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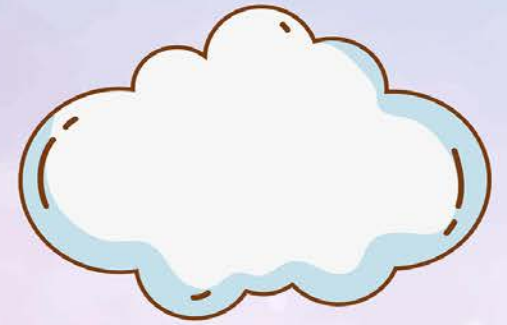
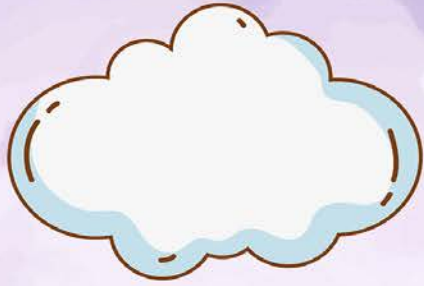


Local music artist
LÄMAR releases
album
- pg 7

LGBTQ+ ally
Rev. William
Barber arrested
- pg 5



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Mission:

The focus of QNotes is to serve the LGBTQ and straight ally communities of the Charlotte region, North Carolina and beyond, by featuring arts, entertainment, news and views content in print and online that directly enlightens, informs and engages the readers about LGBTQ life and social justice issues.

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inside this issue



feature

12 Twenty-fifth anniversary World Pride set for Washington D.C.



news

- 5 Reverend Dr. William Barber and others arrested during prayer in DC Capital rotunda
- 6 Trump admin misgenders Brazilian congresswomen
- 6 California representative stays on case of wrongfully deported gay stylist
- 6 New polls see active Democratic leaders potentially capturing 2028 primary
- 7 LAMÄR draws listeners into his world with Moonseeker III
- 7 Lawsuit filed against Trump's discriminatory passport policy
- 7 Pope Francis dies one day after meeting with U.S. VP JD Vance
- 8 Anti-LGBTQ+ comments turn Newton Pride into 'Rainbow Celebration'
- 9 SC AG demands repeal of conversion therapy ban in Columbia
- 10 Man charged with killing two of Charlotte Trans women rejects plea deal, claims innocence



a&e

13 Out in Print: "When the Harvest Comes"



views

4 Trump says he's the ultimate warrior status against anti-semitism



life

14 Living With Long COVID
15 Our People: Scott Weaver



events

For event listings, visit qnotescarolinas.com/events-calendar.

Living with COVID

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the world was irrevocably transformed. Charlotte "Dimples" Foster, right, shown with wife Angie' a devoted wife, mother and advocate, shares her personal journey through the virus, highlighting the ongoing struggles faced by those suffering with Long COVID.



PAGE 14

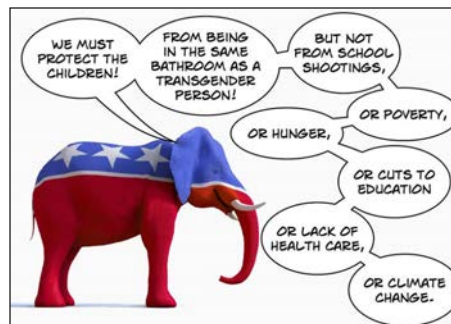


Our People: Scott Weaver

Local renaissance man Scott Weaver has been a force in fashion, music and party promoting. With the changing climate in our culture, he talks with Qnotes about his decision to alter the course of his career, new plans on the horizon, concerns for the future of the country and his best four-legged friend Roy.

PAGE 15

The People speak on Social Media



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Trump says he's the ultimate warrior against anti-semitism

Despite his claims, his actions say something different



by Taylor Heeden Larkins
Qnotes Staff Writer

Throughout his presidential campaign, Donald Trump championed himself as the ultimate ally to Jewish Americans. He touted promises of ending antisemitism in American government and college campuses, as well as promising to be a staunch ally to Israel as its leadership continues its attacks on Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank.

According to data collected by the Pew Research Center, around 90 percent of Jewish Americans say they think discrimination against Jews has risen in the United States since Israel's militarized response following the Oct. 7 attacks. Trump has capitalized on this by continuing to state his "unwavering" support for Jewish Americans by demonizing and attacking those who oppose Israel's handling in its response to the Hamas attack in 2023.

However, the president's actions show he cares little to none about Jewish Americans, Palestinian Americans or any other marginalized people. One of the first actions Trump took as president was to completely gut and cut Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) programs from federally-funded entities, including but not limited to the college campuses where Trump and many others claim antisemitism runs deep. The president also made moves to completely dismantle the Department of Education, cutting federal funding to public K-12 schools and higher education institutions.

These cuts paired with a history of antisemitism, Islamophobia and just overall ignorance and unwillingness to educate himself on facts make one thing clear: Trump is no ally to the Jewish community, the Palestinian people or any group who faces or has faced persecution and violence.

What is DEI?

DEI encompasses people of different ages, races, ethnicities, abilities, disabilities, genders, religions, cultures and sexual orientations. Initiatives included in the DEI umbrella will often provide opportunities for groups who have historically been discriminated against. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Members of the LGBTQ+ community
- People of Color
- People over the age of 65
- Indigenous people
- Folks who practice religions other than Christianity, such as Judaism or Islam
- Veterans

For individuals from marginalized groups, DEI policies can provide essential support and opportunities for career advancement that might otherwise be inaccessible.

