



## Not White! Not Blue! But New-Collar Jobs Are Exploding

By Thomas Frey

futuristspeaker

In the closing months of 2016, a novel term began to echo through the corridors of the tech industry, heralding a significant shift in the employment landscape. Coined by Ginni Rometty, IBM's then-CEO, "new collar" entered the lexicon, encapsulating a burgeoning trend that sought to redefine professional success. Rometty's advocacy shone a light on the transformative nature of the labor market, drawing attention to an emerging breed of jobs that prized skill and capability over the pedigree of a traditional college education.

At the heart of this movement are the new collar workers, a burgeoning demographic in today's labor force. These individuals break the mold, having honed their technical abilities and practical know-how through avenues far removed from the ivy-clad walls of academia. From the digital classrooms of online courses to the intense, focused training of vocational bootcamps, these workers are carving out their niches. Apprenticeships, on-the-job training, and self-directed learning are their tools, crafting a skillset that perfectly fits the contours of contemporary industries like IT, cybersecurity, healthcare, and advanced manufacturing.

The rise of the new collar worker marks a departure from the traditional dichotomy of the professional landscape, where white-collar workers sat on one side with their managerial and professional roles, and blue-collar workers stood on the other, representing manual labor. Today's economy doesn't just blur



these lines; it redraws them entirely. New collar jobs meld the physical and the intellectual, infusing the hands-on approach of blue-collar positions with the analytical acumen typically reserved for their white-collar counterparts.

This evolution in job classification reflects a deeper current sweeping the labor market, a tide that prioritizes the tangible and practical aspects of knowledge over the formality of degrees. It's a shift that acknowledges the role of technol-

ogy in reshaping what it means to be work-ready and what it means to be successful in the digital age.

The emergence of the new collar workforce is no happenstance; it's the result of powerful currents reshaping the landscape of work and education. Understanding these forces is key to grasping the full impact of this transformative trend.

**Technological Advancements: The New Frontier**

At the forefront is the relentless march of technology, with AI lead-

ing the charge. The effect of AI on the job market is twofold: it not only automates routine tasks but also forges new sectors demanding expertise that traditional educational institutions struggle to provide. This rapid technological evolution is creating roles that are as novel as they are niche, necessitating a breed of professionals equipped with specialized skills often acquired outside the confines of conventional degree programs.

**The Educational Evolution: Adapt-**

ing to a New Reality

Educational models are swiftly pivoting in response to the soaring need for specialized technical skills. The landscape is shifting from the traditional, degree-centric approach to a more nimble, skills-focused paradigm. Online learning platforms, micro-credentialing, and industry-specific certifications are stepping into the breach, offering the flexibility and specialized training that traditional academic pathways often lack. This shift is not merely a trend; it's a response to the real-world demands of industries racing to keep up with the pace of innovation.

**Economic Imperatives: The Cost of Competitiveness**

Economic considerations are also significant catalysts for the new collar movement. In an era where technological agility is synonymous with market survival, there's a burgeoning need for a workforce that can pivot with the shifting technological and economic sands. Organizations are on the hunt for cost-effective strategies to cultivate talent, increasingly leaning towards in-house training programs that can swiftly bring employees up to speed on the latest technologies. This approach to talent development provides a practical, financially prudent alternative to the steep investment in traditional education that has long been the default recruitment filter.

Together, these forces are not just driving the new collar movement; they're redefining what it means to be employable and successful in a rapidly transforming economy. It's a movement that is as much about the changing identity of the workforce as it is about the broader evolution

of society in the face of technological progress.

The landscape of work has been altered irrevocably by the advent of new collar jobs, with certain attributes distinguishing them from traditional roles. Understanding these characteristics is essential for both job seekers and employers navigating this new terrain.

**Prioritizing Skillsets: A Practical Approach**

Central to the ethos of new collar jobs is prioritizing practical skills over academic degrees. These roles are defined less by the diplomas candidates hold and more by their capacity to tackle the tasks at hand effectively. Employers increasingly value candidates who can demonstrate their competencies, often through industry certifications, curated portfolios, and direct experience. This shift represents a more pragmatic approach to hiring, focusing on what applicants can do rather than where they studied.

**Synergy of Abilities: The Composite Professional**

New collar roles often demand a blend of technical acumen and soft skills. Mastery of specific technical domains—such as programming, network security, or data analysis—is as crucial as solving problems, adapting to new situations, and communicating effectively. The interweaving of these hard and soft skills equips professionals with the versatility needed to navigate the rapidly shifting technological landscape and contributes to a well-rounded, resilient workforce.

**The Vanguard Industries: Sectors**

(See **NEW COLLAR** P. 2)

## Cryptocurrency Leaps From Litigation

Future Proof Initiative Signals End Of Crypto Litigation Era

Sandmark—The Chairman of the US Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC) has officially signaled the end of the federal government's adversarial relationship with the digital asset industry.

In an op-ed published by The Washington Post, Michael Selig laid out a "Future Proof" agenda that seeks to strip the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) of its de facto role as the primary crypto antagonist.

Selig's intervention marks a decisive pivot in Washington's institutional architecture. By framing blockchain and artificial intelligence as the "next frontier" of US financial markets, the Chairman is positioning the CFTC not just as a regulator, but

as the architect of a new domestic digital economy. The move follows a broader shift in federal policy; earlier this month, Sandmark reported that the US Treasury had halted auctions of seized bitcoin to build a strategic reserve. Selig's roadmap provides the legal teeth for that financial strategy.

**Replacing lawsuits with rules**

The core of Selig's argument is a direct assault on the "regulation by enforcement" model that defined the previous administration. Selig argues that relying on retroactive prosecutions rather than clear, "fit-for-purpose" rules has successfully driven innovation offshore while failing to protect domestic investors. He pledged to move the agency toward a notice-and-comment rulemaking process, a move designed to provide

the permanent legal certainty that institutional capital requires.

This shift is timed to coincide with legislative momentum on Capitol Hill. Congress is currently debating the CLARITY Act and House Bill 3633, both of which seek to codify the jurisdictional boundaries between the CFTC and the SEC. If passed, the legislation would grant the CFTC primary oversight of the \$3tn spot market for non-security digital commodities. Selig is essentially telling lawmakers that the CFTC is no longer waiting for permission; it is preparing for the mandate.

**Unlocking the onchain derivatives market**

Beyond simple spot trading, Selig's op-ed hints at a massive expansion of the CFTC's perimeter.

He specifically highlighted prediction markets, perpetual futures and onchain trading venues as sectors where regulatory clarity could unlock billions in sidelined capital. By embracing these blockchain-native structures, Selig is signaling that the US intends to compete directly with offshore hubs like Dubai and Singapore.

The real shift here is institutional, not just ideological. For years, the crypto industry has asked whether it should exist in the US; Selig has changed the question to who will control it. By offering a "minimum effective dose" of regulation, the CFTC is inviting the global digital asset market to return to US soil. The message to the SEC is blunt: the era of litigation-led policy is over, and the era of the "crypto capital" has begun.

## Efforts To Reclaim The MLK, Jr. Holiday

(AP NEWS) As communities across the country on Monday host parades, panels and service projects for the 40th federal observation of Martin Luther King Jr. Day, the political climate for some is more fraught with tensions than festive with reflection on the slain Black American civil rights icon's legacy.

In the year since Donald Trump's second inauguration fell on King Day, the Republican president has gone scorched earth against diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives and targeted mostly Black-led cities for federal law enforcement operations, among other policies that many King admirers have criticized.

One year ago, Trump's executive orders, "Ending Illegal Discrimination And Restoring Merit-Based Opportunity" and "Ending Radical And Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferencing," accelerated a rollback of civil rights and racial justice initiatives in federal agencies, corporations and universities. Last month, the National Park Service announced it will no longer offer free admission to parks on King Day and Juneteenth, but instead on Flag Day and Trump's birthday.

The fatal shooting this month of an unarmed Minneapolis woman in her car by Immigration and Customs



Enforcement agents sent there to target the city's Somali immigrant population, as well as Trump recently decrying civil rights as discrimination against white people, have only intensified fears of a regression from the social progress King and many others advocated for.

Still, the concerns have not chilled many King holiday events planned this year. Some conservative admirers of King the holiday should be a reminder of the civil rights icon's plea that all people be judged by their

character and not their skin color. Some Black advocacy groups, however, are vowing a day of resistance and rallies nationwide.

**'We've always strived to be a more perfect union'**

In a recent interview with the New York Times, Trump said he felt the Civil Rights Movement and the reforms it helped usher in were harmful to white people, who "were very badly treated." Politicians and advocates say Trump's comments are what are harmful, because they

dismiss the hard work of King and others that helped not just Black Americans but other groups, including women and the LGBTQ+ community.

"I think the Civil Rights Movement was one of the things that made our country so unique, that we haven't always been perfect, but we've always strived to be this more perfect union, and that's what I think the Civil Rights Movement represents," Gov. Wes Moore, Maryland's first Black governor and only the nation's third elected Black governor, said this week in an interview with The Associated Press.

Maya Wiley, president and CEO of the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, one of the nation's oldest and largest civil rights coalitions, said the Trump administration's priorities make clear it is actively trying to erase the movement.

"From health care access and affordable housing to good paying jobs and union representation," Wiley said, "things Dr. King made part of his clarion call for a beloved community are still at stake and is even more so because (the administration) has dismantled the very terms of government and the norms of our culture."

(See **MLK, POLITICAL CLIM.** P. 2)



### NC JOINS INITIATIVE TO EXPAND ACCESS TO EDUCATION, JOBS AFTER INCARCERATION

88.5 WFDD – North Carolina is among four states participating in a new national initiative designed to expand education and job opportunities for people leaving prison.

The state's Department of Adult Correction will join the inaugural cohort of the Fair Chance to Advance State Action Network. The program focuses on removing barriers to education, job training and employment for people with histories of incarceration.

In a statement, Governor Josh Stein said these opportunities help keep people from returning to the criminal justice system, reducing overall crime.

Over the next four years, North Carolina could receive up to \$2.1 million in funding and technical assistance. State agencies will also gain access to a shared data system for coordination around reentry services.

Kansas, Maine and Oregon will also participate in the program.

### NC LAWMAKERS REVIEW FEDERAL MANDATES IMPACTING MEDICAID

By Jordan Meadows

Staff Writer

The Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Medicaid in the NC General Assembly convened Tuesday afternoon to review new federal requirements and funding mechanisms for the state's Medicaid and SNAP programs stemming from H.R.1, the "One Big Beautiful Bill Act".

The law tightens work requirements for Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs), affects eligibility for veterans and former foster youth, and mandates changes to Medicaid administration.

"NC Medicaid relies on county governments to conduct determinations on requirements for programs," said Deputy Secretary for NC Medicaid Jay Ludlam, noting that new rules will require more frequent reporting, additional documentation from providers, and a potential shift from expansion to traditional Medicaid programs.

Sen. Jim Burgin (R-Harnett) asked about potential impacts on pregnant beneficiaries moving from expansion to traditional Medicaid through NC's Medicaid program for pregnancy. Ludlam responded that estimates are not yet available, but cited disability or changes in circumstances as key factors affecting eligibility.

Deputy Medicaid Director Melanie Bush added that approximately 40% of determinations are automated, but as requirements increase, more caseworker input—currently about 60%—will be necessary due to errors in applications that automation cannot resolve.

To fund the new federal mandates, it was proposed that the NCGA fully cover the nonfederal share of NHealthWorks through increased gross premium taxes, requiring an estimated \$7.8 million more per quarter—nearly \$32 million annually—for county eligibility determinations. Nonfederal investments will be matched with federal funds at rates up to 90% for sys-

(See **MEDICAID MANDATES**, P. 5)

### NEW WORK REQUIREMENTS FOR MEDICAID, SNAP WILL COST NC MILLIONS

WUNC—North Carolina is facing a looming deadline to find more funding to cover new federal work requirements for Medicaid.

President Trump's megabill that became law last summer requires most Medicaid recipients to work, volunteer or receive job training at least 20 hours a week. But it will be up to state and county agencies to keep track of the requirement when it starts next year.

State health officials estimate that will cost around \$50 million. But under North Carolina's Medicaid expansion law, that money can't come from state tax dollars. The law requires administrative funding to come from other sources, or Medicaid expansion will be automatically repealed.

Melanie Bush with the Department of Health and Human Services presented several funding options to a legislative committee Tuesday. They include using savings generated by Medicaid expansion or using revenue from taxes

(See **NEW WORK REQUIREMENTS WILL COST MILLIONS**, P. 4)

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# The New 'Be The People' Campaign Wants To Unite Hundreds Of Millions Of Americans To Solve Problems

AP NEWS — As the official celebrations of the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence culminate on July 4, a well-financed, privately funded initiative will kick off to try to connect hundreds of millions of Americans with efforts to solve local problems.

The "Be The People" campaign aspires to change the perception that the U.S. is hopelessly divided and that individuals have little power to overcome problems like poverty, addiction, violence and stalled economic mobility. It also wants to move people take action to solve those problems.

Brian Hooks, chairman and CEO of the nonprofit network Stand Together, said the 250th anniversary is a unique moment "to show people that they matter, that they have a part to play, and that the future is unwritten, but it depends on each one of us stepping up to play our part."

Funded by a mix of 50 philanthropic foundations and individual donors, Be The People builds on research that indicates many people want to contribute to their communities but don't know how. The initiative has raised more than \$200 million for its first year's budget.

Founding members range from nonprofits — including GivingTuesday, Goodwill Industries and Habitat for Humanity, businesses like Ron Howard's Imagine Entertainment and the National Basketball Association, to funders like the John D. and Catherine T.

MacArthur Foundation.

Hooks said this is a 10-year commitment toward trying to achieve what would be a profound shift in behavior and culture. He referenced a 2024 Pew Research Center survey that found most Americans in 2023 and 2024 did not believe that the U.S. could solve its most important problems, saying it was a "red alert" for the country.

Hooks said the initiative envisions actions far beyond volunteering or service that people could do in their free time. He pointed to a role for businesses and schools and said the initiative would launch a major data collection effort to track whether people are actually more engaged and whether problems are actually getting solved.

Stand Together, which was founded by the billionaire Charles Koch, works across a broad range of issues and communities in the U.S. and has carved out a role for itself as a convener that can bring coalitions together across ideological lines.

"Be The People," will not incorporate as a new nonprofit, but act more like a banner for groups to organize under and use to connect to resources. As an example, at the Atlanta Hawks game on Monday, Martin Luther King III and his wife, Arndrea Waters King, linked a program they launched last year, Realize the Dream, which aims to increase acts of service, to the new campaign.

"Our vision is that 'Be The People' helps lift up what is already happening in communities across



Martin Luther King III and his wife Arndrea Waters King

the country and reminds people that service and shared responsibility are defining parts of the American story," the Kings said in a written statement.

"Be The People," will operate

similarly to the nonprofit GivingTuesday. While it started as a hashtag to encourage people to donate to nonprofits on the Tuesday after Thanksgiving, GivingTuesday has grown into a platform that

provides nonprofits with tools, like fundraising kits and advice on how to reach and mobilize their supporters. Nonprofits can participate however they like but gain some momentum by acting alongside many other groups.

"Our experience with GivingTuesday is that when people volunteer together, when people work together on something to do with positive social impact, they find it harder and harder to demonize each other," said Asha Curran, its CEO.

The initiative comes against a backdrop of deep polarization, economic inequality and the degradation of democratic norms and institutions in the U.S.

A growing number of private foundations have started funding issues related to the health of U.S. democracy, said Kristin Goss, a professor who directs the Center for the Study of Philanthropy and Voluntarism at Duke University. While foundations cannot participate in elections, Goss said they can influence policy or public opinion in other ways.

"Funders are getting more concerned about the health of American democracy, the future of the democratic experiment and pluralism and inclusion," Goss said.

Another group of funders, including the Freedom Together Foundation, launched a project last year to recognize people and groups who stand up for their communities, which they called a "civic bravery" award. In a November report, they issued a similar call for funders to invest in helping individuals organize together in response to a rise in authoritarianism.

Hooks and the other leaders of "Be The People" have also convened major communications teams to help tell these stories, which they think are lost in the current information ecosystem.

"What we're doing is we're helping to lift up the story of Americans that is unfolding at the local level, but is not breaking through," Hooks said. "So we're holding up a mirror and a microphone to Americans to reveal to each other who we truly are."

## MLK, Political Climate — CONT. FROM PG 1

The White House did not respond to a request for comment.

The conservative Heritage Foundation think tank is encouraging the holiday's focus to stay solely on King himself. Brenda Hafera, a foundation research fellow, urged people to visit the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historical Park in Atlanta or reread his "I have a dream" speech delivered on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington nearly 63 years ago.

But using the holiday as a platform to rally and speak about "anti-racism" and "critical race theory" actually rejects King's ambition for the country, Hafera argued.

"I think efforts should be conducted in the spirit of what Martin Luther King actually believed and what he preached. And his vision was a colorblind society, right," Hafera said. "He says very famously in his speech, don't judge by the color of your skin, but the content of your character."

Groups call for holiday of reclamation, education and rallying

The NAACP, the nation's oldest civil right organization which had a

myriad MLK Day events planned for Monday, asserted that the heightened fears among communities of color and in immigrant communities mean King Day observances must take a different tone. People will have to put their safety first, even if their government isn't, said Wisdom Cole, NAACP senior national director of advocacy.

"As folks are using their constitutional right to protest and to speak out and stand up for what they believe in, we are being faced with violence. We are faced with increased police and state violence inflicted by the government," Cole said.

The Movement for Black Lives, a coalition of organizations affiliated with the Black Lives Matter movement, has planned its events under the banner "Reclaim MLK Day of Action." Organizers planned demonstrations in Atlanta, Chicago and Oakland, California, among other cities, over the weekend and Monday.

"This year it is more important than ever to reclaim MLK's radical legacy, letting his wisdom and fierce

commitment to freedom move us into the action necessary to take care of one another, fight back, and free ourselves from this fascist regime," Devonte Jackson, a national organizing director for the coalition, said in a statement.

Indiana school cancels historic MLK Day event

For the first time in its 60-year history, Indiana University in Indianapolis canceled its annual Martin Luther King dinner. Over the years, the event drew notable guest speakers including Shirley Chisholm, the first Black woman elected to Congress, and activist Angela Davis.

The reasoning was "budget constraints," according to a social media post by the school's Black Student Union. However, the group said it was worried this was "connected to broader political pressures." A few students have since organized smaller community dinners or "eat-ins" to fill the void, WTHR-TV in Indianapolis reported.

Meanwhile, the St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church in West-

brook, Maine, canceled a MLK Day service due to "unforeseen circumstances," according to the parish website. But a member of the church's "social justice and peace committee" told NewsCenterMaine.com that the pastor was concerned about people's safety amid rumors of ICE agents being in the area.

