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The Carolinian



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Justice Earls Reveals Cancer Diagnosis

NC Newsline—North Carolina Supreme Court Justice Anita Earls announced Tuesday that she was diagnosed with breast cancer late last year.

"I had surgery over the holidays and will continue a course of treatment to address this disease," said Earls in a video released on social media.

Earls told supporters that the diagnosis will not impact her ability to continue to serve on the court or campaign.

"We are not slowing down. We are not losing focus. This is just a bump in the road on the way to a win this November," said Earls. "And we all know courageous women who have experienced breast cancer and treated it successfully, including some of our most brilliant political leaders here in North Carolina."

Earls said she is fortunate that the disease was discovered early during



a routine mammogram, and it's because of that early detection that her prognosis is positive.

"I know it can be easy to put off doctor's appointments, but I encourage every woman to get regularly screened for breast cancer," said Earls.

State representative Sarah Stevens (R-Surry) is running this year

against Earls for a seat on the state's highest court. In January 2024, Stevens announced that she too had undergone treatment for breast cancer.

Stevens told the Associated Press breast cancer runs among women in her family, and she expected to make a full recovery.

Breast cancer survivors serving in the state House and Senate urged

legislators last year to pass legislation that would provide health coverage parity for breast cancer diagnostic imaging.

"You shouldn't be in a situation where women are denied access [to care] because they can't afford the actual screenings," said Senate Democratic Leader Sydney Batch (D-Wake) during a press conference last April.

The Senate did not advance Batch's bill after its introduction. In the N.C. House, Rep. Howard Penny Jr. (R-Harnett) encouraged lawmakers to support a companion bill for better breast imaging, noting he had also been treated for breast cancer. House Bill 297 passed the House with Penny's help, only to stall in the Senate.

N.C. Department of Health and Human Services data indicates over 13,000 women in our state are diagnosed with breast cancer annually.

Community News:

LIGON MAGNET MIDDLE SCHOOL COMMUNITY NOTICE

A Community Engagement meeting on the Ligon Magnet Middle School renovation project will be held **Thursday, Jan. 8, from 6 to 8 p.m.** in the school auditorium. Please enter via the auditorium entrance off South Haywood Street.

District staff will share updates on the project and next steps, followed by time for community questions and feedback. Community members are encouraged to attend and participate.



EIGHT NORTH CAROLINA COMMUNITIES RECEIVE \$12 MILLION IN NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION GRANT

RALEIGH, N.C.—The North Carolina Department of Commerce recently awarded grants to eight local governments to support housing and public improvements for low- and moderate-income North Carolinians. The grants, totaling more than \$12 million, were awarded from the department's Community Development Block Grant – Neighborhood Revitalization (CDBG-NR) program.

"Strong neighborhoods depend on affordable homes and economic opportunities," said Governor Josh Stein. "These grants will enable local leaders to improve housing and public spaces, helping families build stability and supporting long-term economic growth for North Carolinians across the state."

"Grants from the Neighborhood Revitalization program help advance our long-standing mission to improve the economic well-being and quality of life for all North Carolinians," said Commerce Secretary Lee Lilley. "These funds will help Hurricane Helene-impacted areas as well as other rural communities improve economic prosperity for their residents."

The federally funded CDBG-NR program offers eligible municipalities and counties the opportunity to tailor community development projects to the specific and most critical needs of their communities. Areas impacted by the devastation of Helene will especially benefit as they work to recover and build.

This round of funding includes eight projects receiving a total of \$12 million, with individual awards up to \$5 million.

The CDBG program is a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) program administered in part by N.C. Commerce's Rural Economic Development Division. Since 2017, more than \$355 million in CDBG grants have been awarded in North Carolina to enhance the vitality of communities by providing adequate housing, suitable living environments, infrastructure development, and expanding economic opportunities. The program requires at least 70 percent of CDBG grant funds be used for activities and projects that serve households of low and moderate income.

POPE HOUSE MUSEUM CELEBRATES BLACK CIVIL WAR HEROES

By Jordan Meadows

Staff Writer

To celebrate Emancipation Day, the Pope House Museum on S. Wilmington Street in Raleigh, North Carolina, presented "Fighting for Freedom: Black Civil War Reenactors" on Saturday. The free event brought history to life as reenactors portrayed United States Colored Troops (USCT) and their allies, sharing the incredible stories of Black soldiers and their lives both in the camps and on the front lines.

During the Civil War, Black soldiers were primarily commanded by white officers, and Black officers were generally forbidden from leading white troops. While Black soldiers could rise to non-commissioned officer ranks, such as sergeant or lieutenant, instances of them commanding white soldiers were extremely rare and temporary, usually only occurring in emergencies if all other officers were killed or incapacitated. Martin Delany, for example, became the first officially commissioned Black major in the U.S. Army, leading the 55th Massachusetts, but he never officially commanded white troops. By the end of the war, thousands of Black men from North Carolina had joined the USCT, with units including the 1st and 2nd North Carolina Colored Volunteers (later the 35th and 36th U.S. Colored Infantry) and the 37th and 38th US Colored Infantry, many recruited from eastern North Carolina. These regiments were composed largely of formerly enslaved men, whose local knowledge and personal stakes fueled their determination.

The USCT in North Carolina guarded supply lines, forts, and railroads and participated in combat, including raids and battles around Wilmington, Goldsboro, and the coastal regions. In the Battle of Town Creek (1865), USCT regiments helped defeat the last pockets of Confederate resistance in the area.

(See **POPE HOUSE MUSEUM**, P. 6)

NEW LAWS TAKE EFFECT IN NORTH CAROLINA ON JAN. 1. HERE'S WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

ASHEVILLE, N.C. (WLOS) — On Jan. 1, the state of North Carolina ushered in a slate of new laws marking the start of the new calendar year.

The laws cover a range of categories, from business and real estate, to healthcare, adoption and gender identity. The laws, reflecting a legislative process that often saw the state legislature pitted against the governor, as the two power centers looked to weigh proposed legislation in their favor.

House Bill 805 was passed after a legislative override of the governor's veto. The bill began life as a bipartisan effort to protect women and children from online sexual predators. After passing the state House, the bill was re-shaped in the Senate into what became an effort to codify gender identity into North Carolina law. The new law, which recognizes only two genders on all official state documentation, requires individuals to be identified by their gender at birth and not by their chosen gender identity or presentation. The change would most notably affect identification, such as driver's licenses. While state senator Kevin Corbin (R) calls it "fair for everyone," state senator Julie Mayfield (D) calls it "another example of importing to North Carolina this national anti-LGBTQ agenda."

Senate Bill 248 takes a significant step in reducing the differences in birth certificates for those who are adopted. The new law allows for adoptive parents to be named on a child's birth certificate, while making it easier for counties to issue certified birth certificates to adopted individuals.

Senate Bill 690 covers a range of business/broker-related issues. Most notably, its provision changes what is allowed on a real estate purchase offer. The change allows compensation paid (or commission to be paid) to a buyer's agent to be included in the offer. The full disclosure will have an effect on the negotiation process and the purchase price of a property.

House Bill 67 is designed to increase the number of healthcare professionals serving patients in North Carolina. The legislation clears a pathway for licensed physicians and physician assistants to be employed at North Carolina hospitals. It also allows for more internationally trained medical professionals to gain entry to hospitals in the state. The law includes a provision allowing PAs who are licensed in North Carolina to practice in other states. The latter is part of a reciprocity that would align with membership in the broader national PA organization.

Former Inmate Buys N.C. Prison To Help Others Who Have Served Time



NC NEWSLINE — With the recent purchase of the former Wayne Correctional Center in Goldsboro, Kerwin Pittman is laying claim to an unusual title — he says he's the first formerly incarcerated person in the U.S. to purchase a prison.

Pittman, the founder and execu-

tive director of Recidivism Reduction Educational Program Services, Inc. (RREPS), was sent to prison at age 18 and served 11 years and six months for conspiracy to commit murder. January 26 will mark eight years since his release and return to the Southeast Raleigh community in which he was

reared.

"I started a nonprofit when I came home and began advocating for individuals coming out of the [incarceration] system but I also put in programming to try to help them reintegrate into society with a little more ease," Pittman said.

His experience behind bars gave him insight into what other formerly incarcerated individuals needed after they left prison.

"I had family support, so I had housing, but a lot of my friends didn't

(See **NC PRISON** P. 2)

Want To Read More In 2026? Here's How To Revive Your Love Of Books

NEW YORK (AP) — People stop reading in adulthood for lots of reasons. But it's never too late to turn the page on old habits and start again.

Curling up with a good book can reduce stress, increase creativity and boost empathy. A recent analysis of U.S. government data found that the percentage of Americans who read for pleasure during an average day has fallen to 16% in 2023 from 28% in 2004. That includes not just books but audiobooks, e-books and periodicals like magazines.

Some people say they're fatigued from years of assigned reading in school. Others don't have the time or would rather zone out by doomscrolling on social media. And many just got out of the habit.

"It's difficult for people who are really tired and busy to think about getting into reading if it's not something they're used to," said Jacqueline Rammer, director of Menomonee Falls Public Library in Wisconsin.

For those looking to set reading goals or resolutions in 2026, here's how to get back into the habit.

Choose the right book

When picking your next book, avoid

dense nonfiction or a 500-page doorstop.

"Your first book should be something that you think will be joyful," said Jocelyn Luizzi, a software engineer from Chicago who blogs about books.

Everyone's taste is different, so get recommendations from a variety of places including friends, booksellers and online communities like BookTok.

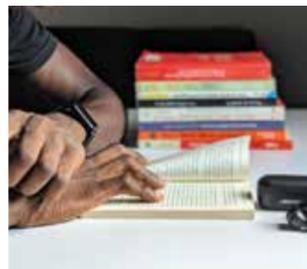
Rammer and her staff ask library visitors: What was the last book, TV show or movie that you really enjoyed? Then, they look for similar genres or themes.

Many libraries offer access to a service called NovelList which suggests "read-alikes" for various books and authors.

Set a reading routine

To create a habit that sticks, "start by scheduling reading into your day," said Gloria Mark, an attention span expert with the University of California, Irvine. Read five pages during a lunch break or right before bed.

If you're reading a physical book, Mark said to avoid distractions by keeping phones and laptops out of sight.



But experimenting with other formats can make reading more convenient. E-books are portable and audiobooks are a good candidate to accompany chores or the morning commute. You can likely access both for free by downloading an app called Libby and signing in with a library card.

Try to read in a quiet setting, but don't be afraid to make it a social activity. Many cities in the U.S. and around the world host silent book clubs where people read their own books together in coffee shops and libraries.

Setting a reading goal for the year or joining a local library's winter reading challenge can help with mo-

tivation — but if it feels like added pressure, don't do it.

Shannon Whitehead Smith, a book blogger from the Atlanta area who also works in marketing, says scrolling through lists of other people's reads on social media and trackers like StoryGraph encourages her to keep the habit.

"Seeing all these other people reading motivates me to put my phone down and pick up this book that's sitting beside me," she said. Feel free to skip a read

If a book feels particularly sluggish, it's OK to put it down and start another. Reading "shouldn't feel like a burden," said Jess Bone with University College London, who analyzed the survey data about American adults reading for pleasure.

Routine readers say the habit helps them stay curious and release the stress of the day. Rammer, the library director, reads mysteries rife with twists and turns, and romances that cycle through roller coasters of emotions.

Most of all, she likes books that end with a "happily ever after."

"I think the guarantee of knowing that things are going to end up OK is really reassuring," Rammer said.



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Edith Smith Witnessed More Than A Century Of History

(Reuters) - Edith Renfrow Smith grew up in the 1910s hearing her grandparents' stories of surviving slavery, including a grandfather who escaped bondage with a group led by abolitionist John Brown. She was still alive more than a century later, having witnessed two world wars and the birth of penicillin, television and artificial intelligence — as well as the end of statutory racial segregation in the United States.

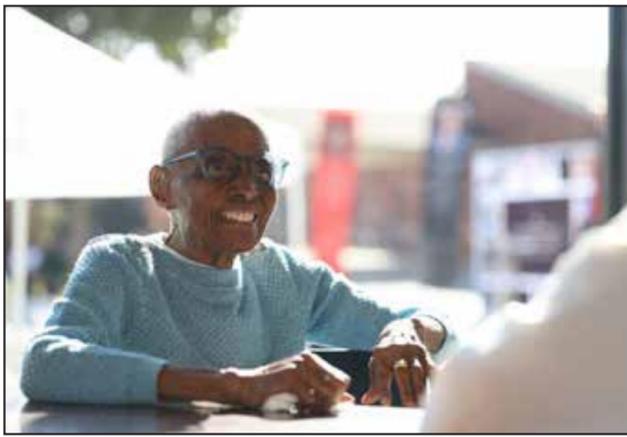
Asked in 2023 how much history she had witnessed, she sighed: "A lot, a lot, a lot. A lot of good, and a lot of bad."

Renfrow Smith, a secretary turned public school teacher, lived a life directly connected to America's history of slavery as well as to the progress made in the 20th and 21st centuries. "This has been the greatest century we have seen," Renfrow Smith told WGN, a television station in Chicago, where she lived most of her life. "There have been so many changes." She died at home in Chicago on January 2, aged 111, her friend Tamara Beaubouef-Lafontant told Reuters on Monday.

THE LOW MAN ON THE TOTEM POLE'

Edith Renfrow was born on July 14, 1914, two weeks before the start of World War One, in Grinnell, an Iowa town that like its college was named after white abolitionist minister and politician Josiah Bushnell Grinnell. But the town's anti-slavery roots did not mean its Black residents escaped racism or segregation.

"If you're the low man on the totem pole, you get stepped on, don't



you?" she said of growing up there. "When you're Black, you're invisible — and that's what we were."

Renfrow Smith told Beaubouef-Lafontant, a professor at Grinnell College: "I come from a family of fighters." She credited her mother, born Eva Pearl Craig, with stealing her against prejudice by repeatedly telling her that "no one is better than you."

Renfrow Smith would eventually turn that mantra into a book — "No One is Better Than You: Edith Renfrow Smith and the Power of a Mother's Words," published in 2024 — in collaboration with her daughter Alice and the author Monique Shore.

UP FROM SLAVERY

Her grandfather, George Craig, died in 1924, when Smith was 10

years old. According to an interview with George Craig that was the basis of a Grinnell Herald article in 1895, he was born enslaved in Missouri and sold to Louisiana slave traders aged 19, in 1857. He recounted tricking the Louisianans into believing his eyes were defective.

After being returned to Missouri, he escaped in 1858 to neighboring Kansas, where pro- and anti-slavery forces were fighting and slave catchers were hunting Black people. Craig hid in tunnels and cellars for a year before heading to Iowa with abolitionist Brown. Later that year, Brown, who was white, led a raid on a federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia, with the intention of arming slaves for an uprising. Brown was quickly captured, then hanged.

In Iowa, Craig married Eliza Gilbal. Their daughter Eva Pearl, born in 1875, married Lee Augustus Renfrow, also the child of former slaves, in 1901. Edith Renfrow was born of that union 13 years later.

A HARD-EARNED EDUCATION
Eva Pearl insisted that all six of her children receive the university education she was denied. She repeatedly told them that an education was the one thing no one could take away.

The older children graduated from the University of Iowa and from Fisk and Hampton, historically Black universities. Once they started working they contributed their earnings to their parents, a laundress and a cook, so that their younger siblings could also study. "Everybody helped each other," Renfrow Smith told NPR in 2023.

Renfrow Smith, the fifth child, earned her bachelor's in psychology from Grinnell College in 1937. She was the first Black woman to graduate from the school, which in 2019 awarded her an honorary doctorate. Grinnell's Renfrow Hall, named in her honor, opened in 2024.

In a statement announcing the death to students and staff on Monday, Anne Harris, the school's president, called her "one of Grinnell College's most inspiring and beloved alumni."

While at the university Renfrow Smith played badminton, ring tennis, basketball and field hockey. She attended a talk by Amelia Earhart there, a decade or so before the aviation pioneer disappeared over the

Pacific. "It was a delightful visit," Renfrow Smith recalled.

During the Great Depression, Renfrow moved to Chicago, where Grinnell had helped her secure a job as a receptionist at the local Young Women's Christian Association. There she met another great: poet Gwendolyn Brooks, the first Black American to win a Pulitzer Prize.

She called the decade-long economic crisis that began in 1929 "very, very strenuous, because we (Black citizens) were the last ones to receive what was offered."

GUIDING HERBIE HANCOCK
She met Henry Smith in Chicago. They were married in 1940 and raised their two daughters in the city's South Side neighborhood.

Jazz musician Herbie Hancock grew up nearby. "Mrs Smith was a dear friend of my mother's," he said in 2023, adding that she was like an aunt to him. "She had a regal kind of presence," he recalled.

She was a major influence on Hancock's decision to study at Grinnell, where he double majored in music and electrical engineering. He would later pioneer a sound that fused jazz with electronic music.

'HIS WONDERFUL WORLD'

Renfrow Smith worked as a secretary for Chicago politician and real estate businessman Oscar De Priest, who in 1928 won a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives. He was the first Black American to serve in Congress in the 20th century, in which capacity he repeatedly introduced legislation against racial discrimination.

In an example of debates within the Black community, Renfrow Smith called Jesse Jackson "a rabble-rouser," saying in 2023: "We only wanted peace and quiet where I was, and that is all I wanted for my children, so I did not march." Jackson was a community organizer in Chicago and a national and international political leader whose two runs for the U.S. presidency in the 1980s were the most prominent by a Black candidate until Barack Obama's victory in 2008.

Jackson marched in the 1960s with Martin Luther King, Jr. Renfrow Smith also saw the civil rights activist and Baptist minister, when he gave a talk at a synagogue in Chicago.

De Priest encouraged Renfrow Smith to become a teacher. She taught in Chicago public schools from 1955 until her retirement in 1976.

She had two daughters: Alice and Edith. Edith died in 1998, her husband Henry in 2023.

Renfrow Smith outlived all of her siblings by several decades. The last of them died in 1997.

Asked aged 109 what wisdom she might share, she said: "Have a goal. Never let anyone tell you that you can't."

She herself made the most of her retirement. "I used it to volunteer and to help because I had gotten so much help for my entire life," she said. As for daily life, she advocated: "Wake up every morning and thank the good Lord that you are alive and able to look at His wonderful world."

U.S. Removal Of Panels Honoring Black Soldiers At A WWII Cemetery In The Netherlands Is Drawing Backlash

MARGRATEN, Netherlands (AP) — Ever since a U.S. military cemetery in the southern Netherlands removed two displays recognizing Black troops who helped to liberate Europe from the Nazis, visitors have filled the guestbook with objections.

Sometime in the spring, the American Battle Monuments Commission, the U.S. government agency responsible for maintaining memorial sites outside of the United States, removed the panels from the visitors center at the American Cemetery in Margraten, the final resting place for roughly 8,300 U.S. soldiers, set in rolling hills near the border with Belgium and Germany.

The move came after U.S. President Donald Trump issued a series of executive orders ending diversity, equity and inclusion programs. "Our country will be woke no longer," Trump said in an address to Congress in March.

The removal, carried out without public explanation, has angered Dutch officials, the families of U.S. soldiers and the local residents who honor the American sacrifice by caring for the graves.

U.S. Ambassador to the Netherlands Joe Popolo seemed to support the removal of the displays. "The signs at Margraten are not intended to promote an agenda that criticizes America," he wrote on social media following a visit to the cemetery after the controversy had erupted. Popolo

declined a request for comment.

The displays highlighted the sacrifices of Black Americans. One display told the story of 23-year-old George H. Pruitt, a Black soldier buried at the cemetery, who died attempting to rescue a comrade from drowning in 1945. The other described the U.S. policy of racial segregation in place during World War II.

Some 1 million Black soldiers enlisted in the U.S. military during the war, serving in separate units, mostly doing menial tasks but also fighting in some combat missions. An all-Black unit dug the thousands of graves in Margraten during the brutal 1944-45 season of famine in the German-occupied Netherlands known in the Hunger Winter.

Cor Linszen, the 79-year-old son of a Black American soldier and a Dutch mother, is one of those who opposes the removal of the panels.