For customers, or students when it comes to universities, DEI policies can improve the overall experience. When companies or schools are diverse and

inclusive, they are able to better understand and meet the needs of an entire population instead of just certain groups.

A reversal of decades of progress

According to reporting from CNN, while the backlash against DEI spiked following the murder of George Floyd and the racial reckoning which followed, DEI has been in place for decades. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 established the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, or EEOC, which works to eliminate employment discrimination.

President John F. Kennedy, prior to the Civil Rights Act, also signed an executive order implementing affirmative action — a policy requiring federal contractors by executive order to treat applicants and employees equally based on race, color, religion and sex. Affirmative action was something all historically marginalized groups could benefit from, including Jewish Americans.

Universities used affirmative action to admit more students of color at majority-White schools, and this included Jewish students. Prior to the 1930s, highly selective universities such as the Ivy League and elite women's colleges used legacy and donor gift factors as a weight to determine students' admission. This resulted in those who were disproportionately economically



impoverished being systematically barred from these institutions, including Jewish applicants.

Affirmative action guaranteed all qualifying students — regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, gender or sexual orientation — would be given the same treatment. However, the conservative majority U.S. Supreme Court (with three Trump-appointed justices) ruled race-conscious college admissions were unconstitutional, effectively ending affirmative action and protections for college admittance for Jewish students.

Trump's cuts to DEI programs have also impacted the presence of Jewish student organizations on college campuses, as the cuts to federal funding threaten the existence of these entities. Wesleyan University President Michael Roth, the first Jewish president of Wesleyan, told Morning Edition that the White House is "using antisemitism as a cloak" to try to get educational institutions to pledge allegiance to his agenda.

"When you see these attacks on different universities ranging from saying to cancel your DEI programs, which really just means canceling access or fairness on your campus, or canceling research projects on diabetes or tuberculosis. Canceling those programs will not protect Jews," Roth explained. "I know that antisemitism is a real thing and it's on the rise worldwide. But this is like using antisemitism as a cloak to do other things, to get universities to express



Around 90 percent of Jewish Americans say they think discrimination against Jews has risen in the United States.

loyalty to the president. And this is new terrain for the United States. We have to call it out, because it really has nothing to do with stopping antisemitism."

Roth addressed in this interview the increase in Jewish Americans flocking to support Trump is rooted in the "Trump administration's support for Israel" in the months following the Oct. 7 attacks. However, Roth states in this interview that while he supports "Israel's right to defend itself," that doesn't mean what the Israeli military and government is doing is right.

"I think that the Trump administration's support for Israel has attracted many Jews who feel beleaguered by their fellow citizens being critical of the current Israeli government. I myself support Israel's right to defend itself. I don't applaud the way they're conducting a war in Gaza, which has displaced so many people and killed so many children and other noncombatants," he says. "But I understand that my fellow Jews often think somebody who supports Israel must be good for us. But ... supporting Trump because he supports Israel, even though he's violating the law, even though he's violating civil rights, is going to turn bad for the Jews. Because we depend on the rule of law, we depend on civil rights, and we abandon them at our peril."

The Oct. 7 attacks launched by Hamas killed more than 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took some 250 people into captivity in Gaza, according to the Israeli government.

According to the most recent data from Reuters, the Palestinian Ministry of Health states those killed up until March 22 includes 50,021 people, ranging from a newborn baby to a 110-year-old. Of those, 15,613 or 31% were under 18.

The reported numbers likely undermine the full scale of casualties, as many individuals remain trapped beneath debris. The ministry estimates that approximately 10,000 bodies have yet to be accounted for, with only a small number recovered following the ceasefire.

A peer-reviewed study published in The Lancet in January suggests that during the first nine months of the Gaza conflict, the official death toll was likely underestimated by about 40%, largely due to the collapse of Gaza's healthcare system. The United

Nations human rights office has also indicated that the Palestinian-reported numbers may fall short of the actual count. In previous conflicts in Gaza, U.N. estimates have at times surpassed those provided by Palestinian authorities.

Israel's actions against the Palestinian people resulted in protests happening across American college campuses, with America's next generation leading the charge in advocating for a ceasefire and an end to the blatant ethnic targeting of Palestinians by the Israeli government. Trump's administration has made an effort to target students who participate in these protests, something the Jewish coalition brought together by the nonpartisan Jewish Council for Public Affairs claims is putting more Jewish Americans in danger than ever before.

This coalition released a statement condemning the administration's approach to pro-Palestinian protests, part of which reads:

"In recent weeks, escalating federal actions have used the guise of fighting antisemitism to justify stripping students of due process rights when they face arrest and/or deportation, as well as to threaten billions in academic research and education funding. Students have been arrested at home and on the street with no transparency as to why they are being held or deported, and in certain cases with the implication that they are being punished for their constitutionally-protected speech. Universities have an obligation to protect Jewish students, and the federal government has an important role to play in that effort; however, sweeping draconian funding cuts will weaken the free academic inquiry that strengthens democracy and society, rather than productively counter antisemitism on campus.

"These actions do not make Jews—or any community—safer. Rather, they only make us less safe."