Overall, there have been few reports of King Day events being majorly scaled down or canceled altogether.

In Memphis, Tennessee, the National Civil Rights Museum is going about its annual King Day celebration as normal. The museum is located on the site of the former Lorraine Motel, where King was shot on April 4, 1968. The museum is offering free admission on the holiday, an annual tradition.

"This milestone year is not only about looking back at what Dr. King stood for, but also recognizing the people who continue to make his ideals real today," museum President Russell Wigginton said.

## NEW COLLAR JOBS

Continued from page 1

in Transformation

Certain industries are particularly emblematic of the new collar revolution. Cybersecurity, data analytics, cloud computing, AI development, and healthcare are among the sectors leading the charge. They are marked by their swift growth and the constant evolution of their operational landscapes, which demand a workforce that is not only competent but also capable of evolving alongside continuous innovations. These industries exemplify the new collar ideal: a work environment where the ability to learn and adapt is as valuable as the expertise one brings to the table.

The journey to becoming a new collar worker is paved with a variety of educational and developmental paths, each catering to the evolving needs of modern industries and the individuals eager to navigate them.

**Hands-On Education: Vocational Training and Apprenticeships**  
Vocational training centers and apprenticeship programs stand out as practical avenues for aspiring new collar workers. These pathways offer a focused education in specific trades and technical fields, pairing curriculum with hands-on application. Apprenticeships are particularly valuable, providing real-world experience under the mentorship of seasoned professionals. Through these channels, individuals can gain the job-specific expertise that is highly sought after in today's market.

**Tech-Intensive Learning: Coding Bootcamps and Online Courses**  
For those aiming to plunge into the digital realms of the new collar world, coding bootcamps and online courses present intensive and flexible learning options. Bootcamps are immersive, often short-term programs designed to impart specific digital skills rapidly. Online courses complement this by offering a breadth of learning opportunities accessible from anywhere, at any time. These educational routes are tailored for swift entry into tech-centric new collar roles.

**Learning in the Trenches: On-the-Job Training and Mentorship Programs**  
A significant number of employers are investing in the future by providing on-the-job training programs, allowing employees to learn while they earn. This practical approach is frequently augmented by mentorship, where novices can draw on the wisdom and experience of experts in their field. This dual strategy benefits not only the employees, who grow their skill sets but also the employers, who cultivate a workforce capable of keeping stride with industry demands and innovations. This symbiotic process fosters a culture of continuous learning and professional development, fueling the growth of both the individual and the company.

SUTHERLAND, Va. — Dr. Gladys Mae West, an African American mathematician whose work played a critical role in the development of satellite navigation technology, died on Jan. 17, 2026 at 95.

West spent more than four decades working at the U.S. Navy's research facility in Dahlgren, Virginia, where her mathematical modeling and data analysis contributed to early systems that allowed satellites to determine precise locations on Earth. That work later became integral to the Global Positioning System, a technology now relied upon worldwide for navigation, transportation, emergency response, and digital mapping.

West was born Gladys Mae Brown on Oct. 27, 1930, in Sutherland County, Virginia. Raised in a farming family during segregation, she spent part of her childhood helping harvest crops such as corn, cotton, and tobacco. Teachers recognized her academic ability early, and she graduated as valedictorian of her high school class.

Her academic success earned her a scholarship to Virginia State University, a historically Black institution, where she studied mathematics. She completed her bachelor's degree in

1952 and earned a master's degree in mathematics in 1955. Before entering federal service, West taught mathematics in Virginia public schools, a common profession for Black graduates at the time.

In 1956, West joined what was then known as the U.S. Naval Proving Ground in Dahlgren. She became only the second African American woman employed at the facility and was among a small number of Black scientists working there. As computing technology advanced, her work evolved from early computer programming to large-scale analysis of satellite data.

West specialized in geodesy, the study of Earth's shape and gravitational field. She worked on satellite altimetry projects that helped produce increasingly accurate models of the Earth, known as the geoid. That precision was essential for satellite-based positioning systems, which depend on accurate Earth measurements to function reliably.

For most of her career, West's work was known primarily within military and scientific communities. She did not work at NASA and was not depicted in the 2016 film Hidden Figures, though her career later drew

attention as part of a broader effort to recognize Black women whose scientific contributions had long been overlooked.

West met her husband, Ira V. West, while working at the Dahlgren facility. The two married in 1957 and raised three children — Carolyn, David, and Michael. They were active in their local chapel community on the base, where they attended services regularly. West was also a grandmother to seven grandchildren.

During the Civil Rights era, West supported the movement's goals but was limited in public participation due to her role as a federal employee. She was part of a group of Black women living in officer housing, known informally as Boomtown, who met to discuss community issues and current events.

West retired from government service in 1998. She continued her education in retirement, earning a doctorate in public administration and policy affairs from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University at the age of 70.

Recognition of her work grew in later years. She was inducted into the U.S. Air Force Space and Missile Pioneers Hall of Fame and received



honors from organizations highlighting the contributions of women and African Americans in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

West was preceded in death by her husband, who died in October 2024. She is survived by her children and grandchildren.

Her career reflects the long-term impact of scientific work that often operates outside public view. The systems her research helped support continue to shape daily life around the world.

## Residents Oppose New Data Centers '999 to 1'

By Andy Schlafly

World Net Daily

As Republicans scramble for a grassroots issue for the New Year, to grow the party as needed to be competitive in elections, opposing new data centers could be the Christmas gift that keeps on giving.

Local residents were "999 to 1 against" a data center planned for the town of Matthews, located in the suburbs of Charlotte, North Carolina, according to its Mayor John Higdon.

Allowing the development of a data center was on the agenda of a council meeting there in October, when it was withdrawn from consideration. If it had been approved, "every person that voted for it would no longer be in office," Mayor Higdon observed. "That's for sure."

This is the reaction across the country to the efforts by Big Tech companies, including Google, Amazon, Microsoft and Facebook, to build massive data centers in the heartland of America. These proj-

ects gobble up land, electricity and water, while creating very few jobs for the locals who have to endure the perpetual 65-decibel hum of the servers and louder backup diesel generators.

Lobbied state government officials tend to welcome these data centers, as Gov. Greg Abbott in Texas has. But often these projects are shrouded in secrecy and sprung on local residents without explaining the full risks and costs.

Texas has a dire water shortage, while data centers require enormous amounts of water to keep their computers from overheating. One data center can consume millions of gallons of water daily, the equivalent of the needs of an entire town of 50,000 people.

Prior to the invasion by data centers, a Texas agency estimated that many Texas towns and communities would face a severe water shortage by 2030. A harsh drought could accelerate that problem.

There are 411 existing data centers in Texas, second only to Virgin-

ia, and another 442 are planned for Texas, which is equivalent to nearly doubling its population in terms of water usage. Texans tap into broad but depleting underground aquifers for most of their water needs, such that data centers anywhere in Texas deplete the water supply for everyone there.

Meanwhile, since 2022 residential electricity prices nationwide have risen by 10%, while electricity prices for data centers and other commercial uses have increased by only 3%, according to a new report published by Yale Climate Connections. Data centers get favorable energy rates while homeowners are forced to make up the difference amid inflation.

If the Democrats who control California want to allow Google and Facebook to build data centers in unpopulated regions of the Golden State, then they can do that. But instead, liberal Big Tech is lobbying Republican officials in other states, like Texas, to impose the costs and burdens of these monstrosities on

unsuspecting local residents there. The grassroots are rising up against this, and rightly so. A new \$2 billion data center that blights the landscape, dries up the water supply and overloads the power grid brings an estimated total of only 37 new jobs.

An outcry last year by the public in St. Charles, Missouri, blocked a data center project there by an undisclosed Big Tech company. When residents learned that 125 diesel generators would be used, any one of which could leak to contaminate the local water supply, they successfully defeated the development.

Supporters of data centers criticize the opposition by calling them NIMBYs, which is short for "Not in my back yard."

Data centers externalize their many costs to burden the targeted communities, while developers line the pockets of lobbyists to push for these projects without transparency to the public. Often local residents receive little advance notice of rezoning demands.

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# Business & Finance

## Community Land Trusts Seek Affordable Housing Nod

NC NEWSLINE – North Carolina's community land trusts are working to raise the profile of their housing preservation model, which its members see as a vital tool in the struggle for affordable housing in a rapidly growing state.

Community land trusts keep housing permanently affordable by maintaining ownership of the land and selling the homes or buildings sitting on it to individuals or groups. The model removes the land cost from the purchase price, and the land trust controls resale values to ensure homes remain affordable to future generations.

Several of the state's trusts have launched the North Carolina Community Land Trust Coalition to share best practices and resources to shape housing policy, and "increase government and philanthropic support" for the programs by educating lawmakers and the public.

Today, more than 300 Community Land Trusts operate across the country, including a dozen or more in North Carolina. Funding comes primarily through competitive processes for grants, loans and other sources at the federal, state and local levels.

"The hardest thing to do is to find operational funding, especially for newer land trusts that are starting to be created," said Kimberly Sanchez, executive director of the Community Home Trust in Chapel Hill. "You have to acquire land, which is not cheap and you have to hold it forever, so you have to have some level of consistent operational funding just to make sure you can keep the inventory that you have forever for the community."

Sanchez has led the Chapel Hill-based Community Home Trust for six years. The nonprofit has been around



for more than 30 years and is one of the oldest community land trusts in the state. It followed the Durham Community Land Trustees, Inc., which became the first in the state in 1987.

Collectively, the state's community land trusts have created 394 homeownership units, 398 affordable rental units and have supported households with an average of 63% of area median income, the coalition reported.

Sanchez's group and the Durham Community Land Trustees control hundreds of those properties, while newer community land trusts control just a few or sometimes a single property. The coalition expects 12 to 14 members, but noted that some are new and still forming and will be added to the coalition's new website at a later date.

Sherry Taylor, executive director of

the Durham Community Land Trustees, said the coalition's rise is timely, given the growing interest in community land trusts in North Carolina.

"We actually started meeting last year to come together and make sure that permanently affordable housing is at the top of mind, not just for individual areas of the state that we cover, but as a statewide initiative," Taylor said.

Taylor noted the state law allows property tax exemptions for certain affordable housing when they're controlled by qualifying nonprofits.

But, she added, there's more to be done.

"We realized that attainable housing, especially home ownership, is something that is a growing need all across the state," Taylor said. "We wanted to first inform lawmakers that this is a model that has worked all over the country and has worked in

North Carolina and is still working to create attainable homeownership."

Finding new ways for community land trusts to increase production of affordable housing would be the next step in the process, Taylor said.

"I'm not gonna list out all the ways that they [lawmakers] can possibly help this group, but I do think thinking through those things and getting in front of them will be the primary goals of our coalition," Taylor said.

Last year, a study commissioned by NC REALTORS®, the NC Chamber and the NC Home Builders Association highlighted the extent of the housing crisis in the state. Researchers found North Carolina will need more than 764,000 rental and for-sale units over the next five years to meet demand across all 100 counties.

The NC Housing Coalition has found that 48% of state renters are cost burdened by rent payments and 19% of homeowners have trouble paying their mortgages. A family is considered cost-burdened if it spends more than 30% of income on housing. Diverse models

North Carolina's community land trusts operate differently from each other even though they share the same model, said Sanchez with the Community Home Trust in Chapel Hill. She says the model's flexibility allows responsiveness to local needs.

"We focus on different things, the way that we're funded is different, the way we interact with our community is different," Sanchez said. "Durham and Chapel Hill are 10 minutes away from each other, but even just culturally, they're totally different."

A notable difference, Sanchez said, is that Durham focused on rentals early on while her organization focused on homeownership. Now,

Durham has a growing stock of owner-occupied homes and Sanchez's organization has entered the rental market.

Sanchez's organization has nearly 300 properties in its portfolio. Many were acquired through Chapel Hill's inclusionary housing policy. Under the policy, housing developers are "encouraged" to sell a few housing units to the community land trust.

"It's that political will that has given us the opportunity to have almost 300 homes," Sanchez said.

A startup in Watauga County Over the summer, the relatively new Watauga Community Housing Trust celebrated the completion of its first home, a refurbished, one-bedroom house near downtown Boone that it sold to an adult with disabilities.

The volunteer-run and member-led nonprofit was created in response to skyrocketing housing costs in one of the state's more expensive zip codes. Boone is a major tourist destination and home to Appalachian State University, both of which put pressure on housing costs.

Ben Loomis, a Watauga land trust member, said the previous owner of the house contacted the then-startup about selling a lot and a rundown house at a good price.

"It was just sort of an opportunity that was too big to pass up, even though we at the time, we had re-

ally just gotten started," Loomis said. "That was like early 2023 and we had no money in the bank."

Loomis said the organization spent the next summer fundraising and raised enough money to purchase the property. Over the next two years, he said, the group took out a construction loan, continued to fundraise and "basically rebuilt it from the ground up, everything from the foundation to the roof."

Affordable housing has become an even bigger issue in region in the aftermath of Tropical Storm Helene and the historic flooding that ensued, Loomis said. Thousands of homes were destroyed or damaged in Western North Carolina, including 140 housing units that were condemned in Boone due to flooding.

"That exacerbated all of the issues that we were focused on when Helene hit," Loomis said.

The new coalition is an opportunity for established community land trusts and new ones like his to share expertise to advocate for a greater good, he said.

"We see the goal as to be able to provide resources to other new community land trusts as they start up, but also to work on a higher level and do lobbying and large-scale partnerships for material donations with building companies and universities that each individual and trust may not be able to do on its own," Loomis said.

## Wendell Hires Its First Human Res. Director

WENDELL, N.C. - The Town of Wendell is pleased to announce the hiring of Melanie D. Joyner as Human Resources Director.

In this new role, effective Jan. 12, 2026, Joyner will oversee the efforts of a people-first organization to serve a growing staff, which will allow for added efficiency of services provided to the greater Wendell community. As Director, she will also work towards streamlining processes and ensuring the growth of the department reflects organizational goals and priorities.

"I am thrilled to join the Town of Wendell as its first Human Resources Director. Throughout my 25 years in the profession, I have learned that our greatest impact comes from supporting employees so they can truly thrive in their work," Joyner said of the position. "I approach my work with a service orientation coupled with a 'yes, and' mentality. I am honored that I get to help the Town of Wendell continue to build a workforce and workplace where our team members can be their best in service to the community."

Joyner brings over two decades of diverse experience from across the industry to the Wendell organization. She began her professional career in human resources with the Virginia Department of Transportation, as the manager of the Engineer Development Program, responsible for recruiting new engineers to the department.

Over the course of her career, she also has had an assortment of leadership roles in higher education.



Joyner previously held the roles of Assistant Vice President for Human Resources in the Office of Health Sciences, Chief HR Officer for the Facility for Rare Isotope Beams and Director of Academic Human Resources, all at Michigan State University. Prior to her time in Michigan, she was the Director of Academic Human Resources for the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

While in the private sector, Joyner was Vice President of People and Culture for Public Sector Consultants, a public policy consulting firm, and HR Director for C2AE, an architecture and engineering firm – both based in Michigan.

A native of Wilson, North Carolina, Joyner holds a master's degree in human resources from Western Carolina University and a Professional in Human Resources (PHR) certification.

## Session On Keys to Retirement Readiness

By Jordan Meadows

Staff Writer

A retirement savings and readiness session hosted Wednesday afternoon by the NC Retirement Systems offered a detailed look at what it takes to prepare for life after work, reframing retirement as a matter of financial preparedness rather than a milestone tied to a specific age. The program, titled "Achieve Retirement Readiness," walked participants through the primary sources of retirement income and the planning decisions that shape long-term security.

Presenters outlined how retirement income is typically built from multiple streams, including Social Security, pension benefits, and supplemental savings through 401(k) and 457 Plans. Participants were introduced to state-provided online planning tools that allow users to project future income, compare different retirement dates, and develop realistic budgets aligned with personal goals. Rather than offering a one-size-fits-all retirement age, the session emphasized envisioning what life in retirement will actually look like. Whether that future includes dividing time between multiple homes, maintaining an active social calendar, traveling, or enjoying a quieter routine at home, lifestyle choices directly affect how much income will be needed and for how long.

Participants were encouraged to plan for the possibility of living well into their 80s, 90s, or beyond, recognizing that retirement readiness means having enough income to support the desired lifestyle for the entirety of one's life. While many people retire around age 65, others may do so earlier at 62 or even 57, and those who began saving aggressively at a young age may have the option to retire sooner.



Inflation emerged as a central theme in the discussion, with presenters illustrating how rising prices can steadily erode purchasing power over time. Since 1990, inflation has driven costs to roughly two and a half times their former levels, meaning that what \$100 bought in 1990 now requires about \$248. A practical example showed how a \$1.50 loaf of bread in 2012 could cost nearly \$4 by 2040. The implication for retirement planning was clear: savings that are not invested in a way that keeps pace with inflation risk losing value, potentially forcing retirees to scale back their standard of living as costs rise.

The session also addressed how much income retirees may need to replace. Financial guidance often suggests aiming for 70% to 90% of pre-retirement income, though presenters stressed that the appropriate target depends on individual situations. Participants were encouraged to consider whether they could meet their expenses without a regular paycheck, how their spending might

change in retirement, whether their mortgage would be paid off, how health care costs would be managed, and whether they planned to continue working or generating income. Decisions about where to live and how to spend time in retirement were framed as financial considerations as much as personal ones.

For 2025, state employees can contribute up to \$23,500 annually to each plan. Additional catch-up options are available, including an extra \$7,500 per plan for individuals aged 50 and older, and a "super catch-up" contribution of up to \$11,250 per plan for those between ages 60 and 63. Presenters noted that these provisions can significantly boost retirement income, especially for those who began saving later in their careers.

Social Security was explained in detail as another cornerstone of retirement income. Benefits can begin as early as age 62, but doing so permanently reduces monthly payments. Conversely, delaying benefits increases them by approximately 8%

for each year waited, up to age 70. An example showed how a monthly benefit of \$1,023 at age 62 could grow to \$2,000 by age 70, nearly doubling, with the potential to add tens of thousands of dollars in lifetime benefits for someone who lives into their mid-80s.

The session also clarified federal rules surrounding required minimum distributions, or RMDs, which apply to pre-tax retirement accounts once individuals reach a certain age and are no longer working for their employer. Depending on an individual's date of birth, RMDs may begin at age 70 and a half, 72, or 73, with a specific deadline known as the required beginning date. Understanding these rules, presenters noted, is critical to avoiding penalties and managing withdrawals in a tax-efficient manner.