Linszen grew up some 30 miles (50 kilometers) away from the cemetery and although he didn't learn who his father was until later in life, he knew he was the son of a Black soldier.

"When I was born, the nurse thought something was wrong with me because I was the wrong color," he told The Associated Press. "I was the only dark child at school."

Linszen together with a group of other children of Black soldiers, now all in their 70s and 80s, visited the cemetery in February 2025 to see the

panels.

"It's an important part of history," Linszen said. "They should put the panels back."

The decision was based on Trump's DEI policies

After months of mystery around the disappearance of the panels, two media organizations — the Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA) and online media Dutch News — this month

published emails obtained through a U.S. Freedom of Information Act request showing that Trump's DEI policies directly prompted the commission to take down the panels.

The White House did not respond to queries from AP about the removed panels.

The American Battle Monuments Commission did not respond to queries from AP about the revelations.

Earlier, the ABMC told the AP that the panel that discussed segregation "did not fall within (the) commemorative mission."

It also said that the panel about Pruitt was "rotated" out. The replacement panel features Leslie Loveland, a white soldier killed in Germany in 1945, who is buried at Margraten.

Chair of the Black Liberators

foundation and Dutch senator Theo Bovens said his organization, which pushed for the inclusion of the panels at the visitors center, was not informed that they were removed. He told AP it is "strange" that the U.S. commission feels the panels are not in their mission, as they placed them in 2024.

"Something has changed in the United States," he said.

Former Inmate Buys NC Prison — CONT. FROM PG 1

have any place to go. Or if they did, there was a time limit on how long they could stay," Pittman said.

Pittman's purchase of the abandoned, 400-bed prison is an extension of the work he started soon after he left prison. He plans to create re-entry housing and a workforce campus where formerly incarcerated people can attain job skills or industry certifications.

"The campus would be like a stabilization phase for guys coming out of jail or prison, to give them a six-month pause so they can get their life back on track," Pittman said.

Pittman estimates it will take up to two years to get the former prison ready for as many as 300 residents who would live on the campus until they completed the six months-long program. Another class of up to 300 would replace the previous residents each six months, he said.

He envisions residents studying and training to become electricians, plumbers, HVAC technicians, construction workers and other trades that are in high demand.

"Right now, not only in the United States, but particularly North Carolina and particularly rural North Carolina, they are experiencing a decline [in people] seeking trade jobs," Pittman said.

Other residents might choose a track to earn industry certifications or a Commercial Driver's License, he said.

The program will be open to previously incarcerated individuals from across the state, Pittman said.

"We'll take referrals, we'll have a case management team that go inside the jails and prison ... and then we'll go and see if the candidate is the best fit for our program," Pittman said.

Pittman said it would make sense to locate such a facility in Goldsboro even if the former prison wasn't available.

"Goldsboro is suffering right now with the plague of not only violence, but also poverty," Pittman said. "It only made sense when this institution came up for sale to purchase it because of all of the other things that are going on in Eastern North Carolina, but also in that area."

Pittman said he bought the former prison for under a million dollars and projects it will take about \$2 million to refurbish it, while taking care to ensure it no longer looks like a prison. Pittman will rely heavily on private donations to fund the enterprise but has not ruled out pursuing local, state or federal funding.

The prison closed in 2013 as North Carolina sought to save money by reducing prison capacity after inmate populations declined.

Wayne County Commissioner Bevan Foster had not heard about the project but was excited after a reporter shared the news.

"If he's able to do what he said he's gonna do, it'd be great," Foster said. "It's the kind of program we need."

Foster noted the irony of the prison being repurposed to help formerly incarcerated individuals.

"They're using it for some good," Foster said. "It would be a great



thing."

Wayne County Commissioner Antonio Williams also had not heard about Pittman's proposal but said it would be a "wonderful opportunity" for people leaving prison.

"You can look around and see a lot of people who have been rehabilitated, but they come home and it's challenging for them to even have housing, it's challenging for them to find a job," Williams said.

Many formerly incarcerated individuals return home to find that relatives or other loved ones have died or they've just lost those relationships while they were away and don't have any place to go, Williams said.

"Pittman's proposal, he said, "would definitely give them a chance to rejoin life and get the basic steps in order such as finding jobs, housing and health care, all of those things that are valuable and have meaning."

As NC Newsline previously reported, a year ago, Pittman launched the state's first mobile reentry service center to bring resources and support to people reentering society from prison. He followed up with a second mobile center six months later.

The centers provide previously incarcerated people with case management and other services such as job placement, housing assistance, mental health support and help obtaining important documents such as identification.

Pittman said the time he spent behind bars fuels his passion to help others.

"Me going into the system young, getting in trouble and being able to come out on the other side of that — and to be honest, just following my spirit and God leading the way — it made me want to be able to help other people," Pittman said.

Wake County Board's New Leadership

By Jordan Meadows

Staff Writer

The Wake County Board of Commissioners held its first meeting of 2026 on Monday afternoon, marking a new year of leadership and fiscal planning for the county.

During the meeting, Chair Mial presented a proclamation recognizing October 28 as the Cary, NC Alumni Chapter of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity Inc. Day of Service.

"Through a comprehensive body of service and community engagement, the young development efforts of Kappa Alpha Psi have produced meaningful civic and improved quality of life outcomes across Wake County," he said. The organization's contributions include family support programs, assistance to seniors, scholarships, STEM education initiatives, and training opportunities for young men.

The board also received the annual comprehensive financial report for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025, presented by Chief Financial Officer Patrick Flanary. The report, audited by independent auditors as



required by state law, showed that county revenues exceeded expenditures by \$65.5 million. Property taxes, which accounted for the vast majority of revenue, rose nearly \$200 million from 2024.

Total spending reached \$2 billion, an increase of \$181 million from the previous fiscal period, with nearly 37% allocated to education. Approximately 27% of expenditures were classified as "transfers to other

funds," reflecting the movement of money from the General Fund to capital projects, debt service, and special revenue funds, including Wake County Schools and Wake Tech Community College. These transfers, while appearing as spending, are internal reallocations used to cover shortfalls, comply with legal restrictions, or fund future projects, with actual spending occurring later when the receiving fund pays

vendors, employees, or lenders.

Health and human services and public safety each accounted for roughly 13% of the budget, while community, environmental services, and infrastructure each made up less than 3.6%. Wake County ended the fiscal year with 20% of its budget in working capital, representing the county's current assets mi-

(See **NEW LEADSHIP** P. 7)

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Business & Finance

Trump Administration Rolls Out Rural Health Funding, With Strings Attached

(AP)—States will share \$10 billion for rural health care next year in a program that aims to offset the Trump administration's massive budget cuts to rural hospitals, federal officials announced Monday.

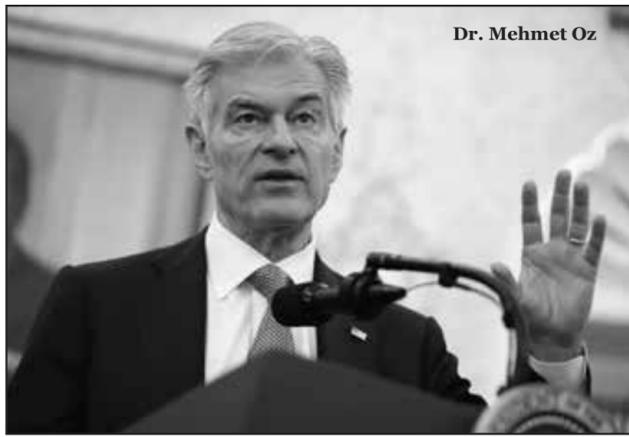
But while every state applied for money from the Rural Health Transformation Program, it won't be distributed equally. And critics worry that the funding might be pulled back if a state's policies don't match up with the administration's.

Officials said the average award for 2026 is \$200 million, and the fund puts a total of \$50 billion into rural health programs over five years. States propose how to spend their awards, and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services assigns project officers to support each state, said agency administrator Dr. Mehmet Oz.

"This fund was crafted as part of the One Big Beautiful Bill, signed only six months ago now into law, in order to push states to be creative," Oz said in a call with reporters Monday.

Under the program, half of the money is equally distributed to each state. The other half is allocated based on a formula developed by CMS that considered rural population size, the financial health of a state's medical facilities and health outcomes for a state's population.

The formula also ties \$12 billion of the five-year funding to whether states are implementing health policies prioritized by the Trump administration's "Make America Healthy Again" initiative. Examples include



Dr. Mehmet Oz

requiring nutrition education for health care providers, having schools participate in the Presidential Fitness Test or banning the use of SNAP benefits for so-called junk foods, Oz said.

Several Republican-led states — including Arkansas, Iowa, Louisiana, Nebraska, Oklahoma and Texas — have already adopted rules banning the purchase of foods like candy and soda with SNAP benefits.

The money that the states get will be recalculated annually, Oz said, allowing the administration to "claw back" funds if, for example, state leaders don't pass promised policies. Oz said the clawbacks are not punishments, but leverage governors can use to push policies by pointing to

the potential loss of millions.

"I've already heard governors express that sentiment that this is not a threat, that this is actually an empowering element of the One Big Beautiful Bill," he said.

Carrie Cochran-McClain, chief policy officer with the National Rural Health Association, said she's heard from a number of Democratic-led states that refused to include such restrictions on SNAP benefits even though it could hurt their chance to get more money from the fund.

"It's not where their state leadership is," she said. Oz and other federal officials have touted the program as a 50% increase in Medicaid investments in rural health care. Rep. Don Bacon, a

Republican from Nebraska who has been critical of many of the administration's policies but voted for the budget bill that slashed Medicaid, pointed to the fund when recently questioned about how the cuts would hurt rural hospitals.

"That's why we added a \$50 billion rural hospital fund, to help any hospital that's struggling," Bacon said. "This money is meant to keep hospitals afloat."

But experts say it won't nearly offset the losses that struggling rural hospitals will face from the federal spending law's \$1.2 trillion cut from the federal budget over the next decade, primarily from Medicaid. Millions of people are also expected to lose Medicaid benefits.

Estimates suggest rural hospitals could lose around \$137 billion over the next decade because of the budget measure. As many as 300 rural hospitals were at risk for closure because of the GOP's spending package, according to an analysis by The Cecil G. Sheps Center for Health Services Research at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

"When you put that up against the \$50 billion for the Rural Health Transformation Fund, you know — that math does not add up," Cochran-McClain said.

She also said there's no guarantee that the funding will go to rural hospitals in need. For example, she noted, one state's application included a proposal for healthier, locally sourced school lunch options in rural areas.



DC Blox/Handout

Why The South Is Becoming A Hotspot For Subsea Cables

By Bradley George

WUNC

The rise of artificial intelligence is changing the physical environment in North Carolina and across the South. Companies are building data centers all over the region.

AI-driven applications are creating demand for more conduits to carry internet traffic, like undersea cables that snake along the ocean floor.

For decades, most of these cables were clustered in the northeastern U.S., but companies like Google and Meta are looking for new connection points along the East Coast.

DC BLOX, a data infrastructure provider, opened a cable landing site in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina in 2023. To the north, a landing station in Virginia Beach carries data from servers in Ashburn, Virginia. The Washington D.C. suburb, with over 130 facilities, is known as "Data Center Alley."

"Cables do break from time to time," said Alan Mauldin, research director at TeleGeography. "Having them spread out into more unique locations creates more diversity, which is a higher resiliency for the network."

Mauldin estimates it costs around \$300 million to lay a new cable end-to-end. "Which is, you know, it's not nothing," he said. "But compared to the cost of a data center and all the investment we're seeing in chips and power globally, the cost of cables is a pretty small amount."

While cables are coming ashore in neighboring states, don't expect to see them slinking along North Carolina beaches anytime soon. Much of the state's coastline, including the Outer Banks, has protected status that limits development. The sea floor is also not ideal for cable construction. "This is a 12.5% grade and is one of eastern North America's steepest continental slopes," according to NC Coastwatch.

Subsea cables also come with security concerns. The FCC recently adopted new rules to limit foreign companies from laying cables U.S. waters. The rules package also streamlines the permitting process for cable construction.

DC BLOX recently announced plans to expand its Myrtle Beach landing station to accommodate five more cables, while LS GreenLink wants to build a cable construction plant in Chesapeake, Virginia.

The New Wave Of American Capitalism

THE BUSINESS INSIDER — To believe in American capitalism has long meant believing in a mostly laissez-faire approach from the government — it sets the rules of the game, but it doesn't have a piece on the board. Markets pick winners and losers, not Washington. The strong thrive, the weak fail. That consensus has been eroding for years, and finally, the dam has broken: The US government has become a shareholder in nearly a dozen companies over the past several months, and the list is growing. It's moved the economy into a much more interventionist — and unfamiliar — territory. The machine is still turning, but more hands are tinkering with the gears, including, most importantly, the president's.



The federal government has been on an equity stake shopping spree during the first year of Trump's second term. The US took a nearly 10% stake in Intel for \$8.9 billion in August, a move aimed at bolstering the country's semiconductor industry. It has invested in several critical minerals firms, including MP Materials, Lithium Americas, and Trilog Metals, as well as in Westinghouse, a nuclear energy company. In June, the administration acquired a "golden share" in US Steel in exchange for approving Japanese company Nippon Steel's acquisition of the company — it gives the government veto-like power over decisions such as shifting jobs outside the US and shuttering plants. (And as for recent developments in Venezuela, the

president clearly is waving a heavy hand toward the US oil industry and potential investment there. How that situation plays remains to be seen.)

These types of moves are not abnormal outside the United States. China's version of capitalism is hyper-state-led. Many governments, including those of France, Italy, and the United Kingdom, make direct investments in some domestic firms. The US has gotten extra involved in private industry in the past, but it's generally been in times of distress, such as during the 2008 crisis, when it took stakes in certain financial institutions and automakers in order to prevent a broader economic meltdown.

This time, it's different: The gov-

ernment is meddling when there's no apparent urgent need, and it's picking companies in what some observers say is a scattershot manner. The sectors make sense, but the criteria for selecting companies are rather unclear, as is the role the government will play in its investments.

"With industrial policy, the devil's in the details of so much, and this is where the details are really obscured, and where they are defined, they're kind of ad hoc," says Nathan Lane, an assistant professor of economic development at the London School of Economics and Political Science.

A novel vision of American state capitalism is emerging right before our eyes. It's a world where the White House puts its thumb on the

scale, whether in injecting funds into a firm, weighing in on mergers, or implementing legally questionable tariffs at the drop of a hat. Many critics have expressed concerns about the risks arising from the Trump administration's actions — the potential for politically biased decision-making, the appearance of crony capitalism, and possible market distortions. In the grand scheme of things, these maneuvers may be financially minor, but they're structurally major developments. Regardless of the drawbacks, it's indicative of where we're headed. There may be no going back.

"The use of these tools generally only goes in one direction, and so the Trump administration, for better or worse, has introduced a new group of tools into the economic statecraft toolkit," says Aaron Bartnick, a former White House economic security official under the Biden administration and a current fellow at Columbia University. "Whatever administration comes next, whether Republican or Democrat, will find it very tempting to continue to use them."

This hasn't all happened out of nowhere — the US has, for a decade, been increasingly comfortable with industrial policy, meaning the government taking a more active role in steering the economy. Trump 1.0 implemented several protectionist policies, including imposing tariffs on steel and aluminum imports,

(See CAPITALISM P. 9)

Raleigh Chamber Economic Forecast 2026 Delivers Essential Insights

By Jheri Hardaway

Staff Writer

Raleigh, NC - The Martin Marietta Center for the Performing Arts was abuzz this morning as business leaders, entrepreneurs, and policymakers gathered for the Economic Forecast 2026, presented by Wells Fargo. The event offered a timely and comprehensive look at the national and regional economic outlook as the new year begins. Attendees started the day with a valuable hour of networking and breakfast, followed by the program in the A.J. Fletcher Opera Theater.

The program delivered a high-caliber lineup of speakers. National perspectives were provided by Tom Barkin of the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond and Tim Quinlan of Wells Fargo, offering attendees key insights into broader economic forces shaping 2026. Tom mentioned, "Build more houses if you want affordable housing. Tim spoke about the fact that economic symbols are all around us in the community."

Connecting these national trends to local realities were regional leaders Danielle Y. Clermont, CEO of Raleigh Regional Association of REALTORS, and Brian Leary, EVP COO of Highwood Properties, Inc. Their discussion centered on how the broader economic picture translates into specific challenges, opportunities, and development trends for businesses operating in the Triangle area.

On Housing and Wealth Creation:

- Strong Domestic and Global Buyer Interest: Buyers, both domestic and global, are actively purchasing homes.
- Resilient Rental Market: The rental market remains strong, and builders are actively increasing inventory.
- The Debate on Homeownership vs. Renting/Investing: There's an

(See RALEIGH CHAMBER ECONOMIC FORECAST, P. 7)



Corporation For Public Broadcasting Votes Itself Out Of Existence

Leaders of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private agency that has steered federal funding to PBS, NPR and hundreds of public television and radio stations across the country, voted Monday to dissolve the organization that was created in 1967.

CPB had been winding down since Congress acted last summer to defund its operations at the encouragement of President Donald Trump. Its board of directors chose Monday to shutter CPB completely instead of keeping it in existence as a shell.

"CPB's final act would be to protect the integrity of the public media system and the democratic values by dissolving, rather than allowing the organization to remain defunded and vulnerable to additional attacks," said Patricia Harrison, the organization's president and CEO.

Many Republicans have long accused public broadcasting, particularly its news programming, of being biased toward liberals but it wasn't until the second Trump administration — with full GOP control of Congress — that those criticisms were turned into action.

Ruby Calvert, head of CPB's board of directors, said the federal defunding of public media has been devastating.

"Even at this moment, I am convinced that public media will survive, and that a new Congress will address public media's role in our country because it is critical to our children's education, our history, culture and democracy to do so," Calvert said.

CPB said it was financially supporting the American Archive of Public Broadcasting in its effort to preserve historic content, and is working with the University of Maryland to maintain its own records.

Real-Time Translation Devices Go Mainstream

By Jordan Meadows

Staff Writer

There are more than 67 million people in the U.S. who speak a language other than English at home, and at least 38% report speaking English less than very well. With over 500 languages tracked by the U.S. Census Bureau, public agencies face growing pressure to serve diverse populations efficiently.

Advances in bilingual and real-time translation technologies are rapidly reshaping how governments, schools, police departments, and everyday consumers communicate, arriving at a moment when language policy and cultural identity are under renewed national scrutiny.

Law enforcement agencies have been among the most visible adopters of these technologies. Immigration and Customs Enforcement previously announced plans to replace a five-week Spanish language course for officers with "robust translation services" intended to expedite hiring and field operations, although the promised technology has yet to be implemented.

Police departments in at least 19 states are using Pockettalk devices and apps that provide real-time translation in more than 90 languages, allowing officers to communicate instantly with residents during traffic stops, emergencies, and investigations.

Cities are also embracing language technology at scale. In De-



cember, outgoing New York City Mayor Eric Adams issued a directive urging all city agencies to integrate language technologies into daily operations. The city plans to install translation apps on more than 100,000 city-owned smart devices, aiming to make New York "the most language-friendly city on the globe." The New York City Office of Technology and Innovation is supporting agencies in deploying tools such as Google Translate and Apple's built-in Translate app, while the NYPD has begun using language technology in routine interactions with the public.

At the same time, New York City Public Schools is developing "Hello," a new app designed to bridge communication gaps between educators and families, scheduled for rollout in spring 2026. Schools nationwide are

increasingly relying on AI-powered translation to support multilingual classrooms: Microsoft Translator allows teachers to transmit spoken lessons via Bluetooth to students' devices, where the content is translated into each student's chosen language in real time.

Google is pushing this even further with a new beta feature that turns ordinary headphones into personal translation devices. By preserving tone, emphasis, and cadence, the technology makes conversations feel natural rather than robotic, while also handling idioms, slang, regional expressions, and nuanced meanings that older translation tools often missed. Phrases like "stealing my thunder" are now interpreted contextually, showing a deeper understanding of culture embedded in language. This Google feature currently

supports more than 70 languages.