It's clear as day: Trump doesn't care about Jewish Americans. He's using the rise of antisemitism, which resulted from the actions of the Israeli government and its blatant disregard for the Palestinian existence, to try to grab at any ounce of power he can muster. ::

Reverend Dr. William Barber and others arrested during prayer in DC Capital rotunda

Well known in NC, Barber is the former head of state NAACP and an LGBTQ+ ally



by David Aaron Moore
Qnotes Staff Writer

Reverend William Barber has a long history with North Carolina. He served as the president of the North Carolina chapter of the NAACP and led the Moral Mondays presentations that began during Donald Trump's first term in office. He is also co-chair of the national Poor People's Campaign.

He has called for political progress in the state on issues such as voting rights, access to healthcare, a living wage, LGBTQ+ rights, public education, women's rights and the environment.

As of April 28, the North Carolina pastor and two other individuals from the Moral Mondays movement were arrested by the U.S. Capitol police. The reason? Praying in the rotunda of the US Capitol to prevent congress from passing a federal budget with a reported \$1.5 trillion dollar total in cuts.

Barber has pointed out the contradiction of the arrests of the interfaith Moral Mondays movement and the recent creation of a DOJ task force, purportedly created to abolish anti-Christian bias in the federal government. He has publicly confirmed his Christian faith as the driving force in his community advocacy work. "But people come in to say this budget does not line up with our values or even the Constitution, and we get arrested," Barber said.

If the legislation in question is passed, it would have a dramatic impact on life-saving assistance for the economically impoverished, while providing huge tax breaks for the country's wealthiest.

In addition to Barber, those arrested include Rev. Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, a writer, preacher and assistant director for partnerships and fellowships at Yale University's Center for Public Theology and Public Policy; and Steve Swayne, director of St. Francis Springs Prayer Center in Stoneville, N.C. All of the

men were members of a larger gathering participating in a Moral Mondays rally held outside the U.S. Supreme Court building.

A video clip posted on Facebook (from an organization called Repairers of the Breach) shows police urging the three men to stop their vigil and leave the rotunda or face arrest while announcing that they were participating in an "unlawful demonstration." When the decision was made to move forward with the arrests, all other civilians and media were immediately ushered to the outer chamber and eventually out of the building entirely.

The video also shows (prior to their arrests) Wilson-Hartgrove, Swayne and Barber (president and senior lecturer of Repairers of the Breach) praying and reading aloud from pre-written documents that announced their concerns:

"We are here crying to you, oh God, because we have heard the cries of your people," said Barber.

"We have also read the budget resolution of this congress," Wilson-Hartgrove continued, "which calls for \$1.5 trillion in cuts to life saving and life sustaining programs in order to give a tax break to billionaires. "Deliver us, oh Lord, from the deceptive lie that says our nation will be better off if those who have little get less, and those who have too much get more," Swayne added.

The three men then read aloud: "Against the conspiracy of cruelty, we plead the power of your mercy."

Police closed the doors to the rotunda, while Barber, Swayne and Wilson-Hartgrove remained inside. The fact that media were not allowed to cover the actual arrests raises concerns about the Trump administration's desire to squash factual news and information from reaching the public.

The three were reportedly handcuffed



Reverend William Barber (right) and other participants making their way to the Capitol Rotunda. CREDIT: Screen Capture

and later charged with crowding, obstructing and incommoding, confirmed as a violation of a District of Columbia ordinance in public demonstrations.

"We weren't cursing. We weren't talking extraordinarily loud," Barber said in a story carried by QNotes media partner The Charlotte Observer. "They gave us three warnings and then they arrested us, saying our prayer was an illegal activity."

As reported previously in QNotes and The Charlotte Observer, Barber has been arrested for civil protest-related activities on several occasions, dating back to 2013 and the initial Moral Mondays public gatherings. From the Observer report: "...the Republican-led state legislature was moving to cut education funding and unemployment benefits, opting out of Medicaid expansion,

restricting abortion rights, limiting voter access and relaxing environmental protections, all of which Barber said was 'regressive' and 'extremist' and had the worst impacts on poor people, women, LGBTQ+ people, immigrants, minorities and the uninsured."

Voicing his concerns over the proposed legislative budget activity currently under consideration, Barber referred to the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. Originally meant to expire at the end of this year, Republicans in Congress want to extend, which could potentially add more than \$4 trillion to the federal deficit from fiscal year 2025 through 2034.

Said Barber: "There is no way they can cut \$2 trillion from the budget and not undermine Social Security, Medicare and free and reduced-price lunches for school children." ::

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Trump admin misgenders Brazilian congresswoman

Not limiting themselves to insulting Congressmen and women within the United States, Donald Trump's administration issued an incorrectly gendered visa to a foreign congressional figure scheduled to speak at a panel this month.

Brazilian congresswoman Erika Hilton, who is transgender, applied for and was issued a U.S. travel visa that listed her as "male." The news came on Weds., April 16, when Hilton wrote on her Instagram page recalling the situation. She had applied for the visa in order to participate in the Brazil Conference at Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Due to the purposeful mistake, Hilton had canceled those plans, and the conference went on without her additional voice.