The discussion on retirement readiness unfolded as state leaders signaled potential changes that could directly affect retirees already drawing benefits. State Treasurer Brad Briner told legislators at the end of last year that improved performance of the state's pension investments could open the door to long-awaited cost-of-living adjustments for retired state employees, linking stronger returns to the possibility of increased monthly benefits.

During a legislative oversight hearing in October, Briner acknowledged that the pension system has struggled to meet its own investment expectations. He noted that the state has projected a 6.5% rate of return but has consistently fallen short, placing North Carolina near the bottom nationally for pension investment performance.

Those changes are set to begin this month, when control of pension investments will shift to a newly created body, the N.C. Investment Authority.

## Early Tax Filing Season Opens January 26th

WASHINGTON (AP) — Jan. 26 marks the official start date of the 2026 tax filing season, when the IRS will begin accepting and processing 2025 tax returns. April 15 is the filing deadline to avoid penalties and interest.

Tax season is the annual period when taxpayers prepare and submit their income tax returns for the previous calendar year to the IRS and most U.S. citizens and permanent residents need to file a tax return if they make more than a certain amount of money for the year.

Tax experts, including the IRS' independent watchdog, have warned that this year's filing season could be hampered by the loss of tens of thousands of tax collection workers who left the agency through planned layoffs and buyouts spurred by Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency.

IRS Chief Executive Officer Frank Bisignano, who was named to the new role in October, said "the IRS workforce remains vigilant and dedicated to their mission to serve the American taxpayer public. At the same time, IRS information systems have been



updated to incorporate the new tax laws and are ready to efficiently and effectively process taxpayer returns during the filing season."

Bisignano is also commissioner of the Social Security Administration.

The IRS will also be responsible for implementing major provisions of Republicans' tax and spending package signed into law last summer. Several provisions in the law retroactively af-

fect the 2025 tax year, likely leading to more questions from taxpayers and requiring the IRS to update tax forms.

"President Trump is committed to the taxpayers of this country and improving upon the successful tax filing season in 2025," said acting IRS Commissioner Scott Bessent in a news release. "I am confident in our ability to deliver results and drive growth for businesses and consumers alike."

The IRS expects to receive roughly 164 million individual income tax returns this year, which is on par with what it received last year.

The average refund amount was \$3,167, according to IRS data. Bessent has said on several occasions that the effects of Republican tax law will result in bigger tax refunds in 2026.

The latest National Taxpayer Advocate report to Congress published in June states that the IRS workforce has fallen from 102,113 workers at the end of the Biden administration to 75,702. The IRS website does not include the latest employment numbers on the agency's workforce.

IRS employees involved in last year's tax season were not allowed to accept a buyout offer from the Trump administration until after the taxpayer filing deadline of April 15, 2025.

The June National Taxpayer Advocate report to Congress warned that the 2026 season could be rocky.

"With the IRS workforce reduced by 26% and significant tax law changes on the horizon, there are risks to next year's filing season," said Erin M. Collins, who leads the organization assigned to protect taxpayers' rights.

# New Work Requirements Will Cost Millions — CONT. FROM PG 1

on hospitals. "We are on a very tight timeline," she told lawmakers. "We need legislative action as soon as possible, so that we can begin building and testing our systems and notifying our members and working with our counties to prepare for Jan. 1."

Bush says that's needed by March 31, but lawmakers might not be in session until April.

"Timing here is, I think, an issue that we're going to think through," said Rep. Donny Lambeth, R-Forsyth, who co-chairs budget and healthcare committees in the House.

Rep. Hugh Blackwell, R-Burke, voiced frustrations that the new Medicaid work requirements might not result in any savings to the state. Congress created the requirement with the expectation that it could lead to fewer people on Medicaid and lower overall costs for the healthcare program.

"The overall idea I'm getting from the department is you all feel that what you're going to be required to do, and what the county is going to be required to do, is just busy work



that's going to add cost, and that there will be no savings anywhere as a result of all this new shuffling of policies," Blackwell said.

Jay Ludlam, the state's deputy secretary for N.C. Medicaid, responded that "I don't know where the savings are going to fall over time, but at least initially, there will have to be

some investments to get there."

Kevin Leonard, executive director of the N.C. Association of County Commissioners, said county governments will see substantial budget impacts as their social services agencies try to administer the new work requirements.

"HR 1 (the "One Big Beautiful Bill

Act") from the view of the North Carolina counties is one of the most significant unfunded mandates, and one of the largest shifts of administrative and economic responsibility, that our state and our counties have seen in generations," Leonard said. "I have concerns that many of our (county) commissioners have yet to fully grasp the significant financial impacts of HR 1."

SNAP work requirements also come with a cost

The cost of new federal requirements for the SNAP food assistance program could fall on county governments.

Two oversight committees at the state legislature held hearings Tuesday on the impacts of President Trump's megabill. In addition to Medicaid, the new law adds work requirements for the program known as food stamps, and it shifts costs to state and local governments.

SNAP recipients between ages 55-65 will no longer be exempt from work requirements, nor will parents of children over age 14, veterans or people experiencing homelessness.

Robby Hall leads the Brunswick County Department of Social Services. He says agencies like his will be responsible for making sure food stamp recipients meet the new requirements. That could cost counties in North Carolina a total of \$70 million per year.

"We do believe that improvements in our system will help everyone in North Carolina, but we've got to find a way to do it that benefits the counties, the people and those individuals, without creating undue hardships," Hall told legislators.

Hall says smaller counties might have to consider raising property taxes if the state doesn't help with the cost.

"If you're in a small rural community such as Scotland County or some of the others, then a couple \$100,000 extra county dollars would be a penny on the tax rate or more, and so when you look at that, that investment becomes really hard," he said.

At the state level, North Carolina could also be forced to pay up to \$400 million a year under the federal SNAP changes.

But officials say recent improvements to the state's payment error rate could reduce that number. That's because the megabill penalizes states with higher error rates, which is the percentage of benefits paid incorrectly — typically because the recipient's eligibility was calculated wrong.

In 2024, North Carolina was one of 20 states with an error rate above 10%, which under the megabill rules would require the state to cover 15% of its SNAP costs.

But the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services told lawmakers Tuesday that the error rate has been reduced to about 7% as of August. The goal is to reduce it below 6%, which would mean the state wouldn't be on the hook for the \$400 million when the new rules take effect in October 2027.

"I'm very excited to see this progress," said Mike Leighs, a DHHS deputy secretary. "I just want to add a note of caution, though ... when we have seen increased complexity added to the program, we have seen a tendency for the error rates to climb."



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# Health and Wellness

## Wake County Opens Brand New Public Health Center

By Jordan Meadows

Staff Writer

Last Friday morning, dozens gathered for the ribbon-cutting ceremony of the new Wake County Public Health Center. The 154,000-square-foot facility, located at 200 Swinburne St., is set to officially open on February 23, just minutes from the original structure on Sunnybrook Road, which served the community for nearly 40 years. The new four-story building fea-

tures a five-level parking deck and a public lot with eight EV charging stations. Green spaces, outdoor shelters, benches, walking paths, and outdoor WiFi enhance the environment, while color-coordinated interiors are designed to improve efficiency and the patient experience. Security will be strengthened with metal detectors and staff, and visitors can check in at kiosks for various clinics.

Wake County Public Health offers a wide range of services in the new facility, including dental care, chil-

dren's, prenatal and women's clinics, vaccinations, testing for sexually transmitted diseases, and other critical health services. Attendees received a tour of the center, which includes a centralized front desk, waiting areas tailored for small children, redesigned laboratory spaces,

mobile staff work areas, and expanded dental treatment rooms equipped with the latest technology. "That's nearly a whole football field of space for our amazing providers to care for Wake residents. Within these four floors, staff will be able to serve 100 patients at a time. 88

exam rooms, 20 dental treatment rooms—that's a good thing, Wake County public health served more than 205,000 patients in our clinics," said Wake County Board Chair Don Mial.

Rebecca Kaufman, Director of Public Health for Wake County, emphasized the significance of the new facility: "Public health is a quiet, steady force that keeps Wake County safe, healthy and thriving. And this new center shows how essential that work is. This building will be home to our pediatric clinic. Family planning and prenatal clinic, dental, TB and refugee health, immunization, infectious disease and STD clinic, just to name a few."

Officials describe the center as a major investment in both patient care and staff efficiency, designed to meet the needs of a growing population. Wake County is home to 1.2 million people, with an average of 66 new residents moving in each day.

Rep. Deborah Ross highlighted the federal support that made the project possible: she spoke about securing \$2 million in funding, which President Biden signed into law as part of legislation passed in 2022. Construction of the new facility be-

gan in 2023 after years of planning, and many spaces remain empty as staff transition in preparation for the official opening.

The new center comes at a critical time for healthcare in North Carolina. Earlier this month, a House Select Committee on Involuntary Commitment and Public Safety met to discuss the state's mental health system, focusing on outpatient versus inpatient care and potential improvements. Meanwhile, leaders from the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services recently hosted a virtual town hall about implementing the Rural Health Transformation Program, funded through \$50 billion in federal resources aimed at improving health outcomes in rural areas.

In addition to the public health center, Wake Radiology and UNC Health have received approval to establish a \$5 million diagnostic center in Wendell, reflecting broader efforts to expand healthcare access in the rapidly growing county.

With the ribbon now cut, Wake County residents can look forward to accessing a modern, comprehensive healthcare facility designed to serve the community for decades to come.



### MEDICAID MANDATES

Continued from page 1

tem development and 70% for operations, with legislative action required to authorize funding adjustments and implement work requirements within federal deadlines.

H.R.1 also affects taxes, eliminating federal income tax on Social Security benefits for many seniors, and extends farm support programs such as PLC and ARC through 2031.

Rep. Hugh Blackwell (R-Burke) asked whether additional determinations would yield savings for the state. Ludlam acknowledged that while similar requirements were considered during the original Medicaid expansion, the aim is to build an efficient system that does not yet exist, and current data cannot predict where potential savings would occur.

Rep. Larry Potts (R-Davidson), co-chair of the House Efficiency Committee, questioned whether counties are the best entities to handle redeterminations or if the marketplace could play a role. And Rep. Donny Lambeth (R-Forsyth) suggested a combination of funding strategies, including leveraging state savings and increasing administrative funding, to meet the new requirements.

Committee discussions made clear that implementing H.R.1 will require significant adjustments in operations, funding, and oversight as the redeterminations move from annually to bi-annually. The NCGA is considering all options as it seeks to manage incoming work requirement determinations in a system that recently expanded to nearly 700,000 participants.

### Trump Admin Quietly Restored Millions To Planned Parenthood

Politico—The American Civil Liberties Union on Monday dropped its lawsuit against the Trump administration over tens of millions in Title X family planning funds that federal officials had withheld from Planned Parenthood and some other health clinics since last spring, after HHS quietly released the money in December.

Though the Trump administration is still defending in court far bigger federal cuts to Planned Parenthood that Congress approved last summer, the release of the Title X funds gives the clinics a crucial lifeline. It is also likely to inflame existing tensions between the administration and anti-abortion conservatives who will rally in Washington later this month for the annual March for Life.

The clinics and the groups representing them argue, however, that the restored funds will not undo all of the harm done over the many months the money was withheld. Though many clinics had been saving their receipts from low-income patients who came in for birth control, testing for sexually transmitted infections and other Title X services and can submit them now for federal reimbursement, dozens of clinics have since shut down and are unlikely to reopen.

"More than 800 service sites were unable to provide Title X services. Hundreds of thousands of patients were unable to get Title X services. So the impact was tremendous," said Brigitte Amiri, the deputy director at the ACLU's Reproductive Freedom Project who represented the clinics in the case. "So damage certainly was done as a result of their unlawful withholding of the funds."

Trump administration health officials did not respond to questions about why the funding was restored.

Last March, the administration informed more than a dozen health care providers in the half-century-old Title X family planning program, including nine Planned Parenthood state affiliates, that their funding would be "temporarily withheld" due to "possible violations" of federal civil rights law and President Donald Trump's executive orders.

One Mississippi provider was cited, for example, for posting a statement in 2020, that it later deleted, saying: "Race, income, geography and/or identity should not determine whether a patient has access to high quality family planning care."

HHS vowed to investigate whether the 16 grantees that collectively ran more than 800 clinics deployed "widespread practices across hiring, operations, and patient treatment that unavoidably employ race in a negative manner," or ran programs in a way that "overtly encourages illegal aliens to receive care," which they deemed "taxpayer subsidization of open borders."

Over the following months, the impacted clinics provided materials and responses to the Trump administration arguing that they were not in violation of any federal rules, including around so-called diversity, equity and inclusion practices the administration has condemned.

### N.C. Begins Planning For A \$1 Billion Rural Health Initiative

NORTH CAROLINA HEALTH NEWS – North Carolina health officials are beginning to sketch out plans for turning the first wave of funding from a new federal program into on-the-ground changes for rural communities that have long struggled with provider shortages, hospital closures and limited access to care.

During a virtual town hall on Jan. 16, leaders from the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services discussed the state's recently approved proposal for the Rural Health Transformation Program.

In the federal budget passed last summer by Congress — known as the One Big Beautiful Bill Act — lawmakers cut as much as \$900 billion from Medicaid spending over the coming decade. Under pressure from rural state senators, the bill also included a \$50 billion pool aimed at improving health outcomes in rural communities, which are heavily dependent on Medicaid for health care coverage.

In late December, the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services announced that NC DHHS would receive \$213 million of this health transformation fund in 2026. It will be the first of five annual payments totaling more than \$1 billion, provided the state meets performance benchmarks set by CMS.

Devdutta Sangvai, head of NC DHHS, said the funding represents a "once-a-lifetime opportunity to transform health care in North Carolina."

"Over the next five years, the funding will help us think about how we create sustainable change in these communities where oftentimes access is the biggest problem," he said.

From broad concepts to concrete plans

While the state's 61-page proposal laid out broad strategies for improving rural health outcomes, Deborah Farrington, deputy secretary for health for NC DHHS, said much of the detailed work lies ahead.

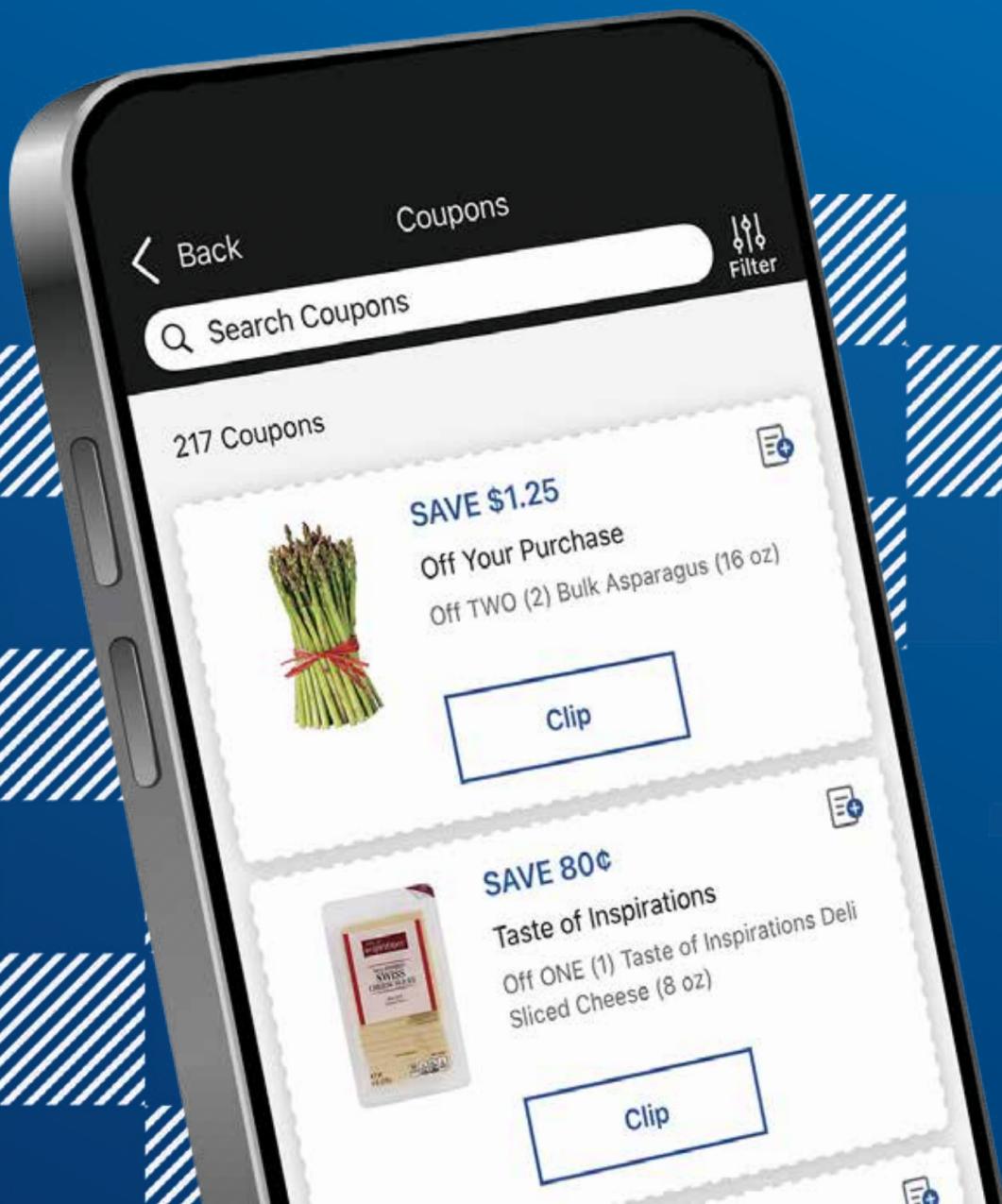
"This is a cooperative agreement with CMS that will require ongoing and substantial federal involvement," Farrington said during the town hall. "We wrote our application in a way that was quite responsive to the federal requirements, but in some cases that meant that we had to describe what we were going to do at a very high level."

Over the coming months, the department plans to translate those concepts into "accountable strategies with clear timelines, clear responsibilities and measurable milestones," she said.

At the center of the state's plan are six interlinked initiatives focused on expanding primary and preventive care, integrating behavioral health servic-

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# Arts & Culture

## Remembering The Battle Of Hayes Pond In Maxton, NC

By Jheri Hardaway

Staff Writer

Maxton, NC - History often remembers the Ku Klux Klan for the fear they sowed through the South, but in the winter of 1958, near a small body of water in Maxton, North Carolina, they encountered something they didn't expect: a community that refused to be afraid. On January 18, 1958, the "Battle of Hayes Pond" became a landmark moment in North Carolina history—a night when the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina stood their ground and sent a clear message that their "place" in the racial order was exactly where they chose to be. Throughout 1957 and early 1958, the air in Robeson County was thick with tension. The area's population was almost evenly divided among Lumbee Indians, African Americans, and Whites. Seeking to exploit these lines, South Carolina Grand Dragon James "Catfish" Cole began organizing Klan rallies to enforce a strict racial hierarchy.

