Jesus came not to condemn but to save us, which is the greatest gift of all.

So, tis the season to be jolly, not just because of holiday traditions, but because of the life and joy we have in Christ. Let His love fill your heart with gladness today and always. Whether it be Winter, Spring, Summer, or Fall, let's be Jolly and thank God for this season that reminds us to be jovial as we give to others with a mind that is also in Christ Jesus.

Practical Biblical Principles

AT YEAR'S END
Read: Psalm 23
By John L. Caldwell, Pastor
New Jerusalem Baptist Cathedral

Who is it that does not think seriously about our lives at the end of each year? Something forces us to reflect upon the events which had befallen us at the end of the old year. Was it fear?

Or was it victory in Jesus? We think on the good times, the bad times, the painful times, and the sorrowful times. They all come together in our hearts at the end of each year. Who is it that can really forget the past year and move on with a clear hope for the incoming year?

And yet we had no idea or knowledge at the beginning of last year on how we will make it through the days ahead. The child of God will testify that it was only through God's grace that we made it through. We know it was the Lord's doings and not ours. And we pray within ourselves, "Whew, Lord let's do this again!" We made it through another year. Our hearts rejoice within us as we believe that God loved us enough to keep us going up until now.

At this point, we promise ourselves that we will do better if God give us another year. We then make promises and resolutions to ourselves and to God that we will do better if He extend our lives. Yet we do not define 'better' whether it is for ourselves or is it for God.

However, this is not the way we should be thinking about approaching the New Year. It would be a grave, spiritual mistake in our faith if we believe moving ahead in our future is based upon the condition, if God will give us another chance. Chance does not indicate nor represent faith at all.

Chance includes doubt and probabilities. God offers his children none of these conditions. God only offers "assurances, blessed assurances! God is not the God of chances or probabilities. If anything, He is the God of second chances, which means He forgives us when we repent of our sins and allows us to try and do better next time.

Otherwise, The beginning of a New year is not a second chance from God. It is the blessed assurances from God, Who promises us life and gives it to us more abundantly (John 10:10).

What kind of a God is it that gives life to the ones He loves and then takes it away at the first little offence or spiritual mistake? The God we serve is not this kind of God. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son to die for us, (cleansing us from all sin) and whosoever believes in Him shall never perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

With this kind of hope and assurances given to us, we can do better for ourselves, our families, our friends, and our church. We can do better for God. Not only this, but we also find ourselves putting more distance between our evil and our good leaving our evil behind. This is victorious living. Each New Year should bring us a more vibrant hope and spiritual energy for victorious living in that the Spirit helps us to grow stronger in the Lord and in the power of His might. We are now able to check our tongues when we speak and know that sweet and bitter waters do not come from the same fountain. We are now able to check and guide our Christian behavior in that we are allowing the Holy Spirit to help guide us instead of us trying to guide ourselves with the devil on our heels. We can be more victorious in the in-coming year because God has promised and have given us more assurances than last year, based upon our growing faith. God's grace and mercy grow stronger and stronger each year we faith-walk with Him. If we are going to gossip, gossip about the goodness of God. Testify to others about His love, goodness, and grace in our lives.

God wants His children's ultimate goal is to be like His Son, which is God's primary plan for our lives. It takes time to become like God's Son. This is one of the main reasons God gives us plenty of good time so that we can become more and more like His Son, Jesus (Romans 8:28-29; Ephesians 4:14). When we come again to that fork in the road, we now know which road to take. God has been down that road already.

When we have trials and fears, we can now cast our burdens and cares upon the Lord. He will sustain us, releasing us from the hurts, dreads, and guilt of the past. Sending us forward with power, strong hope and strength for the New Year (Psalm 55:22). God will not abandon us at the end of the year!

Editorial Policy

Unsigned editorials in this space are the opinion of the newspaper. All other opinion pieces, including those from regular columnists, are the opinion of the writers themselves. The Carolinian strives to provide provocative commentary that is likely to spur thoughtful debate, regardless of whether we agree with it.

Editorials

WILL THE DOGE SUCCEED?

One of the initiatives of the upcoming Trump administration is the "DOGE," — the new Department of Government Efficiency. Its stated goal is finding unneeded government spending to be recommended for elimination. With an annual federal budget of $7 trillion — 46% higher than prior to the pandemic — and with almost $2 trillion of it borrowed, it might appear the DOGE will have an easy time finding millions, if not billions, of spending that could be cut with no harm to government services.

But will it? Prior to becoming an academic, I spent time working in the business sector in the furniture industry, and also in the government sector, at both the city level in my hometown of Cincinnati and with the federal government. So even before I studied the economics of private businesses and public governments, I understood that the incentives, goals and operations of each were very different. Recognizing and understanding these differences will be crucially important for making the DOGE a success.

The incentives of a private company are simple. First, owners of a private company, which can be a single person, a partnership or numerous investors, are using their own money. Owners of a private company strive to sell a product or service consumers want. The owners charge a price that covers the costs of the product or service, with some funds remaining to provide a profit to the owners. Profit is the reward owners receive for taking the risk of operating a company.

Automatically built into these incentives is efficiency in the production of products or delivery of services. If the company can make the product or deliver the service at a lower cost, this leaves more money remaining for profits. Yet at the same time, if the owner cuts corners too much, such that the product or service is not as good, consumers will shift their buying to alternative companies. Hence, the combination of the profit motive and competition keeps costs lower and moderates prices in private companies.

Government is entirely different with many different incentives. First, those who decide on government products and services, such as elected officials and people who manage the government products and services in the federal bureaucracy, are not using their own money. They are using taxpayers' money or money the government has borrowed. Operators of private companies have their own money at risk or the money of investors who can choose to sell their investment if they aren't pleased. Taxpayers don't have that option.

Second, there is no profit motive because profits don't exist for government programs. Third, there is no competition, especially at the federal level. If a person doesn't like the products or services provided by the federal government, there is no alternative provider. The only option is to move to another country. However, at the state and local levels, there are numerous alternatives, allowing people to "vote with their feet" if they are unhappy with state or local programs or services.

Hence, in government work there is no automatic motivation to be efficient, as there is for private companies. Indeed, if a government employee makes recommendations to cut costs in delivering programs, the employee may be opposed because cutting costs could mean job or salary losses.

While DOGE may go through the thousands of federal programs and identify those that are wasteful — in DOGE's evaluation — the ultimate solution may be more fundamental. Can incentives be introduced into the management of government programs such that efficiency and effectiveness become objectives?

One way discussed in the past is introducing competition. The U.S. Postal Service is a good example. Originally funded by the federal government, the Postal Service is now totally self-funded and must compete with other companies for delivering parcels and packages. However, the Postal Service is still the only entity allowed to deliver mail.