"I was worried about the treatment I would receive at the airport from the American authorities, given that the name is feminine and the gender described was masculine. I was scared, to be honest. And I didn't accept subjecting myself to that kind of thing," she told the Brazilian outlet *Folha de S.Paulo*. "I thought I didn't deserve it, even though I was missing out on an important activity that I really wanted to participate in, I shouldn't have to subject myself to such violence and disrespect."

According to the Brazilian news site, Hilton was previously issued a U.S. travel visa in 2023 that had listed her gender as female. However, when she presented documents to the U.S. embassy in Brazil ahead of this year's conference, including

her birth certificate and diplomatic passport, where it specifically lists her gender as female, they were ignored. "I felt violated, disrespected and I felt that my country's powers were being invaded by a completely delusional person, a sick man who occupied the presidency of the United States and feels he owns 'the truth,'" Hilton said, referring to Donald Trump. "My Brazilian civil documents were disrespected."

Included in the Wednesday Instagram post, Hilton, while expressing shock, also said that she was not surprised to be misgendered on her visa, as this had become a growing occurrence with trans citizens in the United States when they've received their own travel documents. In February, Euphoria actress Hunter Schafer said she'd received a new passport that identified her as "male." As well, earlier this week, Canadian singer-songwriter Bells Larsen canceled his U.S. tour dates after being told that he would be unable to get an accurate visa because he is trans.



Erika Hilton (left center) attending a House Ethics Council meeting on April 9. CREDIT: Facebook

Hilton told *Folha de S.Paulo* that she plans to take legal action against Trump at the United Nations and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, stating she hopes Brazil's Ministry of Foreign Affairs will press the U.S. ambassador for an explanation. According to the outlet, the U.S. embassy in Brazil has not commented on the situation dealing with Hilton's visa application. ::

—Jonathan Golian

California representative stays on case of wrongfully deported gay stylist

While much of America's news regarding wrongfully deported immigrants has held the focus on Maryland dad Kilmar Abrego Garcia, gay makeup artist Andry José Hernandez Romero is another case among many forcefully taken by Donald Trump and ICE without due process or oversight to the El Salvadoran super prison known as CECOT.

Much like the moves made by Senator Christ Van Hollen (D-MD) to put a spotlight on Garcia, openly gay Representative Robert Garcia (D-CA) is doing his best to keep Hernandez Romero in the headlines and check on his status in El Salvador.

Only in the United States since last year, Hernandez Romero had journeyed to the border, entering legally through San Diego. In his asylum request, he made claims of being targeted in Venezuela, his home country, due to his political beliefs and for being gay.

"The government had found that his threats against him were credible and that he had a real probability of winning an asylum claim," his lawyer, Lindsay Toczylowski, said.

The deciding factor in which Hernandez Romero was taken by ICE comes from details taken from his screening at a CoreCivic detention center, where former police officer Charles Cross Jr. had noted the crown tattoos on his wrists. The tattoos themselves, coupled together with the words "Mom" and "Dad", link the stylist to a festival in his hometown of Capacho, Venezuela for Three Kings Day, a holiday that falls after the twelve days of Christmas.

Claiming within the following paperwork that the tattoos were gang-related, it was Cross's ill-conceived determination that the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) used as evidence in taking Hernandez

Romero to El Salvador.

In letters sent to CoreCivic and ICE, Rep. Garcia has demanded answers as to why Hernandez Romero is being held in the camp that has a reputation for torturing inmates.

"I write to express grave concerns regarding the deportation of Andry José Hernandez Romero, a 31-year-old gay Venezuelan asylum seeker, to El Salvador," Garcia wrote, asking what role Cross, with his "documented history of misconduct," played in getting Hernandez Romero sent there. Garcia included several questions about what safeguards were put into place before sending Hernandez Romero and gave a May 1 deadline for answers.

Rep. Garcia's direct questions about Cross come from the former officer's record, which specifies he lost his job for DUI and crashing into a house; and allegedly committing fraud. The chain of issues placed Cross on the Brady List, which includes police officers who are considered non-credible for providing legal testimony in Milwaukee County.

Garcia, along with Representatives Maxwell Alejandro Frost (D-FL), Yassamin Ansari (D-AZ) and Maxine E. Dexter (D-OR), traveled El Salvador independently of Congress to demand evidence of Hernandez Romero's status and to highlight his case in mid-April.

"We're not going to be stopped from



Andry José Hernandez Romero in happier times (left) and reportedly in an image believed to be Romero entering CECOT. CREDIT: Facebook

doing the right thing and standing up for due process and the Constitution," Garcia told CBS News. "Democrats have to continue to show up and bring attention to this issue."

According to a report from Fox News 11 in Los Angeles, there have been no details provided on Hernandez Romero's condition and no communication from him at all. Said legal representatives at the social justice law firm Immigrant Defenders Law Center: "We were shocked by Andry's disappearance from ICE custody. There has been zero communication [but] we are fighting to bring him home." ::

—Jonathan Golian

New polls see active Democratic leaders potentially capturing 2028 primary

While the United States is still years away from the next proposed presidential election, should Donald Trump not find a way to hold onto power as he has hinted at, new polls have started to gather data on who in the Democratic Party could be next to run for the party.

According to a Yale Youth Poll, taken at the beginning of April, three names stick out at the top of the list: Harris, Ocasio-Cortez and Buttigieg. In the recent poll, calculated from 4,100 registered Democratic voters, former Vice President Kamala Harris took the top spot at 28 percent, while Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez came in at second place with 21 percent of the responses and Pete

Buttigieg getting third with 14 percent.

