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The Carolinian

N.C.'s Twice-Weekly African-American Owned Newspaper

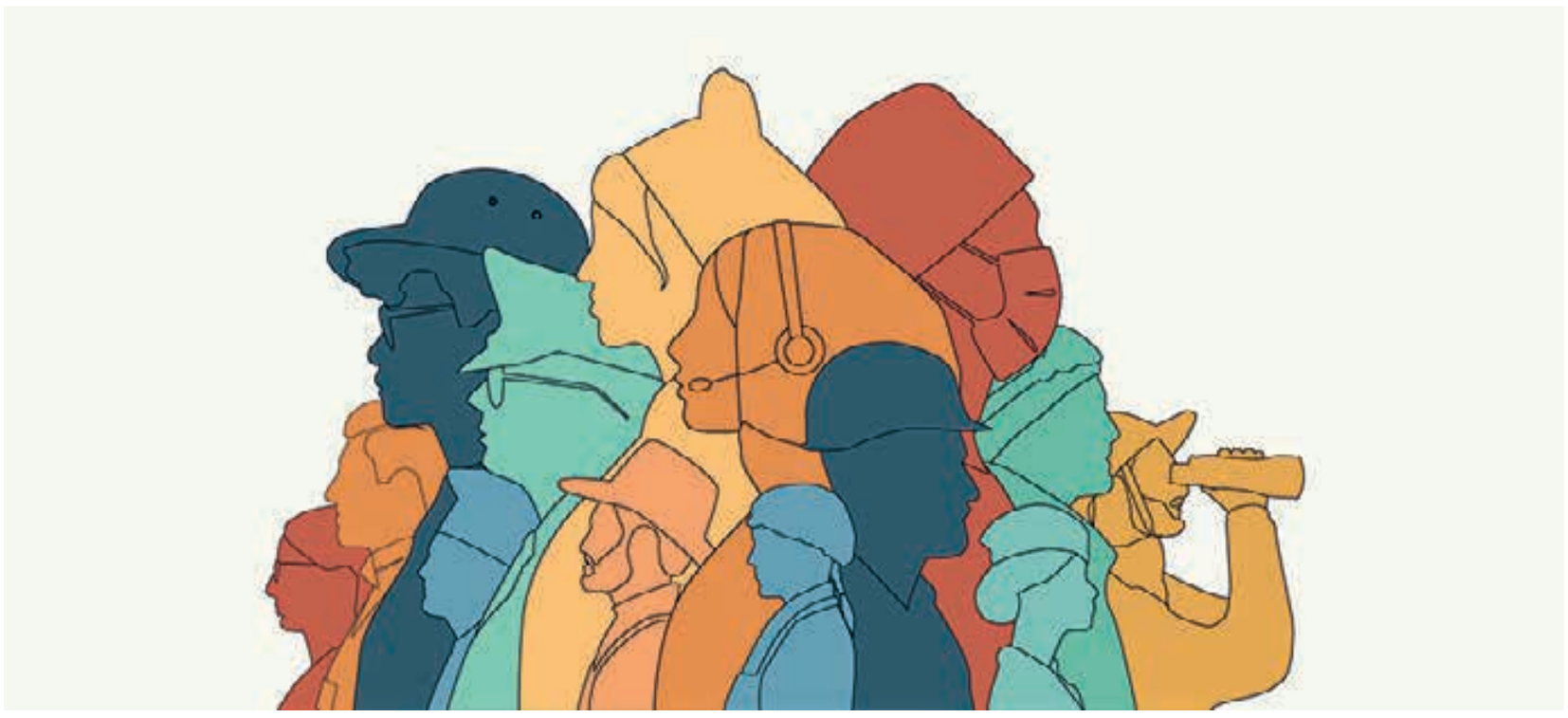
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Do You Know ALICE? Chances Are You Do

Dr. Joynicole Martinez

Rising Tide Capital



She opens her salon at 7 a.m., cuts hair until the last client leaves, and goes home to do the books at the kitchen table. She pays her taxes. She employs two stylists. And by the math of the federal government, she is not poor.

By the math of her rent, her child care bill, and the price of groceries, she is barely hanging on.

United Way has a name for her. She is ALICE.

Who is ALICE?

ALICE stands for Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed. The term describes households that earn more than the Federal Poverty Level but less than what it actually costs to live in their county, according to United For ALICE, the national research initiative that grew out of United Way. These are the cashiers, child care providers, home health aides, drivers, and small business owners who keep neighborhoods running.

The newest national figures are sobering. In 2024, 54.5 million of the country's roughly 132 million households, or 41 percent, fell below the ALICE Threshold, the line that combines households in poverty with ALICE households, according to The State of ALICE in the United States 2026 Report. The number of ALICE households grew 23 percent between 2010 and 2024, faster than the 15 percent growth in total households, the same 2026 report found.

For Black America, the picture is sharper still. Of about 15.8 million Black households nationwide, 9.1 million, or 58 percent, lived below the ALICE Threshold in 2024, according to the national report. State reports tell the same story. In Michigan, 62 percent of Black households were below the threshold in 2023, compared to 38 percent of White households, the Michigan Association of United Ways reported.

These are not families who stopped working. That "E" in ALICE matters. These are families who are working and still falling behind.

The official poverty measure was built decades ago and does not reflect what a family pays today for rent, child care, and health insurance. ALICE fills that gap by pricing a bare-bones Household Survival Budget, county by county.

United For ALICE also tracks prices differently. Its ALICE Essentials Index follows only the basics: housing, child care, food, transportation, health care, and basic technology. From 2021 to 2024, those essentials rose 5.6 percent per year, compared to 5.0 percent for the Consumer Price Index, according to United For ALICE. Between 2007 and 2024, rental housing costs rose 99 percent and food at home rose 38 percent, the Essentials Index shows.

In plain terms, the things our families cannot skip have gotten more expensive faster than everything else. The headline inflation number undercounts the pain.

Consider child care workers, many of them women of color. Their median hourly wage rose from $9.28 in 2010 to $15.41 in 2024. Yet a full-time worker earning that wage still fell $16,766 short of the ALICE Household Survival Budget in 2024, a bigger gap than in 2010, according to United For ALICE. A raise that does not keep up with rent is not a raise.

Why use ALICE? Economists can debate whether the national economy is strong. ALICE asks a simpler question: can a working family in this county pay for the basics this month?

That framing matters right now for three reasons.

First, it is honest. When 41 percent of households are below the threshold, as the 2026 report documents, hardship is not a fringe issue. It is the lived reality of a huge share of the workforce.

Second, it removes shame. ALICE tells the family in the next pew that they are not failing. The system around them has priced out the paycheck.

Third, it is practical. Because ALICE data is local, down to the county and often the town, it gives employers, lawmakers, lenders, and churches a shared map. United For ALICE describes its work as providing "a framework and language" for leaders to reassess public and corporate policies (United For ALICE).

Our community has always built its own doors when others were closed. From the barbershop to the corner store to the family catering business, entrepreneurship has been a path to dignity and wealth when wages alone would not do it.

ALICE data helps explain why. When a paycheck cannot cover the Household Survival Budget, many ALICE earners start a side business, drive for a platform, braid hair on weekends, or turn a talent into a trade. Many of the small business owners who employ ALICE workers are themselves one slow month

(See ***DO YOU KNOW ALICE,*** P. 2)

Wake's 2026 State of the County Address

By Jordan Meadows

Staff Writer



Wake County officials gathered Tuesday afternoon for the 2026 State of the County address, where Board of Commissioners Chair Don Mial highlighted the county's growth and the work being done across the community over the past year.

The 2026 address, themed "We Are Wake," brought county commissioners, mayors and other local government and community partners together for a presentation delivered by Mial, emphasizing the county's rapid growth and the need for continued investment in schools, housing, health care, infrastructure and public services.

Born and raised in Wake County, Mial recalled growing up on a farm near Knightdale before his family moved to Walnut Terrace in Raleigh's Fourth Ward. He described watching the county transform over more than six decades.

"My younger self could never have imagined the changes that I've seen in my 60-plus years here in Wake County," Mial said. "I've seen where we've been and how we got here. And I'm grateful to be a part of where we are going."

Mial pointed to continued corporate investment as one of Wake County's major successes.

Since October, he said, the county has recorded 45 announcements involving new or expanding companies, representing more than $1.5 billion in investment. Among the region's largest recent economic-development projects is Fujifilm's biomanufacturing facility in Holly Springs. The project represents billions of dollars in investment and is expected to create thousands of jobs over time.

Mial said Wake County recently changed its business-development grant policy to make it possible to consider more projects, including those with lower barriers to entry and large-scale developments that could expand the county's long-term tax base.

"But our biggest incentive is still our quality of life," Mial said. "Companies consistently tell us that they want to be here, because this is a place to work, play, and stay."

He also pointed to Wake County Public Schools as part of the region's appeal to businesses and families. The district has reported its third consecutive year of academic proficiency gains, particularly in elementary and middle school mathematics, while its five-year graduation rate reached a historic 93.1%.

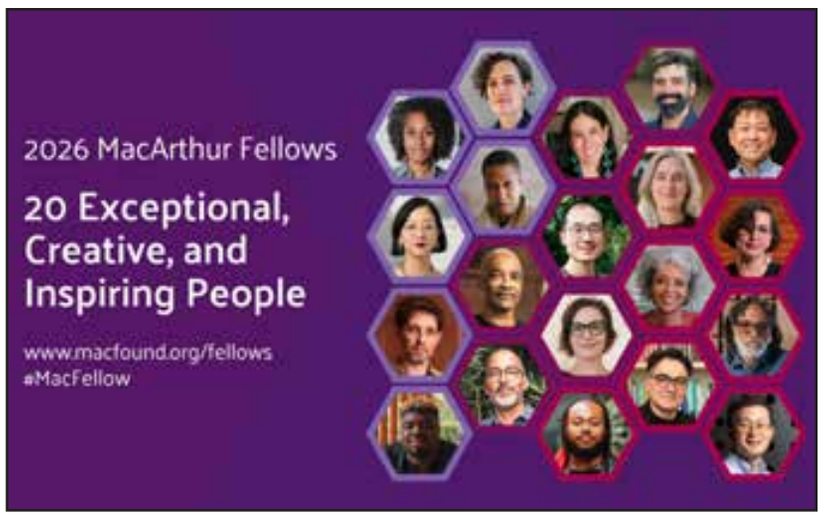
Wake County continues to add residents at a rapid pace, with Mial estimating that about 24,000 people are added to the county each year. The county surpassed 9,300 new home permits in a single year, reflecting continued construction throughout Wake, particularly in rapidly growing communities on the county's eastern side.

That growth has also increased demand for affordable housing. Mial said Wake County has supported 2,840 affordable housing units since the beginning of 2024, surpassing its strategic-plan goal of 2,500 units by 2029. Planning officials are preparing the final two area plans for the county, including the Falls Lake area plan, as Wake attempts to balance new development with farmland preservation, transportation, and community needs.

While much of the address focused

(See ***WAKE CO ADDRESS,*** P. 11)

This Year's MacArthur 'Geniuses' Include A Musician, A Painter And An Economist



NEW YORK (AP) — Immanuel Wilkins was riding the Amtrak from New York to Philadelphia when he got a call from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. But he said he had to wait to deboard the train to find out if it was life-changing news or not.

The Brooklyn-based saxophonist, bandleader and composer hesitated to believe they were calling to say he was part of their prestigious fellows class. He spent the last 15 minutes of his ride convincing himself they only wanted his recommendations.

"I was just outside," said Wilkins, 29, when he finally confirmed it was the former. "Which was nice because then I could yell as loud as I wanted to and celebrate."

The foundation unveiled its 2026 fellows class on Tuesday: 20 individuals ranging in discipline from the performing arts to the social sciences, separated in age by four decades and spread across three continents. They will each receive $800,000 over the next five years in recognition of their "exceptional creativity." Commonly referred to as "genius grants," the no-strings-attached awards are intended to provide the flexibility necessary for recipients to pursue their artistic or scholarly visions.

This year's class shows a particular interest in history. There's a philosopher using cognitive science to investigate the relationship between memory and forgiveness; a poet repurposing historical texts to probe colonial violence and the resilience of Native American communities; and a choreographer breaking down the barriers between difference dance styles across time and place.

They "explore the depths of our humanity; they reveal untold origins to challenges; they expand the edges of scientific inquiry and life-saving research," Kristen Mack, the vice president of communications for fellows and partnerships at the MacArthur Foundation, said in a statement.

"They show us new ways to understand the world," Mack said.

Take Wilkins, the youngest member. His debut album "Omega" connects the 1918 lynching of a pregnant Black woman, Mary Turner, to the 2014 fatal police shooting of a Black teenager, Michael Brown. The abstraction of music, Wilkins told The Associated Press, allows him to represent these stories without "recreating the violence of them."

That abstraction — the rhythms of jazz music that are difficult to capture in written scores — has drawn him to visual art, too.

Jazz musicians have long debated how to notate the "swing" so central to the genre, Wilkins explained. He is exploring whether that sound could be rendered through sculptures or spectrograms in the same way it is currently represented through eighth notes or triplets.

With "RECESS" — an immersive experience recently presented in his hometown of Philadelphia — he attempted a "graphic score" by performing on an industrial jungle gym that was both bandstand and playground.

"The system of Western notation, as we know it, doesn't have the capacity to hold the sound of Black music. Like, a lot of what makes Black music maybe sound 'Black' is these quantum entanglements with the time," he said. "I'm kind of trying to radically debate: what actually is this Western system of notation holding when it comes to Black music? That opens up a wide set of possibilities for what a score could look like."

A Princeton labor economist who centers racial inequality

Awardees who spoke with AP had no concrete plans for how they'd use the sudden gift. Nor does the MacArthur Foundation expect any answer to that question.

Unlike traditional grants, the award requires no progress reports from its fellows. The program does not accept applications, instead relying on an ever-changing list of outside nominators whose recommendations are reviewed by a confidential committee.

Ellora Derenoncourt, a New Jersey-based associate professor at Princeton University's department of economics, wants to use the award's platform to translate issues of economic justice for the broader public and interested policymakers.

Racial wealth disparities may seem too entrenched to ever reverse, she said. But she finds that history explains the origins of economic inequality and highlights "watershed

(See ***MACARTHUR,*** P. 6)

STATE NEWS BRIEFS

USDA ANNOUNCES MASSIVE MEAT RECALL AFFECTING BEEF, PORK AND MORE

Star Meat Delivery Inc., located in Lucama, N.C., is recalling approximately 167,639 pounds of raw pork, beef, and goat products that were produced without the benefit of federal inspection, bearing labels with a false USDA mark of inspection, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) announced today. As more information becomes available, FSIS may update the product list and labels with additional items.

Any product bearing the false establishment number "EST. 1363" should be considered misbranded and unsafe to eat.

The raw pork, beef, and goat items were produced on various dates prior to September 22, 2026. The products were vacuum-sealed and packed into cardboard boxes for shipment; individual consumer packages may not bear this labeling, as retail stores may have applied their own stickers with pricing and safe handling instructions.

The products subject to recall bear false marks of inspection with establishment number "EST. 1363," which does not have a federal grant of inspection. These items were shipped to A&D Foods, a distributor in Georgia, for further distribution to retail and restaurant locations nationwide.

The problem was discovered during FSIS surveillance activities.

There have been no confirmed reports of illness or injury due to consumption of these products. Anyone concerned about an illness or injury should contact a healthcare provider.

Food produced without inspection may contain undeclared allergens, harmful bacteria, or other contaminants that put consumer health and safety at risk. FSIS is concerned that some product may be in the refrigerators or freezers of consumers, restaurants, or retailers. Consumers who have purchased these products are urged not to consume them. Retailers and restaurants are urged not to sell or serve these products. These products should be thrown away or returned to the place of purchase.

RARE EARLY COPIES OF THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE ARE ON DISPLAY AT THE NASHER MUSEUM

The three documents—the Stone, the Binns, and the Tyler—come from the collection of Duke University alumnus David M. Rubenstein and are all rare copies of the Declaration of Independence made in the early 19th century. Their two-part display comes as the centerpiece of We the People, a collaboration between Duke and Durham marking the 250th anniversary of the original Declaration of Independence signing.

The documents' journey in the Bull City began at the Durham County Main Library, where they were on display from September 8th through the 20th; now they've moved to the Nasher Museum of Art, where they're featured alongside Nari Ward's *We the People* and *Turn the volume up!*, two exhibits that touch on American identity and activism. The Declaration of Independence will be on display at the Nasher through January 3rd and is free for the public to visit.

The display includes an official full-sized 1823 facsimile engraved by William J. Stone, often referred to as a "Stone Declaration," along with two early 19th-century broadside reproductions. One is an 1818 copy produced by calligrapher Benjamin Owen Tyler, and the other is an illustrated 1819 edition published by John Binns. All three works are on loan from the David M. Rubenstein Americana Collection.

The exhibition is a centerpiece of *We the People*, a partnership between Duke University and Durham organizations marking the upcoming 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776. Organizers said the display is intended to help audiences understand how Americans encountered the Declaration before the advent of modern printing and mass media.

"These documents show how the Declaration evolved visually and symbolically as the young nation sought to preserve and share its founding ideals," organizers said in a description of the exhibition.

The Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, 2001 Campus Drive, Durham, North Carolina, opened The Declaration of Independence exhibition on Thursday, September 24, 2026.

The exhibition will be on view from September 24, 2026, to January 3, 2027. It's open to the public and free to visit.

Hours are 10 am. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday, and 12 to 5 p.m. on Sunday. It's closed on Mondays.

DO YOU KNOW ALICE?

Continued from page 1

away from joining them.

That is why the ALICE lens should shape how we support entrepreneurs. A business owner who is also ALICE does not need a pep talk. She needs:

· Affordable, patient capital, not predatory loans or high-fee cash advances.

· Practical training in pricing, bookkeeping, and cash flow so revenue actually becomes household income.

· Coaching and peer networks that last beyond a single workshop.

· Access to child care and benefits, because the entrepreneur is often the family's caregiver too.

· Local procurement, so that hospitals, universities, and corporations buy from the businesses on our own blocks.

When a small business stabilizes, the benefit spreads. The owner moves above the threshold. The workers she hires get steadier hours. The dollars stay in the neighborhood longer.

The model works when it is built for people like ALICE. The nonprofit I lead, Rising Tide Capital, started in 2004 with 15 entrepreneurs a year. Today it has served more than 13,500 entrepreneurs in English and Spanish, working in more than 14 states.

The results line up with what ALICE families need most: more income at home. Among the entrepreneurs it serves, business sales grew 77 percent and household incomes grew 56 percent, and together they created more than 1,500 new jobs. More than 81 percent of entrepreneurs we serve are still running their businesses after five years. That is a key test, because many small businesses close within their first few years.

This work is the ALICE lesson in action. A family climbs above the threshold when the business does more than survive, and starts to support the household.

What can you do? Look up your own county. United For ALICE publishes local data at unitedforalice.org, and many local United Ways share state reports.

Bring the numbers to the table. Share them with your family, your friends, pastor, your city council member, your employer, and your chamber of commerce. Ask what they are doing for the 58 percent of Black households the national report says are struggling to afford the basics.

Buy Black, and buy local, on purpose. Every purchase from a neighborhood business is a vote for a family's stability.

And if you are ALICE, know this: the struggle is not a verdict on your worth or your work ethic. It is a measure of an economy that has not yet caught up to you. The goal, for all of us, is to make sure it does.

Senate Passes Bill That Would Rein In College Athlete Payments & Transfers



WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate passed a sweeping bipartisan bill on Monday that would regulate college sports, an attempt to end "chaos" in an industry that has been upended by skyrocketing athlete payments and near-unrestricted transfers between schools.

The overwhelming 77-22 vote to pass the legislation is the strongest effort yet by Congress to set national regulations governing payments to college athletes for their name, image and likeness and how often they can transfer. It would give the NCAA new authority over those rules and limited antitrust protections to enforce them.

The bill is the product of years of Senate negotiations that intensified after a 2025 lawsuit settlement uprooted the college sports landscape by allowing colleges to pay their players. The legislation, which would still have to pass the House, would codify the settlement into law but also establish new guardrails around the system in an attempt to rein in the runaway costs for colleges.

"It would be nice if college sports could somehow magically fix itself, but this is a matter of law, federal law, and only Congress can fix it," said Senate Commerce Committee Chairman Ted Cruz, R-Texas, who negotiated the bill with the top Democrat on the panel, Washington Sen. Maria Cantwell.

President Donald Trump praised the bill in a social media post after the late night passage. "This is a really big deal," he said. "It will not only save college sports, it will save the colleges themselves."

The bill's backers — more than 70 senators from both parties — say it aims to curtail constant litigation and uncertainty across college sports for athletes, schools and fans. It would also give hundreds of thousands of athletes new health and labor protections.

But critics say the bill doesn't do enough to protect athletes or curtail the enormous sums of money flowing to coaches, colleges and conferences.

"This is a bill that essentially ensconces a system of exploitation, and it doesn't fix the broader problems," said Connecticut Sen. Chris Murphy, a Democrat who has worked with labor and civil rights groups to rally opposition to the bill.

The bill's future is still unclear. It could face an uphill battle in the House, which failed repeatedly over the last year to get a different version to the floor and is in recess until after the November elections.

Lawmakers will have to start over in the next Congress if the bill doesn't pass both chambers by the end of the year.

Bill addresses skyrocketing spending, unlimited transfers

College sports have been reeling in the wake of the 2025 court settlement allowing colleges to directly pay players for their name, image and likeness. The fallout has reshaped the industry and led to football roster payrolls that can exceed $40 million.