The intimidation was personal. On January 13, 1958, just five days before the infamous rally, Klans-

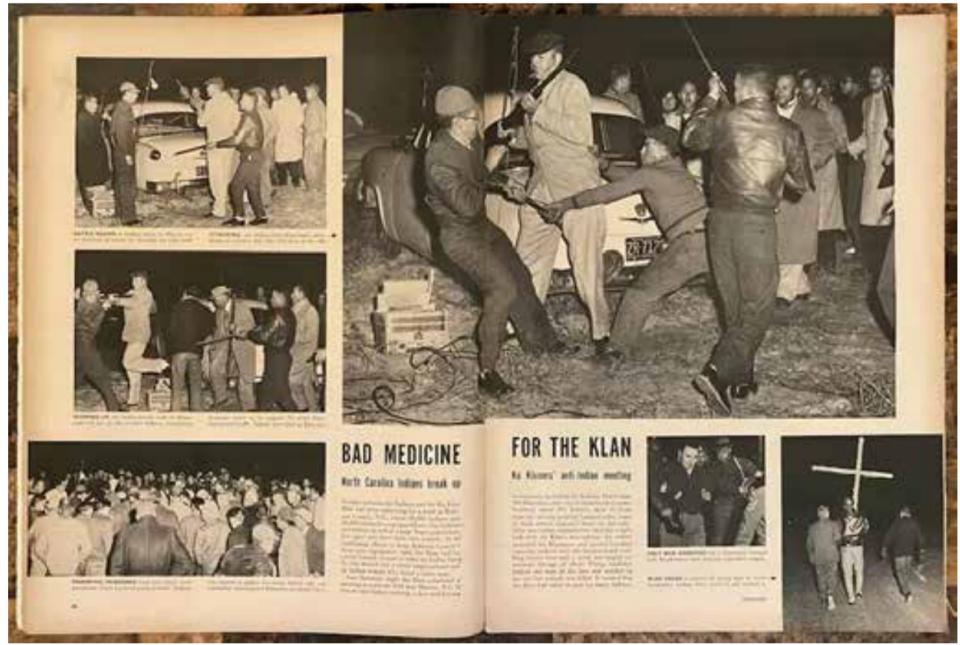
men burned a cross at the home of a Lumbee woman. Cole boasted that his upcoming rally at Hayes Pond would feature 5,000 heavily armed Klansmen. His goal was simple and sinister: to "remind" the Lumbee of their place. For those living in Maxton, the weekly Klan parades were a psychological assault. Lillie McKoy, a former mayor of Maxton, recalls watching the dome lights of seven or eight cars burning through the night as they rolled up US 74. "They wanted you to see them," she noted. "They wanted you to be afraid."

But the Klan miscalculated. They picked a fight with a people whose roots in Robeson County stretched back to the early 18th century—a people who had established their own school systems (now UNC Pembroke) and who had been recognized as a tribe by the state of North Carolina since 1885.

When the night of January 18th 1958, arrived, Cole didn't find 5,000 Klansmen. Instead, he found barely 50 followers huddled around a single lightbulb and a cross that refused to ignite in the damp air. He encountered a force of hundreds of Lumbee men, many of whom were veterans

of World War II and the Korean War, who were skilled in the art of defense. As the Klan attempted to start their rally, the Lumbee moved in. A single shot shattered the Klan's lone lightbulb, plunging the field into darkness. In the ensuing chaos, the "heavily armed" Klansmen did not stand their ground. They fled into the swamps, leaving behind their robes, their banners, and their Grand Dragon, James Cole, who was later prosecuted for inciting a riot.

Today, the Lumbee Tribe remains the largest tribe in North Carolina and the largest east of the Mississippi River, with over 40,000 members. While they gained federal recognition through the Lumbee Act of 1956, the fight for full federal benefits continues to this day and has achieved great strides in recent weeks. The Battle of Hayes Pond serves as a powerful reminder for all of us that freedom requires a collective refusal to be intimidated. Let us look to the courage shown at Hayes Pond as a story of unity over divisiveness, and a testament to what happens when a community decides that their "place" is one of dignity, strength, and mutual respect.



## A Civil War Leader, Politician, Entrepreneur And Inventor

By Jordan Meadows

Staff Writer

Parker David Robbins emerged from the rigid racial order of antebellum North Carolina to become one of the most prominent Black public figures the state produced during and after the Civil War.

Born around 1834 in Bertie County, Robbins was a free person of color of mixed African and Native American ancestry. At a time when North Carolina law prohibited the education of Black people, Robbins was nevertheless literate, apparently educated through private means. By 1860 he stood out among more than 30,000 free Black North Carolinians as a landowner, holding a 102-acre farm, and as a skilled carpenter and mechanic who supported himself through his trade.

The outbreak of the Civil War

opened a new path. In 1863, as federal authorities began recruiting African Americans into the United States Colored Troops, Robbins traveled to Norfolk and Fort Monroe, Virginia, because North Carolina offered no mounted Black units. On January 1, 1864, he and his younger brother Augustus enlisted in the 2nd United States Colored Cavalry Regiment.

Black soldiers were barred from commissioned officer ranks, with sergeant major representing the highest position available, yet Robbins advanced from private to sergeant major in just ten days. His rapid promotion reflected both his leadership and his reputation as a respected mechanic. He became one of only a handful of North Carolinians of color to reach that rank during the war, while Augustus also advanced, eventually serving as quartermaster



sergeant of the regiment.

Robbins remained with the 2nd U.S. Colored Cavalry through the remainder of the conflict, taking part in operations across southeastern

Virginia and northeastern North Carolina. When the fighting ended, the regiment stayed in federal service and was sent to the U.S.-Mexico border, where American troops monitored the French intervention in Mexico. Robbins's military service concluded in Texas in February 1866, when the unit was officially discharged, and he returned home, having spent nearly three years in uniform and later receiving a federal pension for that service.

Back in Bertie County, Robbins moved quickly into public life during Reconstruction. In 1868 he was selected as a delegate to North Carolina's constitutional convention, one of fifteen Black men chosen to help rewrite the state's governing document. That same year county voters elected him to the North Carolina House of Representatives, where he served during the 1869-1870 ses-

sions, and he was elected again for the 1870-1872 legislature.

Among North Carolinians who served in the United States Colored Troops, Robbins ranked among the highest to hold state office.

Following his legislative service, Robbins relocated to Hertford County, where he was appointed postmaster of the town of Harrellsville. His career then took another turn in 1877, as Reconstruction waned, when he resigned that post and moved to Duplin County. There he expanded his activities as a businessman and builder, owning and operating a sawmill and cotton gin and constructing homes in the community of Magnolia. He also built and piloted the steamboat Saint Peter, running it for years along the Northeast Cape Fear River and linking rural communities to regional markets.

Drawing on his background as a

mechanic, he secured United States patents in the mid-1870s for a cotton cultivator and for saw-sharpening machinery, adding him to the small number of African American patentees of the era. He remained active in local Union veterans' organizations while continuing his business ventures in Duplin County, where he lived for roughly four decades.

Robbins died in Magnolia on November 1, 1917, and was buried in Duplin County. Long after his death, his likeness became widely circulated, and his life story entered textbooks and museum exhibits as interest in Black history expanded in the late twentieth century. In recent years, residents of Duplin County have worked to secure broader state and national recognition for a man whose life connected military service, political leadership, entrepreneurship, and invention.

## Harnett County NAACP Celebrates Dr. King With The Chemistry of Courage: Dr. Ben Chavis on "Melting the Ice"

By Jheri Hardaway

Staff Writer

Dunn, NC - In a room where history and hope sat side-by-side, Dr. Benjamin Chavis didn't just give a speech; he delivered a roadmap for the modern movement. Standing before a crowd in Dunn, NC the man who once wore the "black on black" uniform of 1960s militancy spoke with the seasoned grace of a minister, a scientist, and a survivor of one of North Carolina's most infamous injustices. His impactful words came from his lifetime of experience organizing across North Carolina's 100 counties beginning with the NAACP at the age of 12 in Granville County. At 14, Dr. Chavis became the state-

wide coordinator for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

Dr. Chavis shared a deeply personal turning point that many in the audience had never heard. In 1968, he was a chemistry major at UNC, focused on a future in medicine alongside his sister. Everything changed on April 4th. "On the day Dr. King was killed... I accepted my calling to the Lord," Chavis reflected. He traded the laboratory for the pulpit and the front lines, eventually being sent by the United Church of Christ to Wilmington in 1971 to help students protesting the slow pace of school integration.

The Wilmington Ten left a legacy of resilience. Dr. Chavis spoke somberly about the "Wilmington Ten"—the

group of nine young men and one woman falsely accused and sentenced to a combined 282 years in prison. Chavis himself was just 23 at the time. He described the intimidation tactics used by the state, including being marched out in waist chains and ankle irons to instill fear in the community. However, the plan backfired. "When they chained us up that way, the movement became known all over the world," he said. It took 40 years for the state to officially grant a "Pardon of Innocence," a moment Chavis views not with bitterness, but as a lesson in steadfastness.

Chavis introduced a powerful metaphor for 2026: Melting the Ice. While a nod to immigration enforcement (ICE), his meaning went deeper, call-

ing for the melting of "icy" hearts in the White House and the North Carolina Legislature. He criticized recent laws aimed at restricting voting access and healthcare, reminding the audience that "human race" is the only race that matters. He reminded us that "bitterness only distorts the beholder" and that we must remember "to be optimistic, full of faith and hope, to feel the progress on how far we've come. We cannot afford a generation gap in our movement." The words freedom, justice, and equality continued to circulate as we hung on to every story and experience Dr. Chavis shared. This event was a solid MLK Day reminder that we must reflect, learn, and commit ourselves to a brighter tomorrow for all people.



## Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebrations Across The Triangle

By Jordan Meadows

Staff Writer

Across the Triangle, communities came together throughout the weekend and into Monday to honor the life of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., marking the federal holiday with events centered on service and culture.

The weekend culminated Monday morning in Durham with the 45th annual Interfaith Prayer Breakfast, welcoming hundreds of visitors to the Sheraton Imperial Hotel. The longstanding tradition brought together faith leaders, community advocates and residents from across the region.

The 2026 theme, "Mission Possible: The Power of Justice and Radical Love," featured keynote speaker Rev. Jemond Taylor, rector of Saint Ambrose Episcopal Church

in Raleigh. Taylor, who grew up in Louisburg and attended Saint Matthias' Episcopal Church, spoke on the moral urgency of faith-driven justice. The program was hosted by WRAL anchor Gerald Owens and emphasized interfaith collaboration as a pathway to lasting social change.

In Raleigh, hundreds of families, activists and elected officials filled the streets for the city's 46th annual Martin Luther King Jr. Day March. Beginning outside the historic State Capitol, participants marched down Fayetteville Street, singing hymns such as "Amazing Grace" and "This Little Light of Mine," while holding signs quoting King's teachings.

The procession ended at the Martin Marietta Center for the Performing Arts, where an ecumenical service honored King's life and message. Many marchers reflected on the current political climate, describ-



ing it as divisive and challenging, and looked to King's words for guidance and hope. U.S. Rep. Deborah Ross also attended.

Durham's observance continued Monday afternoon with a focus on service and literacy at Book Harvest's 15th Annual Dream Big Book Drive at Boxyard RTP. Held in honor of Dr. King's legacy, Dream Big is the organization's largest event of the year and reflects its mission to ensure every child has access to books and the opportunity to read. The event blended a book drive, volunteer opportunities, a community partner fair and a festival atmosphere, drawing families and supporters from across the Triangle. Book Harvest accepted new and gently used children's books for ages 0 to 18, with a special need for board books, picture books, and Spanish and bilingual titles.

Community engagement also extended through partnerships with organizations such as Love Durham and members of the Divine Nine.

The weekend's celebrations concluded with cultural expression in Cary at the Arts Center, where the 2026 Dreamfest Cultural Celebration, themed "The Beloved Community: Honoring Dignity, Uplifting Humanity," brought together entertainment and inspiration.

The event featured keynote speaker Rev. Jerome Gay Jr., senior pastor of Vision Church RDU, alongside performances by gospel recording artist CoCo McMillan, Pure Life Theater, the Deep River Singers, spoken word artist and rapper Maestra The Emcee, Blue Sands Entertainment's string ensemble, the Enloe Magnet High Dance Collective, and the Black & Belonging Youth Ensemble.



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# Community

## Budget Stalemate Contributes To 'Dire' Conditions In NC Prisons, Says Agency

By Lynn Bonner

NC Newsline

The head of North Carolina's prison system sounded the alarm at a legislative committee meeting Thursday about dangerous conditions created by lack of staff, a problem exacerbated by the failure of state lawmakers to approve raises for correctional workers.

"Our staffing situation is dire and it's dangerous," said Leslie Cooley Dismukes, secretary of the state Department of Adult Correction. "Dangerous to my staff, dangerous to the

people in my custody, and dangerous to the people of North Carolina."

The state doesn't pay enough to attract enough correctional officers, she said.

Starting pay for correctional officers in North Carolina is the second-lowest in the nation at \$37,621 a year, Dismukes told the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Justice & Public Safety. The average starting salary in southern states is \$45,594. Nationwide, the average starting salary is \$52,142.

"If we do not address these issues, something bad will happen," she

said. "It is not a question of 'if,' it's a question of 'when.'"

Staff shortages were at the root of the deadly inmate escape attempt at Pasquotank Correctional Center in 2017 where four staff members were murdered. A federal report said understaffing at the prison was so bad that workers cut corners with safety procedures.

All the prisons were better staffed in 2017 than they are today, Dismukes said after the meeting.

"It just takes one bad thing to happen that detrimentally affects someone's life, someone's health," she

said.

Officers have been assaulted, but fortunately, none have been killed recently, Dismukes said.

"But it can happen," she added. "It can particularly happen when you do not have enough people to maintain the order of the prison, and that's where we're operating right now. So, it is really dangerous."

Gov. Josh Stein proposed 6.5% pay increases for correctional officers in the budget he proposed last year. The state Senate approved salary

(See PRISONS, P. 9)



By Judykay Jefferson

### THE GOLDEN YEARS

FAITH IN ACTION

Today, joined by a team of volunteers, I started 2026 MLK Day at 6am, cooking breakfast at Raleigh Rescue Mission. As you may know, this isn't a new thing for me. This is my favorite thing. As a part of Elevation Church's Outreach team, I harass friends, family, and church folks monthly to help us prepare and serve breakfast to the men, women and children who call Raleigh Rescue Mission home. I've been doing it since 2018, and it never gets old.

I had seven folks, some with whom I have never served, some who join me monthly, arrive before sun-up to as the banner at church says, "See What God Can Do Through Us." This morning, we were able to prepare and serve a pretty tasty meal and share a few moments with the program participants who are there to change their lives. Here's an important thing to understand, the residents of the Raleigh Rescue Mission are not homeless. They have a home. They have a safe place and people invested in their success. Those who complete the program will have major life accomplishments to list. They will have a testimony of God's grace and mercy. They will finish with a plan, skills honed to carry out that plan, and the knowledge that they aren't facing the world alone.

Surely there will be those who are not able to complete the program. Some will leave, only to beg to be allowed to return. Some will persevere to the end and continue down the road to self-sufficiency and trust in God. Others will not be able to hush the sounds of evil, telling them they are not worthy of success, they are too far gone for God's love, or that some people were just born to lose.

When we encounter the program participants, it's impossible to say who will take full advantage of this life-changing opportunity and who won't. It's not ours to judge. For us, these are people with whom we have intersected early one morning. For some, it's the beginning of their day. For other, the end. I want to offer that first meal, spiced with love, served with a smile and direct eye contact. If possible, I hope we can share a laugh. By the time the women and children eat, we're winding down. I like to walk into the dining room and talk with the kids. We usually can give an extra juice bottle or cinnamon roll. These are the moments when I feel the warmth of God's gaze, hear the flutter of angel wings. More than any other place, I experience His presence as we serve His children.

I am truly thankful to my church for sharing this with me. I have gained so much in these eight years. Mostly, I have witnessed faith in action. I had a man who knew I volunteered often ask why the church didn't pay me. It took all I had not to say some very un-God-like things in response until I realized it wasn't a far-fetched question. For those who take for granted the blessings they have received in life, the idea of cooking and serving for free may seem crazy. That's the glory of God's grace. Once you can recognize the many, mini miracles that God performs in our lives daily, volunteering to serve others seems like the very least we can do.

I'm pretty good at seeing and acknowledging miracles. I made a commitment to thanking God for His blessings, big and small, and sharing my testimony with others without fear or embarrassment. So, here's one of the BIGGEST miracles ever: If you know anything about me, you know I've been dealing with dental challenges for the past 3 or so years. Just this week, I answered a phone call on my way to work, later than usual. It was a dentist I saw in November for a screening for implants. The consultant had been trying to get me into a program they have that drastically reduces the cost. She called to see if I was still interested, explaining that she had to know immediately. This dentist is in Rocky Mount. I'm in Wake Forest. I go to Rocky Mount for the pre-and post-op visit but the surgery will be in WAKE FOREST! And the financial side of it is so do-able! This is without a doubt a miracle. A major miracle. A life-changing miracle. I had given up, but God...

Standing at the service window this morning, I felt responsible for dishing out more than cinnamon rolls and hash browns. I was brimming over with joy, gratitude, and faith. That's what I wanted most to share.

## Tariffs Could Wipe Out Nearly A Third Of NC Farm Income, New Report Says

NC Newsline—Retaliatory tariffs could have harsh economic consequences for North Carolina's agricultural sector, according to a new report from the John Locke Foundation.

Over the past year, President Donald Trump has raised tariffs on foreign imports to the U.S. Major trade partners like the European Union, China and Canada imposed retaliatory tariffs in response, leading to trade wars and increased prices across the board.

"How Tariffs Threaten North Carolina Agriculture: NC Farmers at Risk," authored by Jeffrey Dorfman at North Carolina State University, estimates the tariffs could cost the state's farmers about \$695 million.

This figure represents roughly a third of average net farm income in

North Carolina.

"Such a contraction would lead to a total of roughly 8,000 lost jobs, both directly in the agriculture industry along with the ripple effects from that lost revenue," Dorfman wrote. "The job losses would be concentrated in North Carolina's rural communities."