Another poll taken by fairly new independent news media site Zeteo, in collaboration with Data for Progress, came to slightly similar conclusions. Using their poll's questionnaire to see who voters might like to see lead the primary in 2028, Harris still gains the top spot at 18 percent, while Buttigieg, Ocasio-Cortez and Senator Cory Booker range from 14 to 12 percent of responses.

Different from the Zeteo and Data for Progress poll was a section that took Harris out of the mix entirely. Even just after the 2024 election, rumors had started to circulate that Harris had been eyeing the governor seat in California in

2026, which would mean despite how requested she may be, Harris might be in another position in the U.S. government at that point.

Without Harris, Buttigieg seems to mix with Ocasio-Cortez in the positioning between first and second places in each poll.

What has driven up much of the conversation seems to be the activity specific members of the Democratic Party have exuded since Donald Trump's administration started to take the government apart, particularly when it comes to Ocasio-Cortez and Booker. While Booker's most recent notable draw of attention had been his record-breaking 25-hour speech on the House floor, Ocasio-Cortez has been ruling headlines because of her "Fighting Oligarchy" tour with Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders.

Taking on crowds numbering in the thousands at each stop, sharing their platform's message on working-class economic justice and corporate accountability, some strategists are starting to see the young congresswoman stand out in a



Ocasio-Cortez and Sanders stand in front of a packed-out audience on their "Fighting Oligarchy" Tour. CREDIT: Facebook

time where many voters are seeking clarity and bolder leadership from the Democratic party.

Robert Creamer, a Democratic strategist, speculated in a comment to Newsweek that the lack of clear direction and leadership within the party could give way to an opportunity in which a new generation of Democrats could rise up.

"There's room now for a chorus of voices to stand up. And people want to see leaders fighting back," Creamer stated. ::

—Jonathan Golian

LAMÄR draws listeners into his world with Moonseeker III

Capping off his three-album trilogy, Charlotte-based artist LAMÄR brings audiences *Moonseeker III*, a collection of ambient and R&B tones mixed with melodic beats.

Put together, the *Moonseeker* saga of albums share many of the same qualities. One of the main draws that blends seamlessly between them is LAMÄR's soft vocal delivery on the majority of tracks. There is a gentle quality that lies within how the artist blends between speaking and singing, often hitting whatever backing beats are given to him. On certain songs, there's a slight hint of autotuning

that accentuates various verses, but the effect never overshadows LAMÄR himself, only adding to the pleasantries in the combined product.

One of the other qualities that groups the albums together are the composition selections that move the collected works along. Aaron Atkins, the main hand behind the musical structures, as well as being an additional voice for LAMÄR to rely on, brought a lounge-like atmosphere in how the layered symphonies and beats are arranged. There is a spaciness to them in the way that allows the key and beat sections to be recognizably interdependent

of each other, and yet there is never a clash of musical notes at any point.

For the final collection of the trilogy, *Moonseeker III* is given the largest track count at 10 songs. However, listeners might lose track of where they are in the line-up due to the album's relaxed nature. There are two interludes for *Moonseeker III*, "Moonseeker Groove" and "I Need You," but even those momentary departures are hard to recognize off-hand, which isn't a poor quality, as the entire collection is extremely consistent on its styling.

Moonseeker III, along with the two previous entries, allow listeners to lift off from where they are and exist in the atmospheric frameworks that LAMÄR and Atkins have put together. There are hints of R&B and jazz, with keys and horn sections being the easiest to pick out of the beats. Listeners are encouraged to find a good set



LAMÄR performed selections from his album trilogy May 9 at Snug Harbor. CREDIT: LAMÄR

of headphones to pair with this album, and chances may be that time will be lost while in LAMÄR's section of space, as each track, while similar, presents enough unique tones and qualities to merit the body of work placing on repeat.::

—Jonathan Golian

Lawsuit filed against Trump's discriminatory passport policy

A lawsuit filed April 25, on behalf of seven transgender U.S. citizens, including one who is nonbinary, is challenging the Trump administration's policy denying them U.S. passports with accurate sex designations. The discriminatory passport policy exposes transgender U.S. citizens to harassment, abuse and discrimination, in some cases endangering them abroad or preventing them from traveling, by forcing them to use identification documents that share private information against their wishes.

"Like many transgender people, I experience fear of harassment or violence when moving through public spaces, especially where a photo ID is required," said Zander Schlacter, the lead plaintiff and a New York-based textile artist and designer. "My safety is further at risk because of my inaccurate passport. I am unwilling to subject myself and my family to the threat of harassment and discrimination at the hands

of border officials or anyone who views my passport."

"Zander is not alone," said Carl Charles, a Senior Attorney for Lambda Legal, the firm representing the seven individuals. "Each of our clients, and indeed thousands of transgender people across the country, are experiencing similar and very serious harm because of the government's decision to deny them accurate passports.

"Our clients have concluded that international travel is now effectively impossible when they are forced to carry an identity document that shares private and inaccurate information without their consent. This needlessly cruel and discriminatory policy exposes them to the very real dangers of harassment and discrimination and complicates their lives simply because of who they are."