The bill would codify the court settlement, including a revenue cap that allows schools to share up to $21.5 million in revenue with their players. The legislation would more than double that amount for some schools, allowing up to an additional $27.5 million in payments through a retention fund — a change that helped win the support of the two largest conferences, the Big Ten and Southeastern Conference.

To help schools raise more revenue, the bill would give schools and conferences the option of pooling their TV media rights.

The legislation also aims to stabilize the NCAA transfer portal that has led

(See **SPORTS BILL,** P. 8)



U.S. Department of Education Makes Significant Investment In America's Black Colleges

On September 22, 2026, the U.S. Department of Education (the Department) announced a significant, one-time investment of more than $174 million in additional funding to strengthen America's Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). This funding commitment reflects the Trump Administration's ongoing pledge to support institutions that have played a foundational role in advancing opportunity and economic mobility for generations of American students.

U.S. Secretary of Education Linda McMahon announced this major investment at the HBCU Summit at the White House, which convened dozens of senior Administration leaders, university presidents, and stakeholders to discuss the transformative role HBCUs play in higher education and in strengthening our nation.

This announcement builds on last year's record one-time investment of $438 million in additional funding for HBCUs to support the sector's mission and its students. In total, the Trump Administration will have directed more than $612 million in new funding to HBCUs in fiscal years 2025 and 2026.

"For nearly 200 years, HBCUs have been engines of opportunity in communities, advancing critical innovations and uplifting local industries across the nation," said U.S. Secretary of Education Linda McMahon. "This new investment will help ensure these vital institutions have the resources they need to continue delivering world-class education and to prepare students for success in a rapidly evolving economy."

"HBCUs have helped shape the story of American education, and they will undoubtedly shape the future," said Under Secretary of Education Nicholas Kent. "These institutions of higher education remain central to our nation's higher education ecosystem, fueling workforce development, driving economic growth in their communities, and cultivating leaders across sectors including STEM, education, public service, and business."

This significant investment reinforces the Trump Administration's commitment to expanding HBCUs' impact by ensuring they can continue their historic mission with the resources necessary to thrive.

In addition to the investment in HBCUs, the Trump Administration will also make a one-time award of more than $61 million in additional funding for Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities.

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Trump Administration Moves To Limit Fixes For Systemic Racism In Schools



Jovonia Lewis poses for a portrait outside of the Durham Board of Education building on Monday Sept. 21, 2026 in Durham, NC (AP)

WASHINGTON (AP) — For decades, a key principle underpinned civil rights enforcement in American schools: Not all discrimination was intentional.

Even if a school policy was written without overt racial bias, it might unfairly hurt one group of students over another, the understanding went. The concept is known as systemic racism, and Republican and Democratic administrations agreed: Schools and universities that received federal funding had an obligation to address it.

Under President Donald Trump's administration, that's no longer the case. One by one, the administration has limited the remedies schools can use to address systemic racial injustice.

This summer, the Education Department rescinded a regulation that allowed schools to gauge potential discrimination by comparing outcomes across races, such as the racial breakdown of students in advanced classes. Then, it issued a letter to American schools, emphasizing it's illegal to consider race when crafting discipline policies — even if one particular racial group ends up suspended or expelled more often.

At the same time, Trump's Justice Department has stepped away from many school desegregation cases. In a news release Thursday, the department boasted of successfully working through the courts to close more than 50 desegregation cases since Trump took office, with motions to dismiss in the works in many other cases. Previous administrations had used these federal court cases to hold schools accountable when students of color had worse outcomes than white students — high rates of discipline, worse school facilities or reduced access to extracurriculars and advanced coursework.

While Trump's first administration deprioritized enforcing racial justice, his current administration has gone further — threatening to punish schools for any consideration of race in their policies and practices.

To the administration, the practice of examining different outcomes for particular groups of students, sometimes known as "disparate impact," was itself a form of racial discrimination.

"The Obama and Biden Administrations weaponized disparate impact by effectively coercing schools to discipline students differently based on race in order to engineer equitable disciplinary outcomes across racial groups," Education Department spokesperson Sabin Sidney said. "These practices unfortunately led to unsafe classrooms and undermined student learning."

Critics worry the administration's actions will make it easier to get away with racial discrimination.

"When they talk about returning it to the states and making America great again, they're talking about returning to how it was before 1954," when school segregation was legal, said U.S. Rep. Bobby Scott, D-Va.

Since Trump's return to office, the administration has set its sights on school discipline.

In May 2025, the president signed an executive order directing federal agencies to stop looking for " disparate impact," or policies that appear neutral but result in outsized impact to one group over another. Those policies had been examined for possible discrimination, regardless of their intent.

In education, that analysis had most often been applied to school discipline — especially to removing students from the classroom, such as through suspensions, expulsions and referrals to law enforcement.

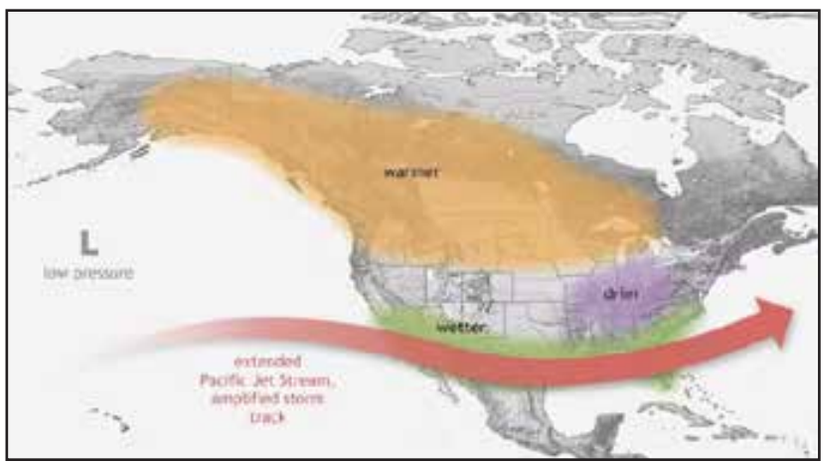
Federal and state data have long shown students of color, particularly Black students, are more likely than their peers to be pulled from the classroom for similar infractions. Research shows that students who are suspended are more likely to become disengaged from school and to have worse academic outcomes.

In 2021, the Education Department began investigating a complaint alleging Black male students with disabilities in Denver Public Schools were being disproportionately pushed out of the classroom. Progress on the case halted after Trump took office in 2025.

Advocates had also filed the complaint with state authorities, who found violations of civil rights laws and ordered the district to mandate new training. Meanwhile, families have heard nothing from the federal Education Department.

The silence gives school districts permission to continue with business as usual, said Pam Bisceglia, executive director of Advocacy Denver, which filed the complaints.

Cities Prepare for 2026 Super El Niño



THE CONVERSATION - This year's El Niño has the potential to be one of the strongest in living memory, and the evidence is showing up around the world.

The U.S. just saw its hottest summer on record in the Lower 48 states. Drought is slowing shipping in the Panama Canal. The Pacific is experiencing an exceptionally busy hurricane season, while the Atlantic is unusually quiet. Those are just a few early signs. Forecasters warn that this El Niño could bring extreme heat, destructive storms and flooding to many parts of the planet through early 2027.

I am a researcher who works on climate and disaster resilience, and I study how governments prepare for climate disasters and help to identify what they are missing.

Community planning for El Niño often starts by identifying infrastructure that's vulnerable to extreme weather. What can be harder to address are the needs of the populations most at risk, including low-income communities and older adults who may need help preparing their homes and themselves for extreme conditions.

As communities prepare for the rising risk of extreme weather, they need to be aware of the blind spots.

What is El Niño and what's at risk?

El Niño is part of a natural climate pattern that appears every few years when temperatures in the eastern Pacific Ocean rise.

Its effects can shift weather patterns away from what is considered normal. Typically wet regions can get unusually dry, while dry areas can experience extreme rainfall that causes flooding. Global average temperatures also tend to rise during El Niño conditions, leaving people facing dangerous heat, both indoors and outdoors.

On the U.S. West Coast, for example, the combination of El Niño conditions with king tides and rising sea levels could lead to more coastal flooding, erosion and damage to homes and infrastructure. In the past, flood damage and landslides from heavy rain during El Niño have shut down highways and affected public services long after a storm has passed.

Preparing for the strong El Niño expected in late 2026 and early 2027 means ensuring that critical infrastructure is able to withstand flooding, temperature extremes and other severe weather conditions.

That means inspecting flood control and drainage systems, trimming trees that could knock down power lines during high winds, and reinforcing or maintaining infrastructure such as dams, stormwater channels, roads and bridges.

Aging infrastructure, in particular, can be a problem.

Old levees and dams, for example, can leave a community vulnerable to catastrophic flooding, as the Seattle area saw in December 2025 when flooding from heavy rainfall broke levees in multiple communities. Repairing and replacing large-scale infrastructure like this is expensive and time-consuming. Too often, by the time it fails, repairs had been discussed for years but not completed.

Where we're finding gaps in disaster planning

Infrastructure is only part of the challenge. Preparing a community for El Niño also means preparing people for what could be unprecedented conditions.

A study I worked on with researchers at Tufts University reviewed climate adaptation and disaster preparedness in several high-risk communities in the United States. We identified gaps in the policies, resources and institutional capacity available to help communities adapt to rising risks.

In particular, we found that governments often focus heavily on physical risks while giving too little attention to social vulnerability.

Vulnerable populations, including people experiencing homelessness, older adults and people with disabilities, often face higher risks and greater challenges in preparing for disasters.

People with limited mobility, for example, may have difficulty evacuating quickly or getting into shelters. Individuals with limited financial resources might have fewer options for relocating or for making home improvements in preparation for extreme weather. Someone experiencing homelessness may not have safe shelter.

It is often easier for governments to identify and invest in physical infrastructure than to invest in policies that address complex social vulnerabilities like these. For example, building a seawall can be tied to a specific project or funding stream. Reducing social vulnerability, on the other hand, may require coordination across housing, healthcare, emergency management and social services. And it typically requires sustained investments over time.

Yet, preparing successfully for extreme weather often requires considering housing and shelter needs, healthcare access and support services.

After a wildfire or major flooding, people may need temporary rental assistance or affordable housing to avoid displacement. Older adults or people with disabilities may need transportation to shelters or assistance getting medications and healthcare.

In both the San Francisco Bay Area and in Durham County, North Carolina, officials are talking publicly about the risks to encourage residents to prepare. Bay Area officials are stressing the importance of following emergency management notifications and weather forecasts, particularly for individuals living close to the water or on hillsides that could face flash flooding and landslides.

In Oceanside, California, city officials convened an El Niño working group that included representatives from their public works, engineering, fire and police departments to coordinate planning, communications strategies and the monitoring of the San Luis Rey River.

Broader lessons

The challenge of preparing for El Niño in the face of uncertainty reflects some of the broader issues humanity faces when preparing for future climate changes.

Keeping up with infrastructure maintenance, scenario planning ahead of heat or storm seasons, understanding the needs of vulnerable populations and having plans in place to meet them can help prevent a severe storm from becoming a major disaster for the community.

Business & Finance

SBA Loan Defaults Surged at 2 Nonbank Lenders. $1.3 Billion Entered Liquidation

Inc,—Federally-backed loans doled out by small-business lending companies have defaulted at a substantially higher rate compared to traditional lenders over the last decade, according to a new report from the Small Business Administration's Inspector General.



The new report takes a look at $9.5 billion worth of SBA 7(a) loans—which are government-backed loans with favorable interest and repayment terms—that were disbursed by SBLCs between fiscal year 2016 to 2023. By the end of March 2025, 1,657 loans defaulted and $1.3 billion worth of loans were headed to liquidation.

The default rate of SBLCs hit 14.87 percent through the end of March 2025, compared to 9.79 percent for traditional lenders, according to the report. Even worse, early default rates were more than double (5.38 percent) that of traditional 7(a) lenders (2.62 percent).

Here's the catch: Poor loan performance is heavily concentrated among two SBLCs, which held 84 percent of the total amount of defaulted loans. The SBA was aware of past infractions committed by these two SBLCs, the report states, but failed to intervene to temper the risks of the underperforming loans.

"This occurred because [Office of Credit Risk Management] did not sufficiently assess the root cause of SBLCs' 7(a) loan portfolio underperformance, related to default rates, to mitigate the associated risks," the Inspector General's office writes in the report, further recommending that the agency conduct its own analysis to figure out the root cause.

To put it differently, SBLC lending grew between fiscal years 2016 to 2023—with loan volumes spiking by 171 percent—but loans also went south more quickly, with the number of early defaults increasing by 800 percent during that same time period.

The SBA says that the above statement, while true, is misleading and instead argues that a more apt portrayal is comparing early default rates to loan disbursements for each fiscal year. That comparison alters the early default count substantially, showing that it increased by 112.5 percent, which the agency acknowledges "is still elevated."

Despite the SBA identifying actions in need of remediation, the two SBLCs reportedly continued improper business practices, such as charging prohibited fees on loans or failing to make sure that borrowers used funding in adherence to SBA rules. The agency did not name any of the SBLCs within the report.

The SBA also stopped examining SBLCs since April 4, 2023 because of "contractual issues." About a week later, the SBA had lifted a near 40-year moratorium on its SBLC licensing program to allow more non-bank lenders into the fold. It has not conducted an exam since.

While the agency's Office of Credit Risk Management isn't formally required to conduct these exams, not doing so could increase noncompliance risks, the report argues. That, in turn, "could jeopardize the integrity of the program and increase the risk of financial loss."

"I was sort of appalled by the deficiencies that they noted because it's just sloppiness," says Chris Hurn, the CEO and co-founder of Lendesca, an SBA lender service provider. "There's really no excuse for some of these things."

Hurn, who was formerly the CEO of Fountainhead, an SBLC, says that the report surprised him, comparing the two poor-performing SBLCs to a couple of bad apples that the agency "didn't do much about for a long time." It makes the other SBLCs look bad by comparison, Hurn adds.

And there are consequences that could come about as a result of the report, especially as SBA Administrator Kelly Loeffler has voiced concerns about the health of the 7(a) portfolio. One possibility, Hurn says, is that some SBLCs might reduce their SBA originations as a result of exams. But overall, he maintains that the majority of SBLCs are operating in the black and continue to help alleviate access to capital gaps faced by entrepreneurs.

The SBA agrees, highlighting in its response to the report that SBLC default rates are heavily concentrated. When removing the two SBLCs in question, the remaining majority outperformed traditional 7(a) lenders.

"While the [Office of Credit Risk Management] largely disagrees with the draft report, it acknowledges opportunities to strengthen oversight activities," the SBA's Edward Ledford, who serves as the OCRM deputy director, wrote in response.



Congress Votes To End Production Of The Penny After 234 Years

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. Mint stopped making pennies in 2025, but legislation passed by the Senate and headed to President Donald Trump's desk will formally end their production after 234 years.

The bill, passed by voice vote late Monday, directs the government to not make pennies, giving a legal stamp of approval to the Trump administration's decision to stop producing the currency last year. The penny, among the first coins to be made after the Mint was established in 1792, has become increasingly expensive to produce and is used by fewer and fewer consumers as digital transactions have become more standard.

Trump is expected to sign the bill. He wrote in a social media post last year that the U.S. has produced the 1-cent coin for "far too long."

Ending the penny will save millions of dollars

The Mint says that production of a penny now costs almost 4 cents and that ceasing to make them would generate immediate savings of $56 million annually.

The bipartisan bill, called The Common Cents Act, was sponsored by Reps. Lisa McClain, R-Mich., and Robert Garcia, D-Calif.

"When it comes to taking on waste and making sure our tax dollars are spent wisely, it's common sense that we should stop making a coin that costs nearly four times more than it's worth to produce," Garcia said.

Consumers can still use their pennies

`Pennies are still in circulation, and the formal end to their production doesn't mean consumers or stores can't use them. The Mint said it made 3.2 billion pennies in 2024.

`The bill outlines new procedures for stores as pennies are phased out, and it allows them to round transactions up or down to the nearest 5 cents.

`Retailers had pushed for the bill to eliminate the threat of lawsuits as penny circulation has dwindled.

"Businesses across the country have faced cascading impacts from the lack of pennies in circulation, operating under constant uncertainty about how to handle cash transactions when exact change is unavailable," a coalition of retailer groups wrote to House leaders in a letter earlier this year.

`The bill would also allow the government to use an inner layer of zinc when producing the nickel, which could increase in circulation as the penny is phased out. The 5-cent coin is currently made from both nickel and copper, which is more expensive than zinc.

US & China Release $60B Product Lists For Tariff Cuts After Trump-Xi Meeting

HONG KONG (AP) — The United States and China on Monday released reciprocal lists of nonsensitive products worth about $30 billion each that will see tariff cuts, from American hair products to Chinese toys, in a deal expected to help bolster bilateral trade.

The details came days after Chinese President Xi Jinping met with U.S. President Donald Trump in Washington in his first state visit to the U.S. since 2015. The U.S. had already reduced tariffs against China after Trump's tariffs reached as high as 145% at one point last year, as tensions between the two countries eased.

China's commerce ministry said in a statement the agreement will help strengthen trade cooperation.

Most country-specific tariffs practically eradicated

The lists included 1,619 items of U.S. goods entering China, ranging from agricultural commodities, hair and personal care products to timber and medical equipment. Coal from the U.S. will also be included.

For Chinese goods exported to the U.S., 77 categories were covered, including fireworks, tableware, toys like dolls and puzzles, glass and wooden Christmas ornaments and soccer balls.

Tariff rates on over 90% of the products would be subject to "most-favored-nation" levels, the Chinese commerce ministry said, meaning that country-specific tariffs will effectively be eliminated.

Most-favored-nation rates are the standard tariffs applied under World Trade Organization rules, but they can differ from item to item and are often in the single digits.

U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer said in a separate statement the product lists focused on "nonsensitive goods on each side that could benefit from more favorable tariff treatment." The deal could help secure market access for U.S. farmers, manufacturers, businesses and workers, while benefiting American consumers with imports from China including household goods and toys, Greer said.

Both countries said they agreed the list may be adjusted later as needed, but amendments were likely to be no more than on an annual basis.

The Chinese commerce ministry said the two countries agreed to further cooperate in the agricultural sector, forming a group under the Board of Trade established in May to optimize bilateral trade.

Sectors of strategic importance for both countries, such as chips, electric vehicles and batteries, were not covered under the agreement.

A potential boost to US-China bilateral trade

"This is a positive outcome for these affected products compared to a smaller tariff cut, and could lead to a more significant boost to bilateral trade," said Lynn Song, chief economist for Greater China at ING Bank.

The lowered tariffs could be a win for U.S. consumer brands, added Jacob Cooke, CEO of WPIC Marketing + Technologies based in Beijing, as some of the products covered by China's list of U.S. imports included fast-growing categories like hair care, personal care products and infant formula.

With the U.S. list for Chinese products focused more on consumer goods, it could help lower U.S. inflation while also allowing Chinese firms to export more of their overcapacity, said Gary Ng, a senior economist at French bank Natixis.

ABEC Brings $11 Million And A 250-Job Biotech Products Factory

ABEC, Inc., the Bethlehem, Pennsylvania-headquartered biopharmaceutical manufacturing solutions company, announced on September 10, 2026 the grand opening of its new manufacturing facility in Wilson, North Carolina, with a ribbon-cutting ceremony scheduled for September 24, 2026. CEO Scott Pickering said: "Opening our Wilson facility represents another important milestone in ABEC's commitment to supporting the global biopharmaceutical industry. This investment expands our manufacturing capabilities, brings us closer to customers in the southeastern United States, and reinforces our ability to deliver the industry's most comprehensive portfolio of bioprocess equipment, consumables, and engineering solutions. We are proud to become part of the Wilson community and look forward to building long-term partnerships throughout the region."

The Wilson facility traces back to an $11 million investment ABEC first announced in August 2022: a 50,000-square-foot facility on 13 acres, originally expected to be operational by early Q2 2023 and projected to create 251 engineering and manufacturing positions.

PUBLIC MEETINGS FOR PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS TO RAMSEY STREET FROM MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. FREEWAY TO BETHUNE DRIVE IN FAYETTEVILLE, CUMBERLAND COUNTY

STIP NO: U-4403

FAYETTEVILLE: The N.C. Department of Transportation will hold two open house style public meetings to provide information on the proposed improvements to Ramsey Street from the Martin Luther King Jr. Freeway to Bethune Drive in Fayetteville.

Wednesday, October 14
5 p.m. to 7 p.m.
First Baptist Church
302 Moore Street
Fayetteville, NC 28301

Thursday, October 15
5 p.m. to 7 p.m.
Cedar Falls Baptist Church
6181 Ramsey Street
Fayetteville, NC 28301

Proposed improvements would widen Ramsey Street to six lanes and provide accommodations for pedestrians and bicyclists. The proposed project would help relieve current and future traffic congestion and improve safety of this heavily traveled corridor.

Additional improvements are also being considered at these two major Ramsey Street interchanges — I-295 and Martin Luther King Jr. Freeway.

NCDOT representatives will be available in an informal, open house-style setting to answer questions and gather public input regarding the proposed project. The opportunity to submit written comments or questions will be provided at the meetings or via the webpage (https://publicinput.com/ramseystreet), email (ramseystreet@publicinput.com) or phone (984-205-6615 and enter code 2502 to leave a message).

Citizens may attend at any time between 5 p.m. and 7 p.m. either day. There will be no formal presentation, and the same information will be available at both meetings as well as on the webpage.

For more information the NCDOT Project Manager:

Craig Freeman
Project Engineer
NCDOT Highway Division 6
PO Box 1150
Fayetteville, NC 28302

NCDOT will provide auxiliary aids and services under the Americans with Disabilities Act for disabled persons who want to participate in this public open house. Anyone requiring special services should contact Diane Wilson at ext-pdwilson1@ncdot.gov or (919)670-7686 as soon as possible so that arrangements can be made.