Major consumer technology companies are also racing to make live translation a seamless experience. Meta has introduced real-time translation to its AI-powered Ray-Ban smart glasses, enabling users to hear translations between English and Spanish, French, or Italian through open-ear speakers or view transcripts on their phones. The glasses now combine translation with features like music identification via Shazam, Instagram messaging, object recognition, and video-enabled AI assistance that responds to what the user is seeing in real time. Apple has entered the space with live translation capabilities in its new AirPods Pro 3, which can lower the volume of a speaker's voice and replace it with a translated version directly in the listener's ear.

Yet as these technologies become more accurate, accessible, and embedded in daily life, they raise deeper questions about the future of language learning and cultural connection. On one hand, AI-powered translation lowers barriers and helps institutions serve multilingual communities more effectively, especially in high-stakes settings like policing and education. On the other hand, reliance on instant translation may reduce the incentive to learn new languages, potentially eroding the cultural knowledge, historical context, and subtle social meanings that come from speaking a language fluently.

Top Strategies for Marketing a Small Business Effectively

Running a small business feels like juggling. You're the CEO, the accountant, and the janitor all at once. Having effective strategies for marketing a small business is how you turn your passion into a profitable venture.

You're not alone if you feel a little lost. Many owners pour their heart into their product or service but get stuck on how to tell people about it. This guide breaks down different marketing strategies so you can start making real progress.

Build Your Foundation: Who Are You Talking To?
Before you spend a dime or a minute on your marketing efforts, you need to know who you're marketing to. Trying to appeal to everyone is a recipe for connecting with no one. You need to get specific about your ideal customer and build a solid marketing plan from there.

Define Your Target Audience
Think about the person who truly needs what you offer. What problem are you solving for them? Getting a clear picture of this person, your

target audience, is the first step to building a strong customer base.

Start by building a simple customer profile. Consider their age, what they do for work, and their hobbies. This helps you fully understand the people you want to reach.

Most importantly, what are their pain points? Understanding their struggles helps you position your business as the solution. Knowing your target market shapes every marketing message you create for potential customers.

Figure Out Your Brand's Voice
Your business has a personality, which is a core part of your brand identity. Is it professional and serious? Or is it playful and funny?

Your brand's voice should be consistent everywhere you connect with people. It shows up in your website copy, social media marketing posts, and even your email campaigns. This consistency builds trust with your audience.

A clear brand voice makes you more relatable. It helps customers feel like they're connecting with a

person, not just a faceless company. This is a powerful way to build a loyal following among existing customers.

Low-Budget Strategies for Marketing a Small Business

The good news is you don't need a huge budget to make a big impact. Many powerful marketing tactics are free or very affordable. These are perfect for small businesses looking to get started and build momentum.

Master Your Google Business Profile
For any business with a physical location, local marketing starts here. Your Google Business Profile is a free listing that appears in Google Maps and local search results. A complete business profile on Google Business is your modern-day phone book listing.

It's one of the best ways to get found by local customers. A recent survey shows that a large number of consumers use the internet to find information about local businesses. This highlights how critical your online presence is.

Make sure you fill out every sec-

tion of your profile. Add high-quality photos, list your hours, and write a compelling description. Actively ask happy customers to leave you reviews, as this social proof is very persuasive.

Get Serious About Content Marketing

Content marketing is about creating and sharing valuable information, which is a cornerstone of any online marketing strategy. It's not about selling directly. It is about building trust, increasing brand awareness, and establishing yourself as an authority.

This could be through blog posts, videos, or social media updates. The goal is to help your audience solve a problem. In doing so, you build a strong relationship with them.

A great place to start your content creation is by making a list of the most frequently asked questions from your customers. Then, create content that answers those questions thoroughly. This shows you pay attention to their needs.

When you answer frequently asked questions, you are creating

helpful resources. This type of content can cover topics from simple how-tos to in-depth industry guides. Explore business challenges your customers face and offer solutions.

Use Email Marketing to Stay in Touch

Unlike social media, you own your email list. An email campaign is a direct line of communication with people who have already shown interest in your business. This is why it's such a valuable asset for business marketing.

To grow your list, offer something valuable in exchange for an email address. This could be a small discount, a free guide, or access to exclusive content. People are more willing to sign up when they get something in return.

A solid email marketing strategy is crucial. You don't have to send emails every day. A simple weekly newsletter with helpful tips or promotions can nurture leads and keep your business top of mind for your people customers.

Level Up with Digital Marketing Tactics

Once you have a solid foundation, you can explore more digital marketing tactics. These approaches help you reach a wider audience. They also help you connect with people actively looking for what you offer.

Understand Basic SEO

SEO stands for Search Engine Optimization. It's the practice of improving your website so it shows up higher in search results on a search engine like Google. Effective engine optimization means when someone searches for a product you offer, you appear on the first page.

It starts with keywords. These are the words and phrases your ideal customer is typing into the search bar. Use free tools to find out what those terms are, and then create high-quality content around them.

A mobile-friendly website is essential for modern SEO. It's clear that Google prioritizes sites that provide a great user experience on all devices. If your website doesn't load correctly on a phone, you will lose customers and sales, as many people shop and pay with a credit card directly from their devices.



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Health and Wellness



By Judykay Jefferson

TRYING SOMETHING NEW

It is the beginning of another year that from all indications is going to speed by like its last 10 predecessors. As is my custom, I bypass "New Year's resolutions," preferring to set what seem like attainable goals for improved living. Unfortunately, the result is about the same: the moment I settle on a goal, my brain rejects it as an affront to my free-will. I have a few familiar go-to plans; lose weight, go to church in-person more, save money, blah, blah, blah. This year, it's Tai Chi.

I am determined to learn the moves and perform them daily. I found a YouTube video for a 15-minute Tai Chi session targeting seniors. I did it, liked it, and determined this would not fall by the wayside like these things usually do. (Total transparency, I did it yesterday, but I didn't do it today.) I did decide to find an in-person class which led me to the following information. I strongly believe that I am at the exact right age to start something new. I'm confident in my ability to learn new skills and develop new habits. As a strong believer in the gospel according to James Brown, "You got to use what you got to get what you want." Besides our monthly checks, Medicare (through Medicare supplement plans) provide us with access to health-promoting resources such as the Silver Sneakers fitness allowance. I'm determined to use mine this year to learn Tai Chi. That started me thinking, what programs are available across North Carolina. I compiled this practical comparison for Raleigh, Wake Forest, Greensboro, Charlotte, Fayetteville, Rocky Mount, Kernersville, and Greenville.

Raleigh runs one of the largest and most structured senior recreation systems in the state.

There are programs for adults 50+ that include exercise and wellness classes, art, music, dance, languages, Cards, games, social clubs and 25+ day and overnight trips each year. These events are held at multiple Active Adult Centers throughout the city.

Wake Forest's Center for Active Aging offers a dedicated center with a strong community feel. They too offer programs for adults 55+. Some of the most popular are aerobics, line dancing, ballroom dancing, woodcarving, painting, crafts, and educational classes (computers, ceramics, clay). There is also a variety of monthly social events and volunteer opportunities.

Greensboro Parks & Recreation provides services and screenings tailored to older adults. In addition to fitness, wellness, and enrichment programs, they offer free AARP tax preparation and balance screenings (I need that!).

Charlotte's programming spans four senior centers across the county. They offer health and wellness programs in addition to health & wellness programs and social, educational, and recreational activities. They list as one of their program objects programs aimed at reducing isolation.

Fayetteville-Cumberland Parks & Recreation department offers a broad range of senior programs through its recreation department and partner agencies. Their Senior-specific recreation programs include tech classes to promote development of new skills and enhancing communication options.

Rocky Mount's Senior Center is a nationally accredited senior center with extensive facilities. It's a great facility that includes an indoor pool, computer lab, library, and physical, mental, emotional, cultural and social programs for adults 50+.

The Kernersville Senior Enrichment Center, operated by The Shepherd's Center, is recognized as a NC Senior Center of Excellence. These accolades have been earned by the diversity of senior-focused programming and a volunteer-driven community model.

The Greenville Recreation & Parks + Pitt County COA (Council on Aging) offers both city-run programs and county senior wellness centers. In addition to programs for adults of all ages, multiple senior wellness centers offer morning activities and lunch.

This is by no means a comprehensive listing but a sampling to show just some of the many resources available to North Carolina seniors. Make this your year for doing rather than wishing. There is no way to accurately measure the value of shared experiences on our mental and physical health, and even longevity. I love baking and candy making however, I can't allow myself to stay home, talking to myself, watching Korean television, and ordering groceries online for more than two or three days at a time. It's not healthy. We all need social interaction with real, live people. And trust me, it's great spending time with our contemporaries who share some of the same challenges. At least check out the senior programs near you. Call, talk to someone. We don't have time to procrastinate. Every day you wake up, do something that makes your life more joyful.

State Retirees Challenged Health Plan Benefit Changes 13 Years Ago. They're Still Fighting.

NC HEALTH NEWS – More than 13 years have passed since a group of prominent state retirees filed a lawsuit challenging what was then a new state law that required them to start paying for health care benefits they had received free of charge for years as part of their benefits package.

Now, attorneys for the state agencies that oversee the state health plan are asking the state Supreme Court to weigh in on the case one more time before trial — a move that the retirees' attorneys contend is yet another of many delay tactics.

"While the defendants have delayed this trial interminably through their procedural antics, the members of the retiree class are dying at an ever-increasing rate," Michael Carpenter, a Gastonia attorney, and Sam McGee, a Charlotte attorney argued in their motion to dismiss the state agency requests. "Many members of the class will never see the benefit of their bargain as promised by the state."

The latest court battle in the lawsuit comes as many state workers

and others across North Carolina are wrestling with uncertainty over health care.

Current North Carolina state employees will be paying more for their health care premiums in 2026 as part of an effort by State Treasurer Brad Briner to chip away at a growing deficit he inherited when he came into office in 2025.

And the U.S. Congress let enhanced subsidies for the Affordable Care Act expire in 2025, leading to premium hikes for many other North Carolinians.

The crux of the lawsuit filed in 2012 by the retirees does not touch on those issues, but they all hinge upon the same thing: rising cost of health care in this country.

Long, winding road to justice

In 2011, the Republican-led General Assembly adopted changes that transferred the State Health Plan for Teachers and State Employees to the state treasurer's portfolio. The new statute also required retirees and some active members of the plan to start paying premiums for their health care, a shift from previous

practice where coverage had been offered premium-free for life once they retired.

Part of the implicit bargain generations of state employees entered into as they took state jobs had been the tradeoff of lesser salaries for richer fringe benefits.

Twenty-seven employees, including the late I. Beverly Lake Jr., a former chief justice of the state Supreme Court who died in 2019, said the state had broken a contract with the retirees and sought class-action status.

The case wended its way through many levels of state court. In 2016, Judge Edwin Wilson certified a group of some 220,000 people as having similar enough complaints against the State Health Plan that they could move forward as a group.

In 2022, the state Supreme Court ruled that employees in that group had a vested contractual right to a plan equivalent to what they had when they were vested — meaning some of the employees should not have to contribute more for their

premiums as the 2011 law stated.

The state sought to appeal that decision to the U.S. Supreme Court, but those justices declined to hear the case in October 2022, setting the stage for more hearings at the North Carolina trial court level to determine damages and further proceedings.

Expert reports were shared. Depositions and sworn statements were gathered by attorneys in the case.

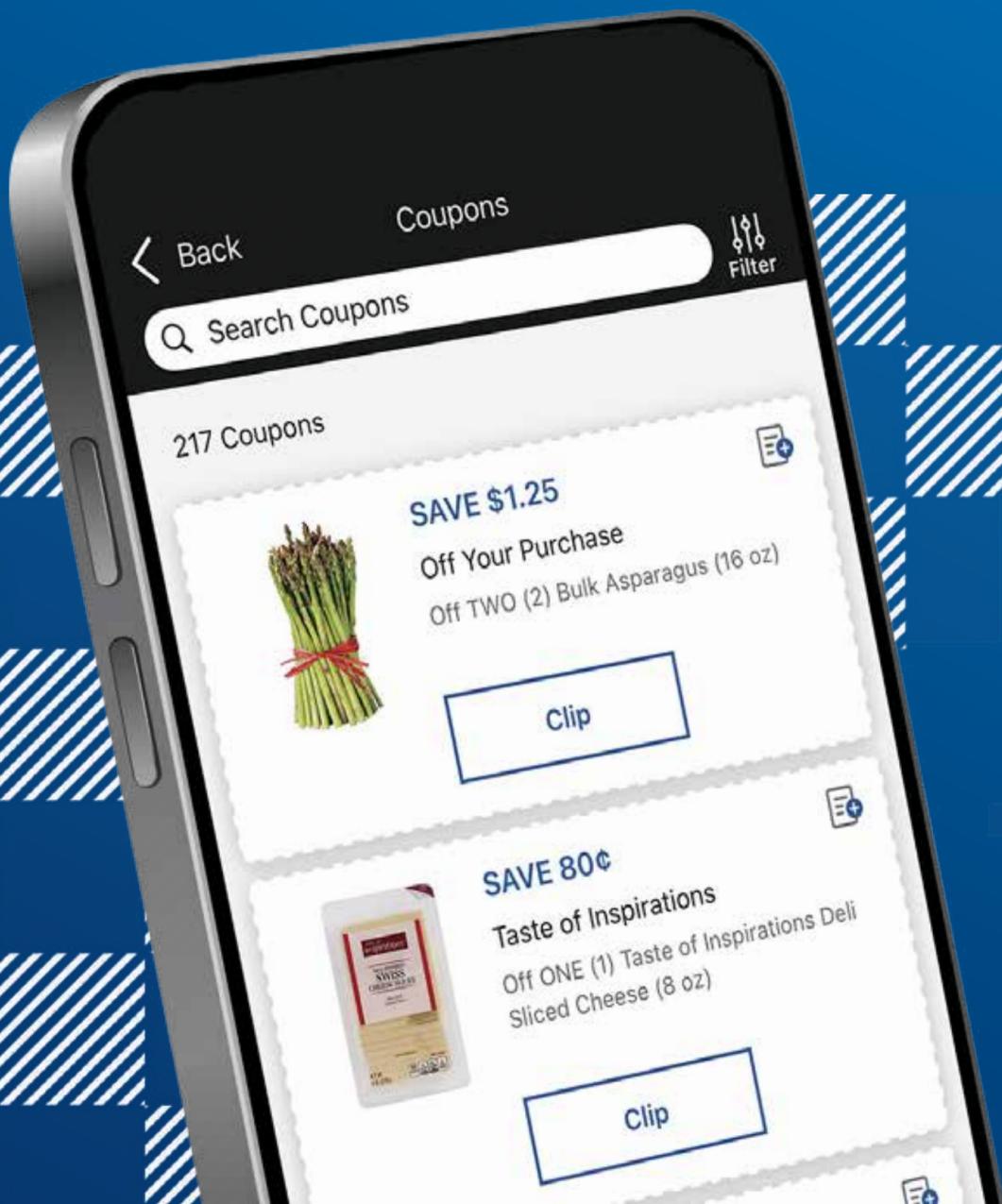
Representatives for the State Health Plan and agencies overseeing it sought to block the previous state Supreme Court ruling. Even after the state Supreme Court switched from a Democratic majority in 2022 to a 5-2 Republican majority in 2023, the answer was no.

On the eve of trial the case had been set to go to trial last year, but after several more attempts by the state agencies to change the course of the lawsuit, the judge canceled the trial, pending appellate review.

Now, the state Supreme Court could take up the case again, making it the third appeal to that court.

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Arts & Culture

Reflection: Emancipation and the "Revolutionary Moment"

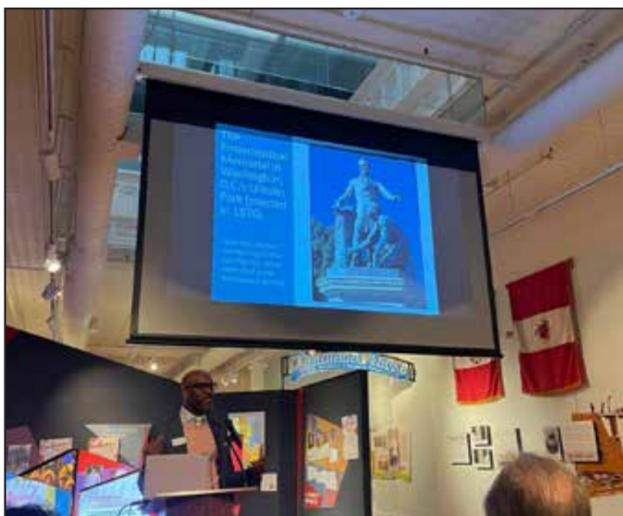
By Jheri Hardaway

Staff Writer

Raleigh, NC - A peaceful Saturday morning in downtown Raleigh at the City of Raleigh Museum was the perfect venue for a powerful Emancipation Day celebration. In addition to the usual historical reverence, the atmosphere was charged with a reimagining of the American narrative. Guest speaker Antwain K. Hunter, UNC Chapel Hill Assistant Professor in the Department of History, delivered a prolific and challenging lecture on the history of Emancipation Day, a day he argues is one of the most "revolutionary moments" in a nation that prides itself on revolution, yet one that remains insufficiently celebrated across the country. For those of us who value transparent history and the execution of memorable experiences, Hunter's talk was a masterclass in intellectual honesty. He pushed the audience to look past the "Great Emancipator" trope and recognize emancipation as a messy, bottom-up process driven as much by enslaved people themselves as by the man in the White House.

Hunter began by addressing the popular imagery of emancipation: President Abraham Lincoln standing over a kneeling enslaved man, bestowing freedom with a signature. While Hunter admitted Lincoln is among his favorite presidents, he was quick to hold him to account. "Lincoln's initial wartime goal, of course, was to preserve the Union," Hunter explained. Early in the conflict, Lincoln was famously cautious, tethered by constitutional constraints and the desperate need to keep the "border states" (slave states that hadn't seceded) loyal to the Union. In his 1861 inaugural address, Lincoln explicitly stated he had no lawful right or inclination to interfere with slavery where it already existed. However, the "revolutionary moment" wasn't waiting for Lincoln to catch up. It was already happening in the muddy camps and fortresses of the South.

To the "Contraband of War" or those we now refer to as the enslaved, freedom appeared as a military necessity. The shift toward freedom began with bold military officers and even bolder "freedom seekers." Hunter highlighted General



Benjamin Butler at Fort Monroe, Virginia. In May 1861, just a month into the war, three enslaved men fled to the fort. When their enslaver came to reclaim them under the Fugitive Slave Law, Butler (a lawyer by trade)

refused. He classified the men as "contraband of war," arguing that if they were "property" being used to aid the Confederacy, the Union had every right to seize them. This sparked a wave. Within months,



thousands of enslaved people from Virginia and Eastern North Carolina were heading toward Union lines, effectively forcing the federal government to create a policy where none existed.

When the Emancipation Proclamation finally took effect on January 1, 1863, it was, as Hunter noted, a strategic "war measure." It was limited in scope, exempting the border states and areas already under Union control. Yet, its symbolic and practical power was undeniable. In North Carolina alone, as many as 10,000 enslaved people sought refuge in New Bern once the Union Army established a foothold. The Proclamation also opened the doors

for Black enlistment. It is believed that 180,000 Black men served in the Union Army, while 18,000 Black men served in the Navy, many of them "Blackwater" men from the coast of North Carolina. These men weren't just recipients of freedom; they were its primary defenders.

The lecture concluded with a vibrant Q&A session that touched on the "pragmatism" of the Black experience—from the use of firearms for self-defense and hunting in the North Carolina swamps to the vital role of the Black church in building schools and hospitals post-1865. Hunter's message was clear: Emancipation is not just Black history or Southern history; it is the moment the United States became a "free country" for the first time in its existence. It was a victory achieved through the collaboration of radical lawmakers, military officers, and, most importantly, the everyday individuals who seized their own liberty. As we look toward the future of Raleigh and the upcoming "America 250" celebrations, let us remember Antwain K. Hunter's call to appreciate the "fullness" of our history—the fireworks and the struggles alike.