Going even further in this direction is the idea of privatization. This approach means taking governmental programs and putting them out to bid to private contractors. The entity with the best bid wins the contract for a specified number of years. Knowing there is a limit on the contract motivates the company to be efficient and effective. Many cities, including New York City and some in North Carolina, have used this method for trash pickup. Yet for privatization to work, there must be an easy and obvious measure of performance. For trash the performance metric is easy: Was the trash picked up and delivered to a landfill or incinerator?

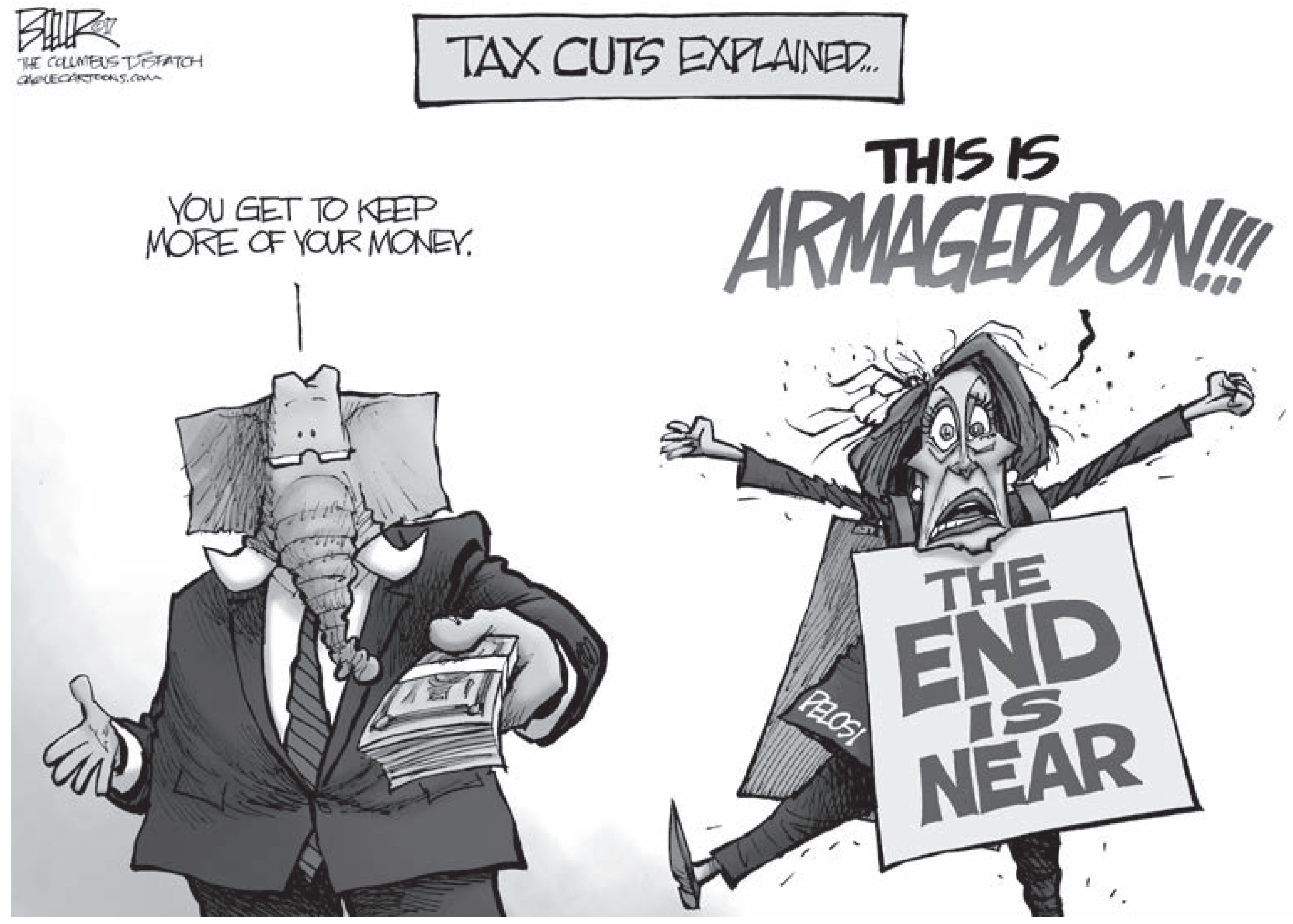
Still, there may be ways to instill efficiency and effectiveness into government programs. The key is developing understandable performance measures for programs. Importantly, the measures must be ones that cannot be manipulated.

As an example, consider a federal program targeted at improving the academic performance of young students, where there are numerous ways the funds can be spent. The federal staff administering the program could be told that for every percentage point improvement in the test results of the students, staff salaries are increased by 1 percent. This would give staff an incentive to research the best way for improving academic performance and for spending the funds in the most effective way.

Of course, all federal programs don't have easily measured objectives. But this might be another area for recommendations and improvement from the DOGE.

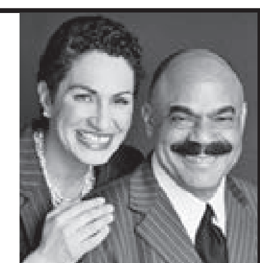
To an economist like me, my conclusion is the DOGE needs to go beyond simply saying, "cut this, cut that." Instead, have the DOGE also make recommendations for changing the incentives of operating government programs to provide motivation for effective and efficient management. Could this approach work? As always, you decide, and Happy New Year.

Mike Walden is a William Neal Reynolds Distinguished Professor Emeritus at North Carolina State University.



FUNdraising Good Times

By Mel & Pearl Shaw Saad & Shaw



LET YOUR LIGHT BURN BRIGHT

It's time to love on each other – those we know well and those we don't know. Generate love in your heart and let it radiate out towards others. Know that the love of countless others has been showered on you for a lifetime, whether you know it or not. Love is that spirit that lifts us up and makes a way when we believe there is no way. The love and light that others believe in benefit all of us. And we benefit others; we are a blessing whether we know it or not.

Here's to those who cook a meal for a sick neighbor and those who help prepare meals for the hungry, who wait in line for both a holiday meal and a kind word. Here's to those who work to keep the planet healthy, those who heal the sick, those who preach, and those who teach. Here's to our firefighters and 911 operators, those who handle baggage at the airport, and those who help us – individually and collectively – deal with our "baggage." We generate love towards those we agree with and those we disagree with.