Those who do not speak English, or have a limited ability to read, speak or understand English, may receive interpretive services upon request prior by calling 1-800-481-6494.

Aquellas personas no hablan inglés, o tienen limitaciones para leer, hablar o entender inglés, podrían recibir servicios de interpretación si los solicitan llamando al 1-800-481-6494.

NCDOT HOSTING A PUBLIC OPEN HOUSE A PROPOSAL TO GRADE SEPARATE N.E. MAYNARD ROAD UNDER THE NCRR/NORFOLK SOUTHERN AND CSX RAIL LINES AND REALIGN THE CHATHAM STREET/N.E. MAYNARD ROAD INTERSECTION SOUTH OF ITS EXISTING ALIGNMENT IN WAKE COUNTY

Project No. P-5718

CARY - The N.C. Department of Transportation is hosting a public meeting to discuss the proposal to grade separate N.E. Maynard Road under the NCRR/Norfolk Southern and CSX Rail lines in Cary.

The purpose of this project is to eliminate rail-highway conflicts at the existing at-grade railroad crossing location on N.E. Maynard Road near its intersection with E. Chatham Street. The proposed project will improve vehicular mobility and safety at this location and the surrounding area.

Project details and maps can be found on NCDOT's project input website at publicinput.com/maynardroad-gradeseparation. The information will be available at the meeting allowing for one-on-one discussions with NCDOT staff, but there will be no formal presentation.

The meeting will be held from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. on October 6 at First Cary United Methodist Church, Community, 117 S. Academy Street, in Cary.

People may also submit comments by phone at 984-205-6615 project code 7714, email maynardroad-gradeseparation@publicinput.com, or mail at the address shown below by October 27, 2026.

By Mail: Matthew Potter
NCDOT Rail Division – Engineer Consultant
1 South Wilmington Street
Raleigh, NC 27699-1553

NCDOT will provide auxiliary aids and services under the Americans with Disabilities Act for disabled people who wish to participate in this meeting. Anyone requiring special services should contact Tony Gallagher, Environmental Analysis Unit, at 1598 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, NC 27699-1598, 919-707-6069 or magallagher@ncdot.gov as early as possible so arrangements can be made.

Those who do not speak English, or have a limited ability to read, speak or understand English, may receive interpretive services upon request prior to the meeting by calling 1-800-481-6494.

Aquellas personas no hablan inglés, o tienen limitaciones para leer, hablar o entender inglés, podrían recibir servicios de interpretación si los solicitan llamando al 1-800-481-6494.

Raleigh Rescue Mission's Expansion Offers More Help For Homeless Women And Children In North Carolina

NC NEWSLINE - A lot of big changes are underway at the Raleigh Rescue Mission, which this month opened a new $41 million campus in Knightdale for women and children experiencing homelessness.

The new campus, named The Garden, allows the faith-based nonprofit to increase its capacity to serve as many as 350 women and children daily, which is 290 more than the 60 it served at its downtown Raleigh facility.

"This is about so much more than a new campus," John Luckett, the Rescue Mission's president and CEO said in a statement following last week's ribbon-cutting ceremony. "The Garden gives us the opportunity to welcome more women and children into a safe, dignified environment where they can heal, find hope, and take meaningful steps toward a different future."

The Rescue Mission's capacity to serve men at its downtown facility also increases as a result of The Garden coming online. The nonprofit can now serve as many as 120 men, compared to only 40 men before the new facility opened.

In an interview with NC Newsline, Luckett stressed that The Garden is not an emergency shelter for women and children looking for a place to spend a night. In those cases, families are referred to traditional shelters, he said. The Garden is focused on longer-term solutions.

"I tell people that if there was such a thing as a boarding school for people experiencing homelessness, we would be it," Luckett said. "We do an assessment and people move in and they're individuals who want to be a part of our New Life program that's focused on getting a job, getting a car and getting an apartment."

The New Life Plan to which Luckett referred is a structured, six-phase program that helps participants build the skills and stability needed for long-term independence.

The women and children entering the program will move into one of the campus' 101 private residential rooms. The campus also features an on-site daycare and will offer life skills and job readiness programs. Women looking to return to the workforce will be prioritized.

"We are a back-to-work program, and that's very important," Luckett said. "We're trying to get people that want to go back to work and need all the support systems in order to make that happen."



Luckett estimates it will take about a year for The Garden to reach capacity. It usually takes a woman with children six to nine months to complete the program. Single women can complete it in four to six months, he said.

The idea for The Garden came after the organization identified a critical shortage of transitional housing for women and children looking to escape homelessness, Luckett said.

Wake County's 2026 Point-in-Time Count (PIT) numbers show more than 1,000 people were living on the street or in emergency shelters in Wake County on a single night in January. The count identified 1,050 people experiencing homelessness in Wake County, including 307 people living unsheltered and 743 staying in shelters or transitional housing programs. By comparison, 1,127 people were counted during the 2025 Point-in-Time Count.

The PIT is an annual effort required by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

The Garden is located within a new Lennar single-family home community on land donated to the Rescue Mission about 25 years ago. Luckett said a donor gave the mission about 60 acres. It sold Lennar 45 acres for its housing development and retained ownership of 15 acres for The Garden.

Lennar helped with "water, sewer, electrical, bringing that to the whole area," Luckett said.

"When we started looking for a place, we kept coming up with the land that we already owned," Luckett said. "We ended up within proximity of the downtown location and in a good town that was very welcoming of us having this residential model of getting women and children back on their feet."

Luckett said The Garden is loosely based on the Purpose Built Communities model, which focuses on mixed-income housing, cradle-to-college education, community wellbeing and economic vitality.

Knightdale Mayor Jessica Day said in a statement that The Garden will be a game-changer for women and children experiencing homelessness.

"The Garden is not only a resource for women and children facing situational homelessness," said. "I believe it will be a haven of hope for them, and a chance to re-envision the lives they want for themselves."

NC High Schoolers Say Schools Feel Safer, Experts Want More

NC NEWSLINE - Dr. Ellen Essick said there is a lot of good news about mental health in the 2025 North Carolina High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey. But there are areas that clearly need attention when it comes to the overall well-being of North Carolina's young people.

Essick, section chief for N.C. Healthy Schools in the state Department of Public Instruction, presented her findings Monday before the N.C. Governor's Advisory Council for Student Safety and Well-Being. Governor Josh Stein created the council in April 2025 to promote safe, welcoming, and inclusive schools while improving student physical, social, and emotional well-being.

Essick told the group that between 2023 and 2025, the survey saw a decrease in physical fighting at schools. And the percentage of students who missed school because they felt unsafe decreased from 14.6% in 2023 to 9.9% last year.

But the survey found sexual violence is a persistent problem.

Nearly 14% of female students and 6.6% of male high schoolers who responded to the anonymous survey said they experienced sexual violence.

"The percentage of students who said they experienced sexual violence was 10.1%, and it was pretty much even [for grades 9-12] across the board," said Essick.

The survey also asked about physical dating violence. Nearly 9% of all students, male and female, reported having experienced some form of dating violence in high school. Hispanic/Latino students (11.4%) and 11th graders (10.9%) experienced the highest rates of physical dating violence.

A question the state had not asked since 2021 delivered equally sobering results. About 30% of North Carolina high schoolers said they could get a loaded gun without their parents' permission in less than 30 minutes. White students (38.8%) and male students (34.6%) reported the highest likelihood of being able to get a gun without adult permission, about the same as in 2021.

Districts seek recurring funds for SROs

To improve student safety, the advisory council will recommend an increase in school resource officers in 2027. The National Association of School Resource Officers recommends every school employ at least one SRO. In North Carolina, there are approximately 1,500 SROs, but over 2,500 public schools. Existing SROs are also asking for additional training in dealing with juveniles, mental health challenges, and active assailants.

Advisory council members want a permanent state earmark for the SROs, replacing the current grant funding system that can fluctuate in each state budget.

Mark McHugh, the director of safety for Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, said the grant system is not working.

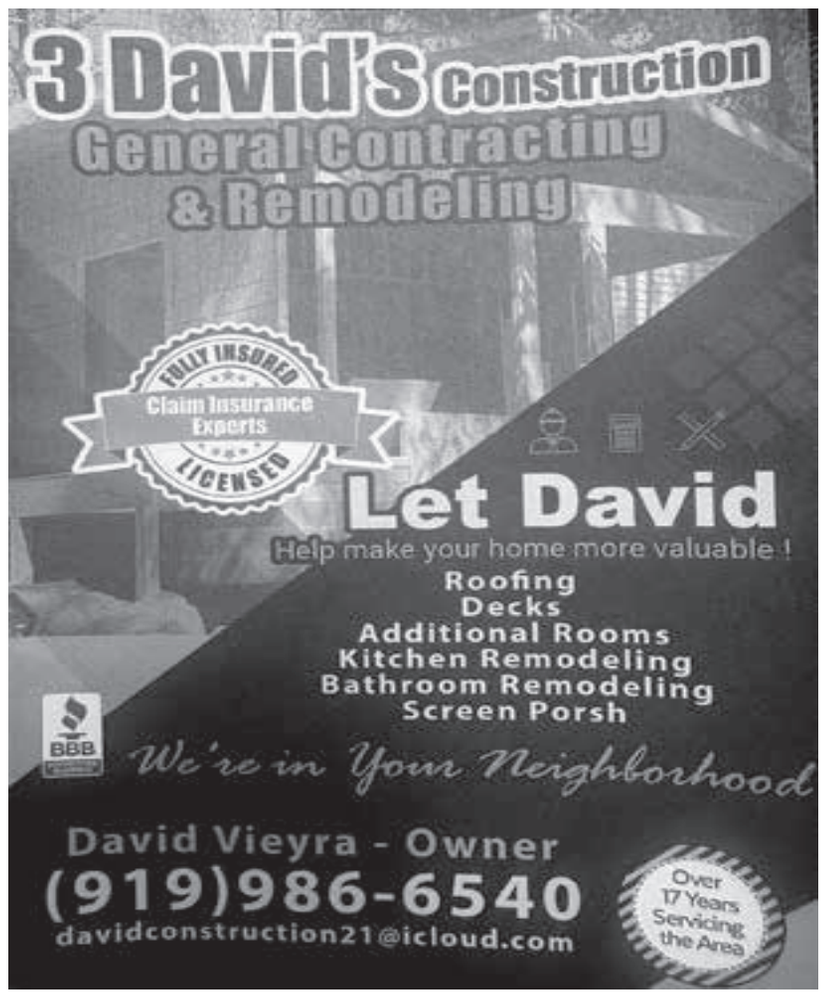
"With 185 schools, I got one SRO in the grant process last year," said McHugh. "That's our biggest hurdle right now."



Support Small & Local Businesses

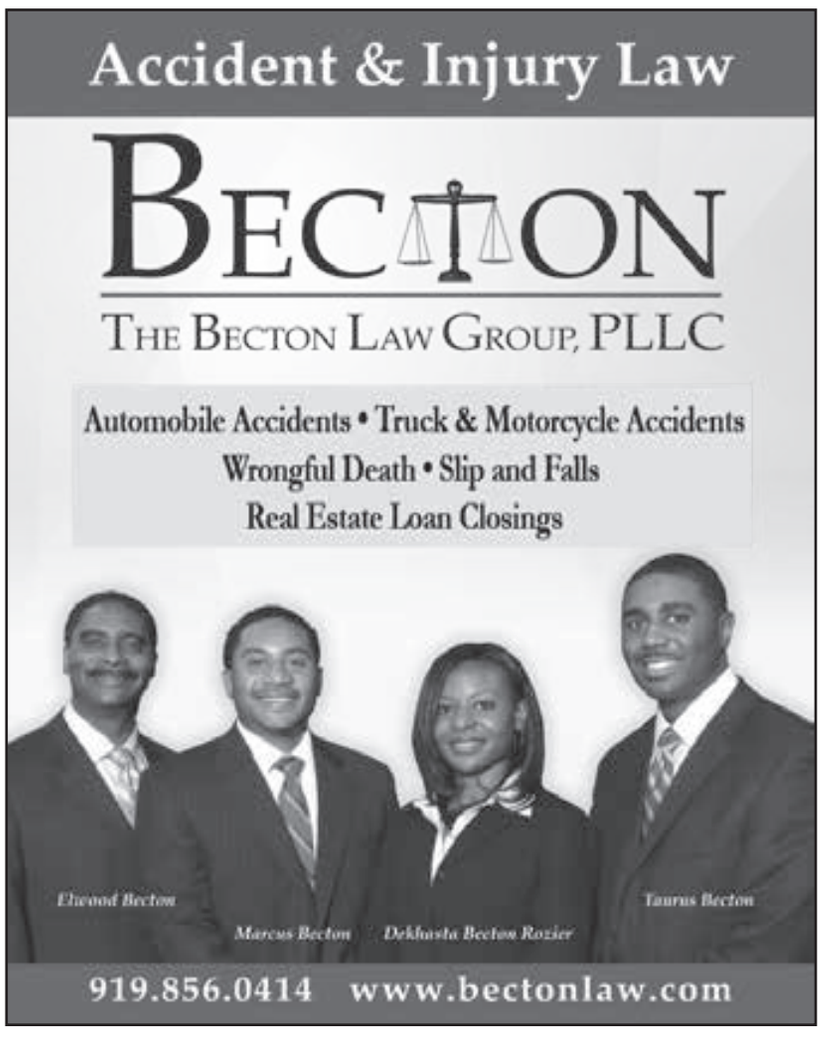


















Health & Wellness

Reclaiming Self-Love in a Culture of Artificial Perfection

By Jheri Hardaway
Staff Writer

Our world is entangled in conflict. Across the globe, geopolitical warfare claims lives and destabilizes regions. Closer to home, a tech battle for our attention wages constantly in the palms of our hands. Algorithms are engineered to capture our attention, commodify our time, and distract us from our presence. Yet perhaps the quietest, most destructive conflict is taking place within the human spirit: the internal war on self-love, contentment, and gratitude for how we were made by our creator.

Jasmine Guy, the 64-year-old 'A Different World' star, recently addressed online comments criticizing her looks as she reprises her iconic Whitley Gilbert-Wayne in the Netflix sequel, which premiered September 24. In her post, she noted how the internet pushes women to live fully yet judges signs of aging, calling instead for love, memories, and joy without expiration dates. Guy expressed via Instagram, "The internet can be brutal to women as we grow older. It asks us to celebrate life while criticizing every sign that we've lived it. Growing older brings change, and I won't pretend every change is easy. But beauty, style, and joy don't have an expiration date. Let's spend less time judging ourselves and each other, and more time loving each other, making memories, and living the life we're here to live." Jasmine's words are timely. When internal peace erodes, the conflict can often migrate to the surface. A quiet dissatisfaction has been sown by modern media telling everyday people that their natural bodies are not enough. While this battle manifests in countless ways, three specific physical trends have accelerated this cultural shift: the surge of GLP-1 weight loss drugs, invasive dangerous cosmetic procedures like the Brazilian Butt Lift (BBL), and daily reliance on artificial enhancements like false eyelashes and hair weaves. Beneath the media and marketing lies an escalating public health crisis and an urgent spiritual reminder to reclaim who we were made to be and embrace who we are.



Originally developed as lifesaving interventions for Type 2 diabetes, GLP-1 receptor agonists (such as semaglutide and tirzepatide) have been rebranded by pop culture as miracle slimming tools. The New England Journal of Medicine outlines that "GLP-1 receptor agonists were fundamentally engineered to mimic gut hormones to stimulate insulin secretion and regulate blood sugar." Celebrities, influencers, and med-spas now peddle weekly injections to individuals chasing an aesthetic ideal rather than managing clinical disease. These quick fixes carry severe financial and physical costs. Health experts from the National Institutes of Health continue to warn us about the dangerous side effects stemming from dramatic, pharmaceutical-driven weight loss: Sarcopenia and Muscle Atrophy, Gastrointestinal Complications, Nutritional and Structural Depletion. When individuals who are otherwise healthy turn to prescription medications to achieve an unattainable body standard, they gamble their long-term organ health for short-term cultural approval.

While previous generations navigated pressures of fashion and makeup, today's youth are pushed toward surgical reconstruction. The Brazilian Butt Lift, or BBL, a procedure where fat is harvested via liposuction and reinjected into the gluteal area, has become a fixture of modern social media culture. The primary danger is a pulmonary fat embolism: if a cannula accidentally penetrates the deep gluteal veins, fat globules enter the bloodstream and travel directly to the heart and lungs, causing sudden, irreversible cardiovascular collapse. The Kardashian Family and hip-hop stars like Cardi B have championed these body structures that are unrealistic and often require multiple surgeries to maintain. Former Wild 'N Out star Jacky Oh (Jacklyn Marie Smith) died on May 31, 2023, at the age of 32 from complications due to cosmetic surgery. Even successful surgeries often lead to chronic pain, permanent nerve damage, and severe scar tissue.

Gluteal fat grafting remains one of the most dangerous elective cosmetic procedures in modern medicine. Dr. Donda West, mother of Kanye West, died on November 10, 2007, at the age of 58, due to a combination of pre-existing coronary artery disease and post-operative factors following cosmetic surgery. As a culture, we've experienced massive loss from these invasive and dangerous procedures. The tragic reality is that lives are being cut short on operating tables to pursue an exaggerated silhouette popularized by digital filters and photo-editing software.

At first glance, cosmetic lashes might seem minor compared to prescription drugs or surgical knives. However, their universal adoption represents the gateway through which routine self-rejection becomes normalized. What was once reserved for theatrical performance or special occasions has become an everyday obligation for some. This constant physical alteration carries real, tangible risks. Chemical adhesives contain formaldehyde, cyanoacrylates, and harsh resins that frequently trig-

(See **NATURAL BEAUTY** P. 11)

Wake County Invests In Youth Prevention Programs

Wake County has awarded more than $750,000 in opioid settlement funds to four community partners advancing youth-focused prevention, education and early intervention services. These investments strengthen efforts to spot mental health and substance use concerns early and help connect young people to services and support before a crisis escalates.

This funding builds on the Wake County Behavioral Health Department's long-term strategy to use opioid settlement dollars across the full continuum of behavioral health supports, from overdose prevention and crisis services to treatment and recovery support. While the County continues to invest millions each year in high impact services, these awards strengthen a different, equally critical part of that continuum: reaching young people and families earlier. By focusing upstream, the County hopes to reduce the number of residents who reach the point of crisis, overdose or long-term behavioral health challenges.

"Wake County is committed to strengthening the behavioral health supports that help our residents thrive," said Wake County Commissioner Cheryl Stallings. "By investing in programs that prioritize prevention, education, and early intervention, we're ensuring that children, teens and families have trusted places to turn before challenges become crises."

The awards come during Suicide Prevention and Recovery Month, a reminder of the importance of early connection and ensuring youth have trusted adults and accessible mental health supports. These investments align with Wake County's commitment to identifying concerns sooner and expanding protective factors that reduce suicide and overdose risk among children, teens and young adults.

The organizations receiving funding are El Futuro, NAMI Wake, SouthLight Healthcare and UCA WAVES.

- El Futuro will launch the Wake County Latino Youth and Family Substance Use Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative, a culturally responsive and family-centered program designed to strengthen prevention, early intervention and behavioral health support systems for Latino youth and families. Funding awarded: $213,908
- NAMI Wake will expand the Young Minds Collective, a youth-focused early-intervention model that serves as an upstream opioid prevention strategy helping young people and the adults around them recognize warning signs, reduce stigma and access support before distress escalates into crisis or substance use. Funding awarded: $250,000
- SouthLight Healthcare will implement the Youth Diversion and Early Intervention Program, an evidence-based behavioral health and diversion initiative serving youth and young adults ages 12–25 who may be at risk of substance misuse, overdose or involvement with the justice system. Funding awarded: $168,848
- UCA WAVES will provide overdose prevention training, one-on-one peer support, group support and health education focused on opioid use and the social determinants of mental health tailored specifically to Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities, including Asian Refugees. Funding awarded: $125,000

WSSU Prof. Earns National Mental Health Award



WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. — Dr. Keisha Grayson Rogers, professor in the Department of Rehabilitation Counseling and chair of the Faculty Senate at Winston-Salem State University, has been named the 2026 Black Mental Health Educator of the Year by the Black Mental Health Symposium.

Rogers was recognized Sept. 11 during the Black Mental Health Symposium Awards Ceremony, held as part of the organization's 10th annual conference, themed "Remember. Reset. Reclaim."

The award recognizes a scholar or professor who has demonstrated exceptional commitment to training the next generation of culturally humble and socially conscious counselors while advancing excellence in Black mental health education.