The other public plaintiffs are two transgender women, Jill Tran of Maryland

and Lia Hepler-Mackey of California, both recent college graduates. The pseudonymous plaintiffs include one nonbinary person, Kris Koe, a full-time university student and part-time tutor and grocery clerk living in Connecticut, and three transgender men, Peter Poe, a Maryland-based college student, David Doe, a Pennsylvania lawyer; and Robert Roe, a U.S. Foreign Service Officer living in Europe.

Each plaintiff experienced a similar outcome when they applied to renew a passport. Some already had a correct sex designation. Others needed to update the sex designation on their existing passport, or to update their legal name only. In each case, and despite supplying the required documents, they all received passports that reflected the State Department's decision about their "biological sex."

"The anti-transgender animus is clear and intentional," Charles added. "We have a Foreign Service officer potentially unable to report to a new post, a lawyer now prevented from visiting his spouse's elderly parents with declining [health], and a college student forced to take a long-planned trip to



Trump has made international travel for trans individuals nearly impossible. Lambda Legal is suing.

visit his father's birthplace with a passport that tells everyone he is transgender, despite his always being correctly perceived as male. The State Department's focus should be on accurate identity verification, including by communicating the sex someone lives as, in accordance with their gender identity. This is yet another deliberate targeting for political gain, ensuring transgender people are singled out for harassment, discrimination and at worst, detention or physical violence.::

—Qnotes Staff

Pope Francis dies one day after meeting with U.S. VP JD Vance

In the early hours of April 21, Pope Francis, the first Jesuit and Latin American pontiff in the role, passed away at the Vatican's Casa Santa Marta. The Vatican announced his death in a statement on X (Twitter). He was 88 and had met the day before with American Vice President JD Vance briefly to exchange Easter greetings. Vance met earlier in the day with Cardinal Pietro Parolin to discuss humanitarian and trade issues, which had become a touchy subject between the Vatican and the Trump administration.

During Pope Francis's 12-year stint in the papacy, he had been an agent for change. After Francis had inherited the role from his extremely conservative predecessor Benedict XVI, he strove to find a new way and place for Catholicism in the modern era.

Moving away from the conservatism that Roman Catholics held as a standard, Francis sought to look toward the marginalized of the world and offer open arms to them. Using the power of his position in the church, Francis spoke out on many increasingly

important topics affecting the world today, whether showing love and help for migrants or voicing concern about the planet.

Many of his actions were due to a different idea of what, or who, the pope should be, and the Argentina native filled his leadership with those that shared his pastoral, welcoming approach to those in need. The motions were viewed positively by many Catholics already in the church, agreeing that the institution had become internally minded and had lost touch with everyday people, though some reacted with shock to what they saw as a tendency to be too progressive – especially when it came to the LGBTQ+ community.

Early on Francis reached out to gay Catholics who he felt had been alienated by the faith. One of the first indications of Francis's thoughts on the LGBTQ+ community came in 2013, as he was christened from his prior title and name, Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, to "Pope Francis." When asked by a reporter a

question about gay priests, Francis simply stated, "If a person is gay and seeks God and has good will, who am I to judge?"

While in his role, Francis pushed the Vatican into making changes that would strongly affect how LGBTQ+ believers could participate in the church. Policy changes, such as allowing transgender people to be baptized and serve as godparents and allowing priests to offer blessings to same-sex couples, were among them. While full equality has still not been gained in the confines of the Catholic faith, those that have been taken are still notable as progress not seen before Francis's era.

"Homosexual people have the right to be in a family. They are children of God," Francis said in a 2020 documentary. "You can't kick someone out of a family, nor make their life miserable for this. What we have to have is a civil union law; that way they are legally covered."

While Francis had a few early stumbles during his time as pope, he would take large steps in addressing the clerical sexual abuse crisis that had created an existential threat in the church. Adopting new rules that would hold top religious leaders in the Catholic church, including bishops, accountable for such actions and their cover-ups, Francis committed to making his churches a safer place.



Pope Francis speaks in front of the United Nations. CREDIT: Facebook

Even in his final years, as several ailments and surgeries weighed on the religious figure, Pope Francis still made travels to often-forgotten and far-flung countries and sought to improve relations with many leaders throughout the fractured Christian world.

While a funeral date has not yet been set by the Vatican, the institution said a public viewing for Pope Francis could take place as early as the morning of April 23.

Additional material was added to this article by Qnotes staff. ::

—Jonathan Golian

Anti-LGBTQ+ comments turn Newton Pride into 'Rainbow Celebration'

Local town council member reaction and social media comments lead to 'rebranding'

by Nora O'Neill | *Charlotte Observer*

Community members in Catawba County are planning a protest after backlash erupted over a scheduled Pride event, including anti-LGBTQ comments from a Newton city council member. The LGBTQ+ Democrats of Catawba County plan to protest at the Newton City Council meeting on May 6.

The group rebranded and reorganized its event, formerly called the "2025 Newton Pride Takeover," after what its leaders described as "nasty" Facebook comments led businesses to withdraw. The comments included discriminatory remarks from Council Member Jon McClure, said group president MacGregor VanBeurden.

"That's when it got really nasty and a lot of people I think felt emboldened by that," VanBeurden said about McClure's comments. "So we got a lot of hate, a lot of bad comments, and then our businesses started pulling out from the event. There were some really serious things said and it's really blown up in the last week.