We embrace Christmas, Chanukah, and Kwanza celebrations as we celebrate you – our readers. We reflect on the meaning of Christmas – God sent his son Jesus to be with us, to comfort us, to bring peace and goodwill. We reflect on Chanukah, the festival of lights, as we celebrate freedom from oppression and freedom of religious expression, rededicating ourselves, and remembering there is more available to us than we might believe. And on December 26th we come together to celebrate the seven principles of Kwanzaa. These celebrate African principles that can guide all of us as we reflect on the year-end and prepare for what lies ahead: Umoja (Unity), Kujichagulia (Self-determination), Ujima (Collective work and responsibility), Ujamaa (Cooperative economics), Nia (Purpose), Kuumba (Creativity), and Imani (Faith).

Throughout the year we are fortunate to work with people from across the country who express these sentiments on a daily basis. They bring the spirit of the holiday season to life through service, science, hard work, strategy, kindness, and consistency. These are the people who work at and volunteer with nonprofits. These people are you – you who give your time, money, wisdom, open hearts, and smarts. You bring the holiday spirit to life across denominations, race, ethnicity, country of origin, gender, and gender identity. Your spirit and belief in the goodness that we can extend to each other burns bright. And like the oil the Hebrews found at the temple, it will burn longer than we can imagine. We have the gifts of love and light. Let your light shine – we need the warmth of your spirit!

A Different Voice

By Dorothy Shaw Thompson

TIDING OF COMFORT & JOY

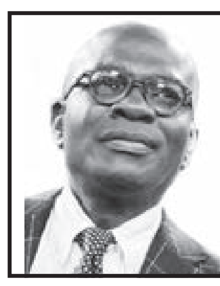
By the time you read this, our day of Christmas celebration will have come and gone. If it's gone and we go back to business as usual, I think we may have missed the meaning of the nativity scene. Of course, our last election tells me that we've been missing it collectively for a long, long time. Just think about it: how could humans have gotten to the point of the birth of Christ and gone on to study and enact wars to solve problems? How could slavery have occurred, or the occupation of America by the Europeans when they came here and discovered people already here? How could we have had Japanese internment camps if we really believe that Jesus came to be a model of how to treat each other?

I could go on and on. To me, we have missed the message profoundly, or we intentionally ignored it. Though Herod didn't get to kill the baby after he was born, the death by crucifixion came later and was thought to have fixed the problem. Well, clearly it didn't stop the praise and worship because we still have churches dedicated to His way. But I have the nerve to think that too many churches, though filled with poinsettias and candlelight, still struggle to get the point all these years later. I find it compelling that Mary was an unwed mother who gave birth in a stable. The attendants at that birth were angels and shepherds, and later three wise men who were astrologers. Yet today, we still fear those who study the stars, unwed mothers, and that shepherds don't change their dirty garments before they come around us. Also, tell somebody today that you heard from or saw an angel and watch how you're looked at.

There is a lot to unpack in the manger scene. It's ironic that though the baby and his parents were denied a room at the inn, we still haven't provided even a room for the unhoused. Too often we turn our noses up and look away. When those angels showed up where the shepherds were protecting their sheep, it scared them, but the angel said, "Fear not; we are bringing you a message of great joy." Are we still fearing or do we go to see this thing so we can have joy? It's also interesting to realize that they left those sheep to go on their journey, but there are no reports that the sheep got lost, killed, or weren't guarded by some unseen force. I think that when we are given a charge to go, provision is made for the job we thought was our only job.

Did you know that the song "Oh Holy Night" had this stanza: "Truly He taught us to love one another; His law is love and His Gospel is peace. Chains shall He break for the slave is our brother"? Did you know that the verse was left out in the 1800s and sometimes today we still are not singing it? It sounds like a choice not to truly celebrate the full message of the nativity, right? Also, did you know that from November 1st to January 15th there are approximately 29 holidays observed by seven of the world's major religions, but we still get angry if people say "Happy Holidays" instead of "Merry Christmas"? Is that because we selfishly think ours is the only one that counts? I wonder why we have that nerve when we are not truly incorporating ours in our daily lives.

A case in point: if you are celebrating the mass deportation of destroyed, exhausted human beings seeking refuge, you probably shouldn't be sweetly singing Christmas songs about a baby born with no crib before bed. John Pavlovitz said that, and I wish I had, but I do agree. I'm sure that there are more insights to come as we study the Christmas stories with open minds. The thing that comes to me from it is that we continue to recycle the issues with each coming generation, and this year we still haven't found a way to choose peace over power.



Guest Columnist

Armstrong Williams

A LETTER TO JESUS

Dear Jesus,

We commonly communicate, but communication reaches a new level in sacredly celebrating your birthday — Christmas Day. Times passes swiftly. But it comes to a halt on Christmas. We pay homage and gratitude to you for your wisdom and sacrifice that we strive in vain to imitate.

Your Sermon on the Mount is our light to happiness and goodness.

As 2025 uncurtains, we need your inspiration more than ever. The world is in turmoil. An epidemic of conflict and natural disasters. Children everywhere are ill-housed, ill-clothed and ill-fed. In some places, infants have death certificates before birth certificates.

Teach us to turn swords into plowshares and make war no more.

Teach us to honor and bless the peacemakers more than the armored knights.

Teach us to love our neighbors more than ourselves — to make perfect selflessness our most cherished aspiration.

We know your Second Coming will be deferred until we align ourselves with pure Christian charity.

We mourn the loss of ethics in our culture. We mourn diminishing benevolence and every gracious instinct of the human heart.

While I harbor high hopes for the incoming administration, President-elect Donald Trump is no savior. He is mortal and made of the same crooked timber as other men. You are our deliverance by appealing to the better angels of our nature to practice virtue and oppose vice. But we hope for the best with Trump.