Black America's Cultural Giants That Were Lost In 2025

NNPA - The losses came steadily in 2025, not as a single rupture but as a quiet procession. Voices that once filled sanctuaries, arenas, studios, television screens, and living rooms went still. The year closed with Black America taking inventory not only of who died, but of what each life carried into the culture and what now remains behind.

From gospel and soul to film, television, activism, and sport, the deaths cut across generations. Some were expected after long lives. Others arrived with shocking speed. Together, they formed a ledger of Black excellence that shaped the country even when the country did not always return the favor.

Among the first major losses was Sam Moore, one half of the legendary duo Sam and Dave, whose gospel-rooted soul helped define an era. Moore died January 10 at 89, closing a chapter on a voice that powered songs still stitched into American music history.

Days later, Atlanta lost DJ Unk, whose club anthems "Walk It Out" and "2 Step" became cultural shorthand for an entire moment in Southern hip hop. He was 43.

February brought a deeper reckoning. Roberta Flack died at 88, her voice measured, deliberate, and intimate in a way that reshaped R&B and pop. "The First Time Ever I Saw Your



Face" and "Killing Me Softly" did not demand attention. They commanded it by restraint. Gwen McCrae, whose disco-infused soul powered dance floors for decades, died days earlier at 81. Roy Ayers, the vibraphonist behind "Everybody Loves the Sunshine," followed, leaving behind a catalog that bridged jazz, funk, and hip-hop sampling culture.

The deaths were not confined to music. George Foreman, heavyweight champion, minister, and business-

man, died in March at 76. His life traced an arc from Olympic gold to redemption, faith, and entrepreneurship. Voletta Wallace, the mother and steward of The Notorious B.I.G.'s legacy, died at 72, having spent decades protecting her son's memory while navigating the machinery of fame that followed his death.

Spring brought another wave. Angie Stone died at 63 following a vehicle crash. Her voice carried the weight of lived experience, anchoring

neo-soul with honesty rather than polish. D'Wayne Wiggins of Tony! Toni! Toné! died at 64, leaving behind a sound that defined Oakland R&B and a generation of Black romance songs that never apologized for vulnerability.

By summer, the losses extended further into television and cultural memory. Ananda Lewis, the MTV VJ whose presence offered intelligence and warmth during the network's most influential era, died at 52. Wal-

ter Scott, co-founder of The Whispers, died at 81, closing the book on one of the most consistent vocal groups in R&B history.

Later in the year came deaths that carried historical weight beyond entertainment. Betty Reid Soskin, the nation's oldest National Park Service ranger, died at 104. She spent her final decades correcting the historical record, insisting that Black women's labor and sacrifice during World War II be acknowledged by the country that benefited from it. Viola Ford Fletcher, the oldest known survivor of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre, died at 111, taking with her a living link to one of the nation's most suppressed atrocities.

Actors who once defined Black television also left. Danielle Spencer, remembered as Dee on "What's Happening," died at 60 after a long battle with cancer. Malcolm-Jamal Warner, forever associated with Theo Huxtable yet far more expansive in his career, died at 54. He spent his later years directing, recording spoken word, and openly addressing mental health in Black communities.

Music losses continued into the fall. Don Bryant, the Memphis soul songwriter behind "I Can't Stand the Rain," died at 83, leaving behind a body of work that centered Black love without spectacle. Jimmy Cliff, the reggae pioneer whose voice carried

protest and hope across borders, died at 81, closing a career that introduced global audiences to Jamaican music and political conscience.

The year ended with the death of Richard Smallwood at 77, one of gospel music's most influential composers. His songs, including "Total Praise," were not merely performed but lived, sung in churches during moments of grief, gratitude, and survival.

Other deaths documented in 2025 included Sly Stone, Michael Sumler, Kevin Arkadie, Carl Carlton, Phil Upchurch, Elden Campbell, Jamil Abdullah Al-Amin (H. Rap Brown), Rodney Rogers, Garry "Jellybean" Johnson, Kenny Easley, Micheal Ray Richardson, Lenny Wilkens, Marshawn Kneeland, Young Bleed, Posta Boy, Mtulazaji Davis, known as P.E.A.C.E., D'Angelo, Ike Turner Jr., Kimberly Hébert Gregory, Arthur Jones, Joshua Allen, Lawrence Moten, Assata Shakur, and Vivian Ayers Allen.

What unites these lives is not celebrity but consequence. Each shaped how Black people saw themselves and how the nation heard Black voices. Some fought for recognition. Others created space where none existed. All left evidence.

As Betty Reid Soskin once said as she contemplated history, "What gets remembered depends on who is in the room doing the remembering."

How Museums Can Help Rebuild Trust In A Divided America

THE CONVERSATION - Across the United States, political polarization has deepened to historic levels. In a report published in May 2025, the Pew Research Center found that Americans are more divided and less trusting of one another than at any point in recent decades. Yet museums remain among the few places where curiosity still draws people across political and cultural lines.

Ninety-two percent of adults view museums as nonpartisan sources of education, according to a report from Wilkening Consulting. People also trust museums for presenting fact-based, authentic and research-driven information. Ninety-six percent of Americans say they would support lawmakers who fund museums, and 97% see museums as vital educational assets to their communities. These findings place museums among the most trusted institutions in American life, ranking just behind friends and family.

That rare level of confidence gives museums both an opportunity and a responsibility. As debates over science, history and art intensify, they are being called upon to do something more fundamental: to model how people might think and listen together.

As director of the Michigan State University Museum in East Lansing, and core faculty in the Arts, Cultural Management and Museum Studies program at MSU, I see every day how these spaces can foster understanding.

Questioning algorithms, fostering dialogue

At the MSU Museum, an upcoming exhibition titled "Blurred Realities" will ask a question that feels urgent far beyond its gallery walls: How do we decide what is true?

Opening in January 2026, "Blurred Realities" examines how information, bias and technology shape people's



The International African American Museum in Charleston, S.C.

understanding of the world. Rather than advancing a single authoritative narrative, the exhibition creates space for inquiry, encouraging visitors to reflect on how beliefs are formed, how digital systems influence perception, and how imagination reshapes memory and identity. In doing so, the exhibition invites thoughtful engagement with the stories, data and algorithms that shape contemporary life, and considers what it means to navigate truth in an increasingly complex information environment.

Central to this effort are the museum's "CoLaborators," a team of college students trained to facilitate small, idea-driven conversations that encourage curiosity and exchange between museum visitors. They engage guests in open conversations that respond to their interests in the moment. This approach differs from the traditional docent model, which often centers on the transmission of information. Instead, the students' work transforms the gallery into a living forum where questions matter more than conclusions.

In my experience, this is just one of many ways that museums are engaging the communities they serve to explore timely and relevant topics that shape contemporary life.

Catalysts for civic connection
Museums have long been places to explore the natural world, cultural artifacts and scientific discovery.

History museums have hosted community storytelling projects. An excellent example is the "Your Story, Our Story" project led by the Tenement Museum in New York.

Science museums, including the Natural History Museum of Utah, have led public discussions on climate change.

Art and history museums have opened their galleries and programming spaces to conversations about identity and belonging. The Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History held an exhibition centered on Detroiters exonerated of crimes and themes of justice, identity and renewal.

The Institute of Museum and Library Services describes museums

and libraries as community catalysts that support social well-being through cultural engagement, shared identity and social connection. In a time when public debate often happens online, in anger and lacking nuance, museums offer something different: a physical place where curiosity can thrive and where people can pause, reflect and listen.

The more than 35,000 museums across the United States represent a remarkably broad and diverse field, rooted in communities of every size and serving people where they live and learn. Their core work has traditionally focused on collecting, researching, preserving and interpreting objects of historical, cultural and scientific significance.

As social divisions grow, they are becoming important forms of social infrastructure where people can encounter different perspectives. In many cases, their roles are also expanding as museums help the public engage with the pressing questions of our time.

The Association of Science and Technology Centers notes that rising mistrust in institutions, the spread of misinformation and the weakening of shared public spaces are creating new challenges for organizations that engage the public. In recent years, these trends are prompting museums to think about their role in supporting connection and understanding. Across the country, institutions that once focused mainly on preservation and education are reframing their purpose to include convening civic dialogue and helping visitors navigate complex issues together.

Preserving trust in an age of discontent

As museums step more visibly into the civic sphere, they also face new pressures. Efforts to engage with difficult topics can draw criticism from across the political spectrum.

Some question why museums address issues like race, climate or misinformation at all, while others expect them to go further. The result can be a delicate balance between maintaining trust and remaining relevant. Staff and volunteers are expected to create inclusive environments while navigating limited resources, public scrutiny and, sometimes, personal attacks. Smaller institutions may lack the capacity to sustain long-term partnerships or withstand political

pushback.

I believe avoiding these conversations carries its own risks. It can reinforce perceptions that museums are detached from the realities of the communities they serve. The key question we ask ourselves at the MSU Museum is not whether to engage with societal issues, but how to do so with care, humility and authenticity. That involves listening as much as leading and viewing dialogue itself as part of our educational mission.

POPE HOUSE MUSEUM

Continued from page 1



Beyond combat, USCT soldiers performed essential work behind the scenes. They prepared meals in field kitchens, baked bread, cooked stews, and preserved food for long marches. They foraged for supplies, transported rations, ammunition, and equipment to frontline units, and constructed forts, camps, trenches, and defensive positions.

USCT units also repaired roads and bridges, maintained picket lines and guard posts, assisted in hospitals as orderlies, and worked in specialized engineering and labor battalions repairing railroads, telegraph lines, and water systems. Maintaining camp hygiene, digging latrines, and collecting firewood were critical tasks to prevent disease and keep the army functional. Black women also played a vital, though often less visible, role in the Union war effort. They worked as spies and scouts, gathering intelligence on Confederate troop movements, and as nurses and cooks in hospitals and army camps. Many served as guides for escaping enslaved people or helped Union forces navigate occupied territories.

One of the most famous of these women was Harriet Tubman, who gathered intelligence on Confederate positions, led reconnaissance missions behind enemy lines, and collaborated with Union commanders to plan raids and assaults, particularly in coastal and swamp areas.

Together, the contributions of Black soldiers and women during the Civil War, both in combat and behind the scenes, were critical to the Union victory and the enforcement of emancipation. This event at the Pope House Museum offered a unique opportunity to hear the stories and honor the bravery and resilience of those who fought for freedom.



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Community

How Blacks In NC Lost Ground In 2025

By Cash Michaels

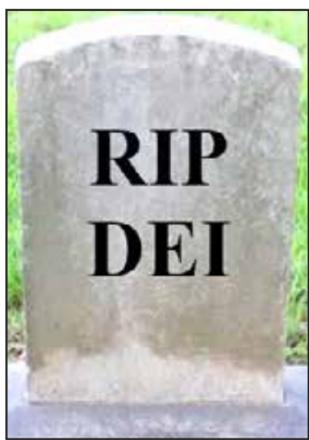
Contributing Writer

As 2026 proceeds, a look back at 2025 raises important questions for African-Americans in North Carolina about how much social, political and human capital was lost last year, and whether much, if any of it, can be regained in the future.

At the top of the list of social and political ground lost to blacks in 2025 has to be the destruction of DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion) policies and programs not only in state government, but private industries as well, affecting hiring, education and small business opportunities.

Even though Democratic Gov. Josh Stein vetoed measures ratified by the NC General Assembly that dismantled DEI in state government, many agencies began ending the policy and practice on their own. And those vetoes can still be overridden by the NC General Assembly in 2026.

Tens of millions of dollars of federal education grants used to "strengthen teacher recruitment and retention, reduce vacancies, and improve hiring processes" for at-risk student needs in schools across North Carolina were also cut off by the Trump Administration, according to published reports. As a result, recruiting efforts for more teachers of color have been hurt, and those already on the job are at risk of losing their employment.



In their termination letter, those teachers were told the special program they were working under "...includes diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives." The letter also alleged that teachers were being trained in "divisive ideologies."

Amid President Donald Trump's promise to close the U.S. Department of Education (DOE), Rep. Alma Adams (D-NC-12) blasted the administration for essentially installing a tip line, otherwise known as an "End DEI portal," "...where the public could make complaints about diversity, equity and inclusion practices in K-12 public schools as the Trump administration works to

purge DEI from the government," according to The Hill.

"The Trump Administration is once again using the federal government to attack teachers, students, and schools that dare to promote fairness and inclusion," Congresswoman Adams, founding chairwoman of the Bipartisan Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) Caucus, said in a statement. "This so-called 'tip line' is a shameless attempt to silence educators and dismantle programs that ensure every child—no matter their race, gender, or background—has a fair shot at success. Instead of working to strengthen our public schools, Trump is weaponizing the Department of Education to push a political agenda."

In an effort to intimidate over 50 private and public universities across the nation to cease their DEI programs and practices, the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) under the Trump Administration began investigating them for allegedly violating Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

One of the universities accused was Duke University in Durham.

The DOE's Office of Civil Rights accused Duke and over 50 other major institutions of racially discriminating against white and Asian-American students...

The state's onslaught against DEI continued as the NC House voted 69-45 to ban state and local govern-

ment agencies (including schools) from promoting, supporting, funding, implementing or maintaining workplace DEI programs, policies, or initiatives.

All House Republicans present voted for the measure.

House Bill 171 also instructed Republican State Auditor Dave Boliek, to audit state agencies periodically to determine if they are in compliance with the new law once it's ratified by the NC Senate.

Any state employee that violates HB 171 could lose their job. There are civil penalties of up to \$10,000 per violation.

A previous version of HB 171 would have mandated criminal punishment for violations.

House Majority Leader Rep. Brenden Jones (R-Columbus), primary sponsor of the bill, said that it was needed to prevent discrimination and restore hiring practices.

The war on DEI in 2025 extended to scientific research in North Carolina as well, setting back work done curing sickle cell anemia and other diseases that primarily affect black people.

Plus, the Trump Administration announced the dismantling of the Dept. of Education, and three notable figures of North Carolina black history, who unquestionably did much to inspire and uplift the community died.

All of that and more in part 2 next week.



ALPHA DELTA GAMMA OMEGA CHAPTER DONATES SURVIVOR SUPPORT BAGS

Members of the Alpha Delta Gamma Omega Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated came together in service and sisterhood in honor of Breast Cancer Awareness Month, prepared and donated 35 Survivor Support Bags to support women during treatment and recovery. The bags, filled with comforting items such as fuzzy socks and soft scarves, were collected by Sister to Sister Alliance representative Malissa Obama at the Pink Sister Christmas Party.



JW LIGON ALUMNI ASSOCIATION SUPPORTS HOLIDAY BLESSING PROGRAM AT LIGON MAGNET MIDDLE SCHOOL

Once again, members of the JW Ligon Alumni Association demonstrated their continued commitment to community and student support by making a generous donation to JW Ligon Magnet Middle School as part of the school's Holiday Blessing program in December 2025.

The donation was formally accepted by the school's social worker, Trinity Pellas, who received the check from Lawrence Lindsey on behalf of the Alumni Association. Pellas expressed heartfelt thanks and appreciation, emphasizing how vital the Alumni's ongoing support is to students and families, particularly during the holiday season.

RALEIGH CHAMBER ECONOMIC FORECAST

Continued from page 3

ongoing discussion about whether homeownership is the best place for capital appreciation versus renting and investing in the stock market (like the S&P).

- **Affordability Solution is More Homes:** Increased housing affordability is directly linked to an increase in housing supply.
- **New Product Type:** The construction of single-family rentals is a positive new product type that adds more housing units to the market.

On Local Spending and Cashless Society:

- **Local Spending Matters:** A dollar spent locally (e.g., at a farmer's market) still has a significant positive economic impact by keeping capital circulating in the local community.
- **Cashless Society Transition:** The move to a completely cashless society is still a distant and complex issue. Many merchants, especially small and local ones, still handle cash, but generally, fewer places are refusing cards for small purchases. The transition is difficult because a significant portion of the population, including the less affluent, still relies on cash and may not have bank accounts, which would need to be addressed in a "zero cash model."
- **Digital Currency:** Digital versions of the U.S. dollar are being worked on and could potentially disrupt correspondent banking, independent of the adoption of cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin or Ethereum.

On Federal Deficits and Debt:

- **Top Concern:** Federal government deficits and debt are a speaker's absolute top economic concern.
- **Historical Context:** Historically, large budget deficits (as a share of GDP) were generally reserved for recessions (peaking around 4-5%) and were quickly brought back under control (e.g., in the '70s, '80s, and '90s, leading to a balanced budget in the late '90s/early 2000s).
- **Current Problem:** The U.S. is now running significant budget deficits (4.5% before COVID and now 5-6%) during normal, non-recessionary periods.
- **Political Inertia:** Fixing the deficit problem would require unpopular measures (like addressing Social Security and healthcare spending), which politicians often avoid due to short election cycles.

On Keeping a Finger on the Pulse of the Market (Economic Indicators):

- **Read Diverse Sources:** Read "the best of the left and the best of the right" (e.g., The Wall Street Journal and The New York Times).
- **Don't Ignore Local Signals (Micro-Indicators):** Pay attention to non-traditional, local economic signals like the number of cars/trucks in a Dollar Tree, Dollar Store, or Family Dollar parking lot (indicating more people are shopping at discount stores, suggesting economic hard times). Attendance at local events (comparing year-to-year data).
- **Talk to People:** The most effective way to understand the economy is to travel and talk directly with people who are making hiring, firing, pricing, and investing decisions in diverse geographic areas (cities and small towns).

The annual Economic Forecast continues to be an essential event for anyone seeking to understand the economic currents that will define the coming year, providing the essential analysis needed for strategic planning and decision-making. The event was made possible by its generous sponsors, including Presenting Sponsor Wells Fargo, Silver Sponsor Duke Energy, Gold Sponsors Coldwell Banker Howard, Pery and Walston, and Porvis Markets, and Bronze Sponsors Highwoods Properties, Inc., Martin Marietta, Research Triangle Foundation of North Carolina, and The Resolute Building Company.

Civics Class Could Stage A Comeback In Some North Carolina Classrooms

CAROLINA PUBLIC PRESS

When Southeast Middle School social studies teacher Eric Shock's eighth-graders walked into class one day last semester, they noticed a piece of paper on the board. It was a bill being considered by the North Carolina General Assembly that would ban cellphones in schools. His students weren't happy.

"Of course, all the kids are like, 'No, we need to have cellphones,'" Shock recalled.

So, he gave them the email addresses of the representatives behind the proposed legislation. If students wanted to share their opposition to the ban, they could reach out directly. They'd get class credit for civic engagement, and just maybe, have their input considered by state leaders.

While the students' lobbying effort ultimately failed — Gov. Josh Stein signed the cellphone ban into law last month — Shock considered it an educational success. Now, his Rowan County eighth-graders knew how their government worked, and how they could use their voice within it.

A few years ago in Vance County, Clarke Elementary School social studies teacher Nicole Clarke wanted to spice up what she saw as an unexciting curriculum.

So one day, she invited Henderson's mayor, city council and the school district superintendent to the school for Resource Day. Her third graders got the chance to talk to their local leaders, and the now-fifth graders still talk about the experience to this day, she said.

When North Carolina Association of Educators Vice President Bryan Proffitt taught social studies, he started one class by playing a breakup song. He then asked students to write about a time when they ended some kind of relationship, why they made that choice, how the person responded and what the consequences were.



Then, he pulled up the Declaration of Independence. After all, it's just a breakup letter, Proffitt said.

"What I often hear from students is that civics is interesting when it connects to their lives," said Wake Forest University School of Medicine researcher Parissa Ballard. "Civics can feel far away, but it actually isn't. I've seen many talented civics teachers who find ways to connect students' interests and concerns to historical and modern politics."

Shock, Clarke and Proffitt may count themselves among those teachers. But the problem is, for many of North Carolina's students, civics class isn't interesting. It's not interactive, and it doesn't effectively motivate them to be informed, engaged citizens.

It doesn't have to be this way. With intentional policymaker investment, school support and teacher effort, civic education can be a powerful tool for building the next generation of active citizens.

To learn civics, you have to do it.