Newton is a city of more than 13,000 people about an hours drive northwest of Charlotte. McClure responded to a Facebook post announcing the Pride event with a video that included a woman making



A scene from Downtown Newton on Main Street/Hwy 16.
CREDIT: Wikipedia CC BY 4.0

false claims about transgender people. The councilman said in subsequent comments he does not support queer and transgender people.

McClure did not respond to emails and phone calls from *The Charlotte Observer* requesting comment. Newton Mayor Jerry Hodge said in an interview with the *Observer* the city will allow people to speak about the issue during public comment like they would in any other meeting. "One council member does not speak for the entire council, and that may have been perceived as the case, but it is not," he said about McClure's comments. "We'll be prepared to conduct a civil meeting for our citizens... and we will conduct the meeting within the realm of respect and dignity for all who speak."

Event rebrand

The original Pride celebration, planned for the week of June 23, included a networking event, a queer karaoke night and a drag fundraiser, VanBeurden said. Facebook comments — from the councilman and others — prompted numerous businesses to pull out, VanBeurden said. But the show will go on.

Since rebranding the event as the

Newton Rainbow Celebration, numerous new businesses have signed on to participate. The event will include the networking event as well as a festival and drag event. One business that pulled out was local bar Pour Choices, which was supposed to host the queer karaoke night, VanBeurden said. Local boutique Emporium 23 also pulled out following the backlash but recommitted once the event was rebranded. About 20 local vendors signed up to participate in the celebration in just a few days, VanBeurden said.

VanBeurden said it is important to him to remain resilient in the face of anti-LGBTQ rhetoric. "We've had a lot of progress made for lesbians, gays and bisexuals. We are nowhere near where we need to be, and there are still issues within our community from the outside world, but we've made a lot of progress," he said.

"I think that's part of the reason that it's so important is because as a gay man I have to stand up for other members of my community that are struggling even harder than I am."

That resilience includes the protest, which VanBeurden expects to draw turnout from the Carolinas LGBTQ+ Chamber of Commerce and the North Carolina Democratic Party.

Catawba County isn't the only area where LGBTQ+ events have faced pushback this year. In March, Union County commissioners voted to ban "obscene" and "sexualized" events in public parks, a move many interpreted as targeting Pride and drag events. In Monroe, two city council members also pushed for local rules to restrict drag performances, classifying them as "adult entertainment."

VanBeurden said rural and conservative areas remain critical battlegrounds in the fight for LGBTQ+ rights. "I think that the most effective way to make a change in any movement is to bring visibility and to show people that we exist and we exist outside of the big cities," he said. "We exist in the middle of nowhere. We exist everywhere."

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SC AG demands repeal of conversion therapy ban in Columbia

Push for repealing the ordinance comes three years after the ban was installed



by Jonathan Golian
Qnotes Staff Writer

In a letter sent to the city of Columbia on April 23, South Carolina Attorney General Alan Wilson demanded a repeal to their 2021 ordinance banning conversion therapy on LGBTQ+ youth.

In 2021, the Columbia City Council made licensed therapy and counseling that seeks to change the sexual orientation or gender identity of a minor a civil violation, which carries a fine of \$500. City leaders who created the ban, referenced statements and evidence from professional psychiatric, social work and counseling organizations that concluded the controversial practice is harmful to the LGBTQ+ youth it targets.

Despite the reasoning justifying the policy, Wilson is pushing to see it repealed. In his public comments pertaining to the demand, Wilson claims the city ordinance conflicts with the state's laws and constitutional rights. "Columbia lacks the authority to regulate professions that the General Assembly has determined requires statewide uniformity, such as psychologists, doctors, and family therapists," Wilson wrote.

Wilson has also cited a state law that, according to the AG, Columbia is violating with the city ordinance: 2022's Medical Ethics and Diversity Act.

The state law "prohibits local governments from interfering with a healthcare provider's professional judgment, including in the realm of psychological counseling," a news release from the AG's office read. "It affirms the rights of patients and families to choose counseling that aligns with their values, including religious beliefs."

SC Statehouse Republicans thinking in the same way as Wilson aren't leaving things to chance. In the event Columbia doesn't revoke the ordinance voluntarily, the state Senate adopted into its budget a measure that would penalize the city for upholding it. Sen. Josh Kimbrell (R-Spartanburg) introduced the measure, which would block state funding from going to Columbia, during a debate on the Senate's version of the state budget on April 23, the same day as Wilson's

letter was sent out.

While the amendment would only apply to the city if they did not comply with Wilson's order, Kimbrell said, "I would hope they do the right thing now. It is our duty to not fund something that is clearly violative."

Columbia Mayor Daniel Rickenmann stated during a news conference after the state Senate session that the letter has been brought to the city's legal team. Although Rickenmann is listed as a Republican and was among the city council members who voted against the ordinance in 2021, he questioned Wilson's priorities.

"Is this what we ought to be spending our time on?" Rickenmann questioned. "I've got budgets to do. We've got infrastructure going on, we have development going on, we're working on improving the city, and I think that's where our time should be spent."

"This is not really an issue or things that people are really interested in right now," the mayor continued. "They're worried about what's happening in the future. They're worried about if tariffs are going to stay in place, and how that's going to affect our auto industry. That's the kind of thing people are concerned about today, and that's where we should be focused."