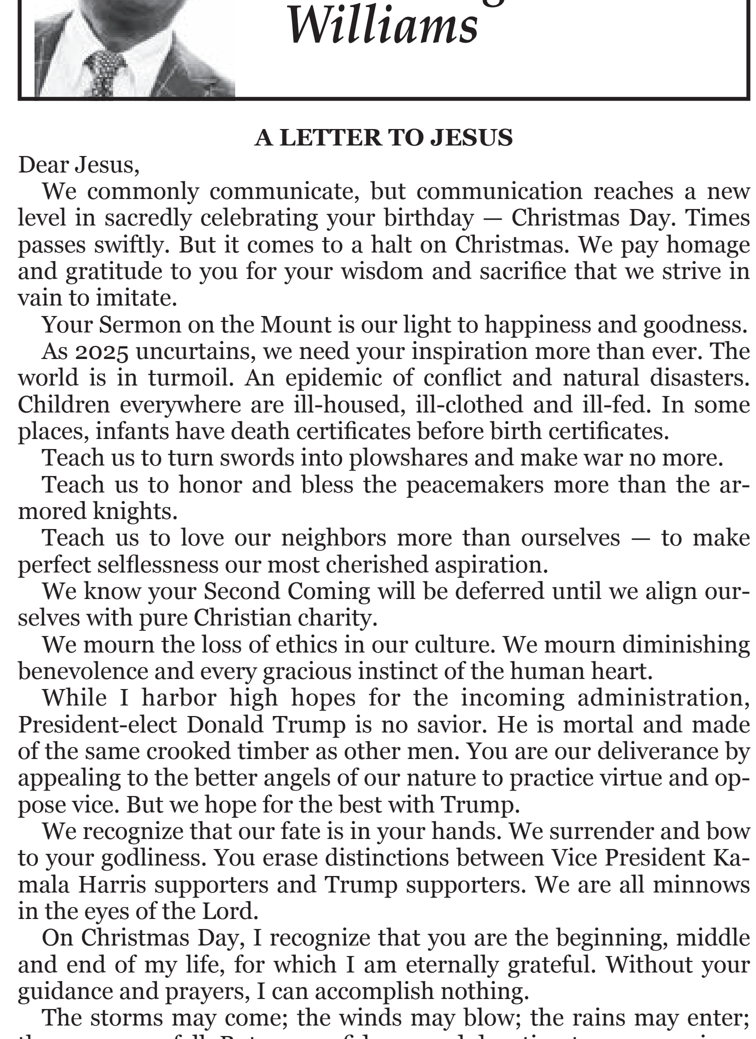
We recognize that our fate is in your hands. We surrender and bow to your godliness. You erase distinctions between Vice President Kamala Harris supporters and Trump supporters. We are all minnows in the eyes of the Lord.

On Christmas Day, I recognize that you are the beginning, middle and end of my life, for which I am eternally grateful. Without your guidance and prayers, I can accomplish nothing.

The storms may come; the winds may blow; the rains may enter; the snow may fall. But my confidence and devotion to you remain as constant and irresolute as the Rock of Gibraltar.

I summon all my reverence and awe of you as a tribute to your bright divinity.

Your servant,
Armstrong Williams



JIMMY CARTER, THE 39TH US PRESIDENT, HAS DIED AT 100

ATLANTA (AP) — Jimmy Carter, the peanut farmer who won the presidency in the wake of the Watergate scandal and Vietnam War, endured humbling defeat after one tumultuous term and then redefined life after the White House as a global humanitarian, has died. He was 100 years old.

The longest-lived American president died on Sunday, roughly 22 months after entering hospice care, at his home in the small town of Plains, Georgia, where he and his wife, Rosalynn, who died at 96 in November 2023, spent most of their lives, The Carter Center said.

"Our founder, former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, passed away this afternoon in Plains, Georgia," the center said on the social media platform X. It added in a statement that he died peacefully, surrounded by his family.

As reaction poured in from around the world, President Joe Biden mourned Carter's death, saying the world lost an "extraordinary leader, statesman and humanitarian" and he lost a dear friend. Biden cited Carter's work to eradicate disease, forge peace, advance civil and human rights, promote free and fair elections and house the homeless as an example for others.

The Best Days Of The Week To Book The Cheapest Flights

Are you looking to score the cheapest flight? The best time to book varies based on factors such as your destination and the timing of your trip. Generally, the day you book your ticket won't impact the price as much as the day of the week you're actually traveling.

According to Expedia's 2024 Air Travel Hacks Report, 55% of Americans find air travel more daunting than filing taxes or visiting the dentist. Understanding when and how to book your flights can help reduce some stress and save you money.

Let's explore strategies for scoring the best deals on airfare, no matter when you're traveling.

Best Time To Book Flights

If you're interested in getting the best deal on flights, it helps to understand what causes changes in pricing. You want to avoid booking too far in advance (more than five months), as prices can be higher. On the flip side, waiting until the last minute can result in prices doubling, especially in the weeks leading up to fly time.

Domestic flights

According to Expedia's 2024 Air Travel Hacks Report, the best time to book domestic flights is about 28 days before departure, as it can save you up to 24% compared to those who book at the last minute. The travel booking app Hopper recommends travelers begin to monitor prices 3-4 months in advance and book 1-2 months ahead for optimal savings.

International flights

Book international flights around 60 days in advance for the best availability and savings. Hopper recommends monitoring the price of your trip 7-8 months in advance.

Cheapest airlines

It's not as simple as an internet search using the term "cheapest airlines." Plenty of low-cost carriers (Frontier, Spirit, Avelo, etc.) offer a cheaper ticket, but you end up paying several add-ons, including carry-on luggage, preferred seat assignment, etc.) Travel site aggregators like Kayak and Expedia may not find you a better flight deal than you'll find on an airline website. Use your due diligence.

Cheapest Days of the Week To Fly

According to Google's 2024 travel trends, Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday are the cheapest days of the week to fly, whether it's international or domestic. Flying on Friday, Saturday, or Sunday could be up to 13% more expensive. For domestic trips, the potential savings jump to 20%.3

The actual time you fly also plays a part. Flights departing before 3 p.m. are statistically less likely to be canceled, and flights with a departure time after 3 p.m. face a 50% higher chance of cancellation.

Cheapest Day of the Week to Book Flights

Expedia analyzed data from the Airlines Reporting Corporation, covering 15 billion flights from 490 airlines. The data reveals that booking domestic or international flights on Sundays instead of Fridays can save travelers an average of 8%.

Seasons Matter

Traveling in January and February is often cheaper than traveling over spring break months. On average, travelers saved 30% per ticket off airfare in 2023 when traveling in the first two months of the year.

If you opt to travel in the spring, prices have been lowest 44 days before departure, with the lowest price range being 33-59 days out.

If you can, skip the warm, peak summer months and consider traveling in September or October. Also known as shoulder season, prices tend to fall before demand increases for the holiday season. In 2023, domestic travelers saved 32% off airfare by shifting trips from peak summer months to September or October.

Tickets are generally more expensive during Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's holidays than during the rest of the winter. Hopper suggests booking your Thanksgiving and Christmas travel by the end of October to avoid airfare selling out or a rise in prices.

Use fare comparison tools

Use tools like Google Flights, Kayak, Expedia, or the Hopper app to track airfare and receive real-time alerts when prices drop. Google Flights will also sometimes show you when it expects prices to drop based on historical data for your selected route. Expedia's Price Drop Protection gives travelers a refund if the cost of their booked flight drops after purchase, as long as they book directly on Expedia.