Other indirect effects on the state's rural economy would result in an additional \$1.2 billion in estimated revenue losses, Dorfman wrote. This brings the potential total economic losses as a result of trade policy retaliation to \$1.9 billion, which is more than 2% of North Carolina's gross state product.

Donald Bryson, CEO of the Locke Foundation, a free-market think tank, said the organization commis-

sioned the study because it has become increasingly concerned about the effect of recent agricultural policies on the state's food supply chain.

"We are an export-dependent state," he said. "Agriculture is the largest sector of North Carolina's economy, and we wanted to know how this is going to be affected by the tariff regime."

North Carolina Agriculture Commissioner Steve Troxler said tariffs are often difficult to quantify because a lot depends on short-term versus long-term impacts.

Troxler said they're usually used as bargaining tools.

"If tariffs result in a more open market, that can be beneficial in the long term, but when it gets into a trade war, it does do harm in the

short term," Troxler said in a statement to NC Newsline. "It's hard to paint tariffs with just one paintbrush."

North Carolina ranks 15th in the country for exports and 13th for imports by dollar value. It's also eighth for total gross farm sales of crops and livestock — especially poultry and hogs.

Farmers in the state have a limited set of options for minimizing damage from agricultural exports, Dorfman wrote. These include looking for new markets and focusing on domestic trade.

"Still, while all these are worth pursuing, they are not likely to be sufficient — especially in the short run — to mitigate the risks North Carolina farmers currently face from a potentially damaging tariff regime," the report read.

The U.S. exported \$24.5 billion worth of soybeans in 2024, with China, Mexico, and the EU as the top markets. North Carolina contributes heavily to soybean production.

Soybeans are the U.S.'s top agricultural export, but North Carolina soybeans are rarely exported; instead, they are used domestically to feed local pigs, chickens and turkeys.

Although the state's soybeans go almost exclusively to animal feed, they are not protected from the risks of trade policy retaliation, Dorfman wrote. China chose not to buy American soybeans for much of 2025, causing the domestic supply of soybeans to soar and lowering their price in U.S. markets.

## Citizen Spotlight: Reverend John A. McKoy, A Witness to History

By Jheri Hardaway

Staff Writer

Reverend John A. McKoy is working to strengthen the bridge between history and the next generation. In a room filled with the energy of both the elders who paved the way and the youth who carry the future, one voice stood out at the Dunn, NC, Martin Luther King Jr. birthday celebration, a voice that echoes with 78 years of wisdom, 62 years of activism, and the unshakable resolve of a Vietnam veteran.

Our featured citizen shared a harrowing yet triumphant journey through the history of Dunn, North Carolina, reminding us that the freedoms we enjoy today were bought with incredible discipline and faith. Reflecting on a life of "good living," Reverend John spoke candidly about the importance of self-respect. From quitting smoking and drinking cold turkey to never touching illegal drugs, he serves as a living testament to the power of the mind. "Don't tell me that you can't do it," he told the crowd. "You can do it." His message to the young men of the community was clear: interest must be shifted away from the streets and back toward participation and progress.

Reverend John recounted the days of the Dunn Chapel Free Will Baptist Church being the hub of the movement under Reverend Dr. Felder, the only local pastor at the time with the courage to lead the civil rights charge openly.

The stories shared were a sobering reminder of the cost of equality, mentioning that demonstrators were once locked in a jail cell while fire



engines were cranked below, filling the space with choking exhaust fumes. Despite being punched, spat upon, and called racial slurs during boycotts at local grocery stores and bakeries, Rev John stayed committed to nonviolence. "I remembered what Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. told us to do. He told us to be non-violent."

He credited local mentors like Mr. C.C. Ray, who taught him to be a gentleman, and Mr. Graham Henry, a businessman who showed kindness and fairness when "times were tough." Sixty-two years ago, he was one of 58 residents who boarded a bus from Dunn to Washington, D.C. He stood among the 250,000 people who heard Dr. King declare, "I have a dream." He noted a striking com-

parison to modern times: despite the massive crowd in 1963, there was not a single arrest, no violence, and no chaos—only a unified, disciplined demand for justice.

"We carried the ball up to this point. Somebody has got to relieve us. You all have to get active." As he looked out at the young people in the audience, Reverend John didn't just see a crowd; he saw the next leg of the relay. His call to action for the youth of Dunn is simple but profound: stay in school, stay out of trouble, join organizations like the NAACP, and never forget that you are a part of history. His final words to us, Romans 12:18 — "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men."



"The Wendell Top Ladies & Top Teens started the New Year with a Complete Day of Community Service 19Jan2026, volunteering to serve during The Annual MLK Breakfast at The Riley Hill Baptist Church in Wendell, NC. The group then headed to The Rolesville Fire Department to participate in The TLOD Pink & Blue Day, by donating to The First Responders; providing appreciation kits & thanking them for their service. The Responders provided a tour of the Station & all the trucks. They took the time to answer questions & to give the Teens an insight into what occurs during Fire & Medical Emergency Calls. The Day was concluded by providing support to The National TTA President, Teen Noah Guilford, who cited experts from The "I Have a Dream" speech by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. during The Interfaith Community Service Program in Kingthdale, NC. It was A Full Fun-filled Day of Service to the Community by The Wendell Top Ladies & Top Teens of America". Below are pictures of some of the participants.

## \$1B Rural Health — CONT. FROM PG 5

es into primary care, strengthening the rural health workforce, advancing value-based payment models and increasing the use of technology and data. Farrington said the initiatives "align with the federal requirements and goals" of the program.

Together, the initiatives are intended to address persistent disparities among rural North Carolinians — including higher rates of chronic disease, gaps in maternal and infant care, workforce shortages and limited access to digital health services.

Rural residents experience diabetes rates roughly 17 percent higher than urban communities, Farrington noted, and rural areas are more likely to be designated maternal care deserts, with higher pregnancy-related mortality and infant death rates.

At the same time, years of hospital closures and provider vacancies have strained access to care, while broadband gaps and limited digital literacy have made it harder for rural residents to take advantage of telehealth options.

Regional hubs and tight timelines

One of the most closely watched components of the plan is the creation of regional "ROOTS" hubs. Short for Rural Organizations Orchestrating Transformation for Sustainability, the hubs will serve as locally governed networks that coordinate care and community-based interventions, according to Farrington.

Each hub will bring together hospitals, primary care practices, behavioral health providers, EMS agencies, local health departments and other partners under a shared regional structure. The goal is to replace the fragmented patchwork of services that rural residents often struggle to navigate with a more coordinated system tailored to local needs.

Maggie Sauer, director of the Office of Rural Health at NC DHHS, said the hubs will be organized around the state's six Medicaid Standard Plan regions, which divide North Carolina into large, multi-county areas used to administer managed care. Those regions broadly cover the western mountains, the Piedmont Triad, the greater Charlotte area, the Triangle, the northeastern part of the state and southeastern North Carolina.

The department expects to launch



an application process for entities that will be tapped to lead the hubs within the next three months, with selections and onboarding taking place between April and October.

"It will be important for us to establish clear criteria to govern those partnerships and sustainability," Sauer said.

Before any funding can flow, however, the state faces a tight set of near-term deadlines. NC DHHS must submit a revised year-one budget to CMS by Jan. 30 and stand up a dedicated Rural Health Transformation office within the department by the end of March.

Funds won't supplant Medicaid cuts

Gov. Josh Stein said the Rural Health Transformation funding offers a rare chance to expand access, stabilize rural providers and improve care delivery for communities that have historically been underserved.

However, he noted that the same federal budget law that created the program is also expected to reduce Medicaid funding in North Carolina by \$50 billion over the next decade.

State health officials have warned that those reductions could place added financial strain on hospitals, clinics and safety-net providers — particularly in rural areas, where Medicaid-heavy margins are already thin.

Cuts to the program could limit access to preventive care, behavioral health services and maternal health care, potentially undercutting some

of the gains the transformation program is designed to achieve.

"It is without doubt that these cuts will inevitably hit rural communities hard," Stein said. "My team and I will continue to urge the Congress to do right by the millions of North Carolinians by redressing these devastating cuts to Medicaid."

One of the biggest threats is a new federal work requirement for Medicaid.

The requirement, set to take effect on Jan. 1, 2027, will force local and county departments of social services to regularly verify that "able-bodied" beneficiaries are working, volunteering or attending school for at least 80 hours a month.

Melanie Bush, assistant secretary for NC Medicaid, recently told lawmakers that the state must find a way to cover the high administrative costs associated with the requirement. She anticipates North Carolina will need millions more each quarter to pay for additional county staff, system upgrades, vendor contracts and member outreach.

All this in an environment where members of the legislature have been unable to agree on a state budget in the past year.

Lawmakers question "rural" definition

During a Jan. 13 meeting of the state General Assembly's Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Health and Human Services, lawmakers voiced concerns about how the program was designed and how the money will ultimately be spent.

# Church

## Building On A Legacy Of Nonviolent Faith-Based Activism

CAROLINA PUBLIC PRESS – Susannah Tuttle is a realist: whatever North Carolina faith activist groups have been doing hasn't been working. Tuttle, North Carolina Council of Churches eco-justice connection director, never thought it would get this bad. Christian nationalists in the top circles of power. A conservative overhaul of the federal government guided by Project 2025. Minnesota ICE protests turning violent.

Monday is Martin Luther King Jr. Day, a celebration of a faith activist who helped lead the modern civil rights movement with nonviolent resistance. The state's faith activist groups are marking this anniversary by considering how to build a similar movement in a different age, one where social media, near-unlimited campaign money and political polarization may obscure their message.

It's a long game, Tuttle said. Almost everything needs to change. However, a few starting blocks may coalesce around another holiday, Valentine's Day.

Locally, the NC Council of Churches is helping voters send Valentines to state lawmakers, with the hopes of forming a relationship built upon mutual respect. From Feb. 11 to 14, a group led by Repairers of the Breach President Rev. William J. Barber II will walk from Wilson to Raleigh in the "This is Our Selma" march, culminating in a Raleigh rally. Nationally, a group of Buddhists travelling 2,300 miles from Texas to Washington D.C. on a Walk for Peace will complete their journey around the holiday.

"Just knowing that that's happening feels magical," Tuttle said. "It's a different way of doing something." Faith helping build moral courage

In the 2012 elections, Republicans won both chambers of the North Carolina legislature and the governor's office. Not long after, the united government began passing a wave of conservative legislation including abortion restrictions, social program cuts and a voter ID law.

Then-NAACP leader Barber launched a statewide Moral Monday



movement in response. Each week, masses of North Carolinians entered the legislative building to pray, sing and chant during sessions. Many were arrested for trespassing after refusing to leave.

Overall, the movement drew hundreds of thousands of peaceful protesters. Ever since, Barber's faith group, Repairers of the Breach, has been a visible force in North Carolina politics.

On a different, much more recent Monday, about a dozen clergy and faith leaders sang "This Little Light of Mine" outside the North Carolina General Assembly. In between speeches about the impact of legislative inaction on healthcare, education and voting rights, they prayed and sang.

They were led by Rev. Floyd Wicker, founder of the People's Fellowship of North Carolina. The group launched in 2021 with a vigil for peace and nonviolence in light of the pandemic and recent police shootings of Black Americans.

Wicker said organizing the event was exhausting. It took six meetings. Nobody showed up to the first one. One person came to the second. Five people made it to the third meeting.

"I feel like I'm having to persuade you to advocate for people in your community when I'm thinking, this is a part of the Bible," Wicker said. "This is a part of faith."

Not everyone understands why it's so important for people of faith to protest, to hold public prayer or write to lawmakers, Wicker said. Some people don't factor that into their faith experience. But it's "theological," he said. It's the outward expression of an internal faith.

"I come from a more prophetic tradition where the spiritual and the political, the social, the economic, all of those are integrated, and they're not compartmentalized," he said.

Wicker wants to return to the energy of 2013. It will require more public action, but above all else, moral courage.

"I think people of faith have to come out of their silos; they have to come out of their temples and churches," he said. "To follow in the footsteps of Jesus and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is going to require courage."

Tuttle wholeheartedly agrees. People of faith might volunteer to pack backpacks every week so kids have something to eat at lunch, for example,



but there's a need for a greater level of advocacy in the places where decisions are made.

"That's very charitable," she said. "But is that creating transformational change in the community, is that solving the hunger issue?" Building relationships

State legislators are no stranger to protests and marches. But they mostly look the other way. After all, nobody wants to listen to someone who's yelling at them.

"I have spent the majority of my life protesting, and I stand firm that whatever we've been doing isn't working," Tuttle said.

But not all hope is lost. Tuttle is working on a new approach: building mutually respectful, genuine

relationships with lawmakers. They already have an in: many lawmakers are people of faith. While groups like the NC Council of Churches tend to align with secular progressive groups, they come at it from a different angle, Tuttle said. Their values are grounded in Scripture.

Recently, she hosted a webinar on advocacy. About 80 people showed up. She advised attendees to invite their representatives to their congregations' events and ask for meetings during the short session to get to know them on a human level.

"If we just go in and talk about the policies with elected officials and decision makers, we're not getting to the source of the core values of why they're making the decisions that they

are," she said.

Voters who build relationships with their lawmakers are more likely to be heard, or at the very least, get an explanation when a lawmaker votes against their preference.

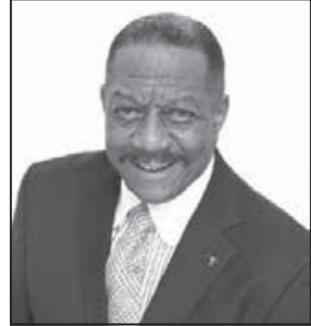
Wicker doesn't believe lawmakers are fully following their faiths, particularly the commandment to love their neighbor. If they were, he said they wouldn't pass legislation cutting SNAP or Medicaid, for example. "The disconnect is power, greed, racism and capitalism," he said. "Those are hard things to fight."

Wicker sees his job as less about influencing politicians and more about building a broader social consciousness that will eventually infiltrate politics.

But for now, both Tuttle and Wicker are thinking about the Buddhist monks. Tuttle watches their progress every day; while they aren't calling it faith-based advocacy, she said walking that far in the cold and rain for peace is a political statement in itself. It's also proof of concept for Wicker. The monks aren't saying much. They're not protesting or calling for any policy in particular. But still, they've drawn people's interest and attention with their presence alone, he said.

"If we build capacity, we're building truth and unity and solidarity, and our presence will speak, because we can't match lawlessness," Wicker said. "We can't match artillery or weaponry. We can't fight racism and poverty with those weapons — we've got to have a much stronger weapon, and that weapon is nonviolence."

## SERMON of the WEEK



### The 33rd 100 Men, Women, and Youth for Christ – 2026 A Special People With Special Promises

Scripture: "We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose." — Romans 8:28 (KJV)

Theme: We Know God Will Turn Things Around

The Mistress of Ceremony was Mrs. Peggy Tatum, Publisher of TCP Magazine, and the Master of Ceremony was Superior Court Judge Vince Rozier.

The Lincoln Park Male Chorus opened the program with Deacon Curtis Boykin leading the song, "The Doors of Progress," followed by Scripture read by Evangelist Selena Hunter and prayer by Elder Demetrius Hunter. Deacon Chairman Harvey Horton then extended a warm

welcome.

Next, Bro. Randy Shepard and the Martin Luther King Jr. Children's Choir presented three uplifting songs that had the entire congregation on their feet. We also want to thank Bro. Randy Shepard for 40 years of dedicated service to the children and youth of Raleigh, Wake County, and North Carolina. His outstanding service and commitment to the Martin Luther King Jr. Children's Choir has been greatly appreciated. The music he and this outstanding choir have provided over the years has been a blessing and inspiration to us all.

My daughter, Takara Morris, was a member of this wonderful choir when she was about nine years old, and you made my family—as well as many other families—happy as we witnessed the generations following us, perform and sing to the glory of the Lord. May God continue to bless you and keep this choir in His loving care.

Next, the highly gifted and anointed Kimberly Michelle, Violinist, played the first of her two selections. Furthermore, let me add that she was so great until my 94-year-old mother, Margaret Ratcliff, texted me the next morning and wrote, "Ain't nobody, nowhere can play a violin liked that but Michelle!"

Our guest speakers (three minutes each) spoke with spiritual wisdom and intellect that even a child could understand.

• City: The Honorable City Councilman Corey Branch & Mrs.

- County: The Honorable Commissioner Donald Mial & Mrs. Donna Mial
- State: The Honorable N.C. Senator Dan Blue & Mrs. Edna E. Blue
- School: Attorney Elwood Becton & Mrs. Diane Becton
- Churches: The Honorable Judge Damion McCullers & Mrs. Bene' McCullers
- Community: The Honorable Justice Michael Morgan (Retired), Supreme Court of N.C., & Mrs. Audrey Morgan
- Lastly, The Honorable Judge Craig Croom, representing his wife, Attorney Claudia C. Croom, spoke about our youth and what willing people living in this world can do—collectively, locally, and nationally—to help turn things around positively for youth of all ages and races or nationalities.

This awesome program reminded and assured us that we are all special in the eyesight of God, and that we can all be recipients of His promises when we put our faith, trust, and hope in Christ.

After the remarks and before the Benediction, Kimberly Michelle, Violinist, blessed us—and my Mom—one more time. In a second text, Mom said, "Now! That's playing a violin! Ain't NOBODY can beat that!"

This powerful program was presented at Lincoln Park Holiness Church on Sunday, January 18, 2026, Bishop-Elect William "Billy" Eli Ratcliff, Pastor

## Practical Biblical Principles

### Who Stirred Up the Water?

Read: John 5:1-15

By John L. Caldwell, Pastor  
New Jerusalem Baptist Cathedral  
Jesus was on His way to a Jewish feast in Jerusalem. He arrived at the temple of worship where the Jews celebrated their religious feast and ceremonies. Thousands of Jews past their way to the temple just as Jesus did. Enroute to the temple Jesus passed by a poor man who had been lame for more than thirty-eight years.

Just inside the Sheep Gate before one enters the temple complex, there is a pool called Bethesda, which means "house of mercy." The sheep gate is where the lambs entered which were to be prepared for the temple daily sacrifices. Jesus entered through this gate.

The pool having five porches were crowded with a great multitude of impotent and sick people, the blind, paralyzed, the lamed all waiting for the movement of the water. There was the traditional belief among these sick people that an Angel would come down annually and stir up the water and the first to get into the pool would be healed. It was this belief which would cause the overflow of sick people to gather at the pool at festival time. Being that such sick folk were not allowed to enter the temple, this was their gathering place, the pool of Bethesda. The cold ritual ceremonies held in the temple had no appetite for those who needed healing.