That's the theory behind action civics, an approach to civics class that has students identify a community issue they care about while teachers guide them toward the

information and public officials they need to devise and implement a public policy solution, Ballard said.

Ballard and her team are conducting research into action civics. They hypothesize that action civics will promote civic engagement, like students taking action in their community, having more civic discussions and feeling a greater sense of belonging.

In Tennessee, action civics is already producing results. In 2012, the state legislature passed a law requiring students to pass a project-based civic assessment once in grades 4-8 and another time in high school. Cleveland Middle School eighth-grade social studies teacher Ed Fickley has been involved with the Tennessee Center for Civic Learning and Engagement for about 20 years. He's seen the impact of action civics firsthand.

"The more engaged they are in something, the more hands on they are with something, they're going to learn and integrate more deeply," he said.

In recent years, Fickley's district piloted a Project Citizen program, which requires students to identify a public policy issue in their communi-

ty, research potential solutions, find who in government is responsible for that issue and present proposals in front of elected officials.

The program also includes a media literacy component to teach students how to distinguish between facts and opinions.

According to Georgetown University research, students who participated in Project Citizen not only demonstrated significantly higher civic knowledge than their peers who took a traditional civics class, but developed a stronger civic disposition — high-schoolers were more inclined to stay informed about government and politics, commit to voting, trust in government and media and feel capable of organizing people to solve a community problem.

A curriculum used by many schools across the U.S., including Tennessee and Indiana, also resulted in stronger civic habits, according to Georgetown research.

The We The People curriculum goes over the founding of the United States, and culminates in a simulated legislative hearing over an academic question. For example, one Indiana middle school class asked why the founding fathers thought that freedom of speech was important, and whether they believed there are times where freedom of speech can be limited, said Tim Kalgreen, director of civic education at the Indiana Bar Association.

In addition to the We the People curriculum, Indiana passed a law in 2021 requiring a standalone middle school civics course, Kalgreen said. "It's catching students younger," he said. "It's getting them interested younger. It's making sure that they get the knowledge younger, which allows their teachers, as they get later into their education, to really build on stronger concepts, or more in depth concepts, more nuanced concepts."

When Independent High School junior and student advisory council member April Alonso of Mecklenburg County spoke to North Carolina Superintendent of Public Instruction Mo Green a few months ago, he talked about bringing project-based civics to the state.

It could be volunteering or public speaking or a voter registration drive — anything that gets students actually engaging in their community, Alonso said.

Green's recently released 2025-2030 strategic plan at least pays lip service to this goal. It states a goal of increasing the number of schools implementing "high-quality character, service-learning and civic programs that reinforce durable skills."

New Leadership — CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

nus current liabilities, providing a strong financial cushion for ongoing operations. Additionally, the county contributed \$8 million to Other Post-Employment Benefits (OPEB), which support retirement benefits for employees beyond pensions.

The board also reviewed appointments and reappointments to several county bodies, including the Housing Authority, Historic Preservation Commission, and Juvenile Prevention Council, ensuring continuity in governance and community

programs.

In December, the board elected Commissioner Don Mial to serve as chair and Commissioner Safiyah Jackson as vice chair for the year ahead. Chair Mial, first elected to the board in 2022, also serves as vice chair of the Public Safety Committee and as a member of the Growth, Sustainability, and Economic Strength Committee. Vice Chair Jackson, appointed to the board in 2025, chairs the Affordable Housing Committee and serves as

liaison to the Wake County Housing Authority and Passage Home Boards.

"I'm honored to serve alongside the other dedicated public servants on this board," said Chair Mial. "Together, we'll drive progress on Wake County's top priorities, from affordable housing to public safety, while investing in the parks, libraries and shared spaces that connect us."

Both will serve in their roles through December 2026.



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Church

A Moral Assembly: The People's Fellowship Of North Carolina And The Pulpit Of Nonviolence Movement

By Jheri Hardaway

Staff Writer

NC General Assembly - On the morning of January 5th at 11AM, area clergy and faith leaders united outside of the North Carolina General Assembly to build a more equitable state for all. The cold air outside the North Carolina General Assembly was no opponent for the passionate speakers charged with a "deep moral conscience." Under the leadership of Reverend Dr. Floyd Wicker Jr., The People's Fellowship of North Carolina, a diverse coalition of clergy, faith leaders, and grassroots advocates gathered to issue a clarion call to the state's lawmakers. The message was unequivocal: A state budget is not merely a ledger of numbers—it is a moral document that reveals the heart of North Carolina's priorities.

The morning's most poignant testimony came from Geraldine Alshamy, whose life's work in social justice was forged in the heat of the 1971 school integration in Wilson, NC. Alshamy detailed a harrowing "second awakening" when she first encountered systemic hostility in the education system. She argued that current legislative failures are fueling what she termed the "Home-School-Prison Cycle." Alshamy highlighted the devastating impact of chronic underfunding and the "dumbing down" of curricula through standardized testing. "When children act out in pain, fear, or distress, the system does not respond with healing," Alshamy stated. "It responds with discipline, exclusion, suspension, and incarceration." Alshamy's data-driven plea emphasized the mental health crisis within schools: 85% of principals report serious mental health issues among students, 75% of teachers report working under extreme mental stress, and many are medicated. North Carolina currently ranks last in the nation for providing faculty access to behavioral health supports.

The economic stakes were laid bare as speakers addressed the on-

going budget impasse. Advocates pointed to a staggering "transfer of wealth" occurring at the legislative level. While corporate tax rates are scheduled to hit 0% by 2030, the federal "funding cliff" threatens to strip food assistance (SNAP) from 142,000 North Carolinians and Medicaid coverage from 255,000 residents. The coalition called for an immediate end to corporate tax cuts to recover the billions in revenue needed to shield the state's most vulnerable from these

federal shortfalls. "Leadership is not measured by how much power you hold," the Reverend Dr. Floyd Wicker Jr. reminded the crowd, "but by how you protect the citizens of this state."

The event also turned its focus toward the integrity of the democratic process. Tyler Daye of Common Cause North Carolina criticized the recent redrawing of congressional districts, specifically targeting District 1. According to Daye, the new maps intentionally dilute the voting

power of the "Black Belt" by shifting the Black Voting Age Population (BVAP) from over 40% down by more than 8%. "This is election manipulation," Daye argued, calling for an independent citizens' commission to take the power of redistricting out of the hands of "power-hungry politicians."

The rally concluded with a unique symbolic gesture: the introduction of the "Pulpit of Nonviolence." Faith leaders from across the state were invited to sign the wooden podium, which will travel across North Carolina as a mobile site for organizing and advocacy. As the gathering dispersed, the sentiment remained:

North Carolina stands at a crossroads. The choice, as the People's Fellowship put it, is between "courage and convenience." For the readers of The Carolinian, the call to action is clear: stay informed, stay vocal, and demand a budget that reflects the worth of every child and worker in the Old North State.



Owen Lun West Smith: AME Zion Leader and U.S. Diplomat

By Jordan Meadows

Staff Writer

Owen Lun West Smith was born into slavery on May 18, 1851, in Giddensville, Sampson County, North Carolina. At the age of at most 14 he initially followed the Confederate Army as a personal servant. As the war drew to a close, Smith's path changed dramatically when he left his mother and joined General William T. Sherman's Union forces on their return north.

He was present at the Battle of Bentonville in North Carolina, the last major engagement of Sherman's campaign against Confederate General Joseph E. Johnston, and later marched in the Grand Review in Washington, D.C., marking the end of the war. After his military service, Smith returned to North Carolina, where his mother ensured he received schooling, first in New Bern under the instruction of an African Methodist Episcopal Zion minister and later in Pitt County, where he worked part-time on a farm while continuing his education at a school established for workers' children.

In 1873, he was appointed a Justice of the Peace in South Carolina, and in 1874, he received a state scholarship to attend the University of South Carolina, where he studied law until 1876. Although African Americans were barred from the university in 1877, Smith had obtained his license and practiced law briefly. He later returned to North Carolina until a turning point in October 1880, when he experienced a religious conversion at a camp meeting in Whiteville, North Carolina. That conversion led him to join the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, where he quickly advanced,



receiving a local preacher's license in February 1881, ordination as a deacon in April 1881, and elder's orders in December 1883 at Raleigh.

Smith pastored numerous circuits and stations, including Stantonburg, Magnolia, Elizabethtown, Ingold, Kinston, Tarboro, and Wilson, earning widespread praise for his leadership and organizational skill. Under his direction, numerous churches were built, including multiple congregations on the Magnolia, Ingold, and Speight's Bridge Circuits, as well as Trinity Church in Wilson. He served as residing elder, secretary of the Sunday School Convention, private secretary to Bishop John Small, conference delegate, and corresponding editor of the Star of Zion. In 1885, he became pastor of St. John's in Wilson, North Carolina, a community where he would live for the remainder of his life and from which he would rise to national and international prominence. In recognition of his religious leadership,

Livingstone College in Salisbury, North Carolina, awarded him an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree in 1883, with another conferred in 1898.

In 1897, he sought an appointment to a foreign post and received strong endorsements from the governor, the attorney general, and members of Congress. From a field of forty-three applicants, President William McKinley selected him as United States Minister Resident and Consul General to Liberia, a position he assumed in 1898 and held until 1902. Smith was the last in a line of four North Carolinians to serve in the top diplomatic post in Monrovia, and his appointment reflected the State Department's comparatively early willingness to entrust African Americans with high-level diplomatic responsibility. While serving in Liberia, Smith also acted as presiding elder for A.M.E. Zion mission work in Africa and traveled through England, including time in London and Oxford, further broadening his international experience.

Alongside his public service, Smith maintained a full personal life rooted largely in North Carolina. He was married three times, first to Lucy Ann Jackson in 1878, with whom he had a son, Jesse Alexander Smith, born in Salisbury, North Carolina, in 1881. While in Liberia, Smith and Adora adopted a girl, Carrie Emma Smith, who later returned with them to North Carolina and died in Wilson in 1917 while preparing to become a missionary. Smith's final marriage was to Cynthia Ann King Isler in 1908.

Owen Lun West Smith died in 1926 and was buried in the private cemetery of Mount Hebron Masonic Lodge in Wilson.

Practical Biblical Principles

PRESSING TOWARD THE GOAL

Read: **Philippians 3:7-16**

By John L. Caldwell, Pastor
New Jerusalem Baptist Cathedral
Paul, the servant of God, constantly pushed himself closer to Christ. When issues of trials and troubles came his way, he used his faith to gain the victory over them and moved on. What mattered with Paul was Jesus Christ and Him crucified. This was the vision Paul kept in his head not allowing anything to separate him from the love of Christ that he had found. Like Paul, the children of God have a mission to accomplish. The Holy Spirit will reveal what our mission is besides becoming more and more like the Son of God.

Paul's troubles came, while ministering to the Philippian church, from the false prophets whom he called dogs (Philippians 3:2). There are things in the lives of God's children that go against us and our faith. We must have the courage to even label whatever opposes us as "dumb dogs." The child of God must learn to take no prisoner and have the courage to label your enemy in ugly terms (Isaiah 56:10). Your enemy has no respect for you when he comes after you. He will bark at you and bite you if he can. This is spiritual warfare. We must bite back with faith and courage.

Just as Paul forged his way pass the false prophets, getting closer to Christ, the child of God must garner the strength to do likewise. This should be everyday work for the Believer. The New Year has begun, and time makes no difference to the enemy. The devil doesn't start a new page of evil doings against us on New Year's Day. He just continues his

same old game against us. Especially the ones that work against us. The same can be said for our faith in God. It will not be new faith on New Year's Day. We are not to abandon whatever faith we have however but build upon the faith that we have already accumulated over the past years, regardless of the coming times.

Yes, there will be anxiousness, anxiety, fear in the hearts of many of God's children when the New Year is ushered in. But we are not given the spirit of fear but of power and of love and of a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7). This promise from God we will use against our new-found fears and anxieties no matter when they come to us. At times this can be difficult spiritual work for the child of God. However, with God's help we will prevail. He (God) promised us that He would be with us till the end.

The New Year gives us another opportunity to improve our spiritual standing with our Lord. However, the truth of the matter is that we have all year to improve our faith and our standing with God. This is what God is looking for from His children any time, and each day of the year.

"Yet indeed I also count things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith. That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection..." (Philippians 3:8-10). Here Paul is making his declaration, no matter what He is going through he intends to stay with Christ. We, like Paul

must always keep the blood-stained Cross before us and recognize what it has given us through Christ.

Paul continues his declaration, "Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things are behind me and reaching forward which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:12-14).

This same declaration should be held by the children of God not only at New Year, but every day we have breath in our bodies. There is no period in Paul's time-line, neither should there be one in the Believer's time-line. Let us take whatever time God gives us and make good with it as we go.

It was the 18th century church which introduced the New Year Concept to us. This is okay. God has given His church the powers to make laws within itself in order to help the people draw closer to God in worship as well as in their personal lives (Matthew 18:18).

Paul continues, "Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if anything, you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind. So, the same mind you had last year keep it and let it continue to grow in Christ."

Some of us, if not all of us, had a good year last year. Let's just keep it up and make it a better year this time around.

SERMON of the WEEK



ARE HEAVEN'S HORSES ALREADY OUT OF THEIR HEAVENLY STABLES?
By Bishop-Elect William "Billy" Eli Ratcliff

Scripture Text: Refer to Revelation 6:1-8, and you'll read about the opening of the first four seals releases four riders: the White Horse, symbolizing aggression or deception; the Red Horse, bringing war and the removal of peace; the Black Horse, representing famine and economic imbalance; and the Pale Horse, symbolizing death, followed by Hades.

This first sermon that God has given me for 2026 has behooved me to ask you a question—a question I don't want you to rush past. Are Heaven's Horses Already Out of Their Heavenly Stables?

John was exiled to Patmos for preaching the Word of God. What looked like punishment was really divine placement—John was exactly where God could use him. The devil didn't trap him; God positioned him. And when God positions you, He's already working it for your good.

John says, "And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals..." and what followed was not silence—but thunder. As the seals were opened, four horses were released.

But let me be clear—these are not farm horses, parade horses, race-horses, or horses that you see while watching Super Bowl advertising for Anheuser-Busch. [They told me back then, "This Bud's for you," and I believed it, but I'm glad one day I found out it wasn't for me.] Now I know if GOD BE FOR ME, IT'S MORE than the whole world against me.

Getting back to the message, these aren't wild horses roaming the Outer

Banks of NC or the valleys of Nevada. And they are definitely not a talking-horse like the one some of us used to watch on TV.

Actually, on this same date, January 4, 1961, which was 65 years ago, a talking-horse named Mister Ed debuted on television. Every time he called his owner's name, he stretched it out: "Wilburrrrr!" Their theme song lyrics were, "A horse is a horse, of course, of course, and no one can talk to a horse, of course." That is, of course, unless the horse is the famous Mister Ed. Mr. Ed caused trouble—but he made us laugh.

But Mr. Ed was fictional. The four horses in Revelation are Prophetic Symbols and should be real to us as believers—and they don't make us laugh. They make us cry.

These horses represent judgment, chaos, and collapse—and should be some of humanity's greatest fears released upon the earth.

So, let me ask you again: Are Heaven's horses perhaps already out of the stables? Look around. Nations are shaking. Economies are stressed. Wars and rumors of wars fill the news. Disease, climate disasters, terror, and unrest are everywhere. Food is scarce. Prices are unfair. And for some, a day's wage barely buys a meal!

Revelation says, "See thou hurt not the oil and the wine." Oil—black gold—has been a reason for war for over a century. Nations fight over it, protect it, and seize it. Even today, tankers are captured, and pipelines are threatened.

Furthermore, during North Carolina's stay-at-home order, gas stations, grocery stores, and even liquor stores were deemed "essential" due to concerns about withdrawal-related medical emergencies, while the House of God—long a source of healing, hope, and stability—was not, even as many continued to draw strength from the church.

So, I want you to follow up on this question all year long—not to scare you, but to prepare you. Are Heaven's horses already out of the stables? We're living in a time where just about anything goes—from the Devil's house to the White House. Lying, cheating, and stealing have become acceptable. Some people aren't even afraid to say publicly on our media sources that they aren't afraid to burn in hell.

As I told you before, our enemy is the Deceiver. He targets the mind; his weapon is lies; his purpose is to make us ignorant of God's will. But our defense is the Inspired Word of God. God's Word is ESSENTIAL! Jesus said the gates of hell would not prevail. Hell may fight the church. The battle may be long. There may be losses. Hell may win a skirmish or two—but it will not win the war.

Prophetically, the Bible says, false prophets will rise, lawlessness will increase, and love will grow cold. Jesus' disciple, Thomas, once asked, "Lord, how can we know the way?" Jesus answered and said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life."

I want you to know today that God is even more than Essential—God is ETERNAL. You can have this whole wide world—but give me Jesus! You can go to heaven without health, without fame, without money, without education, but you can never go without Christ!

Now let me clarify something. The rider on the white horse in Revelation 6 is a counterfeit. But if you search your Bibles and the Scriptures, you'll find out that the rider on the white horse in Revelation 19 is Jesus Christ!

And although Jesus bore the cross alone, He's not the Lone Ranger. The Lone Ranger was fictional, just like Mr. Ed—Jesus is real. I'm GLAD that everybody can talk to Jesus and I'm glad that He can talk to us! These are crisis times, confusing times, compelling times, but the Bible says men ought always to pray and not faint.

Are the horses already out—or still on the way? I'm so glad I already have Jesus in my heart. How about You! We don't know what the future holds in 2026, but I'm glad we know WHO HOLDS THE FUTURE! The Bible says, "Greater is He that is in me than he that is in the world."

So, I want you to keep asking the question all year long: Are Heaven's horses out of the stables? And if they are, will you be ready? TELL SOMEBODY...I WANT TO BE READY TO WALK IN JERUSALEM JUST LIKE JOHN, SING, SHOUT, RUN...!

Please visit www.youtube.com/@lincolnparkholinesschurch1913 to watch this week's sermon on video. We invite you to Like, Subscribe, and Share your comments. We would love to hear from you.



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Editorials

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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.

THE NEW AMERICAN CAPITALISM

Continued from page 1

engaging in a trade war with China, and renegotiating the NAFTA trade agreement with Canada and Mexico. Rather than rolling everything back, Biden left in place many of Trump's tariffs, and his administration pushed in a state-nudged economic direction with the CHIPS Act, which was meant to support the US semiconductor industry, and the Inflation Reduction Act, which, among other things, put tax credits and funds toward sectors such as electric vehicles and solar energy. And even prior to Trump and Biden, the government hasn't completely steered clear of steering the economy when needed. See: The New Deal and the aforementioned response to the financial crisis.

Still, overall, the US has largely taken a hands-off approach to the economy over the last 40 years and been critical of countries that don't.

"The United States has spent decades tsk-tsking the rest of the world about state-owned enterprises and industrial policy and state capitalism," says Scott Lincicome, vice president of general economics and trade at the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank. On the Trump administration's current about-face, "the hypocrisy is pretty big," he says.

The latest turn is a significant step further. Instead of deploying a more typical playbook — grants, loans, tariffs, etc. — that can be seen as at least somewhat neutral in its application, the White House is now picking and choosing companies to get involved in. In broad strokes, one can see what they're getting at here. The companies on Trump's investment list are in important sectors where the US lags behind, and they fit into the president's overall theory of the case on the economy: it's better to have and make stuff here. Take Intel: The Trump administration wants to make sure the US is not reliant on semiconductor companies such as TSMC, which is based in Taiwan, since the island is vulnerable to China. It's a similar story with critical minerals companies, which mine, process, or refine materials crucial for a range of products, from smartphones to defense technology. Even some progressives see these as worthwhile endeavors. Sen. Bernie Sanders is into the Intel deal, telling Reuters in August that "If microchip companies make a profit from the generous grants they receive from the federal government, the taxpayers of America have a right to a reasonable return on that investment."

What some critics find head-scratching is why specific companies are being chosen. Why Intel in particular, and even more peculiarly, why a startup helmed by Intel's former CEO? On a macro level, the end goal may be the same as more typical industrial policy — supporting certain sectors — but it's being performed on a micro level. Trump has also been critical of policies with the same end in mind. Back in March, he told Congress to "get rid of" the CHIPS Act.