Use travel credit card rewards

Travel rewards credit cards can help save you money on your trip overall. For example, you may be able to find a card that offers perks such as:

Free checked bags

Global Entry/TSA PreCheck fee credits

Free companion passes

Elite status in frequent flyer programs

Complimentary airport lounge access

Free food and drinks onboard

Complimentary in-flight WiFi

These benefits may not trim money off your actual ticket cost, but they can save you on other flight-related expenses. If you want to purchase airfare with points and miles instead of cash, redemption values vary.

Avoid peak travel time

Traveling in January, February, September, and October can offer significant savings. Booking a late morning or early afternoon flight (before 3 p.m.) will likely yield fewer delays and fewer chances of a cancellation. Lastly, consider flying on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays to save some cash on airfare prices.

Help Support Your Community By Supporting Small & Local Businesses

Classifieds

DURHAM COUNTY

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
ESTATE OF MURRY RAYMOND HANDLER
File Number 24E002177-310

All persons, firms and corporations having claims against Murry Raymond Handler, deceased, of Durham County, N.C., are notified to exhibit the same to the undersigned on or before April 3rd, 2025, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of recovery. Debtors of the decedent are asked to make immediate payment.

This the 2nd day of January, 2025.
Evan Elliot Handler, Executor
C/O W.G. Alexander & Associates, PLLC
3717 Benson Dr.
Raleigh, NC 27609
Durham, North Carolina 27717
1/2, 1/9, 1/16, & 1/23/2025

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
ESTATE FILE NO. 24 E 002533-310

All persons, firms and corporations having claims against Michael Farmer Blachly, aka Michael Matthew Farmer Blachly, aka Matthew Michael Blachly, deceased of King County, Washington (owning real property in Durham County, North Carolina), are notified to exhibit the same to the undersigned on or before April 6, 2025 or this notice will be pleaded in bar of recovery. Debtors of the decedent are asked to make immediate payment. This the 2nd day of January, 2025. Kendra Johnson Blachly, Ancillary Administrator, c/o Andrea L. Hinshaw, PO Box 10867, Raleigh, NC 27605. This notice runs January 2, 9, 16, 23, 2025 in The Carolinian.

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS

The undersigned, having qualified as Executor of the Estate of Joanna Hawkins Maclay, Deceased, late of Durham County, North Carolina, does hereby notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the estate to exhibit the same on or before April 3, 2025, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. Debtors of the decedent are asked to make immediate payment.

Dated January 2, 2025,
Barbara Maclay Cameron, Executor
c/o Attorney Heather Hazelwood
PO Box 61182
Durham NC 27715
1/2, 1/9, 1/16, & 1/23/2025

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
Estate of Lauree Hersch Meyer.

Lauree Hersch Meyer died on September 24, 2024, in Durham, NC. Joel Newman Meyer qualified as her Executor with Durham County, NC Clerk of Superior Court file 24-E-002549. All persons, firms or corporations indebted to Lauree Hersch Meyer will please make immediate payment. This is to notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against Lauree Hersch Meyer to present them before April 15, 2025, or this Notice may be pleaded to bar their claim. Claims and payments may be filed with James M. Arges, Attorney for the estate at Arges Law Firm, 3200 Croasdaile Drive, Suite 706, Durham, NC 27705. For Publication: 01/02/2025, 01/09/2025, 01/16/2025, and 01/23/2025.
Joel Newman Meyer, Executor

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File Number 24E002522-310

The Undersigned, having qualified as EXECUTOR of the Estate of CRAIG BOWMAN, late of Durham County, North Carolina, hereby wishes to notify all persons having claims against the Estate of said deceased to exhibit them to the undersigned at the below listed address on or before the 27th day of March 2025, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.

All persons indebted to the Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned at the below listed address.

This, the 26th day of December 2024.
Alix Bowman, Executor
2527 Glendale Ave
Durham, NC 27704
12/26/24, 1/2/25, 1/9/25, & 1/16/25

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File Number 24E001974-310

The Undersigned, having qualified as EXECUTOR of the Estate of ARTHUR THOMAS TOTILLO, late of Durham County, North Carolina, hereby wishes to notify all persons having claims against the Estate of said deceased to exhibit them to the undersigned at the below listed address on or before the 27th day of March 2025, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.

All persons indebted to the Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned at the below listed address.

This, the 26th day of December 2024.
Kelliann Marie Totillo, Executor
46 Sparger Springs Lane
Durham, NC 27705
12/26/24, 1/2/25, 1/9/25, & 1/16/25

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File Number 24E002552-310

The Undersigned, having qualified as ADMINISTRATOR of the Estate of ANTONIO WILLIAMS A/K/A ANTONIA WILLIAMS late of Durham County, North Carolina, hereby wishes to notify all persons having claims against the Estate of said deceased to exhibit them to the undersigned at the below listed address on or before the 20th day of March 2025, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.

All persons indebted to the Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned at the below listed address.

This, the 19th day of December 2024.
Broneicia Mason, Administrator
12935 Hill Pine Rd.
Midland, NC 28107
12/19/24, 12/26/24, 1/2/25, & 1/9/25

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File Number 24E002562-310

The Undersigned, having qualified as EXECUTOR of the Estate of CATHERINE INGRAM FOGEL, late of Durham County, North Carolina, hereby wishes to notify all persons having claims against the Estate of said deceased to exhibit them to the undersigned at the below listed address on or before the 20th day of March 2025, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.

All persons indebted to the Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned at the below listed address.

This, the 19th day of December 2024.
Richard Neill Watson, Executor of the Estate of Catherine Ingram Fogel, c/o The Law Office of Anne Page Watson, PLLC, 3400 Croasdaile Drive, Suite 205, Durham, NC 27705
12/19/24, 12/26/24, 1/2/25, & 1/9/25

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
File Number 24E002487-310

Having qualified as Administrator of the Estate of HAROLD CALVIN HEDGEPETH, deceased, this is to notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the Estate of Harold Calvin Hedgepeth to present them to the undersigned within three months from the date of the first date of publication of this Notice or same will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons, firms, and corporations indebted to said Estate, please make immediate payment.

This the 19th day of December, 2024.
Courtney James Elliott, Administrator
c\o John W. Perry, Attorney for the Estate
Post Office Drawer 2051
Durham, North Carolina 27702
Telephone: (919) 683-8685
12/19/24, 12/26/24, 1/2/25, & 1/9/25

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
ESTATE OF MURRY RAYMOND HANDLER
File Number 24E002177-310

All persons, firms and corporations having claims against Murry Raymond Handler, deceased, of Durham County, N.C., are notified to exhibit the same to the undersigned on or before March 24th, 2024, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of recovery. Debtors of the decedent are asked to make immediate payment.