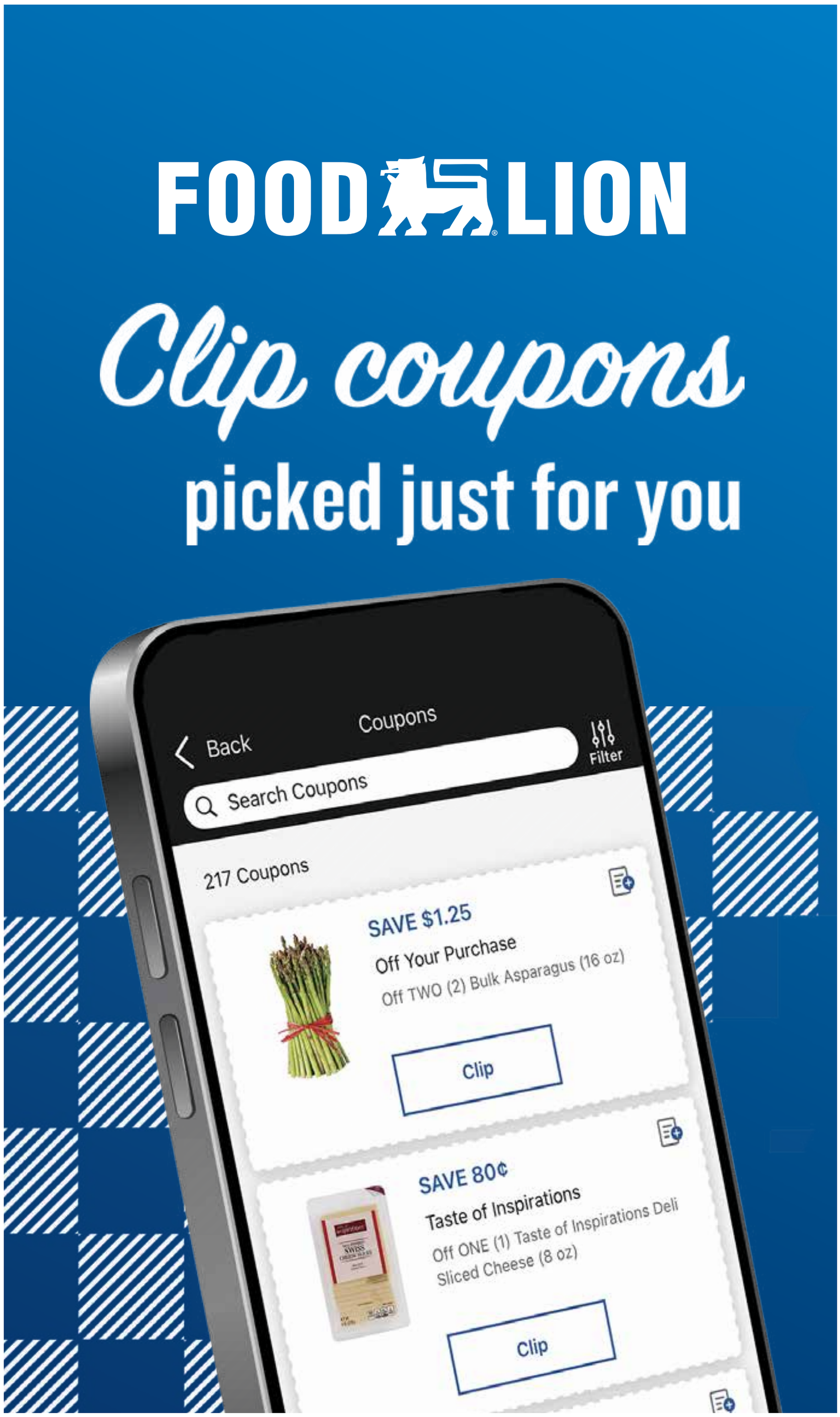
Rogers was selected for her contributions to counselor education, mentorship and advocacy. Throughout her career, she has focused on preparing rehabilitation and clinical mental health counselors to provide culturally responsive, ethical and evidence-based services to people from diverse backgrounds. Her teaching emphasizes cultural humility, social justice, advocacy and reducing mental health disparities affecting historically underserved communities.

"I am deeply honored to receive the Black Mental Health Educator of the Year Award," Rogers said. "This recognition affirms the importance of preparing counselors who lead with cultural humility, compassion and a commitment to social justice. I share this honor with my students, colleagues and the Winston-Salem State University community, whose dedication to excellence continues to inspire my work every day."

At WSSU, Rogers has mentored graduate students, supported professional development opportunities and fostered leadership among future counseling professionals. Through her scholarship, externally funded initiatives, community engagement and service to the counseling profession, she has worked to strengthen the behavioral health workforce and expand access to high-quality mental health care for underserved populations.

As Faculty Senate chair, Rogers provides leadership in support of shared governance, academic excellence and initiatives that advance the university's mission. Her work in teaching, mentorship and service continues to make an impact on students, colleagues and the counseling profession.

Rogers' work supports WSSU's We Are Rising 2030 strategic vision to strengthen academic excellence, prepare graduates for high-demand careers and deepen the university's impact on the communities it serves.



Arts & Culture

This Year's MacArthur 'Geniuses' —CONT. FROM PG 1



IMMANUEL WILKINS



ELLORA DERENONCOURT



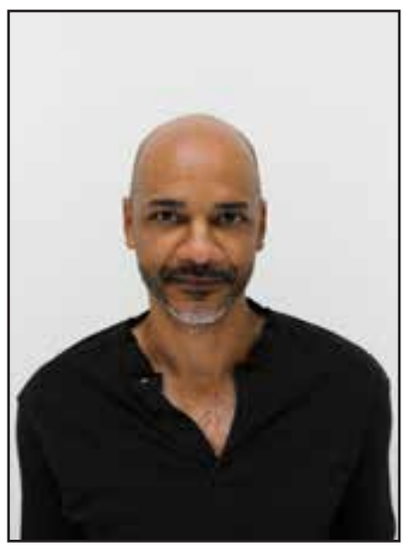
IMMANUEL WILKINS



CHIP THOMAS



MAAZA MENGISTE



RODNEY MCMILLIAN

moments" where public policies narrowed those differences. A 2021 paper showed a drop in the Black-white earnings gap after Congress raised the minimum wage and extended its protections in industries such as agriculture, domestic services and healthcare.

Another project explained how northern cities spent less on education and recreation in the communities where the Great Migration sent millions of Black Americans escaping the southern United States' low wages and racial barriers.

As the Trump administration tosses aside requirements for workforce demographic reports and limits the availability of other official sources, she fears her field might lack the information needed to calculate today's racial inequality. Universities and researchers like herself, she said, must figure out how to maintain robust data sets.

"I hope that I can take this responsibility seriously to highlight these issues," she said. "And maybe also make some more people into history nerds. Because I think, really, we need to turn back the clock to figure out sometimes either what works or what has made things the way they are today."

A painter seeking to counter 'social amnesia'

It's not dissimilar from the mantle taken up by Vincent Valdez.

The contemporary painter was drawing in his studio when the MacArthur Foundation called. For once in his life, he joked, he went "deathly silent." Most every artist is aware of the award, he said, which carries a 45-year legacy of recognizing, as he sees it, individuals "pushing boundaries."

Valdez tackles questions of American identity through representational paintings recalling murals of the southwestern United States. Murals, he learned at a young age, created an "undeniable presence" for his Mexican American community whose stories weren't reflected in dominant culture. He aims to counter what he calls "social amnesia" by helping the public remember "what we are and where we're headed."

His 30-foot-wide painting "The City I" depicts a modern Ku Klux Klan with hooded figures holding a smartphone, a beer and a Pikachu-toting baby. The second part of that trilogy, "Dream Baby Dream," situates Muhammad Ali's many eulogists in boxes that imitate "The Brady Bunch" title sequence.

He's working on the final installment, called "The New Americans." Unlike their predecessors, these colorful portraits stand vertically rather than horizontally. The images aim to highlight overlooked "pillars" of society who he considers to be "fighting the good fight" — or, he said, "the stubborn pulses in a dying heartbeat."

From a soaring Michael Jordan to the forceful eviction of a mostly Mexican American community to build Dodger Stadium, Valdez's work often engages sports. When making such images, he said, he's reminded of San Antonio Spurs' games with his dad. He was "overwhelmed" and "mesmerized," he recalled, at the unified effort required to pull off a vertical version of "the wave." Beginning courtside and moving up to the last-row dollar seats, he said, fans would stand and throw their hands in the air "like a tornado."

"If we can do it for sports on any given Saturday and Sunday in this country, then we can do this as a collective people for the things that truly matter and affect our daily lives and the lives of our neighbors," Valdez said.

'An Embodiment Of White Fears': How Zombies Went From Haitian Spiritual Tradition to Hollywood Monsters

THE GUARDIAN - American film has a canon of racist disinformation that famously includes The Birth of a Nation, King Kong (1933) and Gone With the Wind.

A new documentary makes a compelling argument that zombies, as presented, commodified and popularized by Hollywood, are part of the same tradition. Black Zombie serves as work of restoration and correction, placing its faith in the quiet, persistent power of the truth as it stares down a tsunami of colonial erasure, denial, whitewashing, violence and theft.

Its opening revelation – that zombies are a Haitian idea, invented to capture the metaphysical anguish of being torn from one's home and subjected to torture, rape and forced labor – is startling in its own right. But then director Maya Annik Bedward widens the aperture of understanding, engaging cultural experts in horror, such as Tananarive Due, an author and professor, Tom Savini, Night of the Living Dead special effects guru, Zandashé Brown, southern gothic film-maker, and Erol Josué, Haitian artist, vodou priest and choreographer, as she unwinds centuries of motivated misunderstanding to address broader questions: how did this happen? And why is this knowledge obscured?

In her documentary feature debut, which premiered earlier this year at SXSW, Annik Bedward, a Jamaican-



French Canadian curious about the misconceptions behind vodou, journeys to Haiti to find out. In speaking with local experts and historians to unwrap the bandages of a misinformation mummy, she reveals a larger tragedy: the way the obscured history and provenance of the zombie has mirrored the fate of the people who invented it. When a person becomes a zombie, they are unable to return home, even in death. Part of Haitian lore is that a trapped spirit can free itself with a taste of salt, which white colonizers forbade Haitians from eating.

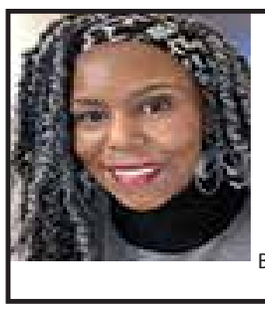
Black Zombie reveals how an enterprising American journalist, William Seabrook, set off a century of cultural extraction, obfuscation and projection with his book The Magic Island, first published in 1929. The Magic Island marks the first use of the word "zombie" in the printed English language. Seabrook becomes the zombie's first sensationalist, patronizing colonial observer, embedding himself with Haitians. His exotic dispatches, set off with racist caricatures by illustrator Alexander King, gets optioned, sending the Haitian zombie tumbling into the Hollywood machine, extruded and presented as White Zombie in 1932.

The Haitian zombie is no longer a sorrowful artefact of dispossession, but a disfigured tool that collapses the zombie and vodou – two adjacent but separate ideas – into an indistinct stew. Vodou is a spiritual practice, a philosophy, a way of transmitting knowledge through generations and across oceans, expressing an embodied relationship with spirits through dance. It's a metaphysical conversation. But onscreen, both vodou and the zombie become embodiments of white fears of Black savagery and desire for revenge. The zombie becomes a monster that must be put down, by any means necessary. The same cycle happens again in 1988, first with the publication of The Serpent and the Rainbow by Wade Davis, and its subsequent sensationalist adaptation by director Wes Craven.

To correct this record, Annik Bedward engages Haitians as reliable narrators of their own experiences, traditions and spiritual practices. She travels to New Orleans to capture how vodou has been turned into meaningless kitsch meant to separate tourists from their money. Together with documentaries such as Exterminate All the Brutes and Soundtrack to a Coup d'Etat, Black Zombie offers an indictment of not just colonialism and slavery, but of the damage that former colonial powers continue to inflict in the postcolonial era.

"The more you can render people monstrous or claim that it's their behavior that calls for punishment, essentially, then, the less you have to feel guilty about your practices, as an individual, as a community, as a state," Kaiama L Glover, a Yale professor, explains in a scene in Black Zombie. "The zombie is a useful tool for that. It really cannot be underestimated the way culture can do the work of statecraft."

There is overt physical violence, the kind which comes from the barrel of a gun, the blade of a machete, or the crack of a lash. But the story of how the Haitian zombie becomes transmuted into a simplistic, undead money-making monster for Hollywood is a story of a more insidious violence that continues into 2026. If weaponry and ammunition constitute hard power, then the ability to shape culture, truth and history, or soft power, can be just as destructive, if not more so. Physical structures can be rebuilt. But memory, even when well-preserved, can be adulterated, drowned out and crumbled with a few well-placed lies.



THE GOLDEN YEARS

By Judykay Jefferson

There is no doubt about it, I AM OLD! I'm not getting old, I have squarely arrived and taken up permanent residence in Old Age. This is never more apparent than when my life collides with Gen Z in the workplace.

From my desk at work, I see job and internship applicants come and go. Regardless of the position sought, the most apparent difference breaks down between the 18-30 year-olds and those closer to middle age. In my various professional capacities, I have participated in the hiring process for several State agencies and let me tell you, I have seen some things that left me aghast.

Societal norms are constantly influx. How we define "professionalism" has remained pretty constant through multiple generations. That is, until COVID. In 100 yrs., the impact of the global pandemic will be viewed as a functional turning point, changing the way we engage with each other and creating an unbridged divide between generations. Simply said, post-COVID was not a "return to the norm." Had it all been over in a week, a month, maybe but in the year of virtual meetings, classes, medical appointments, we forgot how to create positive first impressions and failed to teach our young people the importance of erring on the side of caution. As I watch employment hopefuls enter interviews conducted by veteran team leaders and HR professionals holding dripping cups of iced coffee beverages in what my mother would have called, "play clothes," I think, "who let you out like this?"

Here are five practices Gen Z is moving away from that signal an abrupt change in
workplaceculture.

1. Phonecall apologies

Older generations often view a phone call as the respectful way to communicate serious matters — like being late. Gen Z frequently uses texting instead, believing it's more considerate and less disruptive. I figure if it's important you will pick up the phone and call. Texts are for casual conversations with no timeframe for acceptance or response.

2. Strict punctuality norms

Traditional etiquette treats lateness as a major breach requiring formal acknowledgment.

Gen Z tends to view punctuality more flexibly, especially in workplaces where outcomes matter more than physical presence. This shift is tied to pandemicera remote work, where rigid timebased norms softened.

3. Formal communication styles

Older workers often expect structured emails, formal greetings, and clear hierarchy in communication. Gen Z, shaped by digital saturation, prefers informal, concise, conversational messaging — often via chat platforms or text. They interpret brevity as efficiency, not disrespect. This is a big one for me. I have young colleagues who walk by my desk day-after-day with no acknowledgement that I'm sitting there. To my thinking, that's just RUDE!

4. "Facetime" professionalism

Previous generations equated professionalism with being visibly present, staying late, or showing constant availability. Gen Z rejects this, valuing flexibility, mentalhealth boundaries, and outcomebased evaluation. They see long hours as inefficiency, not dedication.

5. Deference to authority for its own sake

Older norms emphasize hierarchy, formality, and unquestioned respect for managers.

Gen Z grew up with more empathetic, dialoguebased authority structures, leading them to expect mentorship rather than commandandcontrol leadership. This shapes how they communicate with supervisors and interpret workplace expectations.

IT DRIVES ME NUTS!

Younger employees, many barely 21 years old, may rule the tech and communications industries however, in government at every level, they are joining aging workforces; long-term employees some of whom are beyond traditional retirement age, forced to continue working in this out-of-control economy. We don't ask for much. Speak when you see us. Call when you need something. Respect our experience and wisdom and learn from it. Of course, it's not all young people. I also work with some who are pleasant, kind, respectful, and helpful. They open doors and bottle tops. They patiently look at grandchildren's pictures and too long stories. They give this Baby Boomer hope for the future.

Millie And Christine McKoy: The Conjoined Twins Born Into Slavery

By Jordan Meadows

Staff Writer

Millie and Christine McKoy were twins born conjoined at the lower spine in Whiteville, North Carolina, in 1851, enslaved on a farm.

Millie and Christine shared a pelvis and stood at roughly a 90-degree angle to one another, though each had a full, independent set of limbs; they were raised to think of themselves as a single person and referred to themselves as "Millie-Christine."

As enslaved children, they could be bought and sold without any say in the matter, and at just 10 months old, McKay sold them to South Carolina showman John C. Pervis for $1,000, retaining a quarter share of future exhibition proceeds and resale value. Roughly 14 months later, they were sold again to a showman named Brower.

Brower exhibited the twins at North Carolina's inaugural State Fair in October 1853, advertised under the era's common, dehumanizing label as "freaks of nature"; the fair drew 4,000 to 6,000 visitors daily. After the fair, Brower took the twins to New Orleans, where local doctors verified their conjoined anatomy, while their mother, Monemia, was sent back to the plantation where she remained enslaved.

While in New Orleans, the twins were kidnapped and vanished from public view for roughly a year, briefly resurfacing at a Philadelphia museum run by a former P.T. Barnum associate before reappearing under new captors at Barnum's American Museum in Manhattan, where they performed alongside other Black sideshow entertainers of the era, including William Henry Johnson and George and Willie Muse.

From there, the twins were taken through Canada to England, further from home than they'd ever been.

A private investigator eventually traced the girls to Europe, and Monemia and Joseph Smith, who had by then acquired legal claim to the twins after Brower's finances collapsed, traveled to Liverpool and were reunited with them on New Year's Day 1857. The twins were about 5 and a half years old. They were displayed publicly alongside their mother while still in the United Kingdom.

Smith arranged for the twins to receive a formal education once reunited; his wife taught them to read, write, sing, dance and play piano, and the twins became fluent enough in French and German to perform recitations in both languages.

On Jan. 1, 1863, when Millie and Christine were 11, the Emancipation Proclamation ended their legal status as enslaved people, though they continued performing professionally, now billed as "The Two-Headed Nightingale," with Millie singing alto and Christine soprano. After emancipation, the twins chose to remain with the Smith family rather than leave, a decision they later described in explicitly devotional terms in their own writing, likening their loyalty to Mrs. Smith to the biblical relationship between Ruth and Naomi.



The twins toured extensively across the U.S., Canada, and Europe for the following three decades, performing in Baltimore, Washington, Philadelphia, and New York, where they again appeared at Barnum's museum. They played New England in 1869 and swept through the Midwest in 1870.

Their fame brought them before Queen Victoria and the British royal family during their time in the U.K., who gifted them diamond-studded hair combs. They performed in England through the end of 1872 before touring St. Petersburg, Russia, with Hinné's Circus.

Their celebrity did not spare them from being treated as medical curiosities even as adults; while in Philadelphia, they were subjected to a medical examination and photographed by Dr. William Pancoast for his textbook on medicine and surgery.

Millie and Christine also became published authors, producing an autobiographical account, "History and Medical Description of the Two-Headed Girl," sold at their performances beginning around 1869.

In their own writing, the twins directly addressed the public's fixation on whether they were one person or two:

"Although we speak of ourselves in the plural we feel as but one person," they wrote, adding that they would not wish to be surgically separated even if it were possible, because they had "but one heart, one feeling in common, one desire, one purpose."

By the second half of the 1880s, the twins were touring less, and they built a 14-room house in Columbus County, North Carolina, on land their father had purchased from their former enslaver and later left to them. They eventually retired to Whiteville, and throughout their career and into retirement, gave financial support to Black schools and churches in the area.

Millie died of tuberculosis on Oct. 8, 1912, at age 61; accounts vary on exactly how long Christine survived her sister, ranging from about 12 to 17 hours. The two were buried together in an unmarked grave, and their remains were later moved to a Whiteville cemetery in 1969.

Their shared tombstone reads: "A soul with two thoughts. Two hearts that beat as one."

Community

Raleigh Launches Tool That Maps Out Affordable Housing

By Jordan Meadows
Staff Writer

The City of Raleigh has launched an online Housing Production Dashboard that maps and tracks the affordable housing it has helped build.

The interactive dashboard pulls years of housing data into one place. Users can see how many affordable homes have been created or preserved, sort projects by program and year, and track spending from the 2020 Affordable Housing Bond. City staff said it highlights more than 5,900 affordable units the city has helped develop, along with housing built by private organizations.

A map shows affordable developments completed or started over the past decade, layered with transit routes and Bus Rapid Transit corridors, City Council districts, Neighborhood Conservation Overlay Districts, median rent and home values, other market indicators, and other subsidized housing such as Low-Income Housing Tax Credit developments and Housing Authority properties.

A charts section breaks down work completed each year, development types, cumulative totals and the city's work helping first-time homebuyers and funding homeowner repairs. It also shows what percentage of bond money has been committed and what it has been spent on.

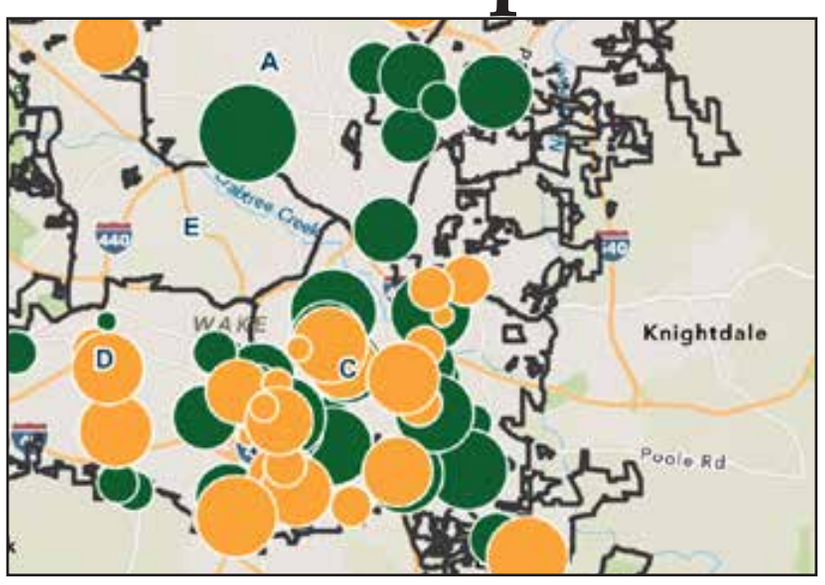
Housing & Community Development Director Emila Sutton said, "We are excited to launch our new Housing Production Dashboard to offer community members a clear window into where affordable housing is being built and preserved and how these efforts are shaping Raleigh's housing future."