"It is fair to say that Intel has been underperforming, but I don't know of anyone who feels that if Intel continued to underperform, there was a risk of taking the entire technology sector down," Bartnick says. "We haven't seen a rationale for how these particular companies were selected, how these particular industries were selected, how the valuations were reached."

The Trump administration may have determined that the US can't win its existential battle with China and protect its economic priorities with the regular tools in the toolbox. William Henagan, a research fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, says those instruments have proven effective in the past because of the size of America's economy and the critical role the US dollar plays in global finance. The fact that the White House thinks throwing around our national weight is not enough to achieve their desired outcomes is an eyebrow-raising sign.

While the motivation for taking stakes in companies may be clear-ish, the execution is not, nor are the potential consequences.

"We know very little about the other rights that are associated with these deals," Bartnick says.

It's hard to predict exactly how the government will wield its equity-derived power. How will these stakes dilute the rights of existing shareholders? And what happens if the US government's interests don't align with those of other stockholders? Will the company feel compelled to follow through on what the government says, regardless? How exactly will the terms of these deals work? And even if the government doesn't use the hard power of its vote shares, it can use soft power to keep companies it's invested in from stepping out of line.

The federal government's Intel investment will be passive, meaning it gets no board representation or other governance rights, and it's agreed to vote with the company's board of directors — with limited exceptions. As part of the MP Materials agreement, the company isn't allowed to nominate any board members who are not US citizens without the Department of Defense's consent. However, the government will generally vote with the company's board, with exceptions.

The way American capitalism is generally supposed to work is that money flows to companies that are doing the best job of utilizing it. The whole idea is that market capital allocation is designed to separate the wheat from the chaff. These stakes may distort that — the government is choosing which specific firms it wants to come out ahead.

What's more, if the federal government is going about throwing around money, rather than businesses focusing on making the best products and services possible, they may turn their attention to currying favor with the president. Whether or not this is crony capitalism or merely appears to be doesn't really matter. If executives make the calculation that it's much better to be on Trump's good side than his bad side, they may fall in line preemptively. The competition isn't for customers, market share, or innovation — it's for the president's affection.

The Trump administration doesn't want to be in the business of running private companies from the Oval Office, the White House official tells me, but the point is for the government to have some sway. "Obviously, the intent wasn't for us to take an equity stake in Intel and then they just close down their Ohio foundry and ship it off to Taiwan," the official says. The hope is there's an "overlap" between what's best for companies and best for American economic national security.

Scott Kennedy, a senior advisor in Chinese business and economics at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, tells me that in an economy as vast and varied as America's, Washington's power is relatively limited, and this activity could be just a "minor nuisance" to industry. "On the other hand, if there are more cases, then it will begin to affect the decision-making of businesses and will increasingly orient them to think about how they should do business in a way that benefits the current administration as opposed to what benefits their company or the US national interest," he says. "And I think that that could have a distorting effect eventually."

"It's better if tech CEOs spend less time in DC and more time coming up with new products," says Owen Zidar, a professor of economics and public affairs at Princeton University.

Nearly every analyst, economist, and academic I spoke to for this story agreed that Trump's version of American state capitalism is more a reflection of where the US is going than where it has been. It's not the same as what China's doing, and it's not socialism, but it's an unconventional step further down the road that the US has been on for a while.

On issues such as antitrust enforcement, industrial policy, and tariffs, factions within both the Republican and Democratic parties are leaning more towards interventionism. Trump is being more obvious with his actions and intentions — there's a reason Tim Cook is showing up in the Oval Office with a gold plaque. This is a situation where there's likely no backtracking. Other countries are reacting to America's inward turn as well — it's why Canada is shoring up its domestic economy, and Europe is taking a corporatist turn.

"It changes the political equilibrium in a way that other countries pursue similar policies. And we get away from the brand of capitalism that we were doing before," Lane says.

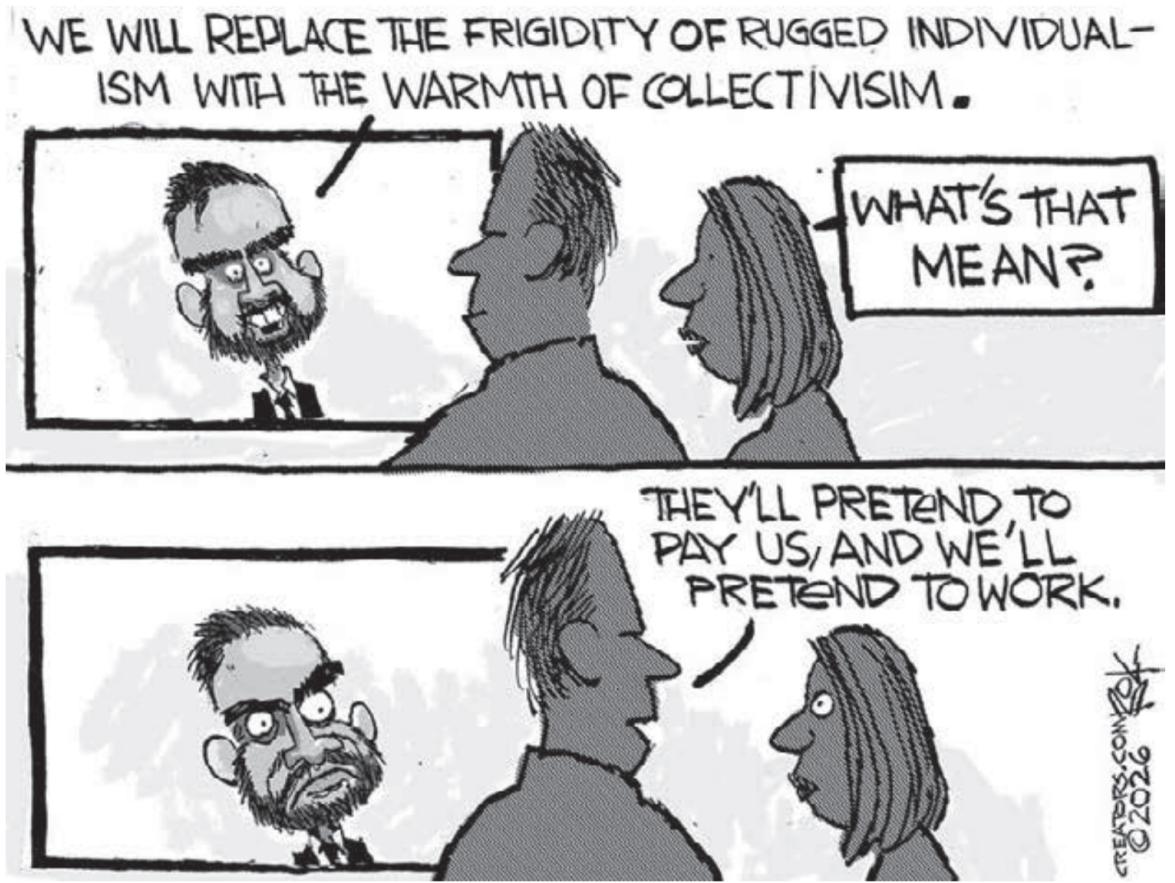
It's not a bad thing to look beyond the previous consensus. Capitalism is increasingly unpopular in America, especially among young people, for a reason. For many Americans, the system isn't working. Instead, it's breeding inequality, shipping jobs overseas, and making the overall economy more precarious. During the pandemic, the public got a front-row seat to the fragility of our supply chains and the risks associated with the just-in-time, globally distributed setup. Political leaders and policymakers aren't wrong to wonder if the state shouldn't take a heavier hand in shoring up important industries, supporting vital companies, and making investments where the private market might blanch at the risks.

The White House has indicated that more equity investments are likely on the horizon, but the criteria for who it will pick are a black box. "We should entirely leave it up to the market to do whatever it wants" is not a great approach to the economy. Neither is, "Who gets a leg up depends on how the president's feeling today." It's odd for Trump to seize the means of production a little bit.

"We've had this sort of ideological view that's now breaking down a bit because we've realized that what we've been doing isn't good enough, isn't adequate enough," says Robert Atkinson, the founder and president of the Information Technology and Innovation Foundation, a tech and science policy think tank. "I wish there was a sort of unified field theory for this in the Trump administration, but I don't think so."

While the motives are understandable, the mechanics are anything but. It's unclear how the US will exit these investments, or, once it does, how much money it will actually make. However, in the context of the enormous federal budget, the return will be minimal. It pushes the global economy into new territory, and it's hard to know whether it's one the US will always like.

"We have spent decades, under both Democrats and even more so under Republicans, criticizing certainly China and Russia, but also Italy, Germany, and the UK on their use of these tools," Bartnick says. "And if the US starts to go down that path as well, it will give not just our adversaries, but also our allies, even greater license to do the same."



JHERI HARDAWAY CLEARS RESIDENCY CHALLENGE, LAUNCHES "WE THE PEOPLE" LISTENING TOUR

By Jheri Hardaway

Staff Writer

Lillington, NC - As a journalist, I truly believe transparency builds trust. For this reason, we are sharing my statements following a formal residency hearing in Harnett County. After successfully demonstrating my status as a continuous resident of Harnett County, the path is cleared for my candidacy for North Carolina Senate District 12. Opening Statement: "Thank you for your time and attention, my name is Jheri Hardaway. I am here today to demonstrate my residency. I will present clear documentation and witness testimony that establish my continuous residence in Harnett County. I purchased the Jernigan House, located within this district. Since then, this property has been my primary and continuous residence. I live there full-time and have been responsible for its maintenance, restoration, and all associated obligations. To support this, I will provide documentation from the Harnett County Register of Deeds, utility records, tax information, and my voting history, which reflects registration and participation exclusively in Harnett County. You will also hear testimony from witnesses who can independently verify my residence, including family, neighbors, and local business owners who have direct, personal knowledge of my day-to-day presence in the community. Outside of my residency, I am actively engaged in service within Harnett County, as a Harnett County Schools Substitute Teacher, Omega Kappa Omega Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc., Harnett County America 250 Committee, and the Harnett County Democratic Party, where I serve as Third Vice Chair, an essential communications role. Despite my service and dedication to the HCDP my residency has been questioned by a fellow board member. My residency was not questioned when former Congressman Etheridge made the motion, which carried unanimously, installing me as 3rd vice. It was not questioned when the chairman asked me to carry out the necessary duties. It was not questioned when the person who brought these allegations had name tags made for the board, including me. The selective memory here is frustrating yet still an opportunity because it has brought me in front of this esteemed panel and I am grateful to meet all of you, what a blessing. Many of you are learning my heart and passion for leadership for the first time today, and I welcome your questions related to this issue. I respectfully ask that you consider the documentation and testimony presented and find that I meet the residency requirements for this race. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you and thank you for your consideration." Closing Statement: "Thank you for the opportunity to present my case. The evidence and testimony provided today establish that I have been a continuous resident of Harnett County. The documentation entered into the record—including my deed, voter registration and voting history, utility records, tax information, and witness statements—collectively and consistently support that fact. I appreciate the panel's careful review of the materials and the seriousness with which you approach your responsibility. I understand that today's proceeding is limited to the question of residency, and I have endeavored to remain focused on that standard. I'd much rather discuss my legislative ideas, the affordability of housing and energy, Governor Stein's plan to increase teacher pay, or bringing living wage jobs to the district. Being in and around the HCDP for the past few years, never once has the person who brought these allegations mentioned a policy or legislative idea, but a lot of work has gone into researching me and concealing her information online. What is the actual motivation here? Why didn't my publicly available voting record make it to these evidence documents? Why didn't HCDP board object to me being the third vice chair? What are we really doing here? I am focused on the issues, not political mudslinging. Based on the record before you, I respectfully ask that you find I meet the residency requirements for this race and allow me to continue as a candidate for North Carolina Senate District 12. I am prepared to serve, committed to this district, and grateful for your consideration." With the legal hurdles in the past, the focus has shifted from the courtroom to the community and the issues facing Lee, Harnett, and NW Sampson counties. The "We The People" Listening Tour is a series of community engagement evenings designed to gather the data necessary to advocate for the public good in Raleigh. The tour launches in Sanford, NC January 15th at 6PM; details can be found on Mobilize. We are building and progressing gracefully, and it starts with listening to the will of the people. With residency officially reaffirmed, it is time to "Put the will of the People First" by asking the important questions and facilitating productive dialogue.

thinks it is. Unfortunately, so do many of his supporters, including those in Congress and even on the Supreme Court. He has blinded, frightened, and confused them. We have no right to go into another country and take what belongs to its people. We have never had that right. So tell me, how do you "capture" someone who is not on a wanted list? A more accurate word is kidnap. They kidnapped a man and his wife and brought them onto U.S. soil, just as Africans, Japanese citizens, Indigenous people, Hispanic immigrants, so-called gang members, and those labeled illegal aliens have been taken. Donald Trump believes he can do the same with Somali people and even with a sitting member of Congress. He invents a crime and then proceeds to seize those he accuses.

He is getting away with it because he also believes there is no law he cannot break. He has said that himself. In the final weeks of 2025, the vice president announced that in the United States you do not have to apologize for being white and claimed that people are not treated differently based on skin color. How delusional is that, when people are being removed every day based on ethnicity and skin color, even when they claim citizenship and are denied legal process? What else are they doing that we do not yet see?

No one has asked them to apologize for being white. We have not even asked them to apologize for being racist. What has been asked is that they follow the Constitution and stop engaging in racist practices. When you deny the history of this country and attempt to justify racism, what else should we expect to hear? Your actions speak so loudly that your words cannot be heard.

The inability to look in the mirror and recognize what these policies truly represent leaves you exposed for the harm being done to humanity. Philanthropy has been insulted, dignity challenged, and nations disrespected. What has been done to Venezuela mirrors what has been done to Ukraine, yet you expect the world to believe you want peace.

The Golden Rule is not a suggestion. It is a law, not just for individuals, but for nations. When you stand behind Trump, align yourself with him, and support his attempts to dominate sovereign countries, you become inseparable from his actions. You become his extension, his voice, his instrument. History will not excuse you. It will show that you knew better.

As we enter and experience 2026, we want a happy new year, and we will have one, not because of what this administration does, but because of how we choose to respond. Scripture is clear. The love of money is the root of all evil. Trump has openly admitted that he wants Venezuela's oil. He wants control of what does not belong to him. That is greed, by definition.

This is not about drugs, nor about care for those suffering from addiction. Has there been a single serious word about healthcare, housing, poverty, or healing, either here or abroad? No, because that is not the goal. The goal is control and profit.

The rest of the world is watching. Trump seems unaware that the majority of the people on this planet are melanated. He believes his plan can prevail against God's plan. It cannot. We are not called to fear this man, but for the sake of our own souls, we are called to resist evil.

I do not know about you, but my calling is to run and tell. As long as my lungs have breath and my fingers can hold a pen, I will continue to write and share what God reveals to me. I will continue to smile, refuse fear, and protect my joy. This man and his followers will not take it from me.

I will treat others as I wish to be treated and trust that this way of living will correct injustice in God's time. There is truth, and you are not God. More people understand this than you realize.

This is 2026, and we shall not be overcome.



"I hope we'll always take the time and effort to look attractive to each other."



HAPPY NEW YEAR 2026

This is the beginning of a new year, and I am happy to be here. We will grow from all that this past year brought, because that is one of the reasons I believe we are here. I am happy to say that God is still on the throne, though I am not pleased to say that Trump is still called president. We must begin to see everything he does as intentional. Those who once wondered why he was focusing on boats in the sea now have their answer. His intention was to gain control of Venezuela's oil. How do I know this? Because he has said it repeatedly, with pride. As the late Maya Angelou famously said, when someone tells you who they are, believe them. Donald Trump believes he has the whole world in his hands to control as he chooses.

He believes he is the subject of the song about having the whole world in one's hands. Of course, the song was never about him, but he

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Classifieds

CURRITUCK COUNTY

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
CURRITUCK COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS RE: THE ESTATE OF MARY JEAN SMITH – 25E000251-260

Having qualified as Administrator of the Estate of MARY JEAN SMITH, deceased, Currituck County, North Carolina, the undersigned does hereby notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the estate of said deceased to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the 8th day of April, 2026, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. This the 8th day of January, 2026.

Charles Smith, Executor
DSR Legal, PLLC
PO Box 51596
Durham, NC 27717
1/8, 1/15, 1/22, and 1/29/2026

DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS 25E001535-310

Having qualified as the Executor of the Estate of Allan K. Troxler, late of Durham County, North Carolina, the undersigned does hereby notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against the estate of said decedent to exhibit them to the undersigned in care of the attorney for the estate, Colin K. Austin, Law Office of Colin K. Austin, PLLC, 128 W. Margaret Lane, Hillsborough, NC 27278, on or before the 9th day of April, 2026, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons, firms and corporations indebted to the said estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.

Kate T. Mitchell, Executor
Attorney for the Estate:
Colin K. Austin
Law Office of Colin K. Austin
128 W. Margaret Lane
Hillsborough, NC 27278
1/8, 1/15, 1/22, and 1/29/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

Having qualified as Executor Administrator CTA of the Estate of ANN GAIL MURCHISON JOHNSON, deceased, of 4408 Berini Drive, Durham, Durham County, North Carolina 27705, the undersigned does hereby notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the estate of said decedent to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before 9th day of April, 2026, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.

All persons, firms, and corporations indebted to the said estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This the 8th day of January 2026.
Jeffrey L. Austin
Executor Administrator CTA
Law Office of Jeffrey L. Austin
PLLC

500 Westover Dr. #32043
Sanford, NC 27330
1/8, 1/15, 1/22, and 1/29/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File Number 25E001454-310
THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 15th day of December 2025, as ADMINISTRATOR of the Estate of JULIE ALLISON HARRISON, late of Durham County, North Carolina, hereby wish 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 9th day of April, 2026, 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 8th day of January, 2026.
Charles Benjamin Harrison Jr.
c/o Sonya Linton
Magnolia Legal
3001 Academy Rd, Suite 120
Durham, NC 27707

1/8, 1/15, 1/22, and 1/29/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File Number 25E001566-310

THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 31st day of December 2025, as EXECUTOR of the Estate of ELSIE OAKLEY STANFORD, late of Durham County, North Carolina, hereby wish 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 9th day of April, 2026, 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 8th day of January, 2026.

Genise Morris Fowler, Executor
c/o Anne Page Watson PLLC
3400 Croasdaile Dr.
Durham, NC 27705

1/8, 1/15, 1/22, and 1/29/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File Number 24-E-338

THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 8th day of March 2024, as ADMINISTRATOR of the Estate of CURTIS HOLLOWAY, late of Durham County, North Carolina, hereby wish 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 9th day of April, 2026, 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 8th day of January, 2026.

Trena Jones, Administrator
1406 Raspberyy Run
Graham, NC 27253

1/8, 1/15, 1/22, and 1/29/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File Number 25E001492-310

THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 24th day of December 2025, as CO-EXECUTORS of the Estate of AGNISH POOLE, late of Durham County, North Carolina, hereby wish 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 9th day of April, 2026, 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 8th day of January, 2026.

Gregory Todd R. Poole, Co-Executor
12701 Cumberland Cove Drive
Charlotte, NC 28273

Roxie Jeneise P. Pagan,
Co-Executor
808 Bluestone Road
Durham, NC 27713

1/8, 1/15, 1/22, and 1/29/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File Number 25E001249-310

THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 30th day of December 2025, as ANCILLARY EXECUTOR of the Estate of LYDIA RUTH BLUNT A/K/A RUTH BLUNT, A/K/A LYDIA R. BLUNT, late of Kings County, NY, hereby wish 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 9th day of April, 2026, 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 8th day of January, 2026.

Marvin M. Reina, Ancillary Executor
2445 Park Avenue Unit 18
Bridgeport, CT 06604

1/8, 1/15, 1/22, and 1/29/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

The undersigned, having qualified as Administrator of the Estate of Joseph Roy Aicher, Jr., 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 2, 2026, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.

Debtors of the decedent are asked to make immediate payment.