This the 19th day of December, 2024.
Evan Elliot Handler, Executor
C/O W.G. Alexander & Associates, PLLC
3717 Benson Dr.
Raleigh, NC 27609
Durham, North Carolina 27717
12/19/24, 12/26/24, 1/2/25, & 1/9/25

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
File Number 24E001718-310

THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 7th day of June 2024, as Administrator CTA of the ESTATE OF LARRY BASDEN, Deceased, of Durham County, North Carolina, does hereby notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said Estate to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the 20th day of March, 2025 or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This, the 19th day of December, 2024.
Ashton Myers
Administrator CTA
ESTATE OF LARRY BASDEN
c/o Jennifer Dalman, Attorney
Walker Lambe, PLLC
Post Office Box 51549
Durham, North Carolina 27717
12/19/24, 12/26/24, 1/2/25, & 1/9/25

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File Number 24E002484-310

The Undersigned, having qualified as CO-EXECUTORS of the Estate of DOROTHY GRAHAM ALLEN late of Durham County, North Carolina, hereby wishes to notify all persons having claims against the Estate of said deceased to exhibit them to the undersigned at the below listed address on or before the 19th day of March 2025, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.

All persons indebted to the Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned at the below listed address.

This, the 19th day of December 2024.
Ervin L Allen Jr and Tami A Love, Co-Executors
c/o Marion Law Office, PLLC
2741 University Drive
Durham, NC 27707
12/19/24, 12/26/24, 1/2/25, & 1/9/25

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File Number 24E002532-310

The Undersigned, having qualified as EXECUTOR of the Estate of KARL KURT HEINZ FREUNDT, late of Durham County, North Carolina, hereby wishes to notify all persons having claims against the Estate of said deceased to exhibit them to the undersigned at the below listed address on or before the 12th day of March 2025, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.

All persons indebted to the Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned at the below listed address.

This, the 12th day of December 2024.
Marion F. Carden, Executor of the Estate of Karl Kurt Heinz Freundt, c/o The Law Office of Anne Page Watson, PLLC, 3400 Croasdaile Drive, Suite 205, Durham, NC 27705.
12/12, 12/19, 12/26/2024 & 1/2/2025

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File Number 24E002431-310

The Undersigned, having qualified as EXECUTOR of the Estate of MARY IRENE GILL DUNBAR, late of Durham County, North Carolina, hereby wishes to notify all persons having claims against the Estate of said deceased to exhibit them to the undersigned at the below listed address on or before the 12th day of March 2025, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.

All persons indebted to the Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned at the below listed address.

This, the 12th day of December 2024.
Robert Joseph Dunbar, Executor
1671 Gallup Road
Chapel Hill, NC 27517
12/12/24, 12/19/24, 12/26/24, and 1/2/2025

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File Number 24E002385-310

The Undersigned, having qualified as ADMINISTRATOR of the Estate of YORK DEWITT PHELPS, late of Durham County, North Carolina, hereby wishes to notify all persons having claims against the Estate of said deceased to exhibit them to the undersigned at the below listed address on or before the 12th day of March 2025, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.

All persons indebted to the Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned at the below listed address.

This, the 12th day of December 2024.
Nathasha Marina Nazareth, Administrator
213 Beckwith St.
Gaithersburg, MD 20878
12/12, 12/19, 12/26/2024 & 1/2/2025

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File Number 24E002232-310

The Undersigned, having qualified as CO-ADMINISTRATOR of the Estate of KENNETH PAUL GRISSOM SR. a/k/a PAUL KENNETH GRISSOM SR. late of Durham County, North Carolina, hereby wishes to notify all persons having claims against the Estate of said deceased to exhibit them to the undersigned at the below listed address on or before the 12th day of March 2025, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.

All persons indebted to the Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned at the below listed address.

This, the 12th day of December 2024.
Heather Grissom, Co-Administrator
7108 Whitney Rd.
Graham, NC 27253
Tara Grissom, Co-Administrator
4407 Hopson Rd., Apt 9102
Morrisville, NC 27560
12/12, 12/19, 12/26/2024 & 1/2/2025

WAKE COUNTY

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
WAKE COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File Number 24E004623-910

The Undersigned, having qualified as EXECUTOR of the Estate of STEPHEN SHELBY LIGHT A/K/A STEPHEN S. LIGHT, late of Wake County, North Carolina, hereby wishes to notify all persons having claims against the Estate of said deceased to exhibit them to the undersigned at the below listed address on or before the 3rd day of April 2025, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.

All persons indebted to the Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned at the below listed address.

This, the 2nd day of January 2025.
Sheryl Lucas, Executor
109 Amsterdam Drive
Archer Lodge, NC 27527
1/2, 1/9, 1/16, & 1/23/2025

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
WAKE COUNTY
LEGAL ANNOUNCEMENT

ABNER PINTO, 314 W Jones Street, Apt. 223, Raleigh, NC 27603, is hereby notified that his spouse, **MARY ELIZABETH CASEY**, filed for divorce in Wake County, North Carolina on November 19, 2024. A response to Plaintiff's Complaint for Absolute Divorce must be filed in the Wake County District Court by February 11, 2025. Any and all inquiries should be directed to Life Law, PLLC, 5 W. Hargett Street, Suite 200, Raleigh, NC 27601; P: (919)832-6111
1/2, 1/9, & 1/16/2025

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
WAKE COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
Estate of Vester Wade Walker, Jr
File Number 24E002659-910

All person, firms and corporations having claims against VESTER WADE WALKER, JR, deceased, of Wake County, NC, are notified to exhibit the same to the undersigned on or before March 12, 2025, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of recovery. Debtors of the decedent are asked to make immediate payment. This the 5th day of December, 2024. Omeba Davis Walker, Executor, c/o Blue LLP, 205 Fayetteville St, Suite 300, Raleigh, NC 27601. The Carolinian, Dec 12, 19, 26, 2024 and Jan 2, 2025.

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
WAKE COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File Number 24E004453-910

The Undersigned, having qualified as EXECUTOR of the Estate of MARGARET CATHERINE SESSOMS, late of Wake County, North Carolina, hereby wishes to notify all persons having claims against the Estate of said deceased to exhibit them to the undersigned at the below listed address on or before the 12th day of March 2025, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.

All persons indebted to the Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned at the below listed address.