There was a belief that the Romans built this pool as a part of their healing ceremonies, There lies the pagan aspect of this pool, which may not be true being the Old Testament mentions this pool before the Romans occupied Jerusalem. Then it was said of the pool that it was fed by underground springs. The springs would periodically erupt and disperse a sediment that apparently had a medicinal effect on those who were bathing. Thus, the belief formed that the pool

had healing powers. And such healing powers only came about when the underground springs erupted. Somehow the belief was formed that an unseen angel would come down and stir up the pool's water. It is strange when we think about God healing only one person at a time could be healed each year. Yet there was never any recorded reaction from the temple priests next door, so to speak.

The belief among the sick was who-soever got in the pool first would be healed. One's timing must be right. Therefore, a man with money around the pool had no better chance of being healed than anyone else. Money did not count at the pool of Bethesda. Money does not count at Calvary.

However, there is a fountain filled with blood. Drawn from Immanuel's veins; And sinners plunged beneath that floor lose all (whatever they may be) their guilty stains.

"Whosoever" stepped in the water according to the traditional belief was made whole of "whatsoever" disease he had. The blind could be healed as quickly as the lame could be healed.

However, such healing would only come on one day and at a certain season. It was an Angel from heaven Who came down and stirred up the water in the pool and left the scene. If this were the case, the Angel came down and passed by the temple ceremonies all together. Could the temple have been that unholy in that the Angel didn't visit the temple as well? It appears that the pool was more holy than the temple and its ceremonies. There is no biblical record of anybody being healed in the pool that day Jesus came to the temple. There was no record that an Angel came down and stirred up the waters on the day that Jesus went into the temple.

Jesus never mentioned anything about an Angel coming down and stirring up the water during His ministry. The take-a-way question is why did Jesus only heal one person out of thousands which were there at the

pool to get healed? Being that the halt and lame could not go into the temple to worship, they made the pool of Bethesda their so-called worship ground. The sick people were trying to make a way out of no-way seeking hope and healing which were not available to them anywhere.

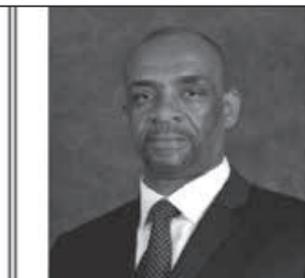
When Jesus healed the lame man outside the temple and continued into the temple without giving attention to others who were also in need of healing, Jesus was making a very powerful statement, "I am the everyday healer and not some contaminated water which only gives out healing once a year. The "take-away" here is that Jesus wanted even the sick people to learn to believe in Him instead of a hopeless belief that the pool water heals.

Jesus was also saying in a spiritual sense, "I will heal 'whosoever' of 'whatsoever' disease, but not 'whensoever' one picks a time for me to heal them. Jesus does not have an appointed time to heal. He heals 24/7/365 days a year.

As far as the temple priests were concerned the lame and paralyzed lying around the pool of Bethesda were a lost cause. One cannot imagine our Lord viewing the sick and lame as a lost cause. "God so love the world that He gave His only begotten Son and whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

When Jesus spoke to the lame man and said, "Do you want to be made well?" The man did not argue with the Lord, but spoke out of his hopelessness, "Lord, I have no one to put me into the water." Jesus then commanded the lame to take up his bed and walk. Here Jesus demonstrated to all who took note how easy it was to be healed by simply believing in Him. How will you be made whole? By believing in an unproven tradition or by having faith in and receiving Jesus Christ as your Lord Savior? Who stirred up the water?





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# Editorials

## Editorial Policy

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

### INVESTING IN OUR FUTURE: A LOOK AT GOVERNOR STEIN'S "PEOPLE FIRST" EDUCATION BUDGET

By Jheri Hardaway

In North Carolina, our biggest asset is our people. Nowhere is that more true than in our public schools. Recently, Governor Josh Stein released a budget proposal that reflects a profound commitment to this principle, recommending an investment of over \$876 million to revitalize the very foundation of our state: our education system.

We cannot expect our students to thrive if we do not respect the professionals who lead them. Governor Stein's budget takes a bold stand by raising starting teacher salaries to the highest in the Southeast. For our veteran teachers, who have stood by our children through every challenge, the budget proposes an average 10.6% pay increase and reinstates Master's Pay. As an educator myself, I know the sacrifice of buying pencils and paper out of our own pockets. This budget provides a \$300 stipend for school supplies, ensuring that teachers can focus on teaching rather than fundraising for basic classroom needs.

This budget plan focuses on the whole child. It is hard to learn when you are hungry or afraid. Governor Stein's proposal includes: Universal School Breakfast, ensuring no child starts their day on an empty stomach, at no cost to families. Mental Health Support is adding 330 school health personnel, including nurses and counselors, to address the mental health crisis facing our youth. Finally, Safe Learning Environments funding for 330 new School Resource Officers and a \$4 billion school construction bond to repair aging facilities and replace leaking roofs.

In our rural pockets, access to technology is a bridge to the future. This budget ensures every public school student has a device for studying and provides the cybersecurity and broadband infrastructure necessary to keep them safe online. Furthermore, it scales evidence-based literacy instruction into middle grades, recognizing that reading is the cornerstone of all academic success.

The General Assembly's current failure to pass a comprehensive budget is an embarrassment to our state. Passing a budget is a core element of the legislative job description. Governor Stein's proposal is a serious plan for a state that is serious about its future. As I travel through District 12 on my "We the People Listening Tour," I hear your desire for better schools and better pay for our workers. This budget is a major step toward that collective good. It prioritizes the student, empowers the parent, and reveres the teacher. Let's stop playing games with our children's future and start building and progressing gracefully, and together.

### MAMDANI'S FANTASY WORLD OF EQUAL OUTCOME

By Larry Elder

New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani, in his inaugural address, said, "We will replace the frugidity of rugged individualism with the warmth of collectivism."

That sentence captures the essence of socialism: the belief that it is simply unfair that some have more than others. To rectify this, Mamdani proposes taking from those he deems undeserving and giving to those he deems deserving. In other words, life is not only unfair but it's government's job to make it fair — not by guaranteeing equal rights but by promising equal results.

Think tanks on the left, such as the Brookings Institution, and on the right, such as the American Enterprise Institute, pretty much agree on the formula to escape poverty: finish high school, get married before having a child, get a job and keep it until you find another or until you start a business. I would add, avoid the criminal justice system.

Economist Walter Williams, who grew up poor, said, "You're not responsible for the cards you're dealt. But you are responsible for picking them up and playing them to the best of your ability. That is your duty."

Consider the wisdom of a few nonsocialists:

"I have learned that success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has overcome while trying to succeed."

"At Hampton I not only learned that it was not a disgrace to labor, but learned to love labor, not alone for its financial value, but for labor's own sake and for the independence and self-reliance which the ability to do something which the world wants done brings."

"Nothing ever comes to one, that is worth having, except as a result of hard work."

"When a Negro girl learns to cook, to wash dishes, to sew, or write a book, or a Negro boy learns to groom horses, or to grow sweet potatoes, or to produce butter, or to build a house, or to be able to practice medicine, as well or better than someone else, they will be rewarded regardless of race or color. In the long run, the world is going to have the best, and any difference in race, religion, or previous history will not long keep the world from what it wants." — Booker T. Washington, born a slave.

"1. Pay yourself first and save a part of all you earn.  
2. Save at an established institution such as a bank or savings and loan and stay away from loan sharks.  
3. Take no chances with your money.  
4. Never borrow anything that if forced to it, you can't pay back.  
5. Don't get big headed with regular people. If you take care of their needs they will make you big.  
6. Don't have so much pride and wear the same suit for a year or two. It doesn't matter the kind of suit if there is no money in it.  
7. Find a need and fill it. Successful businesses are found on the needs of other people. Keep good books and hire the best people you can find.  
8. Never run around with people that you can't compete with. Stay in your own class.  
9. Once you get money or a reputation for having money people will give you money.  
10. Once you reach a certain bracket it is very difficult not to make more money." — A.G. Gaston, grandson of a slave, 10th-grade education, died at age 103 with an inflation-adjusted net worth of \$250,000,000.

"Hard work wins. You get out of life what you put into it. You can't control outcome, but you are 100% in control of the effort. When things go wrong, ask yourself, 'What could I have done to change the outcome?'"

"No matter how hard you work, how good you are, bad things will happen. How you respond will tell your mother and me if we raised a man." — Randolph Elder, WWII Marine Staff Sergeant, 8th-grade education, died at age 95 with an inflation-adjusted net worth of \$1,500,000.

Mamdani's declaration displays a childlike failure by someone raised in affluence to understand or accept why some have more than others. The vast majority of "the rich" achieved that status through hard work consistently applied over a long period of time. Boring, but true.

"I was fortunate to have Dr. Thelma Cumbo Lennon pass through my life. She was a member of my church and one of my favorite Sunday school teachers. She did more than facilitate lessons. She made them relevant to our lives. Her questions were provocative, and she trusted pre-adolescents to answer from their hearts, not just their heads. Before I truly knew who Martin Luther King Jr. was, beyond his name, she introduced us to him. At the time, she was a fellow student, I believe working on her master's degree, and part of a small group of African American students who met together to share their stories, studies, and ideas. I do not know if they had a speech class together, but they would take turns giving speeches. She said that Martin stood out, as if someone were speaking through him. He would, of course, become a great orator for all of us.

Coretta Scott became his wife, and at that time they both had other plans. She wanted to be a concert singer, and he was a young Baptist minister, like his father, with a congregation in which he could grow. As we now know, God had other plans for them, just as God has plans for all of us. Thelma, as I came to call her, later became an educational consultant with a state department here in Raleigh. I may not remember her official title, but I do remember one of the many things she taught us. We are here for a purpose, and the directions are already inside us. She was one of the first people to share with me the idea that we were created to be exactly who we are. She made such an impression on me that I can still hear her voice calling my name.

I will not list all that Dr. King did to change our world. What stands out to me is that he was willing to say yes to his purpose. He gave up the life he might have chosen in order to obey the call placed on him. He became a household name and a leader, much like the prophets who came before him. He understood Christ and the mission behind Christ's words, and that understanding allowed him to walk his path without fear.

Dr. King was not a perfect man, but he was perfect enough for me to honor. He had a conscience about his leadership. As he reflected on the message he was called to deliver, he studied other leaders, including Gandhi and his commitment to nonviolence. He rejected physical violence against our people, whether in slavery or lynching under Jim Crow, and pledged not to become like the systems he protested. He even denounced the war in Vietnam, while still maintaining relationships with leaders who held different views. When Stokely Carmichael began to chant "Black Power," Dr. King did not agree with the language, but he understood the anger behind it. He was a Christian, Malcolm X was a Muslim, yet they could sit together, debate, and shake hands afterward. I personally believe in nonviolence, and I also believe in the message of Black Power. I do not see those beliefs as contradictions.

Today, I think Dr. King would see our time as a nightmare. We have made progress toward his dream, yet there are forces that want to erase him as an honored American. Donald Trump is the polar opposite of Martin Luther King Jr. In truth, he appears so threatened by King's legacy that, were King alive today, Trump would likely seek to silence him through imprisonment or worse. That has always been his response to



"Get right back in there and tell the doctor to diagnose something a lot less expensive."



*A Different Voice*  
By Dorothy Shaw Thompson

### A DAY FOR A KING

This week, we celebrated the life of a man who could have been a great president, but that was not why he was sent here. To me, he was a prototype of what we are all called to be. I believe each of us is called to become the best version of the role we are meant to play in this experience called life. One person's purpose is not the same as another's, yet each is equally important and shares many of the same essential elements. Most of us do not remember our assignment, except perhaps very young children. But if we are willing and pay attention, we eventually fall into our purpose, do the work we are meant to do, and when finished, go home.

I was fortunate to have Dr. Thelma Cumbo Lennon pass through my life. She was a member of my church and one of my favorite Sunday school teachers. She did more than facilitate lessons. She made them relevant to our lives. Her questions were provocative, and she trusted pre-adolescents to answer from their hearts, not just their heads. Before I truly knew who Martin Luther King Jr. was, beyond his name, she introduced us to him. At the time, she was a fellow student, I believe working on her master's degree, and part of a small group of African American students who met together to share their stories, studies, and ideas. I do not know if they had a speech class together, but they would take turns giving speeches. She said that Martin stood out, as if someone were speaking through him. He would, of course, become a great orator for all of us.

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voices that disturb him. It is striking that he would want to release FBI files on Dr. King while hiding the Epstein files. He knows, and we know, that there is nothing redeeming in his behavior. Beyond his sexual misconduct, his actions consistently reflect contempt for justice and decency. He can charge fees to visit parks on Juneteenth and on the King holiday, and most of us see exactly what that represents.

He may try to rewrite history, but we have lived it. Both men were human and imperfect, but the difference between them is profound. Dr. King earned the Nobel Peace Prize at thirty-five years old. Trump, at seventy-nine, accepted a peace award that had been earned by a woman who, knowing the cost, was willing to give it up. He accepted it anyway and now complains because it has been taken back. If that is not pitiful, I do not know what is. Dr. King is revered for teaching love, the Golden Rule, and its application in real life. Trump inspires hatred, deceit, denial, and confusion. He can look into a camera and claim that the civil rights movement resulted in the mistreatment of white people, a belief so deeply rooted in ignorance that it scarcely deserves response. Chaos is the opposite of peace, and for that reason alone, nothing said or done against Dr. King has ever succeeded.

His assassination did not achieve its intended goal. Having foreseen his own death and accepted the possibility of giving his life for others, Dr. King became a martyr. Despite anything Trump may do or say, Martin Luther King Jr. will be celebrated forever.

### PRISONS

Continued from page 7

increases for correctional officers that would have brought the base starting pay to about \$40,000 a year.

The legislature did not pass a comprehensive budget, so state employees have not received raises.

In addition to staffing problems, the department needs to replace fire safety systems at a number of prisons.

Six prisons need significant upgrades or replacements and are on "active fire watch," which means an employee must walk through the prison looking for smoke, Dismukes said. Another seven prisons have obsolete systems and may soon be put on fire watch.

The prisons have been using money from lapsed salaries to pay bills. Even so, the agency ended up with \$89 million in unpaid invoices at the end of the 2025 fiscal year last June.

Committee members appeared to welcome Dismukes' candid assessment of the agency's challenges.

"Appreciate hearing all this," said state Sen. Buck Newton (R-Wilson). "We look forward to working with our counterparts in the House to see if there's some ways that we can really impact some of these issues that we're having."

Another agency told the committee that it's running low on money and will soon have to scale back its GPS ankle-monitoring program for people charged with domestic violence.

The Criminal Justice Information Network, or CJIN, says it needs more than \$4 million to maintain current operations.

Courts can order people accused of crimes to wear GPS tracking monitors as part of their pre-trial release terms. CJIN oversees a system where victims and defendants are alerted when they are close to one another. Victims are called when defendants are within 300 feet, said CJIN Executive Director LaVonda Fowler.

CJIN had 1,391 GPS trackers in the field as of last week. But without additional money, it will be able to operate only about 400 trackers through June 30, Fowler told the committee.

Chief District Court Judge Galen Braddy of Pitt County vouched for the program.

"I put it in every domestic violence case I've got," he said. "This is great money because the money that's being spent is money that's saving lives."

The agency wants a permanent place in the state budget. The General Assembly is not expected to return to work on a state spending plan for months.

After her presentation, Fowler said CJIN would need to start cutting the monitors in use "pretty soon," but as of now, she said, there is no plan for how to do it.

# Classifieds

## AVERY COUNTY

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA  
AVERY COUNTY

In the Superior Court of Court  
In the Matter of the Estate of  
Freddy Gwyn, Deceased  
To: John Lee Partie (Partee)  
Gwyn, whose whereabouts are  
unknown

Take notice that an estate for the  
above-named decedent has been  
duly opened in the Superior Court  
of Avery County, North Carolina.  
The Personal Representative has  
filed or will file pleadings seeking  
to notify all heirs of the administration  
of the estate and to determine the  
respective rights and interests of  
the heirs in the estate, including  
any interest you may claim therein.

You are hereby notified to appear  
and assert any interest you may  
have in this estate no later than  
forty (40) days from the date of  
the first publication of this notice.  
Failure to do so may result in your  
rights being affected by orders  
entered by the Court without  
further notice to you.

This the 22nd day of January,  
2026

Jennifer Crawford, Attorney for  
Petitioner

Edwards Beightol, LLC  
714 St. Mary's Street  
Raleigh, NC 27605  
919-636-5100

1/22, 1/29, 2/5, and 2/12/2026

## CHATHAM COUNTY

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA  
CHATHAM COUNTY

### NOTICE OF SERVICE OF PROCESS BY PUBLICATION

In the General Court of Justice  
District Court Division  
File No: 26CV00047-180

To: EDGAR PERALES CASTRO,  
Defendant.

Take notice that a pleading seeking  
relief against you has been filed.  
The nature of the relief being  
sought is for child custody. You are  
required to make defense to such  
pleading no later than March 3rd,  
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, LEVY  
MORALES RAMIREZ, will apply to  
the court located at 40 E Chatham  
St, Pittsboro, NC 27312 for the  
relief sought.

This, the 16th day of January  
2026.

Aneta Paval  
Paval Law Offices, PLLC  
Telephone: (919) 410-6690  
1/22, 1/29, and 2/5/2026

## 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

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA  
DURHAM COUNTY

### NOTICE TO CREDITORS

File 25E001560-310

All persons, firms and  
corporations having claims against  
THOMAS THOMPSON WEAVER,  
deceased, of Durham County, NC,  
are notified to exhibit the same  
to the undersigned on or before  
April 23, 2026 or this notice will  
be pleaded in bar of recovery. Debtors  
of the decedent are asked to make  
immediate payment.

This the 22nd day of January,  
2026.

JONI PIERCE, EXECUTOR, C/O

BETH W BOWEN, BOWEN LAW  
FIRM PC 590 New Waverly Pl Ste  
120 Cary, NC 27518

1/22, 1/29, 2/5, and 2/12/2026  
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

DURHAM COUNTY

### NOTICE TO CREDITORS

In the General Court of Justice,  
Superior Court Division

Before the Clerk

File Number 25E001585-310

THE UNDERSIGNED, having  
qualified on the 30th day of  
December 2025, as EXECUTOR  
of the Estate of JOHN THOMAS  
GRAY, 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 23rd 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 22nd day of January,  
2026.

Faye Harris Gray, Executor  
4621 Holloman Road  
Durham, NC 27703

1/22, 1/29, 2/5, and 2/12/2026  
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

DURHAM COUNTY

### NOTICE TO CREDITORS

In the General Court of Justice,  
Superior Court Division

Before the Clerk

File Number 25E001375-310

THE UNDERSIGNED, having  
qualified on the 29th day of  
October 2025, as EXECUTOR  
of the Estate of JAMES DAVID LORE, 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 23rd 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 22nd day of January,  
2026.