Erika Brandt, the department's assistant director, said the tool serves two purposes.

"One piece of it is really just showing that production, showing the work that's being done. Another piece of it is showing what are the options that are out there," Brandt said. "If you're improving affordable housing and housing affordability across the market, you are going to see lower rates of homelessness."

The dashboard supports the city's 2026-2030 Affordable Housing Plan, "A Home for Every Neighbor," which describes Raleigh as facing an urgent affordability and homelessness crisis. The plan says population growth is outpacing housing development while rising construction costs push up rents and home prices. Between 2017 and 2022, the most recent period with available data, median gross rent in Raleigh rose about 37%. The city has grown by more than 70,000 people since 2010, making it one of the fastest-growing cities in the country, second only to Austin, Texas, over the past decade, and the metro area, which includes Wake, Johnston, and Franklin counties, has added more than 350,000 residents.

The plan notes that many newcomers are relocating from more expensive parts of the country for higher-paying jobs. Raleigh has almost



twice the national average of jobs paying over $100,000 a year, which lets new arrivals outcompete longtime residents for housing. Demand for urban living has also driven up land values near downtown and put pressure on historically affordable neighborhoods such as South Park, Hungry Neck, Battery Heights, and Roberts Park.

Supply has been another problem: Before 2021, 55% of the city, and more than 70% of its residentially zoned land, was limited to single-family housing, and homebuilding of all types stalled after the 2008 recession. City Council passed zoning reforms in 2021 and 2022 allowing "missing middle" housing such as duplexes, triplexes, courtyard apartments, townhomes and live/work units. The market responded, and over 2,000 units, almost a third of all approved units, have been in those types. Median household income rose 28% from 2017 to 2022, but the plan says that reflects an influx of higher-paying jobs rather than gains for low-income residents.

Inflation-adjusted incomes have fallen for low-income households and stagnated for the middle class. A household must earn almost $66,000 a year to afford a two-bedroom apartment at Raleigh's Fair Market Rent, and the market is short about 38,000 units for households earning between $15,000 and $35,000.

"At its root, homelessness is a housing affordability problem," the dashboard states.

It cites a national report finding that every $100 increase in a community's average monthly rent is associated with a 9% increase in homelessness. It offers a musical chairs analogy: if there are nine chairs and ten players, the player with a broken leg will likely be left standing, but the broken leg is not the cause.

"The issue is structural," the plan says.

National research from 2017 put the public cost of one person experiencing chronic homelessness at about $36,000 a year, and estimates from Houston run as high as $96,000, counting emergency room visits, public safety, emergency medical services, and jail stays. The plan says subsidizing a household's housing and funding case management costs about $27,000 a year.

Clearing encampments without rehousing does not help, it says, costing cities between $1,600 and $6,200 per person a year while doing nothing to end homelessness. In one year, Raleigh's Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources Department and the N.C. Department of Transportation each spent roughly $200,000 on cleanup related to people living unsheltered on their property.

Its targets include creating or preserving 1,345 affordable units by 2030 and housing 400 households by 2030 through decommissioning unsheltered camps with rent assistance and case management.

Other goals include expanding the city's Accessory Dwelling Unit Fast Track Program, easing eligibility barriers such as poor credit or prior evictions, recruiting private landlords for rapid re-housing, and increasing eviction prevention funding. Several of those objectives are flagged as having a resource gap.

Some of the City's congregations are looking at their own land as part of the answer.

According to the NC Housing Coalition, the Raleigh-Cary area has 29 affordable rental units for every 100 low-income households, and while 74% of white households in Raleigh own their homes, only 47% of Black households do. Several downtown faith communities are exploring converting parking lots that sit empty most of the week into housing.

The Rev. Steven Lyons, pastor of St. Paul African Methodist Episcopal Church, the city's oldest Black congregation, said the toll of the crisis is visible just blocks from the State Capitol.

"The economic development has not really been conducive to successful living for the African American community," Lyons said.

In February, Edenton Street UMC's church council approved the Dawson Lot Project, which explores converting its Dawson Street parking lot into affordable housing. The church's website lists six criteria, including serving marginalized communities and providing mixed-income housing. The final outcome is still evolving, Marshall said, but the church remains committed to addressing the housing crisis.

Childcare Workers Struggle To Afford Care For Their Own

NC NEWSLINE — At Kate's Korner, the day begins early – children arriving, classroom doors opening, small voices calling for teachers, parents saying quick goodbyes before heading to work.

For the childcare center's staff, the morning comes with one less worry: they don't have to figure out how to pay for care for their own children.

The center provides employees with free childcare, a benefit owner Kate Goodwin says is an intentional investment in the workers who care for other people's children. Some employees use vouchers, but for those who can't, the center covers all but one week of care a month.

"As a business owner, I made a decision that my margins will be slimmer than most because I felt like this was the commitment I needed to make," she said. "What we hear often is that our childcare providers can't pay for the type of care and education they're providing to others for their own child," she said.

The approach comes as childcare providers across North Carolina continue to grapple with recruiting and retaining workers.

If childcare workers can't afford care for their own children, it becomes harder for centers to maintain the workforce they need. Staffing shortages take the shape of smaller classrooms, shorter hours and reduced enrollment.



Kate's Korner isn't alone in offering childcare for its employees. In a survey of about 1,200 childcare providers across the state, 61% of directors said their programs already offered a childcare benefit to their employees.

But the way those benefits are funded varies. At Kate's Korner, Goodwin said the center absorbs most of the cost. Meanwhile, other communities are testing whether businesses, nonprofits and governments can help shoulder that expense.

A local experiment

Watauga County offers an example of how communities can help offset those costs, while also supporting the broader workforce.

North Carolina's labor force participation rate, or the percentage of those working or actively looking for work, is hovering around 58%, which is lower than the national average of around 61%. Business leaders say a lack of affordable childcare is a big part of the problem.

Childcare is one of the state's lowest-paid professions. A study from Appalachian State University found that childcare workers earned an average of $30,600 a year, while the median monthly cost of childcare was $900. For a worker earning that average salary, one child in care would consume about a third of their gross income.

And for workers earning even less, including in rural counties, the cost of caring for their own children can push them out of the industry in search of higher-paying work.

To help ease a shortage of childcare in Watauga, the Boone Area Chamber of Commerce Foundation launched a childcare assistance initiative last year to help childcare workers pay for the care of their own children with $40,000 in funding from local donors and businesses.

The program provided assistance to 18 childcare employees with 22 children, averaging $684 per child.

David Jackson, president of the chamber, said programs like the one in Watauga can also help strengthen local workforces by giving employees another reason to stay with a center.

"Center directors do not want to see their staff members just essentially handing their paycheck back," he said.

The initiative is part of a larger effort to support the childcare workforce and help providers who are still recovering from the loss of federal funding that helped stabilize the industry.

A statewide model

Kentucky has taken a different approach to supporting providers statewide by investing state dollars.

The state launched its Free Child Care for Child Care Workers Program in 2022, which subsidizes care for workers who work at least 20 hours a week at a center, regardless of household income.

Kate Shanks, senior vice president of public affairs for the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce, said more than 5,300 families working in childcare benefited from the program over the past year.

She said lawmakers made the program permanent earlier this year.

"Quality childcare is a critical part of Kentucky's economic infrastructure," she said. "Childcare professionals provide an essential service that allows thousands of parents to go to work every day."

At least nine other states have since enacted similar policies, according to the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce.

Goodwin said she supports creating a similar program in North Carolina to subsidize childcare for workers at centers across the state, and maybe expanding it to teachers, too.

"I don't care if you say all childcare workers and educators get free childcare," she said. "That's an investment in our education system, all the way around."

Community-Led Grocery Store To Break Ground In Southeast Raleigh

WUNC - When Meisha Gayle moved to southeast Raleigh from Jamaica about 10 years ago, one aspect of daily life brought her more anxiety than anything else: Grocery shopping.

Southeast Raleigh has been federally classified as a food desert ever since the city's two Kroger locations closed in 2013, leaving many residents miles away from affordable grocery stores.

"You had to travel out of your way or purchase at a significant markup, and a lot of the time the produce and the food was not a quality that was very high, so you were purchasing things that were spoiling very quickly, that had clear damage, because that was all you had access to," Gayle recalled.

Black communities are disproportionately affected by food insecurity; of the more than 145,000 residents in Wake County facing hunger, about one in three identify as Black, according to the Food Bank of Central and Eastern North Carolina.

To combat this problem, some Black farmers, business owners, and community members like Gayle have taken the challenge of expanding food access into their own hands.

Gayle now sits on the board of the Fertile Ground Food Cooperative, an initiative to bring a Black-led, community-owned grocery store to southeast Raleigh. After over a decade of planning and fundraising, the co-op will break ground next month.

Expanding grocery access

Fertile Ground began in 2012 as a plan to develop a cooperative cafe. Ben Jones, the co-op's communications manager, said the concept evolved to give residents control of their own grocery store instead of relying on corporations that don't see value in southeast Raleigh.



Along with the store, Fertile Ground plans to create a community garden and offer gathering spaces for southeast Raleigh residents at its future space beside the JD Lewis Multipurpose Center on Garner Road.

The co-op now has more than 1,000 members that serve as partial owners and vote on the store's major decisions. Jones hopes to see that number double by the store's projected opening in 2027.

"There's just a history — especially in North Carolina, but in the U.S. — of African American communities joining together to overcome and help each other with what they're not receiving either from the government or through discrimination," he said. "They band together to support one another and bring about prosperity and all the necessities for everyone. This co-op is for everyone."

Sourcing from Black farmers

Erin Martin used to conduct outreach with Fertile Ground to educate locals about southeast Raleigh's food desert and the initiative to "pour our Black dollars back into our own community." She also manages Footprints in the Garden in Mount Olive, a farm that has been in her family for eight generations.

Footprints in the Garden sells produce to markets and donates to food hubs across the state. Martin says she makes an effort to provide Black residents with food they might not have access to otherwise. She finds the work crucial, especially as low-income residents across North Carolina and the country have lost access to SNAP and may struggle with localized food programs.

"Back in the day or a few years ago, I don't believe farming was a political thing. But it's becoming political, I would say," Martin said.

Along with her involvement with Fertile Ground, Gayle also works alongside Black farmers as the produce and procurement manager of The Produce Box. The organization delivers fresh produce to consumers and collaborates with churches, food banks, and local partners to aid underserved communities.

Gayle tries to source from Black-owned farms for The Produce Box as much as possible. Fertile Ground has similar plans — the cooperative is a longstanding partner of the Black Farmers Market, and once completed, the store will sell fresh food from Black farmers and regional sources.

'Build a little bit more economic resilience'

Fertile Ground has raised more than $5 million since its inception, but hopes to reach its goal of $11 million. Jones said the slower timeline is to prevent debt, which will help in both keeping the store afloat and bringing profitability to members sooner.

"We're still pretty set at this point in breaking ground," he said.

To celebrate progress and push for fundraising, Fertile Ground is hosting a Harvest Gala on Oct. 17 at the Greg Poole, Jr. All Faiths Chapel in Raleigh. The cooperative will highlight progress and feature keynote speaker Malik Yakini, a board member of the Detroit People's Food Co-op.

Following the gala, the cooperative is hosting a groundbreaking ceremony on Oct. 24 at the JD Lewis Recreational Center. Jones said the store plans to be operational next year.

Gayle finds it especially important to support local food systems and initiatives like Fertile Ground, and she continues to educate Triangle residents about the food desert in their backyard.

"I think a lot of people are surprised, considering how much wealth seems to flow through Wake (County) and the Triangle area as a whole, but so few of the dollars actually stay in the community," she said. "We're just trying to change that and build a little bit more economic resilience for everyone."

White Rock Baptist Church Celebrates 160 Years



By Jordan Meadows
Staff Writer

At a Tuesday evening meeting, the Durham Board of County Commissioners commemorated White Rock's 160th anniversary with a resolution recognizing the church as a cornerstone of African American history in Durham. The resolution points to White Rock's beginnings in 1866, its role in community development and its longstanding connections to education, health care, social justice, and other institutions that helped shape Black Durham.

For church members, the anniversary is being observed through a series of gatherings throughout the year, bringing together worship, music, fellowship and reflection on the congregation's history.

White Rock's story begins in the aftermath of the Civil War. In 1866, Margaret Ruffin Faucette and other members of Durham's newly freed Black community began gathering for prayer and fellowship in homes and under brush arbors. Those informal gatherings eventually developed into a congregation that would become White Rock Baptist Church.

As Durham's Black community grew, so did White Rock's influence.

The church's history includes the ministries of numerous pastors, including the Rev. Zuck Horton, the Rev. Samuel "Daddy" Hunt, the Rev. Miles Mark Fisher and others. During the 20th century, White Rock also developed programs intended to address some of the practical needs of the surrounding community.

In February 1960, Martin Luther King Jr. addressed a large crowd at the church, speaking at a time when student sit-ins were spreading across the South. King's appearance came shortly after the Greensboro sit-ins and amid growing activism throughout North Carolina.

His speech at White Rock, known as "A Creative Protest," became one of the most notable moments in the church's history.

In 1967, White Rock's historic church building in Durham's Hayti community was demolished during construction connected to the Durham Freeway. The loss was part of a much broader transformation of Hayti, where highway

(See *WHITE ROCK BAPTIST CHURCH* P. 8)

Sports







East Carolina Defeats NC Central 42-9

By Steve Worthy

Photography

East Carolina defeated North Carolina Central University 42-9 in a non-conference matchup at Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium in Greenville on Sept. 26.

The Eagles faced a tough ECU defense throughout the game but continued to battle on both sides of the ball. Quarterback Nelson Layne used his mobility to pick up yards under pressure, including scrambling past ECU defensive lineman Kelton Smith and fighting through contact from defensive back Angelo Ross.

NC Central's defense also found opportunities to disrupt the Pirates. Defensive lineman Taeshawn Alston brought down ECU quarterback Emory Williams for a sack and later celebrated with teammates Jaysen Oriol and Eli Clark.

On offense, running back Zion Dobson helped move the ball on the ground in the second half, while quarterback Cobey Thompkins also entered the game and looked to create opportunities through the air.

East Carolina's offense ultimately proved too much for the Eagles. Wide receivers Ray-Ray Joseph and Ja'Keith Shelton contributed to the Pirates' attack and secured the 42-9 victory.

The non-conference contest brought the two North Carolina programs together in Greenville, with NC Central leaving Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium with the loss while East Carolina added another win to its season.

2028 Olympic Torch Relay to Travel Through All 50 States



LOS ANGELES (AP) — The torch relay for the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics will begin in Atlanta, home of the last U.S. Summer Games in 1996, and travel through all 50 states, organizers announced Tuesday.

The Olympic flame will be lit in Olympia, Greece, the birthplace of the Olympic Games, before beginning its journey around the United States in spring 2028. The full route for the torch relay will be announced in 2027.

LA28 organizers say the relay will be one of the largest in Olympic history, passing through iconic and internationally renowned landmarks, stopping at major cultural and sporting events and hosting festival celebrations in select cities nationwide.

"Every Olympic Games begins with a single flame, and carrying that flame to Los Angeles is an honor and privilege that we'll share with every corner of the country, as Americans in all 50 states carry the flame on its path to our Opening Ceremony," LA28 chair and president Casey Wasserman said in a statement.

Atlanta Mayor Andre Dickens said the city will be proud to welcome the Olympic flame back 32 years after hosting the centennial Summer Games.

"Atlanta looks a little different. We are bigger. We are more connected to the world. So, when the flame returns to the U.S., Atlanta will be ready," Dickens said in a statement. "Ready to welcome it from Greece. Ready to celebrate the spirit of the Games together as a community. And ready to send it forward toward Los Angeles and the next chapter of America's Olympic story."







One Hundred Black Men of the Triangle held their inaugural golf tournament on Monday. The tournament was held in Cary at Lochmere Golf Course. The tournament brought together members and community partners to help support the organization's mentoring, education, health & wellness and economic empowerment programs serving young men across the Triangle.

Simone Biles Remains Undecided

AP NEWS - Simone Biles understands the constant speculation about whether she has one more run at Olympic gold in her.

Mostly because the American gymnastics icon is still kind of wondering about it herself. So much so that there will be times when the question wakes the 29-year-old two-time Olympic all-around champion up in the middle of the night.

"I'm like 'Oh my gosh, I don't know what the decision (is) I should make, but I don't necessarily have to make it just yet," Biles told The Associated Press. "But I feel like it's kind of in the works which way I'm leaning towards."

After trips to Rio de Janeiro, Tokyo and Paris, the lure of the opportunity to perform on the world stage at home in Los Angeles in the summer of 2028 is real. Olympic teammates Suni Lee, Jordan Chiles and Jade Carey are already pointing toward LA. So is Katelyn Ohashi, a former college star at UCLA who returned to elite competition in July following a staggering 13-year break from the sport's top level.

"I know (athletes) are going a lot longer, and I'm just like, what the hell? It's going to be like a big reunion if I did," Biles said. "It would be so much fun. But I still have to weigh the options."

And the risks. Biles will be 31 by the time the flame is lit at the opening ceremony in the LA Coliseum and Sofi Stadium in July 2028. The sacrifices of trying to make a fourth Olympic team would be far different than what she faced in Brazil a decade ago.

Biles and her husband, Indianapolis Colts safety Jonathan Owens, would like to have a family at some point. The potential impact of training on her reproductive health is a factor. So is the likelihood that returning to competition would mean she and Owens could be separated for significant stretches.

"I am getting to the age of 30 where we start to talk about, 'What does your reproduction cycle ... what's going on in there? What does that look like? How healthy is it? And so I think these are major things that are on the table at my age that I have to take in consideration and weigh those options and what that looks like and when we want to start a family."

Still, the FOMO (fear of missing out) when it comes to LA is only too real.

"Like a home Olympic Games, like, how could you not?" she said. "It's absolutely incredible."

Biles has spent the last two years since her history-making performance in Paris — when she became the third woman ever to win multiple all-around golds — taking a break and leaning into the trappings that come with being one of the most recognizable faces of the U.S. Olympic movement.

COLLEGE SPORTS BILL

Continued from page 2

to players constantly switching teams. It would restrict player transfers to one "free" move over five years without sitting out a year, with some exceptions, and also would restrict players to five years of total eligibility.

The proposed eligibility limit comes amid backlash to schools that have increasingly pushed boundaries, including LSU's now-canceled plans to place players on the roster who had participated in NFL training camps.

"That was probably like a big lamp for some people who saw it and said, 'Oh my God, this is so out of control,'" Cantwell said in a recent interview with The Associated Press.

The bill also would restrict coaches from leaving their schools during the season, force schools that want to switch conferences to spend three years as an independent and prevent conferences from growing larger than 20 programs — an effort to prevent so-called "superleagues" from taking over sports. A last-minute amendment proposed by Florida Sen. Ashley Moody raised that cap from 19 in the original legislation.

The vote was delayed several hours on Monday as senators negotiated Moody's amendment and others that were eventually adopted, including a provision to make it easier for athletes to sue over sexual assault and a requirement to disclose foreign financing.

The Senate rejected an amendment by Sen. John Kennedy, R-La., that would have put limits on ticket prices for fans and two by Sen. Cory Booker, D-N.J., that would have capped coaches' salaries at $5 million a year and increased compensation for athletes who have catastrophic injuries.

Critics say it wouldn't do enough to help athletes

The legislation includes new protections for athletes, including caps on agent fees and guarantees for health insurance and scholarships. It would also require schools to maintain a minimum number of sports and roster spots — an effort to ensure that women's and Olympic sports are not cut in favor of football, basketball and other sports that generate more revenue.

Still, some Democrats say it wouldn't do enough to limit the big money in college sports.

The legislation "places a cap on the students' cut of the revenues, but there are no caps on coaches' salaries or on the size of donations to athletic programs," Murphy said last week.

Groups like the NAACP, Congressional Black Caucus and AFL-CIO have also opposed the bill, in part, because it leaves unresolved whether athletes should be considered employees with the ability to collectively bargain.

All four Black Democrats in the Senate — Booker, Raphael Warnock of Georgia, Lisa Blunt Rochester of Delaware and Angela Alsobrooks of Maryland — have opposed the bill.

The Perilous Fight by Colin Kaepernick

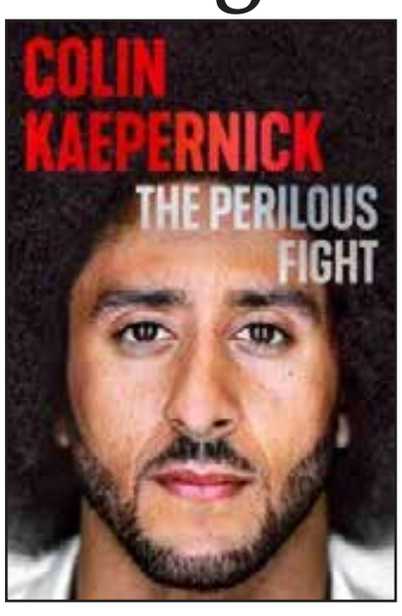
By Jheri Hardaway

Staff Writer

The Perilous Fight paints a vivid picture of Colin Kaepernick's rise to notoriety in American culture. The painting would appear to be American Gothic meets Strange Fruit, but on a field of perfectly manicured game-day grass from the very first page. Colin Kaepernick wastes no energy on pleasantries or political correctness; he delivers facts, dates, names, and hard-earned truths with surgical precision just like his touchdown passes.