This, the 12th day of December 2024.
Stuart E. Sessoms, Executor
2808 New Hope Church Rd.
Raleigh, NC 27604
12/12, 12/19,12/26/2024 & 1/2/2025

JOHNSTON COUNTY

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
JOHNSTON COUNTY
NOTICE OF SERVICE OF PROCESS BY PUBLICATION
In The General Court Of Justice
Superior Court Division
Before The Clerk
File No. 23SP000068-500
FOR THE ADOPTION OF KAIDEN JOSIAH PETTIFORD BASS
BY CHRISTIE PETTIFORD BASS
TO: UNKNOWN FATHER

Take notice that a Petition for Adoption was filed with the Clerk of Superior Court for Johnston County, Smithfield, North Carolina in the above entitled special proceeding. The Petition relates to a male child born July 19, 2015 in Raleigh, Wake County, North Carolina. The Birth mother is Ebony M. Dennis, a Black female who formerly resided in Wake County, approximately 31 years old. The child was conceived in Raleigh Wake County, North Carolina on or about December of 2014. TAKE NOTICE that you are required to make defense to such pleading not later than 40 days from the first day of publication of this notice by February 11th, 2025, and upon your failure to do so the Petitioner will apply to the Court for relief sought in the Petition. Any parental rights you may have will be terminated upon the entry of the decree of adoption.

This the 2nd day of January, 2025.
Stephanie J. Brown
Attorney for Petitioner
P.O. Box 2596
Raleigh, NC 27602
(919)836-9444
sjbrown_law@hotmail.com
1/2, 1/9, & 1/16/2025

FORECLOSURE

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE OF FORECLOSURE SALE
In The General Court Of Justice
Superior Court Division
Before The Clerk
FILE NO. 24SP001375-310

Under and by virtue of a Power of Sale contained in that certain Deed of Trust executed Eh Doe and Ka Paw La, which was dated April 10, 2017 and recorded on April 10, 2017 in Book 8159, Page 798, Durham County Registry, North Carolina.

Default having been made of the note thereby secured by the said Deed of Trust and the undersigned, Satterfield Law, PLLC, having been substituted as Trustee in said Deed of Trust, and the holder of the note evidencing said default having directed that the Deed of Trust be foreclosed, the undersigned Substitute Trustee will offer for sale at the courthouse door of the county courthouse where the property is located, or the usual and customary location at the county courthouse for conducting the sale on January 16, 2024 at 12:00 PM, and will sell to the highest bidder for cash the following described property situated in Durham County, North Carolina, to wit:

Being all of Lot #2 of the G.C. Ray Property as per plat and survey of the H.N. Michie, C.E., dated October 5, 1950 and recorded in the Office of the Register of Deeds of Durham County in Plat Book 23 at Page 88, to which reference is hereby made for a more particular description of same.

All or portion of the property hereinabove described was acquired by Grantor by instrument recorded in Boom 6080, Page 834, Durham County Registry.

A map showing the above-described property is recorded in Plat Book 23, Page 88, and referenced within this instrument.

Third party purchasers must pay the excise tax, and the court costs of Forty-Five Cents ($0.45) per One Hundred Dollars ($100.00) pursuant to NCGS 7A-308(a)(1). A cash deposit (no personal checks) of five percent (5%) of the purchase price, or Seven Hundred Fifty Dollars ($750.00), whichever is greater, will be required at the time of the sale. Following the expiration of the statutory upset bid period, all the remaining amounts are immediately due and owing.

Said property to be offered pursuant to this Notice of Sale is being offered for sale, transfer and conveyance "AS IS WHERE IS." There are no representations of warranty relating to the title or any physical, environmental, health or safety conditions existing in, on, at, or relating to the property being offered for sale. This sale is made subject to all prior liens, unpaid taxes, any unpaid land transfer taxes, special assessments, easements, rights of way, deeds of release, and any other encumbrances or exceptions of record. To the best of the knowledge and belief of the undersigned, the current owner(s) of the property is/are En Doe and Ka Pa Law.

An Order for possession of the property may be issued pursuant to G.S. 45-21.29 in favor of the purchaser and against the party or parties in possession by the clerk of superior court of the county in which the property is sold. Any person who occupies the property pursuant to a rental agreement entered into or renewed on or after October 1, 2007, may, after receiving the notice of sale, terminate the rental agreement upon 10 days' written notice to the landlord. The notice shall also state that upon termination of a rental agreement, the tenant is liable for rent due under the rental agreement prorated to the effective date of the termination.

If the trustee is unable to convey title to this property for any reason, the sole remedy of the purchaser is the return of the deposit. Reasons of such inability to convey include, but are not limited to, the filing of a bankruptcy petition prior to the confirmation of the sale and reinstatement of the loan without the knowledge of the Trustee. If the validity of the sale is challenged by any other party, the Trustee, in their sole discretion, if they believe the challenge to have merit, may request the court to declare the sale to be void and return the deposit. The purchaser will have no further remedy.

Satterfield Law, PLLC
Substitute Trustee
Daron D. Satterfield, Attorney for Substitute Trustee
Satterfield Law, PLLC
307 Meadowlands Drive, Suite 101
Hillsborough, NC 27278
(984) 229-8584, phone
(919) 287-2696 fax
1/2/25, & 1/9/25

New 2025 Laws Hit The Hot Topics —CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

right to the procedure in 2022. One of the latest is the Democratic-led state of Delaware. A law there will require the state employee health plan and Medicaid plans for lower-income residents to cover abortions with no deductible, co-payments or other cost-sharing requirements.

Gun control

A new Minnesota law prohibits guns with "binary triggers" that allow for more rapid fire, causing a weapon to fire one round when the trigger is pulled and another when it is released.

In Delaware, a law adds colleges and universities to a list of school zones where guns are prohibited, with exceptions for those working in their official capacity such as law officers and commissioned security guards.

Medical marijuana

Kentucky is becoming the latest state to let people use marijuana for medical purposes. To apply for a state medical cannabis card, people must get written certification from a medical provider of a qualifying condition, such as cancer, multiple sclerosis, chronic pain, epilepsy, chronic nausea or post-traumatic stress disorder. Nearly four-fifths of U.S. states have now legalized medical marijuana.

Minimum wages

Minimum wage workers in more than 20 states are due to receive raises in January. The highest minimum wages will be in Washington, California and Connecticut, all of which will top $16 an hour after modest increases.

The largest increases are scheduled in Delaware, where the minimum wage will rise by $1.75 to $15 an hour, and in Nebraska, where a ballot measure approved by voters in 2022 will add $1.50 to the current minimum of $12 an hour.

Twenty other states still follow the federal minimum wage of $7.25 an hour.

Safer traveling

In Oregon, using drugs on public transit will be considered a misdemeanor crime of interfering with public transportation. While the measure worked its way through the legislature, multiple transportation officials said drug use on buses and trains, and at transit stops and stations, was making passengers and drivers feel less safe.