This 1st day of January, 2026.
Kathleen M. Aicher, Administrator
c/o Attorney Heather Hazelwood
PO Box 61182
Durham NC 27715

1/1, 1/8, 1/15, and 1/22/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

All persons, firms and corporations having claims against the Estate of MARY DOLAN O'DONNELL, File No.: 25E001434-310, deceased, of Durham County, NC, are notified to present the same to the personal representative listed below on or before March 25, 2026, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of recovery. All debtors of the said estate are asked to make immediate payment.

This 25th day of December, 2025.
Brendan Hugh O'Donnell, Executor
c/o Moeller & Smith, PA
607 Broad St.
New Bern, NC 28560

12/25/2025, 1/1, 1/8, and 1/15/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

File 25E001257-310

All persons, firms and corporations having claims against WILLIAM LEONARD BUTTERFIELD, deceased, of Durham County, NC, are notified to exhibit the same to the undersigned on or before March 26th, 2026, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of recovery. Debtors of the decedent are asked to make immediate payment. This, the 25th day of December, 2025.

Loree K Miller, Executor
c/o Beth W. Bowen
Bowen Law Firm PC
590 New Waverly Pl., Ste 120
Cary, NC 27518

12/25/2025, 1/1, 1/8, and 1/15/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

Estate Of Arthur William Egan, Jr.
Aka Arthur William Egan
File No. 25E001509-310

THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 16th day of December, 2025, as Co-Executors of the ESTATE of ARTHUR WILLIAM EGAN, JR., also known as ARTHUR WILLIAM EGAN, Deceased, do hereby notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said Estate to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before March 26th, 2026, 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 25th day of December, 2025.

Courtney Jayne Egan, Co-Executor
Brittany Yvette Egan, Co-Executor
ESTATE OF ARTHUR WILLIAM EGAN, JR.
AKA ARTHUR WILLIAM EGAN
c/o Jennifer Dalman, Attorney
Walker Lambe, PLLC

240 Leigh Farm Road, Suite 100
Durham, North Carolina 27707
12/25/2025, 1/1, 1/8, and 1/15/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File Number 25E001464-310

THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 15th day of December 2025, as EXECUTOR of the Estate of DEWEY J. CUNNINGHAM, late of Durham County, North Carolina, hereby wish 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 25th day of March, 2026, 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 25th day of December, 2025.

Rhonda S. Cohen, Executor
c/o David A. Burns, Esq.
Wyrick Robbins Yates & Ponton, LLP

4101 Lake Boone Trail, Ste. 300
Raleigh, NC 27607
12/25/2025, 1/1, 1/8, and 1/15/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File Number 25E001760-310

THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 15th day of August 2024, as ADMINISTRATOR of the Estate of RICHARD DORSEY, late of Durham County, North Carolina, hereby wish 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 25th day of March, 2026, 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 25th day of December, 2025.

Vanessa Dorsey, Administrator
8 Miranda Place
Durham, NC 27707

12/25/2025, 1/1, 1/8, and 1/15/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

File Number 25E001348-310

The undersigned having qualified as Executor of the Estate of JAMES SLADE CRUMPTON, Deceased, late of Durham County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against the Estate to Exhibit them to the undersigned at the office of IDOL LAW, PLLC, PO Box 51759, Durham, North Carolina 27717, on or before the 30th day of March, 2026, or this Notice will be in bar of their recovery.

All persons indebted to the Estate will please make immediate payment.

This is the 25th day of December, 2025.

James Slade Crumpton, Jr.,
Catherine Crumpton, Co-Executors
Estate of James Slade Crumpton,
Deceased
Robert A. Idol, Esquire
IDOL LAW, PLLC
Attorney at Law
PO Box 51759
Durham, NC 27717
(919)401.5151

12/25/2025, 1/1, 1/8, and 1/15/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE OF CREDITORS

THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 16th day of December 2025, as Executor of the ESTATE OF BARBARA JEAN GOODWIN aka BARBARA JEAN GOODWIN-BRODAS, 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 26th day of March 2026 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 25th day of December, 2025.

Mitchell S. Heard, Executor
Estate Of Barbara Jean Goodwin aka Barbara Jean Goodwin-Brodas
c/o Rupe S. Gill, Attorney
Walker Lambe, PLLC
Post Office Box 51549
Durham, North Carolina 27717

12/25/2025, 1/1, 1/8, and 1/15/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE OF SERVICE OF PROCESS BY PUBLICATION

File No.: 25CV001360-310
(Divorce Proceedings)

Rukayat Sealy, Plaintiff VS. Joseph Sealy, Defendant

TAKE NOTICE that a pleading seeking relief against you has been filed in the above-entitled action. The nature of the relief sought is an absolute divorce.

You are required to make defense to this pleading no later than forty (40) days from the first publication of this notice by filing a response with the Clerk of Superior Court of Durham County, North Carolina. Upon your failure to do so, the party seeking relief will apply to the Court for the relief sought.

This the 25th day of December, 2025.

Rukayat Sealy, Plaintiff
2317 Fitzgerald Avenue
Durham, NC 27707

12/25/2025, 1/1, and 1/8/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

File Number 25E001254-310

All persons, firms and corporations having claims against GORDON ROBERT PERRY, DECEASED, are notified to exhibit the same to the undersigned on or before March 18, 2026, or this notice along with the appropriate general statute will be pleaded in bar of recovery. Debtors of the deceased are asked to make immediate payment. This the 18th day of December, 2025. All correspondence should be to the Estate of Gordon Robert Perry, c/o Florence A. Bowens, Attorney, P.O. Box 51263, Durham, NC 27717.

12/18, 12/25/2025, 1/1 & 1/8/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk

File Number 25E001530-310

THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 9th day of December 2025, as EXECUTOR of the Estate of GORDON SPENCER MYERS, late of Durham County, North Carolina, hereby wish 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 18th day of March, 2026, 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 18th day of December, 2025.

Barbara A. Horvitz, Executor
1541 Catch Fly Lane
Durham, NC 27713

12/18, 12/25/2025, 1/1 & 1/8/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File Number 25E001466-310

THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 18th day of November 2025, as EXECUTOR of the Estate of RONNIE LLOYD HOLDEN, late of Durham County, North Carolina, hereby wish 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 18th day of March, 2026, 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 18th day of December, 2025.

Kristen Aiken, Executor
2421 Orange Factory Rd.
Bahama, NC 27503

12/18, 12/25/2025, 1/1 & 1/8/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File Number 25E001427-310

THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 8th day of December 2025, as EXECUTOR of the Estate of ALLAN KEITH MORELOCK, late of Durham County, North Carolina, hereby wish 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 18th day of March, 2026, 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 18th day of December, 2025.

Gena Netten, Executor
c/o Marion Law Office, PLLC
2741 University Drive
Durham, NC 27707

12/18, 12/25/2025, 1/1 & 1/8/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File Number 25E001380-310

THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 12th day of December 2025, as EXECUTOR of the Estate of DAVID ANDREW ROBERTSON, SR., A/K/A DAVID ROBERTSON, SR., A/K/A DAVID A. ROBERTSON, SR., A/K/A DAVID ANDREW ROBERTSON, late of Durham County, North Carolina, hereby wish 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 18th day of March, 2026, 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 18th day of December, 2025.

Ronald Wayne Robertson, Executor
c/o B. Bailey Lipfert, III
Allman Spry Leggett Crumpler & Horn PA

380 Knollwood Street, Suite 700
Winston-Salem, NC 27103
12/18, 12/25/2025, 1/1 & 1/8/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

ESTATE OF BEATRICE A. CLEMENTS
FILE NO. 25E001359-310

All persons, firms and corporations having claims against Beatrice A. Clements, deceased, of Durham County, N.C., are notified to exhibit the same to the

undersigned on or before March 20th, 2026 or this notice will be pleaded in bar of recovery. Debtors of the decedent are asked to make immediate payment.

This the 18th day of December, 2025.

Cynthia W. Barrows, Executrix
c/o W.G. Alexander & Associates, PLLC
3717 Benson Dr.

Raleigh, NC 27609
12/18, 12/25/2025, 1/1 & 1/8/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File Number 25E001468-310

THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 18th day of November 2025, as EXECUTOR of the Estate of BARBARA JEAN WALKER, late of Durham County, North Carolina, hereby wish 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 18th day of March, 2026, 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 18th day of December, 2025.

Amy R. Walker, Executor
4144 Crown Oaks Drive
Oxford, NC 27565

12/18, 12/25/2025, 1/1 & 1/8/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File Number 25E001479-310

THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 16th day of December 2025, as EXECUTOR of the Estate of CHARLIE THOMAS GARRETT, SR., late of Durham County, North Carolina, hereby wish 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 18th day of March, 2026, 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 18th day of December, 2025.

Charlie Thomas Garrett, Jr.,
Executor, c/o Richard F. Prentiss, Jr.,
4 Consultant Pl., Durham, NC 27707
12/18, 12/25/2025, 1/1 & 1/8/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File Number 25E001459-310

THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 15th

FORSYTH COUNTY

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
FORSYTH COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File Number 25E002798-330
THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 9th day of December 2025, as ADMINISTRATOR of the Estate of ARENETTIA HICKS, late of Forsyth County, North Carolina, hereby wish 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 18th day of March, 2026, 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 18th day of December, 2025.
Torey Hicks, Administrator
5112 Tall Tree Dr.
Winston-Salem, NC 27105
12/18, 12/25/2025, 1/1 & 1/8/2026

ORANGE COUNTY

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
ORANGE COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File Number 25E000066-670
THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 29th day of October 2025, as ADMINISTRATOR of the Estate of ROLIN GHOLAM MAINUDDIN, late of ORANGE County, North Carolina, hereby wish 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 2nd day of April, 2026, 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 1st day of January, 2026.
Christopher Hill, Administrator
311 E. Main St.
Durham, NC 27701
1/1, 1/8, 1/15, and 1/22/2026

JOHNSTON COUNTY

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
JOHNSTON COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File Number 25E001468-500
THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 3rd day of December 2025, as ADMINISTRATOR of the Estate of ASHLEY DALLAS MENGES, late of Johnston County, North Carolina, hereby wish 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 18th day of March, 2026, 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 18th day of December, 2025.
Christina Menges, Administrator
c/o Ethan C. Timmins
Patrick Law, PLLC
3805 University Drive, Suite A
Durham, NC 27707
12/18, 12/25/2025, 1/1 & 1/8/2026

ONSWLOW COUNTY

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
ONSWLOW COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File Number 25E003532-660
THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 17th day of July 2025, as EXECUTOR of the Estate of QUENTIN LEE ALDERMAN, late of Onslow County, North Carolina, hereby wish 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 18th day of March, 2026, 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 18th day of December, 2025.
Quentin Lee Alderman II, Executor
110 Magnolia Drive
Hubert, NC 28539
12/18, 12/25/2025, 1/1 & 1/8/2026

GUILFORD COUNTY

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
HARNETT COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File Number 24E000392-420
Having qualified as Executor of the Estate of IRWIN CLAUDE BENJAMIN, deceased, of 240 Rock Harbor Lane, Spring Lake, Harnett County, North Carolina, the undersigned does hereby notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against the Estate of said Decedent to exhibit them to the undersigned at Steven Benjamin, c/o Susan Harman-Scott, Attorney at Law, PLLC, P. O. Box 1593, Nags Head, NC 27959, on or before the 8th day of April, 2026, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons, firms and corporations indebted to the said Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.
This the 8th day of January, 2026.
Steven Benjamin
c/o Susan Harman-Scott
Attorney at Law, PLLC
P. O. Box 1593
Nags Head, NC 27959
(252) 573-8248
1/8, 1/15, 1/22, and 1/29/2026

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 25E002418-910
THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 25th day of August 2025, as ADMINISTRATOR of the Estate of MARY ALICE POTEAT TRAPP, late of Wake County, North Carolina, hereby wish 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 9th day of April, 2026, 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 8th day of January, 2026.
Cynthia Poteat Brandon
Administrator
12677 Talon Drive
Zebulon, NC 27597
1/8, 1/15, 1/22, and 1/29/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
COUNTY OF WAKE
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
Having qualified as Executor of the Estate of Louis Randolph Barbee, deceased, this is to notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the Estate of LOUIS RANDOLPH BARBEE to present them to the undersigned on or before the 9th day of April 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons, firms, and corporations indebted to said Estate, please make immediate payment.
This the 8th day of January, 2026.
Linda C. Evans, Executor
c/o John W. Perry, Attorney of the Estate of Louis Randolph Barbee
Post Office Drawer 2051
Durham, North Carolina 27702
Telephone: (919) 683-8685
1/8, 1/15, 1/22, and 1/29/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
WAKE COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
File Number 25E001464-310
Having qualified as Executor of the Estate of EDWARD LOWELL THOMAS, JR. aka EDWARD L. THOMAS, JR. deceased in Wake County, this is to notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said Estate to present them, duly verified, to the undersigned at 5108 Currihan Court, Fuquay Varina, NC 27526 on or before the 8th day of April, 2026, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said Estate will please make immediate settlement with the undersigned.
This the 8th day of January, 2026.
Donna R. Thomas, Executor
5108 Currihan Court
Fuquay Varina, NC 27526
File # 25E002984-910
1/8, 1/15, 1/22, and 1/29/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
WAKE COUNTY
NOTICE OF SERVICE OF PROCESS BY PUBLICATION
In the General Court of Justice
District Court Division
File No. 24CV021463-910
To: CHARLENE DOUGLAS, Defendant.
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: The Plaintiff has filed a COMPLAINT

FOR JUDGMENT FOR ABSOLUTE DIVORCE. You are required to make defense to such pleading no later than February 9, 2026 said date being at least thirty (30) days from the first publication of this Notice, and upon your failure to do so, the Plaintiff, THERESE MCCOLLERS, will apply to the court located at 316 Fayetteville St., Raleigh NC 27601 for the relief sought.
This, the 9th day of January, 2026.
Theresa Mccullers, Plaintiff
2702 Verde Dr. Apt. D
Raleigh, NC 27603
1/8, 1/15, and 1/22/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
WAKE COUNTY
NOTICE OF SERVICE OF PROCESS BY PUBLICATION
In the District Court Division
File No. 25CV037854-910,
Alcerro v. Sanchez
To: CRISTIAN J. BANEGAS SANCHEZ
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 for child custody. You are required to make a defense to such pleading no later than February 17,

2026, said date being at least forty (40) days from the first publication of this Notice, and upon your failure to do so, the Plaintiff, SINDY G. POLANCO ALCERRO, will apply to the court for the relief sought.
This, the 8th day of January, 2026.
Yvonne Armendariz, Esq
Attorney for Plaintiff
Armendariz Law Office, PLLC
6110 Lake Wheeler Road
Raleigh, NC 27603
Office: (919) 656-1524
Yvonne@armendarizlaw.com
1/8, 1/15, and 1/22/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
WAKE COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
ALL PERSONS, firms and corporations having claims against BENJAMIN WESTLEY WHITAKER, AKA BENJAMIN WHITAKER, Deceased, of WAKE COUNTY, NC, are notified to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before APRIL 8, 2026, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of recovery.
Debtors of the decedent are asked to make immediate payment.
This is the 8th day of January 2026.
Dorothy Whitaker, Executor of the Estate,
c/o MONROE JENKINS, PA

Post Office Box 12534
Durham, North Carolina 27709
1/1, 1/8, 1/15, and 1/22/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
WAKE COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File Number 25E003790-910
THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 12th day of December 2025, as EXECUTOR of the Estate of JOAN TECKLA NIELSEN a/k/a JOANNE TECKLA AMTOFT-NIELSEN a/k/a JOAN MANZOLILLO NIELSEN, late of Wake County, North Carolina, hereby wish 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 25th day of March, 2026, 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 25th day of December, 2025.
Anja Wynns, Executor
218 Rosebrooks Drive

Cary NC 27513
12/25/2025, 1/1, 1/8, and 1/15/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
WAKE COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File Number 25E004295-910
THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 5th day of December 2025, as ADMINISTRATOR of the Estate of LINDA RYAN A/K/A LINDA ANN RYAN, late of Wake County, North Carolina, hereby wish 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 18th day of March, 2026, 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 18th day of December, 2025.
Ryan Keith Pruzinsky, Administrator
413 Lindsays Run
Rolesville, NC 27571
12/18, 12/25/2025, 1/1 & 1/8/2026

SBA Suspends Nearly 7,000 Minnesota Borrowers Over Suspected Loan Fraud



The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) has suspended thousands of Minnesota borrowers after reviewing pandemic-era loans for possible fraud.
According to BrightUAI's Enoch, SBA offered pandemic-era loans through two primary programs: the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) and the Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) program. These loans were designed to provide financial relief to small businesses affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The PPP offered forgivable loans to maintain payroll and cover certain expenses, while EIDL provided low-interest loans to cover working capital and normal operating expenses.
However, they have faced widespread scrutiny nationwide over improper payments and fraud.
In a post on X, formerly known as Twitter, SBA Administrator Kelly Loeffler said the agency reviewed thousands of PPP and EIDL approvals tied to Minnesota and took action against nearly 7,000 borrowers.
"Over the last week, SBA has reviewed thousands of potentially fraudulent pandemic-era PPP and EIDL loans approved in Minnesota," Loeffler posted Thursday, Jan. 1. "Today, our agency took action to suspend 6,900 Minnesota borrowers

amid suspected fraudulent activity." Loeffler revealed that the suspended borrowers were approved for a combined 7,900 PPP and EIDL loans totaling approximately \$400 million. She said those individuals will be banned from all SBA loan programs moving forward, including disaster assistance loans. Loeffler added that the agency plans to refer cases to federal law enforcement when appropriate for potential prosecution and recovery of funds.
"These individuals will be banned

from all SBA loan programs, including disaster loans, going forward. We will also refer every case, where appropriate, to federal law enforcement for prosecution and repayment. After years, the American people will finally begin to see the criminals who stole from law-abiding taxpayers held accountable – and this is just the first state," she wrote.
SBA halts annual funding to Minnesota
The announcement follows the halting of the annual funding to the

state of Minnesota amid reports alleging more than \$100 million in fraud.
In a separate post on X, Loeffler said the agency is pausing funding while it investigates suspected fraud involving PPP loans statewide. The announcement was posted after independent journalist Nick Shirley claimed in a 42-minute YouTube video that he uncovered more than \$110 million in alleged fraud in a single day after visiting multiple day-care facilities across Minnesota.
"SBA is pausing annual funding to Minnesota while we investigate \$430 million in suspected PPP fraud across the state," Loeffler posted Monday, Dec. 29. "This Admin will not continue to hand out blank checks to fraudsters – and we will not rest until we clean up the criminal networks that have been stealing from American taxpayers."
Furthermore, the administration has announced it is suspending certain federal child care funds to Minnesota following the fraud accusations, further escalating the federal response.
Watch the Dec. 30 episode of "Brighteon Broadcast News" as Mike Adams, the Health Ranger, talks about the widespread government grant fraud.