Colin shared details of being born to a teen mother in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in 1987. He was adopted by Rick and Teresa Kapernick at five weeks old, "They wouldn't believe me. They wouldn't understand. They wouldn't know what to say. I was certain of that. I knew my parents loved me, but they were profoundly uncomfortable discussing race. There was only so much Blackness they could stand. It was easier for me to hold my Blackness close, out of their sight. And keep quiet. I was different from the rest of them, my parents and my older sister and older brother, but we didn't talk about it. I just learned to live with the difference."

While critics and pundits have attempted to reduce his voice and this memoir to a tell-all on his NFL sideline protest, the book is far more expansive: it is an intimate coming-of-age story and glimpse into a side of the American story that is often suppressed. Beginning in chapter one, where an early racial encounter with neighborhood peers shattered his childhood innocence, Kaepernick traces the awakening of his identity. As someone who also grew up in predominantly white environments, frequently navigating spaces as the only Black girl in the room, his early encounters resonated deeply. His reflections on icons like Allen Iverson and Randy Moss and the racial conflicts they overcame provide invaluable context for his evolving self-awareness as a biracial man who unapologetically identifies as Black.



This unvarnished reckoning brings the reader along on an American experience that, from the surface, appears like a dream. Stellar collegiate career, Nike deals, exceptional stats, yet a transparent perspective explains plainly Colin's inability to escape the proverbial "system." From his athletic evolution to encounters with law enforcement, education, healthcare, professional alignments, to marriage, no detail was spared. Kaepernick was transparent and informative in this autobiography, asking the tough questions: "If the police exist to protect and serve, my question had always been, protect and serve who? Protect and serve wealthy people; protect and serve white people. That's what I am called on to honor and celebrate? There's no room to question that, critique that, maybe even improve the institution? Can't I show my love for this country by fighting to make it better?"

Few memoirs provoke audible gasps, but Kaepernick achieves this feat by pulling back the curtain on moments the public only witnessed from the sideline. He finally adds the dimensions to his lived experience that we never could understand without Kaepernick's perspective. He speaks plainly to the anxieties, compromises, and allegiances African Americans endure in White spaces. The parallels between the NFL Combine and the chattel slavery auction block. From professional dealings in the job setting to his family dynamic, to interactions with law enforcement, Kaepernick successfully describes the nuances of our Black reality in clear and digestible language.

A highlight of The Perilous Fight was learning more about radio legend Nessa Diab, Colin's wife. They are understandably private about their personal life, yet the explanation of how they connected was a special part of the book. Kaepernick and Nessa embody the kind of cultural and political conviction that celebrity power couples could only aspire to. They are the real deal and have demonstrated such with their Know Your Rights Camps and other endeavors. Colin shared that Nessa a graduate of the University of California, Berkeley, "On one trip, she gave me a copy of The Autobiography of Malcolm X. I'd let it slip that I had never read it, and she was adamant that I'd be forever changed once I did. Nessa had grown up in a very pro-Black household. Her parents had exposed her to figures like Muhammad Ali and Malcolm X, telling her that they were amazing people who had changed the world. That's how I'd viewed Allen Iverson and Randy Moss growing up. They'd changed my world and opened a window into my own Blackness. Ali and Malcolm were men who sacrificed everything for their beliefs. They were men of uncompromising integrity who deeply loved their people." Colin now stands shoulder to shoulder with these heroes in the eyes of the informed.

This book should be required reading for young men across America. Way more than an athlete, Colin Kaepernick displays and explains the traits that truly make a man. He honors us with his truth, good, bad, and painful. Unwavering in his self-respect and dedicated to his beliefs, there is so much to learn and be inspired by. The drama is there. From NFL owners to media personalities to historians, and so many others, folks are called out by name in this book which is long overdue. Receipts and stats are all there. All in all, I'm still with Kap. Read his book for a deeper look into the realities of America today.

Deja Barber Heads to Italy



Local Paralympian Deja Barber is headed to Olbia, Italy, to compete internationally in wheelchair boccia. A graduate of Southeast Raleigh High School and William Peace University, Barber also earned two master's degrees from North Carolina A&T State University. She recently captured an individual silver medal and a gold medal at the USA Boccia National Championships. In 2024, Barber made history in Cali, Colombia, earning an individual silver medal and becoming the first U.S. athlete to win an international individual medal in her classification.

WHITE ROCK BAPTIST CHURCH

Continued from page 7

construction and urban renewal displaced residents, businesses and institutions.

White Rock's congregation remained together. Members eventually purchased land farther south, and the present sanctuary on Fayetteville Street opened in 1977.

Today, White Rock remains at 3400 Fayetteville St. under the leadership of the Rev. Dr. Reginald Van Stephens.

The church's anniversary theme is "Planting in Faith, Growing in Grace, and Gathering the Harvest: Unity and Community."

Deaconess Dr. Joyce Blackwell said the theme is intended to connect the church's past with its present and future.

"As we look back, we remember those who planted the seeds of hope and faith that have grown into the vibrant community we are today. In addition, our evolution has been marked by grace, as we have navigated challenges and celebrated victories together," she said. "Today, we find ourselves reaping the fruits of our labor, unity, and commitment to serving one another and uplifting our community."

The anniversary calendar includes several special programs throughout the fall, including musical performances, worship services and other gatherings. The events bring together members of the congregation and guests from outside the church as White Rock marks the milestone. The celebration culminates with a series of major anniversary observances in October.

"As we celebrate this milestone, let us remember that we are more than a church; we are a family, united in our faith and commitment to one another," Blackwell said.

Church

Obituaries

REV. ISAIAH GREEN JR.



Isaiah Green, Jr., was the oldest of eight sons born to the late Bertha and Isaiah Green in Craven County, NC. On September 14, 2026, God dispatched his angels to call our beloved Isaiah Jr. from labor to reward. He was preceded in death by his brothers: Aaron Green, Barry Green, Moses Green and Terrence Green.

Isaiah was affectionately known by his family as "Sonny", a nickname given by his mother. At an early age his parents moved to Wake County, NC where he attended public school and was a 1965 graduate of J.W. Ligon High School where he played football. He would later marry his high school sweetheart Irene, this young couple would go on to start their family. Isaiah worked at Standard trucking company prior to joining the NC State Highway Patrol.

Isaiah began is career of public service with the NC State Highway patrol in 1971, when there were less than ten African American troopers statewide. With hard work and determination, he progressed up the ranks to Master Trooper and became Officer of the Year in 1979 through 1980. On a rainy day in 1980 sitting on the side of Reedy Creek Road in his patrol car he heard the voice of God give him a divine calling to spread the good news to others. In the spring of 1985 he was completing Shaw University's Theological program. He was ordained and officially started in the ministry at Young Missionary Temple Christian Methodist Episcopal Church in Raleigh, NC where he and his family were members. Isaiah continued in the ministry for several decades. To stay true to his commitment of the ministry call he made a career move to the NC Department of Transportation as a License and theft investigator. Yet again he remained committed and disciplined to his new role earning the promotion of Lieutenant. He would go on to serve his home state of North Carolina for over 30 years.

Isaiah was married to his beloved high school sweetheart Irene for 62 years. Together these two young people set out to build a life together they could be proud of. They enjoyed being parents, spending time with family, friends and neighbors. He loved fishing, hunting, playing golf and was always willing to share vegetables from his garden or give gardening tips. When he was not advocating for others, you could find him working on cars or consulting family members who had received speeding tickets. He had a beautiful voice and enjoyed singing in church harmonizing with the Young Missionary Temple church male chorus. Isaiah had a servant's heart for people and a giving spirit. He never met a stranger, his compassion and empathy for others was immeasurable.

He leaves to cherish his memory his devoted wife, Irene Green of the home; one daughter, Brenda Green; four sons, Isaiah Green III, James Green, Gale Green, and his chosen son, Anthony (Tamara) Barbour; five grandchildren, Denon (Ricci) Green, Chesney Suber, Brehana Harris, Jai Mosley, and Galen Green; one great-granddaughter, Ari; one sister, Faye McCullough of Charlotte, NC; three brothers, James M. (Marie) Green of Middlesex, NC, Stanley Green of Waldorf, Maryland, and Robert Green of Durham, NC; and a host of other loving relatives and friends.

MARY BETTY WILLIAMS



Mary Betty Williams was born in Johnston County, NC to the late Roy and Bertie Williams on July 16, 1922 and passed away peacefully on September 3, 2026. She grew up in Raleigh, NC attending Raleigh public schools. She briefly moved to Greensboro, NC with family and received her high school diploma from Dudley High School in Greensboro.

Returning to Raleigh as a young adult, Mary obtained employment at Servitex Linen Service. She retired with full benefits after completing forty-four years of service.

Throughout her life, Mary was continuously involved in both community and church activities. She received Christ at an early age and joined Providence Holy Church (now Providence Harvest Church) in 1944 and remained for over 70 years. She served in many positions, including: Usher Board for over 55 years (Secretary), Missionary Circle (Secretary and kitchen help), City and County Usher Union, and Southern District Usher Union. Mary received awards for her service to Providence Holy Church Usher Board, Raleigh Usher Union, and Missionary Circle. She was also a long-serving member with dedicated service to the Floral Club, Sunday School, and weekly Bible Study. Additionally, she was also a faithful member of the Interdenominational Ushers Union and the Southern Central District Ushers Union. Following Providence Holy Church and Providence Harvest Church, Mary continued to worship and serve with Power House Church under Bishop Ronald Sharpe.

Mary has been a sister, mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, aunt, and friend to many. Throughout her retirement, she remained active in the community through her most precious affiliations with the Smiling Age Club of the Biltmore Hills Community Center, the Golden Ages of Providence Holy Church, and the Parkview Manor Senior Club. She enjoyed fellowshipping with friends, traveling, interacting with Raleigh's youth, and spending time with her family.

Mary was preceded in death by her daughter, Doris Williams Bennett; parents, Roy and Bertie Williams; sisters, Lumus, Martha, and Lizzie Williams; brothers, Booker T. and Sandy Williams.

She leaves to cherish her memories: grandsons, Thomas Bennett, Jr. (Sharifa) and Warren Bennett (Kimberly); great-grandchildren, Natalie Jiggetts, Taryn Bennett, Greyson Bennett, Thomas Bennett, III, and Andrew Bennett; nieces, Ginger Sullivan and Yvonne Cunningham.

A Different Voice



By Dorothy Shaw Thompson

WHAT MUST YOU THINK ABOUT YOURSELF

We live in a world that is constantly obsessed with skin color, even Christians. Yet nowhere have I read in the Bible does it say that skin color is important to the evaluation of people. There is a white Christian minister who says there are no white people in the Bible. I think that's true, but why does that even have to be a question? If there are no white people in the Bible, should that make Black people think they are superior? I think not, because as we read the Bible, surely we can see that there are good people in there and not-good people also, which would lead us to understand that good and evil are deeper than skin color. Then you may ask, why the discussion at all? I think it is important because understanding racism is important. Seeking the truth about how racism has negatively affected the minds of people and caused major false beliefs in the minds and behaviors of people is important.

How many of us would want to live our entire lives believing something that isn't true? I think most healthy people would prefer to live their lives by what is true. And Jesus did say, "The truth shall set you free." I bring this up for many reasons. One is because I was in a discussion recently that centered around a portrayal of Jesus as a white man. This was not the first time this discussion has come up, but I was pleasantly surprised that the majority of people appeared to conclude that Jesus was an African/Black man. When I was 27 years old, I decided to read the whole Bible for myself. I admit I wasn't seeking to be a better person, but rather I was wanting not to be embarrassed at not knowing the answers to questions that the Sunday school teacher was asking. I'm so glad I made that decision, for I became not just intellectually educated but also spiritually informed. Actually, I almost became an agnostic when I read the Bible because, to me, I saw instances where the Bible had been tampered with by human hands. But I kept reading, and my faith was secured. That's another discussion.

I found as I read that skin color and region are a part of the information that the Bible reveals. A sister was turned white in the Bible as a punishment for her attitude. If she was turned white, what color was she before? A queen was described as "Black, but comely," but I asked, why did "but" have to be used in her description? Surely, God did not inspire that. As I read, I saw a description of Jesus that portrayed him as having the skin color of bronze, not alabaster, copper. But bronze didn't say ebony, but that's close enough to me. Then, of course, the hair. Ever seen lamb's wool? Definitely not straight.

Since that time, I've learned even more. The work of my deceased sister, Dr. Frances Wesley, helped me get why and how racism impacts our mental health and how we have evolved out of Africa to become so symbolically confused by skin color. Dr. Howard Thurman, the mystic, gives voice to my understanding, as well as Yosef Ben-Jochannan, who showed me pictures of Black Madonnas he managed to film in the archives of the Vatican. Why not have paintings of Jesus in our churches depicting him as the Bible described? Because it doesn't matter what he looked like? Then why, all your life and in your Bible on your coffee table, is he depicted in a way he is not described?

Someone said, "Well, doesn't the Bible say make no graven image of God?" I say Google "graven image" and learn why your interpretation of that is incorrect. I suggest that the psychological effect of racism on the minds of some Black people could also affect their esteem of themselves and cause them to believe that white is smarter, better, more pure, etc. For that reason, some just can't believe that he was a Black-skinned, woolly-haired human who God sent down to represent Him.

I leave you with that. This question: If the master of the universe can be depicted as a Black man, what must you think about the skin you are in? What must you think about yourself? We've got so much research today, historically and biologically, that we ought to understand the craziness better. But the choice to learn and grow away from deceit is personal, and just that: a choice.

SERMON of the WEEK



BIRDS OF THE SAME FEATHER FLOCK TOGETHER
Bishop William Eli Ratcliff

Luke 13:18–19 — He said therefore, "What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it? It is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his garden, and it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches."

Most of us have heard about "the birds and the bees, the flowers and the trees." But today, I'm not talking about where babies come from. I want to talk about where Saved Christians come from. And half of that old expression is right here in our text—the BIRDS and the TREE!

Jesus said the seed grew into a tree, and then, here come the birds. Nobody invited them. Nobody assigned them a seat. Nobody checked their feathers at the door. They found shelter—and they came!

Jesus never told us what kind of birds they were. And that's the point: when God's Kingdom grows, all kinds of people are going to show up!

#1. GOD CAN GROW A GREAT TREE FROM A SMALL SEED

This parable doesn't begin with the birds or the tree. It begins with the SEED. That mustard seed didn't look like much, but everything that tree would become was already wrapped up inside it. Never despise a small beginning when GOD is in it!

Somebody planted a seed in you. Somebody prayed for you. Somebody carried you to church. Somebody taught you about Jesus—and look at you now!

Jesus said the seed grew and became a tree. Are churches growing or becoming? Sadly, a church can get older without getting better. We can preserve traditions and still lose our power. The Power is not in the size of the seed. The Power is in the God who makes it grow.

#2. GOD'S TREE MUST HAVE ROOM FOR ALL KINDS OF BIRDS

The seed becomes a tree, and suddenly, HERE COME THE BIRDS! The tree didn't stop being a tree because a different bird landed on it; just as the church must never stop being the church because somebody different walks through the door!

Somebody may come tired, wounded, disappointed, used and abused, with their life upside down! But if you can just GET to the TREE, things will be alright.

Don't be surprised if a couple of BLUE JAYS are there—always singing the blues and complaining. Sometimes Hawks are in the tree looking for something to attack. How about a Raven, always raving about things that don't matter?

Beware of the Robin, who will try to rob people of money and positive energy. Don't be surprised if you see a PEACOCK strutting around thinking their feathers are prettier than everybody else's. That peacock needs to lower that long neck and humble itself!

And don't forget the BUZZARDS! They don't care if something is dead, rotten, stinking, or nasty. Amazingly, they'll feast on it. I'm glad they don't have mobile phones so they can call and tell somebody how bad something was, but it is good to them! [Lord have mercy!] HELL-O-PHONES—I mean telephone! "Child, let me tell you what I just heard!"

I haven't always been a Bishop with an eagle mentality. I had to develop it. Many years ago, I scratched around like a chicken in a barnyard full of people with chicken thoughts, chicken dreams and chicken behaviors. I've even been a dirty old buzzard feeding on things I should have left alone! How about you?

But I thank GOD FOR Grace and His Mercy! Grace gave me what I didn't deserve, and MERCY kept me from getting what I did deserve! How about You? So, when God sends another bird to the branch—don't shoo it away!

#3. ONCE GOD GIVES YOU WINGS, YOU HAVE A PURPOSE

Birds don't just have feathers. God gave them wings! Everybody making noise isn't leading right. Everybody flapping isn't flying. And everybody with a microphone isn't saying what God said!

If hollering could save somebody, a MOCKINGBIRD could preach revival! If repeating somebody else could save somebody, a Copy-Cat-Preaching-PARROT could become a soul-winning Bishop!

God didn't give you wings to sit on a branch bragging about your feathers. The sparrow, dove, hawk and eagle don't fly the same height, but they all have a purpose!

Quit comparing your wings! Quit worrying about what's going on in Watermelon Baptist, Pine Tree Presbyterian or Popsicle Holiness Church where Bishop Banana Fudge is Pastor! Stay focused on what God has assigned you to do!

None of us can fly without GOD'S AIR. Just as a bird needs wind beneath its wings—we need the Holy Spirit.

My Daddy used to say, "No matter how high a bird flies, at some point it's got to come down." So don't get so proud of your feathers that you forget who gave you your wings!

Church, one day God's going to bring His WHOLE FLOCK together! John saw a multitude no man could number—from every nation, kindred, people and tongue! Different colors! Different feathers! Different backgrounds! Different assignments! BUT ONE KINGDOM and ONE GOD!

If you're tired, disappointed, wounded, sick, or feel pecked and picked on, thank God for your wings! Isaiah said, "They that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; THEY SHALL MOUNT UP WITH WINGS AS EAGLES!"

One of these mornings, when this life is over—We're GOING TO SPREAD our WINGS AND FLY AWAY to Glory! But until then—don't just sit in the nest and die on a branch. Fly out and find somebody, love somebody, help somebody, and bring another bird back to the tree! Because BIRDS OF THE SAME FEATHER—Flock Together!

I'VE GOT WINGS! YOU'VE GOT WINGS! ALL GOD'S CHILDREN GOT WINGS! And when we all get together—WE'RE GOING TO PUT ON OUR WINGS AND WALK, ALL OVER, RUN ALL OVER, DANCE ALL OVER God's Heavenly Kingdom!



Practical Biblical Principles

FAITH VS FEAR
Mark 4:35-41
By: John L. Caldwell, Pastor
New Jerusalem Baptist Cathedral

Our Bible teaches us it is through Jesus Christ faith can heal all forms of sickness. Fear is a form of spiritual sickness. It can lead to a feeling of depression, which is a heavy human emotion that drains one's mental and physical energy as well as making one feel afraid. There are medicines which can help relieve depression, but it can only mask over the feeling of fear. Again, fear is a form of spiritual sickness! In other words, anything which keeps the body from functioning normally can be called a "sickness." Fear can sometimes create psychosomatic (phantom) sickness or even death. We often use the expression "scared to death" when something frightens us.

Dr. David Jeremiah's gospel commentary, found in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke recording the storm event on the sea of Galilee serves as a metaphor to remind Christians that no one is exempted from life's storms just because he or she follows Christ.

As the disciple experienced the tempest, it can burst upon the lives of people even when they are following Christ, when they are doing nothing wrong and doing right, when there is no sin which separate us from Christ, and when we are living perfectly within His will.

Scripture says that storms must come our way if we are to live a godly life (1Timothy 3:12).

Our Lord is always looking for the opportunity to increase our faith. When Jesus and the disciples shoved off from the shore that eventful day, He knew the storm was coming, yet He didn't prevent it. Jesus knew He would be with them through the storm. He also knew that life without turmoil has no real meaning and would not produce any real faith. Joy and emotional relief can only come when the storm which created our fear (sickness) is over.

In the storms of life, Christians must remember that Jesus is in the boat with us. Whether you can see or know this or not, Jesus is always in control. We can only know this when we put our trust in Jesus. Trust is a kind to faith.

It is only a three to four hours boat trip to cross from one side of the sea of Galilee to the other depending upon the strength of the wind and its direction.

The typical Jesus "sailing boat" was about 28 feet long by 7.5 feet wide and stood about 4 feet above the water line when unloaded. The boat could carry upwards to 1000 pound of fish when loaded and no more than five crewmen. When loaded the boat sailed a little less than two feet above the water.

The event which we are focusing on today tells us that there were twelve disciples plus Christ in the boat crossing the Galilean Sea. The crossing goes well when the sea is calm and the waves are less than two feet in height. The disciples could use roaring paddles or sails to make use of the prevailing winds to make the crossing. When the wind is strong and blowing contrary at sea you do not make use of the sails. They are taken down from the mask.

One can rest assured that the boat was rocking and rolling from side to side and taking on water, which is not a safe thing. The disciples, who made their living on the waters, became so afraid. In Jesus' day fishermen did not go to sea when a storm was coming or already upon them. This is not true today. Today fishing boats travel through storms to get to their fishing grounds. This is due to the way modern ships are constructed today.

After the ministry of healing the demonic man and concluding the issue with the swine stampeding down the hill into the sea, Jesus said to His disciples, "Let's cross back over to the western side of the sea.

Lest we forget, the scripture tells us there were other little boats which followed them (Mark 4:36). Here, lest we overlook it, Jesus gets the opportunity to teach not only His disciple about faith and fear, but to tens or maybe hundreds who followed them across the lake in their boats.

A great windstorm arose and the waves blew into the boat. And the boat was sinking down to the water line. It was the strong winds which blew the water into the boat. It appears the waves were blowing more than two feet high filling the boat.

Jesus was asleep in the rear of the boat laying on a pillow, maybe on a fishing net or His folded-up garment at His head. At any rate Jesus was in a deep sleep in the middle of the storm. The disciples could not understand how Jesus could sleep in such a storm. He never woke up. Jesus 's deep sleep may have well come from the energy and time He spent healing the people on the other side of the Sea.