In Missouri, law enforcement officers have spent the past 16 months issuing warnings to motorists that handheld cellphone use is illegal. Starting with the new year, penalties will kick in: a $150 fine for the first violation, progressing to $500 for third and subsequent offenses and up to 15 years imprisonment if a driver using a cellphone cause an injury or death. But police must notice a primary violation, such as speeding or weaving across lanes, to cite motorists for violating the cellphone law.

Montana is the only state that hasn't banned texting while driving, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Tax breaks

Tenants in Arizona will no longer have to pay tax on their monthly rent, thanks to the repeal of a law that had allowed cities and towns to impose such taxes. While a victory for renters, the new law is a financial loss for governments. An analysis by Arizona's nonpartisan Joint Legislative Budget Committee estimated that $230 million would be lost in municipal tax revenue during the first full fiscal year of implementation.

Meanwhile Alabama will offer tax credits to businesses that help employees with child care costs.

Kansas is eliminating its 2% sales tax on groceries. It also is cutting individual income taxes by dropping the top tax rate, increasing a credit for child care expenses and exempting all Social Security income from taxes, among other things. Taxpayers are expected to save about $320 million a year going forward.

Voting rights

An Oklahoma law expands voting privileges to people who have been convicted of felonies but had their sentences discharged or commuted, including commutations for crimes that have been reclassified from felonies to misdemeanors. Former state Sen. George Young, an Oklahoma City Democrat, carried the bill in the Senate.

"I think it's very important that people who have gone through trials and tribulations in their life, that we have a system that brings them back and allows them to participate as contributing citizens," Young said.

Work In Retirement—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

In 2024, full-time workers age 65 and older earned a median wage of around $58,292 per year, according to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Let's say, for example, you're only working part-time in retirement while earning half of that amount, or $29,146 per year.

Let's also say you're 65 years old with an FRA of 67. Those figures would subject you to the smaller income limit, since you won't reach your FRA in 2025. Your income in this case would be $5,746 over the annual limit, reducing your benefits by $2,873 per year, or around $239 per month.

One major silver lining to keep in mind

The more you're earning in retirement, the more drastic your benefit cuts will be. In extreme cases, you could even have your entire benefit amount withheld. However, the good news is that your benefit will be recalculated at your FRA, and you'll receive larger checks for the rest of your life.

The retirement-earnings test is designed so that, in theory, you should recoup all of the benefits that were withheld. So while these reductions can be severe in the short term, you're not actually missing out on anything, assuming you spend a significant amount of time in retirement.

In an example provided by the Social Security Administration, a retiree with a normal benefit amount of $1,000 per month could have their payment reduced to just $655 per month after earnings-test reductions. At that person's FRA, they will begin receiving new payments of $1,070 per month.

To recoup the total $16,560 that was withheld throughout their four years of work, it would take 20 years of receiving slightly larger payments after FRA. Either way, this worker will receive the same amount in total. But if you have reason to believe you may not spend at least a couple of decades in retirement, there's a chance you may not recoup all of your benefits that were withheld.

In general, the advantages of working after taking Social Security often outweigh the disadvantages. The short-term benefit reductions can sting, but the income you're earning from your job may have a bigger impact on your overall budget than the withholdings.

It's still wise, though, to consider your goals and preferences to make the best decision for your situation. When you know what to expect from the retirement-earnings test, you can decide whether it's really worthwhile to continue working while on Social Security.

If you're like most Americans, you're a few years (or more) behind on your retirement savings. But a handful of little-known "Social Security secrets" could help ensure a boost in your retirement income. For example: one easy trick could pay you as much as $22,924 more... each year! Once you learn how to maximize your Social Security benefits, we think you could retire confidently with the peace of mind we're all after.

Classifieds

MECKLENBURG COUNTY

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
MECKLENBURG COUNTY

NOTICE OF SERVICE OF PROCESS BY PUBLICATION

In The General Court Of Justice
Superior Court Division
FILE NO.: 24CV040129-590
VEALE MANAGEMENT SERVICES, LLC.
Plaintiff,
V,
CALVARY CONCRETE CONSTRUCTION, LLC., MONICA CARR, CHARLES CHAPPELL, individually and dba BLESSED HANDS CONTRACTING
Defendants.

To Monica Carr, Charles Chappell, individually, and dba Blessed Hands Contracting, as above named Defendants:

Take notice that a pleading seeking relief against you has been filed in the above entitled action, The nature of the relief being sought is as follows: This is an action for breach of contract and collection on account, arising from an agreement between the parties.

You are required to make defense to such pleading not later than the 11th day of February, 2025, said date being 40 days from the first publication of this notice, exclusive of the first date, and upon failure to do so the party seeking service against you shall apply to the court for the relief sought.

This the 2nd day of January 2025.

The Duggan Law Firm, P. C.
Christopher M. Duggan. Esq.
NC State Bar Number 39065
Attorneys for Plaintiff
PO Box 481
Monroe North Carolina 28111
Telephone: (704) 776-9610
1/2, 1/9, & 1/16/2025

ATTENTION: DBE's

BID REQUEST-BARNHILL CONTRACTING COMPANY

Attention DBEs-Barnhill Contracting Company is requesting bids from any interested firms for the following project: OCW North GA Area Taxilanes, Hangars and Drone Pad, Washington-Warren Field Airport, Washington, North Carolina. Pre-Bid Meeting is on Thursday, January 9th, 2025 at 10:00 AM. This meeting will be held virtually utilizing conference call and online meeting tools. Please contact Dustin Faulkner at the number below for meeting details. This project bids on January 23, 2025 and includes opportunities on, but not limited to Erosion Control, Clearing & Grubbing, Misc. Concrete, Milling, Hauling, Pavement Markings, Pipe Installation/Removal, Fencing, Misc Drainage Structures, Airfield Hangars, Airfield Lighting and Utility Installations. Bids are due to Dustin Faulkner no later than 12:00 P.M. on Wednesday January 22nd, 2025.

Plans can be viewed in our office (please call to schedule).

Attn: Dustin Faulkner at (252)335-9503.

AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

"In accordance with the provisions of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (78 Stat. 252, 42 US.C. §§ 2000d to 2000d-4) and the Regulations, hereby notifies all bidders that it will affirmatively ensure that any contract entered into pursuant to this advertisement, disadvantaged business enterprises will be afforded full and fair opportunity to submit bids in response to this invitation and will not be discriminated against on the grounds of race, color, or national origin in consideration for an award. In accordance with other related nondiscrimination authorities, bidders and contractors will also not be discriminated against on the grounds of sex, age, disability, low-income level, creed/religion, or limited English proficiency in consideration for an award."