John C. Wainio, Executor  
109 Presque Isle Lane  
Chapel Hills, NC 27514

1/22, 1/29, 2/5, and 2/12/2026  
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

DURHAM COUNTY

### NOTICE TO CREDITORS

In the General Court of Justice,  
Superior Court Division

Before the Clerk

File Number 26E000052-310

THE UNDERSIGNED, having  
qualified on the 13th day of January  
2026, as EXECUTOR of the Estate  
of BARBARA A. REED, 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 16th 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 15th day of January,  
2026.

Elizabeth Gualtieri-Reed, Executor  
105 Hogan Glen Ct.  
Chapel Hill, NC 27516

1/15, 1/22, 1/29, and 2/5/2026  
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

COUNTY OF DURHAM

### NOTICE OF SERVICE OF PROCESS BY PUBLICATION

In the General Court of Justice,  
Superior Court Division

FILE NO.: 24SP001412-310

IN THE MATTER OF A DEED  
OF TRUST EXECUTED BY  
ANGELA RENEESIMPSON  
DATED JANUARY 13, 2004 AND  
RECORDED IN BOOK 4248 AT  
PAGE 641 IN THE DURHAM  
COUNTY PUBLIC REGISTRY,  
NORTH CAROLINA.

TO: Jennifer Simpson-Rogers  
3004 Ivey Wood Lane  
Apt. 219  
Durham, NC 27703; and

Jamie Allen Bowen  
2001 Keotuk Court  
Apex, NC 27523

Take notice that a pleading  
seeking relief against you has  
been filed in the above action. The  
nature of the relief being sought  
is as follows: Petitioner has filed a  
Petition to for Surplus Funds.

You are required to make defense  
to such pleading no later than the  
24th day of February, 2026, which  
is 40 days from the first publication  
of this notice. Upon your failure to  
file a pleading by the above date,  
party seeking service against you  
will apply to the Court for the relief  
sought.

This the 15th day of January,  
2026.

Thomas K. Reardon attorney for  
Robert E. Levin, Petitioner  
Haywood, Denny & Miller, L.L.P.

P.O. Box 51429  
Durham, NC 27717

Telephone: 919-403-0000

The Carolinian: 1/15, 1/22, 1/29,  
and 2/5/2026

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

DURHAM COUNTY

### NOTICE TO CREDITORS

FILE NO: 25E001317-310

In The General Court Of Justice  
Superior Court Division

Before The Clerk

ESTATE OF AURIEL CIMONE LOWE  
ADMINSTRATORS NOTICE TO  
CREDITORS

THE UNDERSIGNED having  
qualified as Administrator of the  
Estate of AURIEL CIMONE LOWE,  
Deceased, in the Office of the  
Clerk of Superior Court of Durham  
County, does hereby notify all  
persons, firms and corporations  
having claims against the said  
Decedent to present the same to  
the undersigned on or before  
April 17, 2026, said date being at  
least three months from the date  
of the first publication or posting  
of this Notice as indicated below,  
or the same will be pleaded in bar  
of their recovery. All persons  
indebted to said Estate, please  
make immediate payment.

This Notice is given pursuant to  
the provisions of G.S. 28A-14-1.  
This 15th day of January, 2026.

Name and Address of Administrator  
Stephanie Thomas  
29237 Garnet Canyon Drive  
Santa Clarita, CA 91390

Name and Address of Attorney:  
Steven Lundberg  
1155 Kildaire Farm Rd, Ste. 204  
Cary, NC 27511

Date of Publication: January 15,  
22, 29 and February 5, 2026

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

DURHAM COUNTY

### NOTICE TO CREDITORS

The undersigned, Carl A. Harris,  
having duly qualified as Executor  
of the Estate of ANNIE H. COOPER,  
deceased, late of Durham County,  
North Carolina, hereby notifies all  
persons, firms and corporations  
having claims against the Estate to  
present them to the undersigned in  
care of Ronald G. Coulter, Attorney  
for the Estate, 3400 Croasdaile Dr.,  
Ste 205, Durham, NC 27705, on  
or before April 17, 2026 or it will  
be pleaded in bar of their recovery.  
All persons and legal entities  
indebted to the Estate will please  
make immediate payment. This the  
15th day of January, 2026.

Carl A. Harris, Executor  
C/O Ronald G. Coulter, Attorney  
3400 Croasdaile Drive Ste 205  
Durham, NC 27705

1-919-246-5775  
Publication Dates: 1/15, 1/22, 1/29,  
2/5/2026.

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

COUNTY OF DURHAM

### NOTICE TO CREDITORS

The undersigned, having  
qualified as Executor of the Estate  
of CATHERINE C. ASCOTT AKA  
CATHERINE CHAVIOUS ASCOTT,  
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 16th  
day or April, 2026, or this notice  
will be pleaded in bar of their  
recovery. Debtors of the decedent  
are asked to make immediate  
payment.

Dated Januay 15, 2026.

Ashley Ascott Ahlers, Administrator  
c/o Attorney Heather Hazelwood  
PO Box 61182  
Durham NC 27715

1/15, 1/22, 1/29, and 2/5/2026  
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

COUNTY OF DURHAM

### NOTICE TO CREDITORS

All persons, firms and  
corporations having claims against  
KATHLEEN DIANE CALLAHAN,  
deceased, of Durham County, NC,  
are notified to exhibit the same  
to the undersigned on or before  
the 16th day of April 2026, or this  
notice will be pleaded in bar of  
recovery. Debtors of the decedent  
are asked to make immediate  
payment.

This the 15th day of January  
2026.

Peggy K. Callahan, Limited  
Personal Representative  
c/o Trusts and Estates Law Group  
4141 Parklake Avenue, Suite 310  
Raleigh, NC 27612

1/15, 1/22, 1/29, and 2/5/2026  
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

COUNTY OF DURHAM

### NOTICE TO CREDITORS

All persons, firms and  
corporations having claims against  
KATHLEEN DIANE CALLAHAN,  
deceased, of Durham County, NC,  
are notified to exhibit the same  
to the undersigned on or before  
the 16th day of April 2026, or this  
notice will be pleaded in bar of  
recovery. Debtors of the decedent  
are asked to make immediate  
payment.

This the 15th day of January  
2026.

Peggy K. Callahan, Limited  
Personal Representative  
c/o Trusts and Estates Law Group  
4141 Parklake Avenue, Suite 310  
Raleigh, NC 27612

1/15, 1/22, 1/29, and 2/5/2026  
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

COUNTY OF DURHAM

### NOTICE TO CREDITORS

All persons, firms and  
corporations having claims against  
KATHLEEN DIANE CALLAHAN,  
deceased, of Durham County, NC,  
are notified to exhibit the same  
to the undersigned on or before  
the 16th day of April 2026, or this  
notice will be pleaded in bar of  
recovery. Debtors of the decedent  
are asked to make immediate  
payment.

This the 15th day of January  
2026.

Peggy K. Callahan, Limited  
Personal Representative  
c/o Trusts and Estates Law Group  
4141 Parklake Avenue, Suite 310  
Raleigh, NC 27612

1/15, 1/22, 1/29, and 2/5/2026  
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

COUNTY OF DURHAM

### NOTICE TO CREDITORS

All persons, firms and  
corporations having claims against  
KATHLEEN DIANE CALLAHAN,  
deceased, of Durham County, NC,  
are notified to exhibit the same  
to the undersigned on or before  
the 16th day of April 2026, or this  
notice will be pleaded in bar of  
recovery. Debtors of the decedent  
are asked to make immediate  
payment.

This the 15th day of January  
2026.

Peggy K. Callahan, Limited  
Personal Representative  
c/o Trusts and Estates Law Group  
4141 Parklake Avenue, Suite 310  
Raleigh, NC 27612

1/15, 1/22, 1/29, and 2/5/2026  
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

COUNTY OF DURHAM

### NOTICE TO CREDITORS

All persons, firms and  
corporations having claims against  
KATHLEEN DIANE CALLAHAN,  
deceased, of Durham County, NC,  
are notified to exhibit the same  
to the undersigned on or before  
the 16th day of April 2026, or this  
notice will be pleaded in bar of  
recovery. Debtors of the decedent  
are asked to make immediate  
payment.

This the 15th day of January  
2026.

Peggy K. Callahan, Limited  
Personal Representative  
c/o Trusts and Estates Law Group  
4141 Parklake Avenue, Suite 310  
Raleigh, NC 27612

1/15, 1/22, 1/29, and 2/5/2026  
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

COUNTY OF DURHAM

### NOTICE TO CREDITORS

All persons, firms and  
corporations having claims against  
KATHLEEN DIANE CALLAHAN,  
deceased, of Durham County, NC,  
are notified to exhibit the same  
to the undersigned on or before  
the 16th day of April 2026, or this  
notice will be pleaded in bar of  
recovery. Debtors of the decedent  
are asked to make immediate  
payment.

This the 15th day of January  
2026.

Peggy K. Callahan, Limited  
Personal Representative  
c/o Trusts and Estates Law Group  
4141 Parklake Avenue, Suite 310  
Raleigh, NC 27612

1/15, 1/22, 1/29, and 2/5/2026  
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

COUNTY OF DURHAM

### NOTICE TO CREDITORS

All persons, firms and  
corporations having claims against  
KATHLEEN DIANE CALLAHAN,  
deceased, of Durham County, NC,  
are notified to exhibit the same  
to the undersigned on or before  
the 16th day of April 2026, or this  
notice will be pleaded in bar of  
recovery. Debtors of the decedent  
are asked to make immediate  
payment.

This the 15th day of January  
2026.

Peggy K. Callahan, Limited  
Personal Representative  
c/o Trusts and Estates Law Group  
4141 Parklake Avenue, Suite 310  
Raleigh, NC 27612

1/15, 1/22, 1/29, and 2/5/2026  
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

COUNTY OF DURHAM

### NOTICE TO CREDITORS

All persons, firms and  
corporations having claims against  
KATHLEEN DIANE CALLAHAN,  
deceased, of Durham County, NC,  
are notified to exhibit the same  
to the undersigned on or before  
the 16th day of April 2026, or this  
notice will be pleaded in bar of  
recovery. Debtors of the decedent  
are asked to make immediate  
payment.

This the 15th day of January  
2026.

Peggy K. Callahan, Limited  
Personal Representative  
c/o Trusts and Estates Law Group  
4141 Parklake Avenue, Suite 310  
Raleigh, NC 27612

1/15, 1/22, 1/29, and 2/5/2026  
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

COUNTY OF DURHAM

### NOTICE TO CREDITORS

All persons, firms and  
corporations having claims against  
KATHLEEN DIANE CALLAHAN,  
deceased, of Durham County, NC,  
are notified to exhibit the same  
to the undersigned on or before  
the 16th day of April 2026, or this  
notice will be pleaded in bar of  
recovery. Debtors of the decedent  
are asked to make immediate  
payment.

This the 15th day of January  
2026.

Peggy K. Callahan, Limited  
Personal Representative  
c/o Trusts and Estates Law Group  
4141 Parklake Avenue, Suite 310  
Raleigh, NC 27612

1/15, 1/22, 1/29, and 2/5/2026  
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

to the undersigned at the office of  
IDOL LAW, PLLC, PO Box 51759,  
Durham, North Carolina 27717,  
on or before the 17th day of April,  
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 15th day of January,  
2026.

Simone Bennett, Limited Personal  
Representative  
Estate of John Phillip Bennett,  
Deceased

Robert A. Idol, Esquire  
IDOL LAW, PLLC  
Attorney at Law  
PO Box 51759  
Durham, NC 27717

(919)401.5151

1/15, 1/22, 1/29, and 2/5/2026  
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

DURHAM COUNTY

### NOTICE TO CREDITORS

In the General Court of Justice,  
Superior Court Division

Before the Clerk

File Number 25E001163-310

THE UNDERSIGNED, having  
qualified on the 3rd day of  
September 2025, as EXECUTOR  
of the Estate of GEORGE WHITLEY  
BOLDEN, 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 16th 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 15th day of January,  
2026.

Lesley Ruth Bolden, Executor  
620 Wellingham Drive  
Durham, NC 27713

1/15, 1/22, 1/29, and 2/5/2026  
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

DURHAM COUNTY

### NOTICE OF SERVICE OF PROCESS BY PUBLICATION

In the Superior Court

File Number 25CV013616-310

**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 25E000780-670  
THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 5th day of January 2026, as EXECUTOR of the Estate of SANDRA SNEED JOSEPH, 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 16th 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 15th day of January, 2026.  
Bruce Michael Joseph, Executor  
c/o Richard F. Prentis, Jr.  
4 Consultant Pl.  
Durham, NC 27707  
1/15, 1/22, 1/29, and 2/5/2026  
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

**HARNETT 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 OF SERVICE OF PROCESS BY PUBLICATION**  
In the General Court of Justice  
District Court Division  
File No: 25CV033894-910  
To: WILBER MACHADO, 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 for child custody. You are required to make defense to such pleading no later than March 3rd, 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, ERIKA PINEDA, will apply to the court located at 300 S. Salisbury St., Raleigh, NC, 27601, for the relief sought.

This, the 22nd day of January 2026.  
Erika Pineda, Plaintiff  
7803 S. Arizona Dr.  
Raleigh, NC 27616  
1/22, 1/29, and 2/5/2026  
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA  
COUNTY OF WAKE

**NOTICE OF SERVICE OF PROCESS BY PUBLICATION**  
In The General Court Of Justice  
Superior Court Division  
File No. 25CV030600-910  
MARINE FEDERAL CREDIT UNION,  
Plaintiff, v.  
JUSTIN SHARMA, Defendant.

To: Justin Sharma  
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 the collection of money owed, as more fully described in the Complaint filed in Wake County Superior Court, File Number 25CV030600-910.  
You are required to make a defense to such pleading no later than March 2, 2026, which is forty (40) days from the first date of publication reduces. Upon your failure to do so, the party seeking service against you will apply to the Court for the relief sought.

This the 22nd day of January, 2026.  
MEWBORN & DESELMS, ATTORNEYS AT LAW  
Brett J. DeSelms  
Michael Tuton  
Attorneys for Plaintiff  
829 Gum Branch Road, Suite C  
Jacksonville, NC 28540  
Telephone: (910) 455-9755  
Publication Dates: January 22, January 29, and February 5, 2026  
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA  
WAKE COUNTY

**NOTICE TO CREDITORS**  
All persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the HILDA JANE HARPER, deceased, of Wake County, NC are notified to exhibit the same to the undersigned on or before April 20, 2026 or this notice will be pleaded in bar or recovery.  
Debtors of the decedent of the Estate are asked to make immediate payment. This the 20th day of January, 2026.  
Gwendolyn Kathy Riggs, Executor  
Estate of Hilda Jane Harper  
5050 Pender Road  
Shallotte, NC 28470  
Jan 22, 29, Feb 5, & 12, 2026  
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA  
COUNTY OF WAKE

**NOTICE TO CREDITORS**  
ESTATE OF JAMES RANDOLPH FULLWOOD  
FILE NO 25E004348-910  
All persons, firms and corporations having claims against JAMES RANDOLPH FULLWOOD, deceased, of Wake County, NC, are notified to exhibit the same to the undersigned on or before April 16, 2026, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of recovery. Debtors of the decedent are asked to make immediate payment. This the 15th day of January, 2026. Ernest B. Fullwood, Jerelene Fullwood-Carver, and Lorenzo Keith, Co-Executors, c/o Blue LLP, 205 Fayetteville St, Suite 300, Raleigh, NC 27601. The Carolinian, 1/15, 1/22, 1/29, and 2/5/2026.  
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA  
WAKE COUNTY

**COMPLAINT TO ENFORCE POSSESSORY LIEN ON MOTOR VEHICLE**  
In The General Court Of Justice  
District Court Division  
Small Claims  
File No. W  
ANTHONY WILSON, Plaintiff VS.  
UNKNOWN VIN: 136177A181112, 1967 CHEVROLET, Defendant  
TO UNKNOWN OWNER:  
TAKE NOTICE the petitioner has filed with the clerk a petition in proper form indicating that the petitioner has a valid lien against a 1967 CHEVROLET, ID No. 136177A181112 and that the petitioner shall have the right to sell to the highest bidder the motor vehicle listed on February 11, 2026 at WCCH, 316 Fayetteville St., 3rd Floor, Raleigh, NC 27601, at 1:30 p.m. You are required to make a defense to such pleading before such date and time.

This the 15th day of January, 2026.  
Anthony Wilson, Plaintiff  
13100 Callens Ln.  
Willow Spring, NC 27592  
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. 25CV000889-910  
To: JESSICA MADDEN, 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 19, 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, ERIN MADDEN, will apply to the court located at 316 Fayetteville St., Raleigh NC 27601 for the relief sought.  
This, the 15th day of January, 2026.  
Erin Madden, Plaintiff  
933 Rand Street  
Smithfield, NC 27577  
1/15, 1/22, and 1/29/2026  
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 Currgan 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 Currgan 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 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 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.  
Therese 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 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 the same 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

**MECKLENBURG COUNTY**

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA  
MECKLENBURG COUNTY  
**NOTICE TO CREDITORS**  
In the General Court of Justice,  
Superior Court Division  
Before the Clerk  
File Number 25E004303-590  
THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 13th day of January 2026, as ADMINISTRATOR of the Estate of BARBARA JONES HANKS, late of Mecklenburg 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 16th 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 15th day of January, 2026.  
Thomas Myers, Administrator  
30 North Gould Street, Suite R  
Sheridan, WY 82801  
1/15, 1/22, 1/29, and 2/5/2026

**Classifieds**

**RE-ADVERTISEMENT FOR BIDS**

Town of Dover  
P.O. Box 128  
Dover, NC 28526

Separate sealed BIDS for the construction of 2022 Water Line Replacement Project Contract No. 1 - Water System Improvements will be received by the ENGINEER at the Dover Town Hall, 105 N. Main Street, NC 28526 until 2:00 PM Eastern Standard Time, January 29, 2026, and then at said office publicly opened and read aloud.

The CONTRACT DOCUMENTS may be examined at the following locations:  
Dover Town Hall, 105 N. Main Street, NC 28526  
McDavid Associates, Inc., 3714 North Main Street, Farmville, NC 27828-049

Dodge Data and Analytics, 2860 South State Highway 161, Suite 160, #501, Grand Prairie, TX 750527361 (View online at www.construction.com)  
ConstructConnect, Attn: DPC, 30 Technology Parkway South, Suite 100, Norcross, GA 30092 (View online at www.constructconnect.com)  
Construction Journal, 400 SW 7th Street, Stuart, FL 34994 (View online at www.ConstructionJournal.com)  
Builders & Contractors Exchange, Inc., 1118 Azalea Garden Road, Norfolk, VA 235025612 (View online at www.bceva.com)

Physical copies of the CONTRACT DOCUMENTS may be obtained at the office of McDavid Associates, Inc. located at 3714 North Main Street, Farmville, NC 27828-0049 upon a non-refundable payment of \$100.00 for each set.