The issue with the woman who touched the hem of His garment and drew virtue out of Him is translated as drawing "righteousness" out of Him. The faithful can all agree that what that woman went through for those twelve suffering years was unfair and wrong. It was the righteousness of Jesus which made the wrong the poor woman suffered right.

Jesus on many occasions took all day healing those who were brought to Him or came to Him. Is it little wonder Jesus may well have tired out physically from such powerful healing work. He was a hundred percent human, lest we forget.

The disciple could not handle the fear of the blowing storm any longer as the boat continued to take on water. In the Greek language, scripture tell us that one or several of the disciples came and grabbed a hold of Jesus, violently shaking Him to wake him up. After Jesus was awaken, He didn't respond in an ugly way like some of us do when abruptly awaken from sound sleep.

"Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing in this storm?" Evaluating the situation, Jesus immediately rose up from His sleep and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace be still! And the winds immediately ceased and there was an immediate calm in the waters. The Greek picture here is that Jesus, in a sense, rebuked (or fussed out) the winds, as if He were about to give the winds a spanking for upsetting and scaring His disciples. Oh, what a God!

Jesus waited for a short while until the storm miracle had set in, then He chided His disciples. "How is it that you have no faith?" Jesus did not discount the danger the disciples were in. He rebuked them for their doubt in His ability to save them, given the previous miracles He had performed in their sight. After Jesus' rebuke, the disciple feared Jesus even more, when they realized that Jesus had power over the wind and sea. And they said one to another, "Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him (Mark 4:40-4). While the disciples were still fearing and mustering up their trust and faith in Jesus, Jesus still held them spiritually close to Himself.

Jesus does the very same thing today for His growing- in -faith children.

Classifieds

DURHAM COUNTY

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
ESTATE OF JOHN JOSEPH SNEDDON
FILE NO. 22E000375-310

All persons, firms, and corporations having claims against John Joseph Sneddon, deceased, of Durham County, North Carolina are notified to exhibit the same to the undersigned on or before January 06, 2027 or this notice will be pleaded in bar of recovery. Debtors of the Decedent are asked to make immediate payment.

This the 1st day of October 2026.
LuAnn Sneddon Pendergraft,
Co-Executor and
Amy Sneddon McKnight, Co-Executor
C/O Hanrahan Law PLLC
4801 Glenwood Ave. Ste 200
Raleigh, NC 27612
10/1, 10/8, 10/15, and 10/22/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File No: 26E001201-310

Having qualified as ADMINISTRATOR of the Estate of DAVID DANIEL CRAIG, deceased, late of Durham County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said Estate to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the 1st day of January, 2027, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This, the 1st day of October, 2026.
Alan Wade Craig, Administrator
817 Fanning Way
Durham, NC 27704
10/1, 10/8, 10/15, and 10/22/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File No: 26E001156-310

Having qualified as EXECUTOR of the Estate of PAULA SCHUBERT, deceased, late of Durham County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said Estate to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the 1st day of January, 2027, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This, the 1st day of October, 2026.
Scott Pappas, Executor
c/o Attorney Christopher Hill
311 E. Main Street
Durham, NC 27701
10/1, 10/8, 10/15, and 10/22/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File No: 26E001159-310

Having qualified as ADMINISTRATOR and CO-ADMINISTRATOR of the Estate of VALJEANE KING SIMPSON, deceased, late of Durham County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said Estate to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the 1st day of January, 2027, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This, the 1st day of October, 2026.
Katherine King Cooper
Administrator
6409 3rd St. NW
Washington, DC 20012
Arvetta King Weston
Co-Administrator
5237 New Hampshire Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20011
10/1, 10/8, 10/15, and 10/22/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE OF SERVICE OF PROCESS BY PUBLICATION
In The General Court Of Justice
Superior Court Division
File No.: 26CV003984-310

ANTHONY DOUGLAS, PLAINTIFF, VS. MATHEW KIPTUM, DEFENDANT

TO: Mathew Kiptum

Take notice that a pleading seeking relief against you has been filed in the above entitled action. The nature of the relief sought is as follows:

Complaint for Personal Injuries as a result of a Motor Vehicle Accident on September 9, 2023 on PP 1310 Wyldewood Drive in Durham, NC.

You are required to make defense to such pleading not later than November 10, 2026 and upon your failure to do so the party seeking service against you will apply to the Court for the relief sought.

This the 1st day of October, 2026.
Robert T. Perry
N.C. State Bar #11051
PERRY, PERRY & PERRY, P.A.
Attorneys for Plaintiff
601 Fayetteville Street, Suite 300
Post Office Drawer 2051
Durham, North Carolina 27702
Telephone: (919) 683-8685
10/1, 10/8, and 10/15/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS

Having qualified as Administrator of the Estate of WILLIAM MANUEL VIERRA, SR., deceased, this is to notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the Estate of WILLIAM MANUEL VIERRA, SR. to present them to the undersigned on or before the 24th day of December, 2026,
or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.

All persons indebted to said Estate, please make immediate payment.

This, the 22nd day of September, 2026.
EDWARD J. FALCONE
Attorney for the Estate of WILLIAM MANUEL VIERRA, SR.
120 E. Parrish Street, Suite 200
Durham, North Carolina 27701
(919) 682-9273
9/24, 10/1, 10/8, and 10/15/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File No: 26E000942-310

Having qualified as EXECUTOR of the Estate of JAUN GILBERTO RODRIGUEZ ZEPEDA, deceased, late of Durham County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said Estate to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the 24th day of December, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This, the 24th day of September, 2026.
Erika Rodriguez, Executor
c/o Justin L. McCarthy
Bagwell Holt Smith P.A.
111 Cloister Court, Suite 200
Chapel Hill , NC 27514
9/24, 10/1, 10/8, and 10/15/2026
NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS

All persons, firms and corporations having claims against RAY CAPLE, deceased of Durham County, North Carolina, are notified to exhibit the same to the undersigned on or before the 24th day of December or this notice will be pleaded in bar of recovery. Debtors of the decedent are asked to make immediate payment. This the 24th day of September 2026.
Carlous Caple, Administrator
c/o Trusts and Estates Law Group
4141 Parklake Avenue, Suite 310
Raleigh, NC 27612
9/24, 10/1, 10/8, and 10/15/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File No: 26E001101-310

Having qualified as EXECUTOR of the Estate of JUDITH BEVERLYN CRABTREE, deceased, late of Durham County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said Estate to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the 24th day of December, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This, the 24th day of September, 2026.
Eddie Crabtree, Executor
c/o Christopher Hill
311 E. Main street
Durham, NC, 27701
9/24, 10/1, 10/8, and 10/15/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
File No: 26E000549-310

ALL PERSONS, firms and corporations having claims against DAVID LEE HARRISON, deceased, of DURHAM COUNTY, NC, are notified to exhibit the same to the undersigned on or before December 24, 2026 or this notice will be pleaded in bar of recovery. Debtors
of the decedent are asked to make immediate payment.

This the 24th day of September 2026.
Carl D. Harrison, David D. Harrison/ Executors of the Estate,
c/o MONROE JENKINS, PA
PO Box 12534
Durham, North Carolina 27709
9/24, 10/1, 10/8, and 10/15/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS

All persons, firms and corporations having claims against KIRSTEN KAY KLUMP, deceased of Durham County, North Carolina, are notified to exhibit the same to the undersigned on or before the 24th day of December or this notice will be pleaded in bar of recovery. Debtors of the decedent are asked to make immediate payment. This the 24th day of September 2026.
Bradley S. Klump, Executor
Estate of Kirsten Kay Klump, Deceased
c/o Trusts and Estates Law Group
4141 Parklake Avenue, Suite 310
Raleigh, NC 27612
9/24, 10/1, 10/8, and 10/15/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
File No: 26E001079-310

Having qualified as Public Administrator of the Estate of RICHARD M. ALLEN, SR., deceased, of 114 Laurel Avenue, Durham County, Durham, NC 27701, the undersigned does hereby notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the estate of said decedent to exhibit them to the undersigned in care of the attorney for the estate on or before December 18, 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 17th day of September, 2026.
Jeffrey L. Austin
Public Administrator of the Estate of Richard M. Allen, Sr.
c/o Law Office of Jeffrey L. Austin, PLLC
500 Westover Dr. #32043
Sanford, NC 27330
9/17, 9/24, 10/1, and 10/8/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
File No: 26E001080-310

Having qualified as Public Administrator of the Estate of JAMES MICHAEL DAVIS, deceased, of 901 Wood Chapel Lane, Durham County, Durham, NC 27703, the undersigned does hereby notify all persons, firms, and corporations having claims against the estate of said decedent to exhibit them to the undersigned in care of the attorney for the estate on or before December 18, 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 17th day of September, 2026.
Jeffrey L. Austin
Public Administrator of the Estate of James Michael Davis
c/o Law Office of Jeffrey L. Austin, PLLC
500 Westover Dr. #32043
Sanford, NC 27330
9/17, 9/24, 10/1, and 10/8/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File No: 26E001098-310

Having qualified as CO-EXECUTORS of the Estate of FRANCES OLIVIA GARRETT, deceased, late of Durham County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said Estate to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the 17th day of December, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This, the 17th day of September, 2026.
Frederick Wayne Garrett,
Co-Executor
316 Olive Branch Rd.
Durham, NC 27703
Janet G. Bennett, Co-Executor
712 E. Enon Rd.
Oxford, NC 27565
Tommy D. Garrett, Co-Executor
3606 E. Greer St.
Durham, NC 27704
9/17, 9/24, 10/1, and 10/8/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS AND DEBTORS OF Judy Frances Cosler

All persons, firms and corporations having claims against JUDY FRANCES COSLER, late of Durham County, North Carolina, are notified to exhibit them to Heather Batt as Executor of the decedent's estate on or before December 19, 2026, c/o Janet B. Witchger, Attorney at Law, 1414 Raleigh Rd., Ste. 203, Chapel Hill, NC 27517, or be barred from their recovery. Debtors of the decedent are asked to make immediate payment to the above-named Executor.

This the 17th day of September 2026.
Heather Batt, Executor
c/o Janet B. Witchger, Atty.
TrustCounsel
1414 Raleigh Rd., Ste. 203
Chapel Hill, NC 27517
9/17, 9/24, 10/1, and 10/8/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
File No: 26E001104-310

THE UNDERSIGNED, having qualified on the 8th day of September 2026, as Executor of the ESTATE OF NELSON LUTHER HOWER, III, Deceased, of Durham County, North Carolina, does hereby notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said Estate to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the 18th day of December 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This, the 17th day of September 2026.
EMILY KATE HOWER
EXECUTOR
ESTATE OF NELSON LUTHER HOWER, III
c/o Jennifer Dalman, Attorney
Walker Lambe, PLLC
240 Leigh Farm Rd, Ste 100
Durham, North Carolina 27707
9/17, 9/24, 10/1, and 10/8/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File No: 26E001096-310

Having qualified as EXECUTOR of the Estate of DAPHINE JEAN BRADSHER A/K/A DAPHINE NORWOOD BRADSHER, deceased, late of Durham County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said Estate to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the 17th day of December, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This, the 17th day of September, 2026.
LaJean Cris Bradsher, Executor
2194 Lauren Mill Drive
Oxford, NC 27565
9/17, 9/24, 10/1, and 10/8/2026
Estate of Leonard Edward Gethers, Durham County Estate
File No. 26E001121-310:

All persons, firms and corporations having claims against LEONARD EDWARD GETHERS, deceased, of Durham, N.C., are notified to exhibit the same to the undersigned on or before December 21, 2026, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of recovery. Debtors of the decedent are asked to make immediate payment. This the 17th day of September 2026.
Lauren Elizabeth Gethers, Administrator
C/O Elizabeth Boyette, Boyette Law, PLLC
4509 Creedmoor Road
Suite 201
Raleigh, NC 27612
9/17, 9/24, 10/1, and 10/8/2026
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File No: 25E001016-310

Having qualified as ADMINISTRATOR of the Estate of BETTY HARRINGTON, deceased, late of Durham County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said Estate to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the 17th day of December, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This, the 17th day of September, 2026.
Mike Wills, Administrator, c/o Richard F. Prentis, Jr., 4 Consultant Pl., Durham, NC 27707.
9/17, 9/24, 10/1, and 10/8/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File No: 26E000895-310

Having qualified as EXECUTOR of the Estate of MARK ROBERT MCGRATH, deceased, late of Durham County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said Estate to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the 10th day of December, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This, the 10th day of September, 2026.
Robert F. McGrath, Executor
1230 Trillium Circle, Apt. G
Raleigh, NC 27606
9/10, 9/17, 9/24, and 10/1/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File No: 26E000829-310

Having qualified as EXECUTOR of the Estate of MARION MILES, deceased, late of Durham County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said Estate to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the 10th day of December, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This, the 10th day of September, 2026.
John Erick Miles, Executor
c/o Floyd B. McKissick, III, Esq.
McKissick & McKissick
835 N Mangum Street
Durham, NC 27701
9/10, 9/17, 9/24, and 10/1/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File No: 26E001085-310

Having qualified as EXECUTOR of the Estate of EDITH C. HEATHERLY, deceased, late of Durham County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said Estate to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the 10th day of December, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This, the 10th day of September, 2026.
Charlotte Sinclaire, Executor
c/o Robert N. Crosswhite, Attorney
239 E. Broad Street
Statesville NC 28677
9/10, 9/17, 9/24, and 10/1/2026

IREDELL COUNTY

NORTH CAROLINA
IREDELL COUNTY
NOTICE OF SERVICE OF PROCESS BY PUBLICATION
In The General Court Of Justice
District Court Division
26CV005116-480

DESIREE LEWIS, Plaintiff, vs. DEOJUNIQUE FLIPPIN, SR., Defendant.

To: Deojunique Flippin, Sr.

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 seeks a final determination of legal and physical custody of the minor child identified in the Complaint, together with such other and further relief as the Court deems just and proper.

You are required to make defense to such pleading not later than forty (40) days from the first date of this publication, and upon your failure to do so the party seeking service against you will apply to the court for the relief sought.

This the 24th day of September, 2026.
KOONTZ LAW, PLLC
Brandy E. Koontz,
Attorney for Plaintiff
NC State Bar #45458
181 South Main Street
Mocksville, NC 27028
Telephone: (336) 751-6235
Fax: (336) 751-7929
9/24, 10/1, and 10/8/2026

WAKE COUNTY

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
WAKE COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File No: 26E002169-910

Having qualified as ADMINISTRATOR of the Estate of JOSEPH LOVELL PIERCE, deceased, late of Wake County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said Estate to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the 1st day of January, 2027, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This, the 1st day of October, 2026.
Lisa Ann Pierce, Administratrix
c/o Richard F. Prentis, Jr.
4 Consultant Pl.
Durham, NC 27707
10/1, 10/8, 10/15, and 10/22/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
WAKE COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File No: 26E002594-910

Having qualified as ADMINISTRATOR of the Estate of RAYMOND PARIS WILLIAMS, deceased, late of Wake County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said Estate to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the 1st day of January, 2027, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This, the 1st day of October, 2026.
Antonio Paris Williams
Administrator
6029 Quitman Trl.
Raleigh, NC 27610
10/1, 10/8, 10/15, and 10/22/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
WAKE COUNTY
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice, Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File No: 25E003477-910

Having qualified as ADMINISTRATOR of the Estate of JOHN TIMOTHY RHODES, deceased, late of Wake County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said Estate to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the 1st day of January, 2027, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This, the 1st day of October, 2026.
Shannon Williamson, Administrator
2644 Wintergreen Rd
Nashville, NC 27856
10/1, 10/8, 10/15, and 10/22/2026
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
WAKE COUNTY
NOTICE OF SERVICE OF PROCESS BY PUBLICATION
In The General Court Of Justice
District Court Division

PAYING CASH AND BUYING ALL OLD RAP MUSIC CASSETTE TAPES AND MIXTAPES. CALL MARVIN 919-268-7476.

www.CARO.news

Classifieds

WAKE COUNTY

File No. 25CV011670-910
LAKEMA BENTZEL, Plaintiff,
v. JACOB BENTZEL, Defendant.

TO: JACOB BENTZEL

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: Complaint for Absolute Divorce.

You are required to make defense to such pleading not later than November 3, 2026, which is forty (40) days from the date of the first publication of this notice. Upon your failure to do so, the party seeking service against you will apply to the court for the relief sought.

This the 24th day of September 2026.

Lakema Bentzel, Plaintiff Pro Se
622 Georgetown Road
Raleigh, NC 27608
9/24, 10/1, and 10/8/2026

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
WAKE COUNTY

NOTICE OF SERVICE OF PROCESS BY PUBLICATION
IN THE GENERAL COURT OF JUSTICE
DISTRICT COURT DIVISION
FILE NO. 25CV045670-910

CHETACHI NWOKEJIOBI, Plaintiff,
v. TABATHA TOMRA TURNER,
Defendant.

TO: TABATHA TOMRA TURNER

TAKE NOTICE that a pleading seeking relief against you has been filed in the above-entitled action in the District Court of Wake County, North Carolina. The action concerns temporary and permanent custody.

You are required to make defense to such pleading within the time prescribed by law following the first publication of this notice, and upon your failure to do so, the party seeking service against you will apply to the Court for the relief sought.

The matter is presently scheduled for hearing on November 10, 2026, at 9:00 a.m. in Wake County Courthouse, Courtroom 2A, Wake County, North Carolina.

Chetachi Nwokejiobi
Plaintiff, Pro Se
2917 Little John Road
Raleigh, NC 27610
9/24, 10/1, and 10/8/2026

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
WAKE COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File No: 26E001811-910

Having qualified as ADMINISTRATOR of the Estate of EVELYN VERNELL HINTON, deceased, late of Wake County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said Estate to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the 17th day of December, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This, the 17th day of September, 2026.

Vivian Beatrice Logan,
Administrator
5408 Kincross Ct.
Raleigh, NC 27610
9/17, 9/24, 10/1, and 10/8/2026

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
WAKE COUNTY

NOTICE OF SERVICE OF PROCESS BY PUBLICATION
In The General Court Of Justice
District Court Division
File No. 26CV023452-910

MICHAEL OAKLEY and EVA OAKLEY, Plaintiff v.
MEQUINTA OAKLEY and UNKNOWN FATHER, Defendants

TO: MEQUINTA OAKLEY AND THE UNKNOWN FATHER OF THE MINOR CHILD

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 custody of the minor child.

You are required to make defense to such pleading not later than forty (40) days after the first date of publication of this notice. Upon your failure to do so, the Plaintiff will apply to the Court for the relief sought.

This the 17th day of September, 2026.

Michael Oakley, Plaintiff
Eva Oakley, Plaintiff
2301 Catfish Creek Ct
Raleigh, NC 27604
9/17, 9/24, and 10/1/2026

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
WAKE COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS
In the General Court of Justice,
Superior Court Division
Before the Clerk
File No: 25E003697-910

Having qualified as EXECUTOR of the Estate of MARIE BIRDSALL PALMER A/K/A MARIE B. PALMER, deceased, late of Wake County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said Estate to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the 10th day of December, 2026, or this Notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said Estate will please make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This, the 10th day of September, 2026.

Desiree Glascoe, Executor
3705 Del Mar Drive
Woodbridge, Virginia 22193
9/10, 9/17, 9/24, and 10/1/2026

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DURHAM COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

Having qualified as Personal Representative of the Estate of LINDA GAIL FISH, deceased, late of WAKE 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: 300 PINEHURST AVENUE, SOUTHERN PINES, NORTH CAROLINA 28387, on or before the 17th day of DECEMBER, 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 10th day of September, 2026.

STEPHANIE FISH JENKINS
PERSONAL REPRESENTATIVE
FOR THE ESTATE OF
LINDA GAIL FISH
JAMES H. JENKINS
Thigpen and Jenkins, L.L.P.
Attorney for Estate
300 Pinehurst Avenue
Southern Pines, North Carolina 28387
9/10, 9/17, 9/24, and 10/1/2026

WANTED WBE, MBE & DBE BIDS

for the following job:

Division Three Letting

DC00508	New Hanover Co.	Bid Date: Oct. 15th
DC00509	Pender Co.	Bid Date: Oct. 15th

NCDOT Central Letting

C204338	Wake Co.	Bid Date: Oct. 20th
C205207	Pender Co.	Bid Date: Oct. 20th

These projects may involve some or all of the following aspects of construction: construction survey, clear and grub, trucking, drainage, milling, paving, incidental concrete, fence and guardrail, signs, structures, traffic control, utilities, signals, pavement marking, erosion control and seeding.

Bids can be emailed to **stw.quotes@stwcorp.com**

Please contact S. T. Wooten at 252-291-5165,

Fax 252-243-0900 no later than 5:00 p.m. the day before the bid date.

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

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Town of Magnolia
P.O. Box 459
Magnolia, NC 28453

The REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL (RFP) procedure shall be evaluated and administered through the "Information Technology - Best Value" procurement under North Carolina General Statue 143-129.8. The referenced procurement shall be utilized to enable the OWNER to effectively select the most appropriate Automatic Meter Reading System to meet their business and future operational objectives. The procurement allows the OWNER to evaluate PROPOSALS based on the complexity and ingenuity of the technology solutions available.

The Town of Magnolia is accepting PROPOSALS for the unit price items and technical services for the installation of an Automatic Meter Reading (AMR) System (Base) or Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) System (Alternate). The PROPOSER may submit a PROPOSAL for the AMR System (Base), or the AMI System (Alternate), or both.

The AMR System shall encompass a ride-by metering solution that includes but not be limited to the following components: water meters capable of storing multiple readings each day and periodically transmit readings; transceiver device; handheld device; mobile device; integration of OWNER's computer network/server with AMR operating software; Host Software; integration with OWNER's billing software, and any other equipment and services as required for a complete and operable system.