Generations Of Thinkers Gather At Hoover To Honor Thomas Sowell



Hoover Institution (Stanford, CA)—Supreme Court Associate Justice Clarence Thomas spoke at the Hoover Institution's celebration of Thomas Sowell on October 20, saying his writing gave him the fortitude and confidence in his own beliefs at a time in his life when he was beset with doubt.
Justice Thomas said as he was a young law student and lawyer, navigating what his teachers, peers, coworkers, and others expected him to think as a Black man, Sowell, now 95, paved the way for him to form his own views, and be proud of them.
"Here's someone who's thought it through and makes sense of what your instinct has been," Thomas told a packed Hauck Auditorium. "[Sowell] demonstrated that in a logical analytical way, you're not alone."
Recognized globally for his contributions to economics, social theory, and public policy across six decades, Sowell continues to inspire and influence scholars and thinkers through his work. Now the author of nearly fifty books, Sowell has written on a variety of topics throughout his career, ranging from economics, history, social policy, and ethnicity to the history of ideas. He won the National Humanities Medal in 2002.
Some of his most famous books include Social Justice Fallacies (2023); Discrimination and Disparities (2018); Intellectuals and Society (2010); Basic Economics: A Common Sense Guide to the Economy (2000), now in its fifth edition; The Vision of the Anointed: Self-Congratulation as a Basis for Social Policy (1995); and A Conflict of Visions: Ideological Origins of Political Struggles (1987).
Before exposure to Sowell's early work, in the 1970s, Justice Thomas says he was nothing like he is now.
He was a Marxist. He supported George McGovern in the 1972 US presidential election.
"In 1970, I was part of a riot in Harvard Square to free political prisoners," he said.
But just a few years later, after reading Sowell's Race and Economics, he was hooked. As he says in his memoir, he felt "like a thirsty man gulping down a glass of cool water in

the desert."
Justice Thomas said Sowell gave him the confidence to oppose orthodoxies imposed on him in settings like Yale, where he was sometimes ostracized for his views on race, or economics, or the role of the state in society.
But Sowell was not prescriptive, Justice Thomas said, he merely empowered you to form your own beliefs, freeing you from concerns about offending others by merely expressing a contradictory view.
"He always says what he thinks, but he never tells you to say what he wants you to think," Thomas said. "That is yours."
"He's more than a hero," Justice Thomas said. "You say that he is an intellectual giant—he's more than that."
The Sum of Sowell's Legacy
Sowell addressed the celebrants with a video message, thanking Hoover for letting me have more than half a century of the kind of freedom that one can no longer have in most universities without ever trying to censor what I say or to make it comply with any political correctness."
"I would not have had the gall to invite so many busy people to come out here for the sake of some old man who's theoretically retired," Sowell said in a recorded message played for attendees.

The day saw a host of cultural commentators and scholars pay tribute to Sowell's work and its influence on their careers. Writers, economists and thought leaders within and outside Hoover each expressed an admiration for Sowell as someone who let fact along guide them in reaching conclusions about the nature of life and society.
The day also involved honoring the winners of an essay and content creator competition for students to reflect on the impact of Sowell's work on their lives.
Like Thomas, Distinguished Visiting Fellow Glenn Loury told attendees he once thought Sowell's ideas should be opposed at every opportunity.
"That was a long time ago, over a half a century" Loury said. "I've come around."
"Thomas Sowell is by any reasonable standard, one of the most important social thinkers America has produced in the last 100 years," Loury said. "And yet his greatness lies not only in his academic acclaim, but also in his consistent and unflinching application of reason to the most difficult public questions of our time; race, culture, inequality and human freedom."
In a separate panel discussion, Hoover Senior Fellows Niall Ferguson and Victor Davis Hanson joined cultural commentator and podcaster Coleman Hughes to discuss Sowell's legacy as a sort of cultural historian.
Hughes' father attended Howard

University and did his undergraduate economics thesis on the work of Sowell. As a child, Hughes came across one of Sowell's books.
"I knew he was some sort of bad guy that you weren't supposed to agree with," Hughes said.
Ferguson said Sowell was able to make observations about the drivers and determinants of inequality; and how nationalities were able to overcome disadvantages, such as lack of natural resources or poor growing conditions, and prosper with the right ethic or leadership.
Over monthly lunches in Palo Alto with Sowell held over the span of 16 years, Hanson said he came to learn what Sowell thought drove some peoples to become prosperous and free and others to struggle under the constraints imposed on them by others.
During one lunch years ago, Hanson recalled discussing with Sowell: "Are those do-gooder white liberals just misguided, or are they actually pernicious people?"
"We debated that all the time."
But what got in the way of sharing this truth and getting it to go mainstream was basic human nature.
Ideology and the desire "to gravitate to the common opinion" are the things that get in the way of truth, Hanson said.
Sowell's Contributions to Child Development Psychology
Over lunch, cognitive psychologist Steven Pinker spoke to attendees about Sowell's observations about his own son, John, who did not begin speaking at the regular age and was therefore misdiagnosed as being on the autism spectrum.
Pinker said Sowell reached out to him via letter to work out what else could explain John's late arrival at speech, as he was an otherwise attentive little boy.
For instance, Pinker said once at the age of two, John knocked over his father's chess board in the middle of a game.
"The boy picked up the chess board and replaced every piece in its exact position," Pinker recounted Sowell telling him, indicating John had incredible spatial ability and memory.

Sports

The Total Number Of NFL Coaching Openings Is Seven!



ATLANTA (AP) — The Atlanta Falcons fired coach Raheem Morris and general manager Terry Fontenot on Sunday night, announcing the moves hours after the team completed its second straight 8-9 finish under Morris and eighth consecutive losing season.

Morris said after Sunday's 19-17 win over the New Orleans Saints that he expected to return for a third season. Instead, his 16-18 record was not enough for him to keep his job after the year began with optimism that the Falcons would reach the playoffs for the first time since 2017.

"I have great personal affinity for both Raheem and Terry and appreciate their hard work and dedication to the Falcons, but I believe we need new leadership in these roles moving forward," owner Arthur Blank said in a statement.

"The decision to move away from people who represent the organization so well and have a shared commitment to the values that are important to the organization is not an easy one, but the results on the field have not met our expectations or those of our fans and leadership."



HENDERSON, Nev. (AP) — The Las Vegas Raiders fired Pete Carroll on Monday after just one year, meaning they will enter their third consecutive season with a new coach in charge.

Carroll expressed high hopes upon taking over, saying he was used to double-digit victories and expected the same in Las Vegas. But the Raiders went 3-14, going on a 10-game losing streak before finishing with a 14-12 victory over Kansas City on Sunday.

"I want to make it extremely clear, too, that I bear a ton of responsibility for the outcome of this season and our record," general manager John Spytek said. "This isn't on any one person, and really I don't want anyone to think anyone deserves more responsibility than me on that. It's something I'm very aware of. I think about it all the time, and I'm determined to get it right. The accountability should start and stop with me, and that needs to be said."

Now the question is where the Raiders head next under the direction of owner Mark Davis, minority owner Tom Brady and Spytek.



OWINGS MILLS, Md. (AP) — John Harbaugh's 18-year tenure in Baltimore included two distinct periods of success.

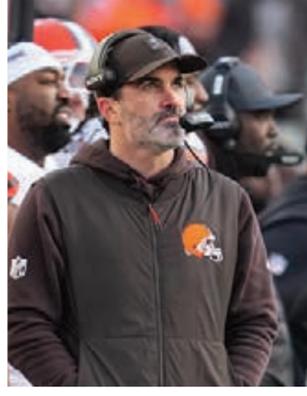
After taking over, Harbaugh capitalized on the last few years of Ray Lewis' career, reaching the AFC title game three times in his first five seasons as coach and winning a Super Bowl.

When Lamar Jackson arrived in 2018, the Ravens became contenders again — but there's been no conference championship yet for this particular era, and lately Baltimore has experienced more angst than glory.

So Harbaugh is out of a job.

Owner Steve Bisciotti fired Harbaugh on Tuesday after the Ravens were one of the league's most disappointing teams this season. They went 8-9 and missed the playoffs after entering Week 1 as one of the Super Bowl favorites.

Baltimore's season ended Sunday night when Tyler Lopp missed a last-second field-goal attempt, allowing Pittsburgh to hold on for a 26-24 victory in the game that decided the AFC North title.



BEREA, Ohio (AP) — Kevin Stefanski led the Cleveland Browns to two playoff appearances in his first four seasons as head coach.

However, with only eight wins the past two seasons, owners Jimmy and Dee Haslam will be making their sixth coaching hire since purchasing the franchise in 2012.

Stefanski was dismissed Monday morning after six seasons. The Browns won their final two games to finish 5-12, including a 20-18 victory over the Cincinnati Bengals on Sunday.

"We're capable of winning more than the games that we won, but we obviously didn't. Things are going to change and have to change. We got to find a way to get this thing rolling," cornerback Denzel Ward said.

The Haslams are not doing a total housecleaning, announcing that Andrew Berry will remain as general manager. Berry joined the Browns in 2019 and was named GM the following year. Stefanski and Berry signed multiyear contract extensions in June 2024.



TEMPE, Ariz. (AP) — Jonathan Gannon's once-promising head coaching tenure with the Arizona Cardinals is done following a dismal third season that started with high expectations but quickly collapsed thanks to injuries, embarrassing gaffes and a long string of losses that became increasingly noncompetitive.

Now the franchise is preparing for a rebuild — again.

The Cardinals parted ways with Gannon on Monday, one day after a 37-20 loss to the Los Angeles Rams. It was the team's ninth straight loss and 14th setback in 15 games.

"Jonathan is a very smart, motivated, enthusiastic, intelligent, awesome coach," Cardinals owner Michael Bidwill said. "He made us better. But — as you all know — this is a league about wins and losses."

"The wins and losses speak for themselves."

Now a new coaching staff gets the chance to rebuild a franchise that will have the No. 3 overall pick in April, but has been to the playoffs just once since 2016.

Brian Callahan, Tennessee Titans

The Tennessee Titans had the first pick in the 2025 NFL Draft.

They also had the first head coach firing of the year as well.

Tennessee parted ways with Brian Callahan back on October 13, just five weeks into the season. Callahan's tenure ended after a string of questionable moments for the young head coach, including a decision not to challenge a potential catch early in the season that led those of us in the media space wondering if the head coach knew the catch rules.

Who really does, when you think about it?

This is not the only change that came to Tennessee this year, as news in recent days indicated that the team is implementing a change in the front office structure ahead of their coaching search. General manager Mike Borgonzi will be in charge of the coaching search, and report directly to owner Amy Adams Strunk.

Brian Daboll, New York Giants

Brian Daboll was the next head coach to see his time cut short.

The Giants let Daboll go after the team started 2-8, with a history of blowing double-digit leads a leading cause behind the firing. Daboll was let go hours after the Giants blew a 20-10 lead in the fourth quarter, giving up 14 unanswered points en route to a 24-20 loss.

That was the second time this season the Giants lost despite leading by at least ten points with under four minutes remaining.

Earlier this year New York led the Denver Broncos by 26-8 with just over ten minutes remaining in the game, and still led by ten at the four-minute mark.

The Giants lost that game by a final score of 33-32.

SafeSport Center Turns To Olympic Gold Medalist Mosley As New CEO

DENVER (AP) — The U.S. Center for SafeSport announced Benita Fitzgerald Mosley as its new CEO on Tuesday, placing the 1984 Olympic gold medalist in charge of rebooting an agency that has been plagued with problems over most of its nearly nine-year history.

Fitzgerald Mosley will start her job Feb. 1, saying in a statement provided to The Associated Press that it is "more than a job opportunity for me, it is a calling."

"We have an extraordinary opportunity to reimagine what excellence in athlete protection looks like," she said. "And I am deeply confident that we can build something stronger, steadier, and more hopeful than ever before."

The congressionally chartered center opened in 2017 in the wake of the mishandling of sex-abuse cases by the U.S. Olympic Committee, USA Gymnastics and a number of other Olympic-related sports agencies.

"It's made great strides in shifting sport culture toward athlete safety," Fitzgerald Mosley said. "However, there is a continuing need to grow this impact, enhance efficiencies, and evolve the organization to fulfill its potential for athletes, survivors, and



the entire sport community."

The 64-year-old Fitzgerald Mosley has deep experience in the inner workings of Olympic administration.

She served as chief of sport performance at USA Track and Field from 2009-13 before moving to the U.S. Olympic Committee as its chief operating officer from 2013-16.

More recently, Fitzgerald Mosley

was on the Commission on the State of U.S. Olympics & Paralympics — a congressionally appointed panel that recommended some changes for the center after concluding in its report that "it became clearer with each new piece of evidence that SafeSport has lost the trust of many athletes."

That was before revelations about the center's hiring and firing of in-

vestigator Jason Krasley, a former police officer who was arrested for sex crimes he allegedly committed while in his cop job in Pennsylvania.

The center parted ways with CEO Ju'Riese Colon in April and embarked on a search that lasted more than six months and netted Fitzgerald Mosley to take SafeSport into its next chapter.

Fitzgerald Mosley is taking over an agency that has made a number of changes to investigative procedures in response to complaints about cases taking too long and not being considerate of the trauma felt by some of those who take complaints to the center.

"She is well-positioned to advance the Center's mission as the organization completes its first nine years of operation and prepares for the next era," Chicka Elloy, vice chair of the SafeSport board and head of its search committee, said in a statement announcing the hire.

Fitzgerald Mosley's high point as an athlete came at the LA Olympics in 1984 when she became the first American woman to win the 100-meter hurdles. She was part of the 1980 team that did not travel to Moscow for those boycotted Games.

Why The NCAA Won't To Fight To Keep Pros Out Of College B-Ball

By Jeff Eisenberg

Sr Writer Yahoo Sports

Only a few months ago, James Nnaji faced a career crossroads.

A Summer League audition with the New York Knicks hadn't produced so much as an invitation to training camp, let alone his first NBA contract.

Since the salaries top college players were making dwarfed what Nnaji could earn overseas, the Nigerian 7-footer and his agent hatched an audacious plan. They began to explore the unprecedented possibility of going from the 31st pick in the 2023 NBA Draft at 18 to entering college basketball at 21.

Desperate for a big man after losing its projected starting center to a season-ending arm injury during the summer, Baylor targeted Nnaji as soon as he became available and began working to try to get the NCAA to clear him to play. Nnaji made his collegiate debut in Baylor's Big 12 opener at TCU this past Saturday, checking in eight minutes into the first half to an onslaught of jeers and boos.

Granting Nnaji immediate eligibility is the most extreme example yet of the NCAA's reluctance to fight to keep professional players out of the college game. The NCAA had previously given colleges the greenlight to recruit prospects with experience playing in the G League or top overseas professional leagues. Now the governing body is also rolling out

the red carpet for someone who once guarded Victor Wembanyama in a Summer League game, someone who was once a throw-in in the trade that shipped Karl-Anthony Towns to the Knicks.

"It's wild out there right now," Gonzaga coach Mark Few told reporters last week.

"We don't have any rules," Arkansas coach John Calipari lamented during a recent news conference.

"Santa Claus is delivering mid-season acquisitions," UConn coach Dan Hurley quipped on social media. "This s— is crazy!!"

Just when many joked Arizona might want to reach out to LeBron James about playing alongside his son Bryce next season, NCAA president Charlie Baker at last drew a firm line. The NCAA will not grant college eligibility to any player who has previously signed an NBA contract, Baker clarified in a statement last Tuesday.

Why has the NCAA loosened eligibility restrictions to the point where such a commonsense statement is necessary?

Is the risk of exposing itself to fresh legal challenges really the main reason for the NCAA's hesitance to try to enforce stricter rules? Or might the NCAA have an ulterior motive? Could it be intentionally trying to spark public outrage in hopes of persuading Congress to finally grant antitrust protection that would reestablish the NCAA's authority and shield it from the threat of litigation?

As Mit Winter, an experienced attorney specializing in collegiate sports law, told Yahoo Sports, "I don't go the full conspiracy theory that the NCAA is making all these eligibility decisions for the sole reason of creating mass chaos so that Congress comes to help, but it's definitely a side benefit of what's going on."

Not long after highly touted center Enes Kanter committed to Kentucky in early 2010, the NCAA received a set of documents from his former Turkish club.

Officials at Fenerbahce were unhappy with Kanter's abrupt departure after they had invested heavily in his development. As a result, they turned over financial records to the NCAA purportedly showing that Fenerbahce had provided the projected lottery pick payments that would jeopardize his amateur status.

On Nov. 11, 2010, the NCAA declared Kanter permanently ineligible to play college basketball for receiving benefits \$33,033 above what the governing body deemed his "actual and necessary expenses." The ruling epitomized how tightly the NCAA clung to a strict concept of amateurism before legal challenges dismantled the system.

The Supreme Court struck a deathblow to amateurism in June 2021 when it unanimously ruled that the NCAA's restrictions on compensation for student-athletes were a violation of federal antitrust law. The landmark decision in NCAA v.

Alston paved the way for the modern NIL and revenue-sharing era and left the NCAA's model vulnerable to further legal challenges.

"Nowhere else in America can businesses get away with agreeing not to pay their workers a fair market rate on the theory that their product is defined by not paying their workers a fair market rate," Justice Brett Kavanaugh wrote in a concurring opinion in NCAA v. Alston. He concluded by sharply noting, "The NCAA is not above the law."

As the NIL market for impact basketball players at the high-major level skyrocketed north of seven figures, the best young international prospects began to take notice. Teenagers who might have chosen to develop abroad in previous eras left their high-level European club teams and jetted across the Atlantic because the salaries were as much as 10 to 15 times more lucrative.

Skilled 7-footers Zvonimir Ivisic of Croatia, Aday Mara of Spain and Motiejus Krivas of Lithuania were part of the initial wave of prized European prospects in 2023. A year later, future NBA first-round draft picks Egor Demin and Kasparas Jakucionis joined them. This year, 19-year-old German forward Hannes Steinbach is passing through Washington on his way to the NBA, as is Italian guard Dame Sarr, 19, at Duke and Greek guard Neoklis Avdalas, 19, at Virginia Tech.

"There used to be a small number



Anthony Duclair Has A Hat Trick And Two Assists

NEW YORK (AP) — Anthony Duclair recorded a hat trick for the first time in more than six years, Ilya Sorokin stopped all 44 shots he faced in his return from injury and the New York Islanders handed the New Jersey Devils a second consecutive defeat, routing them 9-0 on Tuesday night.

Back in the lineup after being a healthy scratch the past two games, Duclair scored three goals in a row during a stretch from 4:01 into the first period to 3:29 into the second and also had two assists for a five-point game. His fourth hat trick in the NHL was his first since Dec. 14, 2019, four teams ago when he was with the Ottawa Senators.

Sorokin was exceptional, showing no rust in his first game action since Dec. 19 as he became the franchise's career shutout leader with his 26th. He had been out with what the Islanders called a nagging lower-body injury.

At the other end of the rink, Devils goaltender Jacob Markstrom allowed goals on the first two shots he faced — from Mat Barzal and Duclair — and three on five, finishing with nine on 24. His teammates had little bounce back after losing at home to Carolina on Sunday in a game in which young defenseman Luke Hughes twice put the puck into his own net.

of top [European] prospects that would consider the college route," said Guillermo Bermejo, European-based director of global basketball at Gersh Sports, the agency that represents Nnaji. "It was a rarity for a player to choose that route versus staying pro and developing over here. Now the rarity is someone staying over here versus going to college. When you're sitting down with a player and his family, the first thing that comes up is the college route, how it works and how to get there. It has been a 180-degree change."

Last offseason, the influx of European pros entering the college game went from a trickle to a deluge. College coaches became more brazen about targeting international players with several years experience competing in the Euroleague or top professional domestic leagues.

Virginia's leading scorer this season is a 22-year-old Belgian forward who was a key contributor for a professional club in Spain's top division the previous two years. Louisville's top big man is a 22-year-old German who last season was one of the Bundesliga's most efficient players. North Carolina starts a 22-year-old guard from Montenegro who averaged 14.9 points per game in Southeastern Europe's top league.

The NCAA's lenience in granting those players college eligibility tempted other programs to test the limits of the governing body's generosity. They targeted G League players who had once passed on the

college route but now were having regrets due to the money available.

In late September, Santa Clara announced the signing of guard Thierry Darlan, who spent the previous two years with the now-defunct G League Ignite, the Delaware Blue Coats and the Rip City Remix. A month later, Louisville landed guard London Johnson out of the G League. Westchester Knicks center Abdullah Ahmed signed with BYU in November and just made his midseason debut this past Saturday against Kansas State.

How are these G Leaguers and European pros eligible when Kanter and others in his position once were not? Because, since the onset of the NIL era, the NCAA has been more forgiving in its interpretation of Bylaw 12.2.2.2.1, which states that "before initial full-time collegiate enrollment, an individual may compete on a professional team provided the individual does not receive more than actual and necessary expenses."

Without protection from antitrust laws, the NCAA doesn't appear interested in trying to legally defend banning players who have received five-figure or six-figure salaries from professional teams. The NCAA, as Baker recently put it, "is exercising discretion in applying the actual and necessary expenses bylaw." International pros who were paid more than what the NCAA deems actual and necessary expenses have allegedly been able to get eligible by paying back the difference.