The OWNER reserves the right to reject any and all BIDS. BIDDER shall be properly licensed under Chapter 87, General Statutes of North Carolina. Small, minority, women's, and disadvantaged businesses and labor surplus area firms are encouraged to submit BIDS.

This PROJECT is subject to the good faith efforts and goals for participation by minority businesses required by G.S. 143-128.2. The OWNER has adopted a verifiable ten percent (10%) goal for participation by minority businesses in the total value of the WORK.

BIDDERS shall, within the time frames specified in the BID documents, submit all required affidavits and documentation demonstrating that the BIDDER made the required good faith effort in compliance with G.S. 143-128.2. Failure to file all required affidavits and documentation within the required time frames is grounds for rejection of the BID.

Prospective BIDDERS who have been found guilty of discrimination within the last two (2) years are debarred from bidding.

January 15, 2026  
William R. Mitchell, Jr.  
Mayor  
Town of Dover



**ADVERTISEMENT FOR BIDS**

The North Carolina Department of Adult Correction has the following contract in Wake County out for bid: C- 11838 Central Prison Steam Leak Repairs . The bid opening is scheduled for: Tuesday, 02/24/2026 . To obtain the Notice to Bidders, any Pre-Bid Requirements, and any Addenda visit: <https://evp.nc.gov/solicitations/details/?id=674d8d1f-ebf2-f011-8406-001dd8003962>



**ADVERTISEMENT FOR BIDS**

The North Carolina Department of Adult Correction has the following contract in McDowell County out for bid: C- C11831 Marion FA Replacement . The bid opening is scheduled for: Tuesday, 02/17/2026 . To obtain the Notice to Bidders, any Pre-Bid Requirements, and any Addenda visit: <https://evp.nc.gov/solicitations/details/?id=067ff40d-8ded-f011-8407-001dd80a67c90>

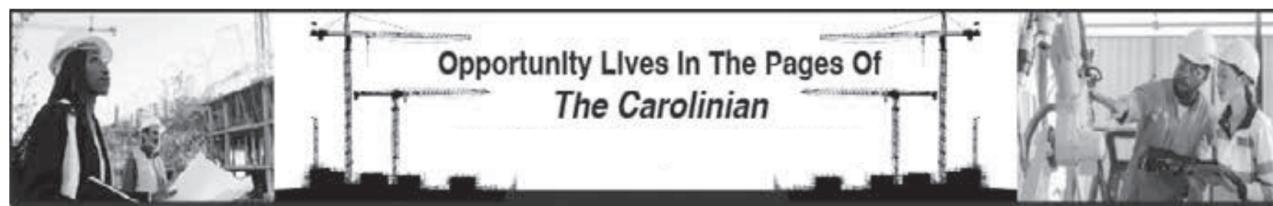
**D/M/WBE**

**SUBCONTRACTORS/SUPPLIERS WANTED**

T. A. Loving Company (NC General Contractor License No. 325) is seeking certified DBE, MBE, and WBE subcontractors and suppliers for the Waterline Replacement - Contract No. 1 project for the Town of Dover which bids on January 29, 2026, at 2:00 PM. Plans and specifications for this project are available at the following locations: T. A. Loving Company; 400 Patetown Road; Goldsboro, NC 27530 \* Town of Dover, Town Hall; 105 North Main Street; Dover, NC 28526 \* McDavid Associates, Inc., 3714 North Main Street; Farmville, NC 27828 \* Dodge Data and Analytics website \* Construct-Connect website (formerly iSqFt) \* Construction Journal website \* Builders and Contractors Exchange website.

Potential subcontracting opportunities include but are not limited to surveying, asphalt paving, traffic control, erosion control, seeding, linework/pipe installation, bore and jack, and flatwork. Please contact Jeff Price (jprice@taloving.com) if you are interested in submitting a proposal on any portion(s) of this project. Contact via phone at 919-734-8400; fax: 919-736-2148; or email. All quotations will be accepted up to the closing time of the bid date. T. A. Loving Company is an Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Employer.

Please advise if assistance is needed with obtaining necessary equipment, supplies, materials, or insurance/bonding to satisfy the work requirements. We are willing to accept quotations for all or partial quantities and items of work. We can offer 2-party check payments and quick payment agreements, but the agreements need to be negotiated prior to the bid date.



# Sports

## Diversity Is Still A Major Issue At The Winter Olympics

LAKE PLACID, N.Y. (AP) — When USA Bobsled and Skeleton unveils its Olympic rosters, the most likely scenario is that either eight or nine women will wind up competing for that federation on the ice at the Milan Cortina Winter Games.

Most of those sliders will almost certainly be women of color. By the time the Games open, this could be the most diverse U.S. Olympic winter roster ever assembled. The 2018 U.S. roster for the 2018 Games included 21 athletes of either Black or Asian descent, about 8% of the total; the 2026 team could top that number. There is still obvious potential for far more growth on the diversity front, but some athletes feel that steps are being taken in the right direction.

"We're really doing this," said U.S. skeleton athlete Mystique Ro, a woman of Black and Korean descent and someone who teamed with Austin Florian to win last year's world championship in the sport's mixed event. "The train has left the station. We're going. And it's such a surreal feeling. ... We're really making history out here and it's not slowing down at all."

People of color fill the rosters for non-traditional winter sports nations like Jamaica but most of the dominant teams from European powers — and, to be fair, the U.S. as well — are almost entirely white.



Still, some of the top American medal hopefuls at these Olympics will be Black women, and that's not exactly a new phenomenon — especially in bobsled.

Bobsledder Elana Meyers Taylor is a five-time Olympic medalist and is the most decorated Black athlete in Winter Games history. Kaysha Love is the reigning world champion in monobob, making her the first Black woman to hold that title. Speedskater Erin Jackson, who in 2022 became the first Black woman to win Olympic winter gold in an individual sport, is back for more in 2026. Laila Edwards is a rising star

of the powerhouse U.S. women's hockey team and will be the first Black woman to wear the American sweater on the Olympic stage.

"It's a really big deal," Edwards said when the roster was unveiled. "Representation matters. In terms of processing it, I think I'm just trying to use it as something that motivates me to be the best role model and person I can be."

It also remains clear that the sports offered as part of the Winter Olympic program seem to come with fewer opportunities for athletes of color. The National Ski Areas Association said in 2024 that, of all



guests who visit U.S. ski resorts, about 1% identify as Black. The reasons most commonly cited are cost and accessibility: many winter sports are expensive and ski areas are generally remote.

Of the 2,900 or so athletes who competed at the most recent Winter Games in Beijing, the overwhelming majority of them identified white. There was a smattering of non-traditional winter sports nations to see athletes qualify — Ghana, Nigeria and Haiti among them — and the impact that Jamaica's famed "Cool Runnings" bobsled team had when it debuted at the Olympics a genera-

tion ago is still felt today.

"I never thought I would be doing this," said bobsledder Adanna Johnson, who was 17 when she competed for Jamaica at last year's world championships. "The sport is growing. There are more opportunities."

Much more needs to be done, Ro said, particularly in the years where the Winter Olympic spotlight doesn't shine on these sports.

"There's a lot more diversity," Ro said. "But seeing us without the helmet, seeing the roster, seeing the names, it's just really important how we present it to the people so it's not just at the Olympics. It has to be ev-

ery year because we compete every year."

Almost every person who has made a national team over the last few decades came to bobsled after being recruited from another sport — often track, since bobsled thrives on a combination of speed and power. Vionetta Flowers was the first Black woman to win a bobsled medal for the U.S., teaming with Jill Bakken for gold at the Salt Lake City Games in 2002, and the Americans have seen women of color make their way to the medal stand steadily ever since.

Meyers Taylor, an elite softball player in college, counts Flowers as one of her top inspirations. So does Love, who was a record-setting sprinter in high school who went on to UNLV. She then got invited to try bobsled and is about to become a two-time Olympian.

She always knew she'd get there. She just thought it'd be in gymnastics.

"Growing up, I was really only excited about summer sports because that's where I saw me. That's where I saw representation," Love said. "You always had Black athletes in gymnastics and track and even swimming sometimes. So, to know that now I get to be that representation along with like some of my other teammates who have worked so hard to be a part of this ... that change is inspiring."

## How Fernando Mendoza And Indiana Made The Greatest Run In US Sports

MIAMI GARDENS, Fla. — About half an hour before Curt Cignetti stood on a stage and lifted a trophy, before Mark Cuban put on the T-shirt they hand out to the national champions, before tens of thousands of fans sang ABBA's "Fernando" in unison as red-and-white confetti fell on the field at Hard Rock Stadium, there was a moment that defined all of it.

With 9 minutes, 27 seconds remaining on the clock, the greatest turnaround story in the history of American sports was wobbling toward the finish line. Indiana hadn't put Miami away, and the Hurricanes were starting to claw back their momentum.

In that moment, it felt very much like four yards could be the difference between a championship that will be remembered forever and a lifetime of second guessing.

Initially, Cignetti sent his field goal unit onto the field. Taking a six-point lead would have been the safe, by-the-book play. But it wouldn't have been the right one. Carter Smith, Indiana's left tackle, watched Cignetti tell his kicking team he changed his mind.

"Get off the field! We're going for it!"

It took Indiana football 139 years to get here, and if there was a gravity to the biggest coaching decision of Cignetti's coaching career and the biggest play of quarterback Fernando Mendoza's life, it had already been defied by the time they exited their timeout huddle with 9 minutes, 27 seconds remaining in the College Football Playoff championship game.

It was only one fourth down in a game with a lot of big plays left. But if you're trying to describe how the program with the most losses in the history of college football ended up two years later as the first 16-0 national champion in the sport's modern era, it resides somewhere in between Cignetti's decision to pull his field-goal team off the field and Mendoza bullying through the



line of scrimmage, cutting back to his right when he saw a defender closing in and stretching to the end zone for the touchdown and a 10-point lead.

"A big constant we've had is to bet on ourselves," Mendoza said. "Whenever they called that play, we knew we're going to bet on ourselves one more time in the biggest stage of the game. It wasn't the perfect coverage for it, but I trusted my linemen and everybody had a gritty performance today. It was the least I could do for my brothers."

As Indiana built to this, from the upset win at Oregon in October, to the last-second escape at Penn State in November, to beating Ohio State for the Big Ten title, to romping through the playoff with wins over programs that wrote the history of the sport, everybody wanted to figure out how.

Sometimes, the only explanation is watching it happen.

All the things that weren't supposed to happen in college football? Indiana made them happen. The Hoosiers cracked the playoff. They made blue-bloods feel blue. They won the national championship.

And at the end, as Jamari Sharpe snagged the interception that se-

cured Indiana's 27-21 victory, there was little doubt about what it meant: In a sport where upward mobility has forever been slow and grueling, leading often to a dead end, what Indiana pulled off in two years is the most unlikely run in the history of American sports.

"Ever. Ever," said Cuban, who won an NBA title as the Dallas Mavericks' owner and is now helping fund his alma mater's roster. "I mean, the Miracle on Ice, I don't think there's anything compared to this. To go from the outhouse to the penthouse, to win 16 games in a row, I mean, who'd have think? I don't think anybody could ever imagine in their wildest of wildest dreams."

Cignetti had this dream early in life. The son of College Football Hall of Fame coach Frank Cignetti, who got fired after four years at West Virginia but became a legend in D-II, spent his childhood envisioning himself as "a Bear Bryant kind of coach." But the business never handed him those cards to play.

As he worked his way up the ladder, he too often landed on coaching staffs that lost — Rice, Temple, Pittsburgh — until Nick Saban hired him as the recruiting coordinator

and receivers coach at the beginning of his Alabama dynasty.

"That tied it together for me," Cignetti said. "I was hitting the big 5-0 and wasn't a coordinator, wasn't on track to get a head-coaching job and didn't want to be a 60-year-old assistant. I saw what those lives looked like as a kid. I took an unprecedented chance in this business."

He became the head coach at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, the same place his father coached. As far as he was concerned, the Bear Bryant dream was long gone. It turned out the journey was only beginning.

From IUP to Elon to James Madison and then Indiana — the worst of the worst. Nobody won there, and even those who had a little success eventually got fired too because nothing was built to last there. It was a graveyard. At least maybe Cignetti could make some money. A photograph of Indiana's nearly-empty Memorial Stadium, taken during the first game of the Cignetti era in August 2024, began to go viral Monday on social media. It was a snapshot of what Hoosier football used to be: a program that had been dead for decades, a lost cause, a waste of time.

You couldn't even really call Indiana's fans long-suffering. In basketball, the sport Indiana fans used to care about above all else, they've suffered. But is there really any suffering if there's no hope in the first place?

"There wasn't an emphasis on football, plain and simple," Cignetti said. "Basketball school."

And then, he just ... changed it. Some of the best parts of his James Madison teams came with him. He demanded investment and attitude. He out-evaluated everyone in the transfer portal, and as Indiana's 2024 season unfolded, leading to a first-round playoff loss at Notre Dame, it was clear he was out-coaching a lot of the game's stalwarts, too.



## San Diego Wave Acquire Brazilian Int'l Ludmila

CBSsports—San Diego Wave FC boosted its attack with a new acquisition. Brazilian international Ludmila has been traded from the Chicago Stars to San Diego in exchange for \$800,000 transfer fee funds. It's a record fee for Chicago, the second-highest in intraleague funds, after last year's \$1.25 million transfer for Jayden Shaw from North Carolina to Gotham FC.

The Chicago Stars could receive an additional \$200,000 based on performance incentives, which would bring the trade transfer value to the \$1 million threshold. Ludmila will occupy an international slot on San Diego's 2026 roster. The news comes following transfer rumors around another Wave FC player departure, France international Delphine Cascarino.

"We're very excited to come to an agreement to bring Ludmila to San Diego. She's a player who not only brings a great deal of talent, but also complements the strengths of our existing roster," said Sporting Director and General Manager Camille Ashton.

"Her versatility allows her to operate in multiple attacking roles, giving our coaches more tactical options in different game situations. Her creativity and movement will enhance our ability to break down defenses, and we're confident she will be a valuable asset to the Club's success moving forward."

The Brazilian international scored 81 goals across her 185 appearances in her club career with Rio Preto (2013), São José (2015-2016), Atlético Madrid (2017-2024), and Chicago Stars.

The 31-year-old forward has been in NWSL since July 2024, and has scored 13 goals through 31 appearances. She was in contention for the 2025 Golden Boot and tied for fourth with 10 goals.

"I scored my first NWSL goal against San Diego and always was a team I admired. I loved the supporters, the energy of the team, and the vibes of the city when I visited. I'm very happy to be part of this Club's history," said Ludmila.

"From the moment Cami and the organization showed interest in me, my focus was clear. I wanted to play for this team and this city. I didn't come here just to play. I came to give my best and fight to win trophies. I'm very excited to show my football in front of all the supporters and score many goals in these colors."

The move sends significant funds to Chicago, and the franchise will retain a 10% sell-on clause on any future transfer, but proven goal-scoring is difficult to come by in the league. With such a large amount, there will be plenty of questions about how Stars FC will utilize the new influx of money.

## Duke Sues Darian Mensah, Tries To Stop Transfer Portal Entry

Duke University sued quarterback Darian Mensah on Tuesday, and a judge denied a request for a temporary restraining order that would have prevented him from entering the transfer portal.

Darren Heitner, Mensah's attorney, told ESPN that Durham County (North Carolina) Superior Court Judge Michael O'Foghluha ruled from the bench Tuesday, pending a written ruling, and denied Duke's request that Mensah be enjoined from entering the transfer portal.

Heitner said Duke is expected to enter Mensah into the transfer portal Wednesday.

"The judge, a Duke basketball season-ticket holder, and thus a booster, also recused himself from future proceedings," Heitner said.

As a result, a different judge, Ed Wilson, will rule on Duke's request for relief that would prevent Mensah from enrolling at another school, playing at another school and licensing his name, image and likeness to another school.

Heitner said Wilson is scheduled to hear the case on Feb. 2, but Mensah's team will push to move

the date sooner.

Mensah informed Duke coach Manny Diaz that he intended to transfer on Friday, the last day of the transfer portal window.

Under the terms of Duke's NIL contract with Mensah, any disputes must be settled through arbitration. The school said it filed a claim for arbitration Monday and wants the judge to issue relief until the end of that arbitration process.

Mensah, who led the Blue Devils to a 9-5 record and ACC title this past season, announced Dec. 19 that he intended to return to Duke this coming season, instead of entering the NFL draft. He had a multiyear NIL contract with Duke, which expires Dec. 31, that was believed to be worth up to \$4 million for the upcoming season.

"Mensah reversed course, informed Duke that he would seek a transfer, and issued a public farewell," the lawsuit said. "In so doing, he repudiated the contract. He proposes now to move onto another collegiate institution and act as if his obligations to Duke University do not exist. None of these



facts can be disputed. But contracts mean something."

Mensah, who started his college career at Tulane, has been linked to Miami, which is seeking a successor for quarterback Carson Beck. The No. 10 Hurricanes lost to No. 1 Indiana in Monday's CFP National Championship.

In a sign that Miami has secured a quarterback for 2026, backup Emory Williams told ESPN on Tuesday that he has entered the transfer portal. He is expected to go to East Carolina.

"[I]f Mensah is permitted to continue his course of ignoring his contractual obligations and transfer to another school to compete in football and license his NIL rights to that school, Duke University will have no ability to protect its rights in an arbitral proceeding," the lawsuit said. "Indeed, those rights will be practically worthless if Mensah is allowed to enroll at another collegiate institution, play football there, and relicense his rights. If allowed to enter the portal, Mensah can, within less than a day, do precisely this. In other words, unless

the present position of the parties is preserved, Duke University's ability to seek relief is irreparably limited."

Duke's attorneys wrote that Mensah violated the terms of his NIL agreement by "disclosing its monetary terms, seeking to license his NIL in football and to another collegiate institution, seeking his enrollment at another institution, initiating contact with admissions or athletics staff at another institution, failing to notify Duke University if he is contacted by another institution or its representatives, and/or acting in way that has now harmed his image and the image of Duke University by ignoring the terms and conditions of his contract."

Duke alleges in the lawsuit that if Mensah joins another school, he'll "negotiate a license agreement for the rights that he has licensed to Duke."

This past season, Mensah led the ACC with 3,973 passing yards and 34 touchdowns, while completing 66.8% of his attempts.