The AMI System shall encompass a truly fixed metering solution that includes but not limited to the following components: water meters capable of storing multiple readings each day and periodically transmit readings; meter transceiver unit (MTU); gateway units; integration of Host Software to OWNER's computer network/server; transfer data to OWNER's billing system; handheld device; and any other equipment and services required for a complete and operable system.

Separate sealed PROPOSALS for the construction of 2024 Automatic Meter Infrastructure Project Contract No. 2 - Automatic Meter Reading System will be received by the ENGINEER at the Magnolia Town Hall, 110 East Carroll Street, Magnolia, NC 28453 until 2:00 PM Eastern Daylight Time , October 29, 2026, and then at said office publicly opened and read aloud.

The CONTRACT DOCUMENTS may be examined at the following locations:

Magnolia Town Hall, 110 East Carroll Street, Magnolia, NC 28453
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 $104.00 for each set.

The OWNER reserves the right to reject any and all PROPOSALS, waive all technicalities, and accept the PROPOSAL most advantageous. The OWNER shall select which PROPOSAL is most advantageous based upon criteria established by this CONTRACT DOCUMENT.

PROPOSER 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 PROPOSALS.

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.

PROPOSERS shall, within the time frames specified in the PROPOSAL documents, submit all required affidavits and documentation demonstrating that the PROPOSER 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 PROPOSAL.

Prospective PROPOSERS who have been found guilty of discrimination within the last two (2) years are debarred from submitting a proposal.

A pre-Proposal conference will be held at 10:00 AM on October 7, 2026 in Magnolia Town Hall, 110 East Carroll Street, Magnolia, NC 28453. Prospective PROPOSERS are encouraged to attend this pre-proposal conference as part of their good faith efforts.

September 26, 2026
Charles Banks
Town Manager
Town of Magnolia

Wake County Address —CONT. FROM PG 1

on accomplishments, Mial also devoted considerable time to the financial challenges facing the county.

He said Wake County is facing millions of dollars in additional costs and lost revenue tied to decisions made at the state level, including the county expecting to lose approximately $12 million this year because of what he called the "Blue Ridge loophole," while other state policy changes could shift additional costs onto the county. He also cited approximately $12 million in potential SNAP-related costs, $3 million in additional jail expenses and another $9 million to renovate a facility for foster youth awaiting placement.

Mial criticized efforts by the General Assembly to limit local governments' ability to increase property taxes, arguing that local governments need the authority to respond to the needs of their own communities.

"The General Assembly won't fix the Blue Ridge loophole, but they will shift state costs back to the counties," Mial said. "And now they're trying to cap our ability to meet these unfunded mandates."

He said the financial pressures could affect Wake County's ability to maintain the quality-of-life residents have come to expect.

For the coming fiscal year, Wake County increased its operating contribution to Wake County Public Schools by $25.3 million, bringing the county's total operating investment in the district to approximately $768 million, according to Mial.

North Carolina law assigns counties responsibility for school construction and facilities while the state is responsible for operating costs such as teacher salaries and supplies. Voters will also have an opportunity this fall to consider a $680 million school bond and a $149 million Wake Tech bond. The Wake Tech proposal would support renovations at the college's Southern Wake Campus and workforce-development programs.

Wake County and public and private partners launched Wake at Home, an initiative designed to move people experiencing homelessness from encampments into stable housing while expanding the county's ability to provide services. The first phase aims to connect 400 people living in encampments with housing and support services, help 1,000 people experiencing homelessness for the first time return to housing quickly and provide intensive assistance to people with complex behavioral-health needs.

"By investing in solutions that help house people quickly, we reduce the need for emergency intervention. Wake at Home is a moving initiative. It's a commitment to solving homelessness with proven evidence and humanity," Commissioner Tara Waters said.

Mial said 33 people living in a local encampment recently accepted offers of housing and support after outreach workers spent eight weeks building relationships with them.

"What this is really about?" Mial said. "Helping neighbors who are down, pick themselves up, build the life they want, and deserve."

The county is also marking the 50th anniversary of its Parks, Recreation and Open Space system.

"Wake County Parks, Recreation, and Open Space has come a long way in 50 years. Today, nearly every corner of the county has a park, Greenway, or nature preserve nearby, with two more in the works right now," Vice Chair Commissioner Safiyah Jackson said.

The county has also adopted a 50-year One Water Plan, bringing drinking water, stormwater, wastewater and groundwater planning into one long-term framework. The plan is intended to prepare for population growth, increased water demand, flooding and drought.

"It says water doesn't stop at city limits, and neither should our planning. This framework helps us better prepare for population growth, changing land use, and more powerful together," Commissioner Seneca said.

Mial also revisited the county board's decision to endorse the strategic combination between WakeMed and Atrium Health. The decision followed months of public meetings, calls, emails, and negotiations.

"Deciding to endorse the WakeMed and Atrium Health strategic combination was one of the most intense and focused decisions," Mial said, describing the process as involving "many meetings, calls, emails, and many sleepless nights. At the end of the day, we all agree that WakeMed provides vital health care to our community. And its future must be protected," he said. "The time for us to prepare for increased demand for healthcare is now."

The address also highlighted Wake County's new public health facility in East Raleigh, which opened in February. The four-story building contains nearly 90 exam rooms and 20 dental treatment rooms and is equipped with nearly 1,300 solar panels.

Wake County is also working to preserve farmland. Since the beginning

Natural Beauty—CONTINUED FROM PG 5

ger severe contact dermatitis, corneal abrasions, and chronic eye infections. Repeated application and heavy extension weights destroy the natural lash follicle, resulting in permanent thinning of the natural lashes.

The deeper danger is mental. When people condition themselves to believe they look tired, unpresentable, or unfinished without aspiring to artificial beauty standards, they lose the ability to look in the mirror and recognize their own innate beauty. When cosmetic perfectionism becomes the baseline expectation, society suffers. Communities divert immense amounts of money that could build homes, seed generational businesses, or fund educational advancements into consumer-driven beauty industries. Nails, hair weaves, and eyelashes will not help us build better futures for the generations to come. More critically, our young daughters and sons grow up watching adults mutilate and medicate their God-given temples, the inherent toxic message that natural beauty is an error that needs fixing. I reject this notion. We must, as a people, recognize that every insecurity is a revenue stream for a pharmaceutical supplier, a surgical clinic, or a cosmetic brand, and instead see ourselves as God's creation.

Ending the war on self does not mean abandoning personal wellness or healthy discipline. True stewardship of the body honors nutrition, movement, rest, and vitality. It treats the physical vessel as sacred. The Creator did not make mistakes. Every natural contour, texture, and feature carries heritage, character, and dignity. To step away from the scalpel, the needle, and the mask is not a concession; it is an act of spiritual and cultural rebellion. True peace begins when we lay down our arms against our own reflection, reject the industry of inadequacy, and embrace the truth that we are already wonderfully and completely made.

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Politics & Election News

North Carolina NAACP 83rd Annual State Convention

By Jheri Hardaway
Staff Writer



High Point, NC - Delegates, youth organizers, veterans, and civic leaders from across the state assembled at Congdon Yards on September 25–26, 2026, for the 83rd Annual State Convention of the North Carolina State Conference of the NAACP. Convening under the theme "We the People," the gathering confronted systemic racial disparities, the protection of voting rights, healthcare inequities, and the deliberate transfer of political and economic inheritance across generations. State Conference President Deborah Dicks Maxwell and Conference Chair Gerry McCants did an outstanding job of bringing people and information together in a beautiful and inviting space.

The convention opened with an official civic proclamation by High Point Mayor Cyril Jefferson, who declared September 25–26, 2026, as "We the People Days" across the city. Mayor Jefferson reminded attendees of High Point's historic role in the civil rights struggle, specifically noting February 11, 1960, when students from William Penn High School staged a courageous lunch counter sit-in at the local Woolworth's just days after the Greensboro Four. "The arc of the moral universe is long, and it bends toward justice," Mayor Jefferson stated, invoking Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Barack Obama. "Brother Barack taught me that if that arc is going to bend, it takes all of us bending it. Because when we don't bend the arc, the pliability of it means it will snap back."

The public health crisis facing North Carolina's Black families served as an immediate call to action. Dr. Makunda Abdul-Mbacke delivered an address regarding birth outcomes and life expectancy, exposing structural neglect based on geographic access to grocery stores and maternal healthcare. In Guilford County, Black parents experienced 70% of infant deaths in 2023, a steep surge from 52% in 2021. Dr. Abdul-Mbacke emphasized that systemic disparities are worsening as diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives face legislative budget stripping and programmatic bans across the state and beyond. "Healthcare should cover you from the top of your head to the soles of your feet," Dr. Abdul-Mbacke urged. "How do we pay for it? We are already paying for it. People get caught up in the additional costs, but we are already paying for it through our taxes." She shared, "All of our congressional leadership receive healthcare through the ACA; we the people pay over 70% of the cost of our elected officials' healthcare."

Dr. Abdul-Mbacke underscored that possessing health insurance does not equate to affordability or comprehensive access, particularly in North Carolina, where rising premiums and coverage gaps persist despite federal Affordable Care Act provisions.

Former North Carolina Secretary of Commerce Machelle Sanders echoed the need to sustain institutional focus across business, education, and healthcare: "Remember that our forefathers, our parents, and grandparents have been through tough times, but they overcame. Continue to make improvements... and stay focused on something bigger than where you are." One of the convention's centerpiece panels, titled The Inheritance, challenged members to look past transactional activism and build long-term, independent power. Co-facilitated by Josh Vincent and Mantryll Williams, the session opened with several questions: "What would it take for Black people to have the power to determine what happens next to us?" "What have we inherited? What will we leave?" People mentioned many things, including an understanding of successes and challenges through wisdom. Rebellion, faith, spirituality, and so much more. What they call a 'formation' has formed around the idea that we can be more free than this. This powerful sentiment is more of a covenant, the facilitators explained.

Vincent, an alumnus of North Carolina Central University, emphasized that we hold the motion: progressive ideas start with us. He explained the Black Radical Imagination in the face of continued oppression as he led attendees through a comprehensive historical timeline stretching from the Civil War to modern pushbacks. Tracing the trajectory through self-emancipation, Reconstruction, the 1898 Wilmington Coup, the 1930s Southern tenant farmers' organizing, and the Historic Thousands on Jones Street (HKONJ) 14-Point Agenda, and more. Vincent stressed that every major democratic leap in the United States was fueled by Black struggle. "Every significant political motion or movement that has ever taken place in this country has been inspired and fueled by the fight for Black resistance," Vincent said. "We don't get written out of progressive ideas. It belongs to us... But with every single one of our political movements has come a significant, radical, oftentimes violent backlash."

Vincent cited Project 2025, noting that its primary architect, Kevin Roberts, built his doctoral research directly upon the study of historic Black resistance to design contemporary countermeasures. Panelists and leaders pushed back against organizational silos, urging the NAACP to operate not as a solitary silo, but as a binding covenant or "formation" that connects independent institutions, land preservation, and economic cooperatives. Brian reinforced that political power and economic power cannot be separated.

Reverend Corine Mack, 1st Vice President of the NC NAACP State Conference, delivered a stirring and candid response: "In the last four years, we have not worked together as we should. One of the reasons white supremacy works is because we are divided. The foundation of every movement was love... Every real movement was led by young people. It's time for us to move out of the way sometimes, let them decide what they want to do and how, and give them the tools to get it done."

Former State Representative and former NC Secretary of Military and Veterans Affairs Larry D. Hall addressed the underutilization of veterans' assets as a critical missing link in closing the racial wealth gap. "One of the areas that we've ignored continuously are veterans' benefits, veterans' assets, and how you can both preserve and create wealth that can be transferred to future generations," Hall said. He announced a statewide initiative connecting the NC NAACP Veterans and Military Committee with organizations like the National Association of Black Veterans (NABVETS), establishing direct contact rosters for county veterans services offices, VA hospitals, congressional delegations, and state property tax exemptions for service members.

The Saturday Political Action Luncheon brought delegates together with statewide candidates and leaders, highlighted by an address from lifetime NAACP member, former North Carolina Governor, and current U.S. Senate candidate Roy Cooper.

Cooper addressed the political landscape with 38 days remaining until the general election, acknowledging that more than $100 million in attack ads have flooded the airwaves in the contested Senate race. "We don't have the billionaires they do. We don't have the dark money groups that they do. We have a people-powered campaign—95% of our contributions are $100 or less, with an average grassroots donation of $36," Cooper said. "We're gonna make it through, but don't take anything for granted."

Cooper pointed directly to looming federal deadlines, noting that without decisive legislative intervention, Social Security benefits face automatic reductions: "In 2032, Social Security benefits will be cut significantly unless Congress does something. We've gotta fix the system. Wealthier people need to pay their fair share. I am a prisoner of hope; I truly believe our best days are ahead of us if we work for it."

Youth inclusion and ground-level voter protection anchored the convention's operational priorities heading into early voting. Nevaeh Hodge, President of the North Carolina NAACP Youth & College Division and National Board Member, challenged everyone to move beyond nominal invitations and share institutional decision-making. "Young people care deeply about what happens in our communities. We care whether we can afford college, whether we can find a place to live, whether we feel safe at school, and whether we have access to healthcare," Hodge declared. "Reach out to your youth council or nearby college chapter before you plan your next civic engagement event. Make the invitation, offer your guidance, listen to their ideas, and give them the space to act."

Addressing the legal front, Nicholas Gothard, Senior National Coordinator of Election Protection at the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, called on every branch to recruit at least 10 poll monitors and nonpartisan vote protectors. Gothard directed delegates to inform their communities about the nonpartisan 888-OUR-VOTE (888-687-8683) hotline and the state coalition portal SafeVoterNC.org to intercept improper ballot rejections, voter intimidation, and accessibility violations at precinct sites.

The Ballot Box Revolt: Why Our Elders Are Saying "No" to School Bonds in the Era of Vouchers

By Jheri Hardaway
Staff Writer

As a mobile notary public, my seal often grants me an intimate window into our community's quietest moments. Recently, as mail-in absentee ballots began arriving at kitchen tables across our state, I sat with several elderly neighbors and seniors. Several of these Wake County-based voters experienced the challenges of school integration, affirmative action, and made sacrifices so their children and grandchildren could receive an equitable education. When it came time to vote on the school bonds, I fully expected an automatic "Yes." After all, who understands the sacred value of public education more than the generation that had to fight state troopers and courtroom battles just to enter the front doors?

Instead, my pen paused. One after another, they voted "NO." I was stunned. Why would our elders living on fixed incomes, but fiercely protective of our youth, refuse a marginal tax rate increase of a few dollars per month to upgrade crumbling classrooms, modernize aging HVAC systems, and expand community colleges?

Their answer was swift, unified, and deeply piercing despite not knowing each other:"Why should we pay out of our pockets to patch the holes when the General Assembly is funneling hundreds of millions out of our public schools and giving it to private academies?"

Our seniors aren't abandoning our children. But they are acutely aware of state spending, especially after it took a year to pass the state budget. They are staging a quiet, desperate rebellion against the systematic dismantling of public education.

To understand their anger, one must understand how school funding functions in North Carolina. Local school boards possess zero taxing authority. Under state law, counties bear the sole legal burden of building, repairing, and modernizing physical educational facilities. When roofs leak in older neighborhoods, when science labs lag decades behind modern technology, or when explosive growth requires new classrooms, counties must turn to General Obligation (GO) bonds. These voter-approved municipal loans allow local governments to borrow capital at favorable interest rates, repaying them through modest property tax adjustments over twenty or thirty years. It is the most cost-effective tool local communities have to build schools. Without bonds, growth halts, facilities decay, and children suffer.

Yet our elders are asking the hard question our state lawmakers continue to dodge: How can local homeowners be asked to bail out a leaking ship while the state legislature continues to drill holes in the hull? The resentment at the kitchen table is aimed directly at North Carolina's rapidly expanding Opportunity Scholarship voucher program. First enacted under Governor Pat McCrory in 2013 with a modest $10.8 million budget, the program was originally sold to the public as a targeted rescue lifeline: a means-tested voucher intended strictly to help low-income families escape underperforming public schools. Fast-forward a decade, and the mask has fallen off.

Beginning in the 2024–25 academic year, the General Assembly completely eliminated income caps. Millionaires and affluent households whose children had never spent a single day in a public school classroom are now eligible for taxpayer-funded subsidies to cover private school tuition. According to advocacy group Public Schools First NC:

The program transfers state tuition subsidies ranging up to 100% of the average state per-pupil allocation (over $6,400 per child) straight into private and religious school coffers. Through the companion Personal Education Student Accounts (PESA/ESA+) program, vouchers for students with disabilities can divert up to $17,000 per student annually into private hands with minimal state curriculum oversight.

The legislative funding pipeline is staggering: by 2031–32, annual voucher allocations will surpass $500 million per year, totaling nearly $5 billion diverted away from the public trust over the next decade.

All of this occurs while North Carolina ranks near the bottom nationwide in per-pupil funding, while veteran teachers flee the classroom over stagnating pay, and while the state remains in perpetual defiance of the landmark Leandro ruling, which constitutionally mandates a sound, basic education for every child. Our voting elders and many others see the playbook clearly because they have seen it before. They remember the "Pearsall Plan" of the late 1950s, North Carolina's historic resistance strategy to Brown v. Board of Education, where the state offered taxpayer-funded tuition grants so white students could flee integrated public schools and attend private, segregated academies.

To those who lived that history, the unlimited expansion of modern private vouchers feels painfully familiar: an intentional disinvestment from common spaces in favor of privatized privilege. When a 75-year-old voter looks at their property tax bill, they do not see an isolated bond measure for air conditioners or brick-and-mortar classrooms. They see things for what they are. They see a state legislature that starves the public school system, forces county commissioners to beg local taxpayers to fill the void, and redirects public tax dollars to subsidize wealthy private school tuition.

The protest of our elders is rooted in righteous indignation, but it presents a tragic paradox. Voting down local school bonds will not stop the General Assembly from sending hundreds of millions to private schools. The voucher pipeline will continue to flow from Raleigh untouched. What a "No" vote will do is ensure that the neighborhood school down the street remains overcrowded, that the mold in the aging elementary school classroom goes unmitigated, and that our community colleges lack the technical labs required to prepare the next generation for the modern economy. The children who pay the price for a defeated bond will not be the families cashing voucher checks; it will be the working-class children who remain in public classrooms.

Our elders have sounded a necessary alarm. Their refusal to rubber-stamp school bonds is a warning to every elected leader in North Carolina: the public is waking up to the voucher heist. The real solution cannot be to starve our local schools from both ends. The true solution is to continue to vote to elect lawmakers who will stop using public tax dollars to fund private school tuition.



RECEIVES BIRTHDAY WISHES—Mrs. Geraldine Burroughs was wished a Happy Birthday by family, friends, and the First Cosmopolitan Baptist church family on this past Sunday. Pictured with Mrs. Burroughs (center) are left Pastor Dr. Dorwin Howard and right her son, Kelvin Burroughs. (Contributed Photo)

Poll: Older Voters Could Be Decisive in U.S. Senate Race

WASHINGTON – Today, AARP released new bipartisan polling highlighting the outsized role older voters are poised to play in North Carolina's closely-watched Senate race this November. Older North Carolinians remain highly motivated to vote and are focused on a range of affordability concerns -- including national issues like Social Security and Medicare and local conversations around data center utility costs and the affordable housing shortage, according to the survey.

"Older voters are highly engaged, motivated to vote, and likely to determine close midterm races," said Nancy LeaMond, AARP Executive Vice President and Chief Advocacy Officer. "Candidates looking to gain an edge must speak to their everyday concerns, including whether Social Security will be there for them and if they'll be able to keep up with rising prices for everyday essentials like groceries, gasoline and health care."

Voters 66+ alone accounted for 35% of all voters in North Carolina's 2026 primary election – and new polling suggests this rate of involvement is likely to continue: 83% of voters 50+ rated themselves a "10" on a 10-point motivation-to-vote scale, compared with 66% of voters under 50. Swing 50+ voters -- those not voting a straight ticket for both the U.S. Senate and generic House races -- make up 6% of North Carolina's electorate, underscoring this bloc's importance for candidates looking to gain an advantage.

In the race for U.S. Senate, Democrat Roy Cooper has an 11-point edge over Republican Michael Whatley with all voters (53%-42%), while Whatley leads among voters 50+ by 6-points (51%-45%). Cooper wins both women and men, though women by a larger margin. Women 50+ are competitive, with Cooper up by 3-points, while men 50+ back Whatley by 16-points

"Both candidates would be wise to speak clearly and directly to the issues older voters care about," said AARP North Carolina State Director Michael Olender. "North Carolinians 50 and older are concerned about national issues like Social Security and Medicare, but are also focused on local conversations like ensuring data centers don't raise utility costs and addressing the affordable housing shortage. Older North Carolinians want to know they will be able to age with financial security and independence and are looking for candidates who can answer that plainly."

AARP's polling found that affordability is the top issue for North Carolina voters 50+, followed by threats to democracy, then Social Security and Medicare.

Among voters age 50+:

- 83% say Social Security is an important issue when deciding their vote, and 93% are more likely to support a candidate who will make sure workers receive the Social Security benefits they earned.
- 77% say Medicare is an important voting issue, and 84% are more likely to support a candidate who would expand Medicare's ability to negotiate prescription drug prices.
- 74% support requiring local communities to permit more accessory dwelling units (ADUs), a proposal aimed at helping address North Carolina's affordable housing shortage.
- 80% believe that state policy makers should work to ensure that the utility costs for serving new data centers should not be passed on to residential consumers.