Rickenmann also took a quick examination of the timing of the letter, given the chain of events compounding the stresses of LGBTQ+ communities around the United States, all coming directly from the White House. "Is it just political season?" the mayor asked.

Sen. Tameika Isaac-Devine (D-Richland), who initially pushed back on the demand in the state Senate before it was reworked and ultimately adopted, also commented on where the letter sat in current political discourse.

"This ordinance was never about politics," Devine told the *Post and Courier*. "It was about protecting vulnerable children in our community from a harmful, discredited practice that has no place in a society that values mental health, dignity, and human rights."



Alan Wilson, South Carolina's Attorney General, speaks at a conference with Lieutenant Governor Pamela Evette. CREDIT: Facebook

"If he were genuinely concerned about the ordinance's legality," the congresswoman went on, "he had ample opportunity to address it when it was enacted in 2021. His current intervention, years later, suggests a strategic move to appeal to certain political bases rather than a sincere legal concern."

Along with parts of the state Senate and Columbia's government reacting to the demand, local LGBTQ+ organizations in South Carolina see the push as a threat to their communities.

"For (Wilson) to come and say that

this is unconstitutional, it needs to be repealed, just proves one, that he doesn't fully [understand] conversion therapy and how it harms people," South Carolina Pride President Dylan Gunnels said in reaction to the AG's demand.

"It proves two, that he's not listening to people. He's not listening to experts or data, and most notably, LGBTQ people. And the third part is, I would venture to say he probably doesn't care that much, because this is about a show of power."

Having undergone conversion therapy himself, Gunnels was a vocal proponent of the city's 2021 ban. He was approached by council members Devine and Howard Duvall to help create the ordinance, he said. Gunnels is also a founder of the LGBTQ+ religious organization Agape Table, as well as a practicing pastor.

"I think this is a show of somebody who is looking to run for governor and has to stay relevant to the people that he needs to stay relevant to," he said.

Rickenmann indicated the city would need more time to respond to Wilson's May 5 deadline. As of this writing, the city has not received any complaints regarding the ordinance and hasn't handed out any fines related to it..:



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Man charged with killing two Charlotte Trans women rejects plea deal, claims innocence

Joel Brewer is now headed to trial for the murders of Jaida Peterson and Remy Fennell



by Jonathan Golian
Qnotes Staff Writer

On April 17, during a court hearing, a man accused of murdering two transgender women in Charlotte rejected a plea deal offer given to him, setting the stage for a full jury trial.

Joel Brewer, the man in question, was accused of killing two transgender women in 2021. Jaida Peterson, the first victim, was shot and killed, her body later found in a west Charlotte hotel in April 2021. Remy Fennell, the second victim, was found dead a few days later at the Sleep Hotel in University City. Brewer was also connected to her death.

Several major charges have been filed, including robbery with a dangerous weapon, possession of a firearm by a convicted felon, and the two counts of murder of both victims. Both had been identified as sex workers, according to police reports.



Mugshot of Joel Brewer, the suspected murderer in both cases.
CREDIT: Mecklenburg County Sherriff

At the hearing in Mecklenburg County, prosecutors offered Brewer a plea bargain, which in exchange for pleading guilty to the two counts of murder along with the additional charges, he would have received a prison sentence between 25 to 31 years. Brewer rejected the offer, pleading not guilty to all charges.

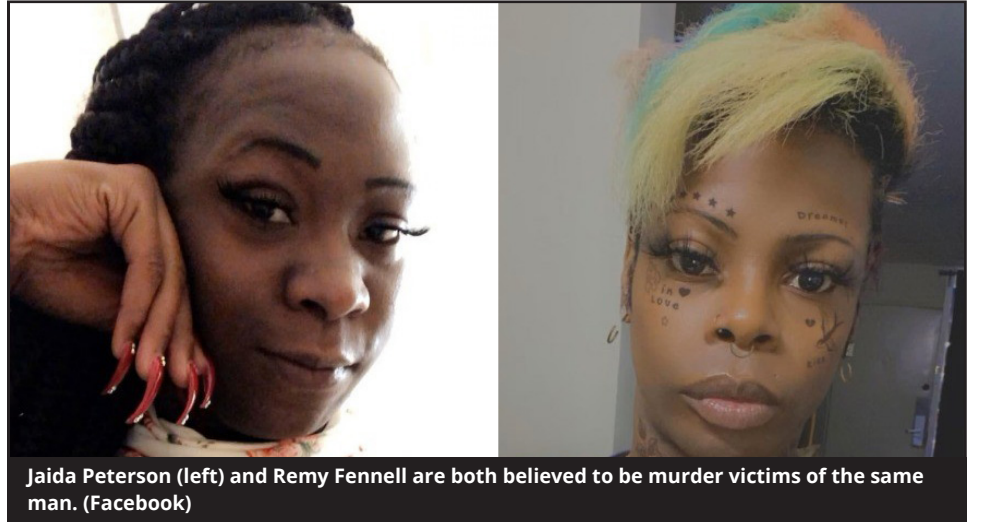
From there, Brewer will head to trial where a full jury awaits him. With the plea being turned down, prosecutors say they'll now go for the maximum sentence if convicted: life in prison with no parole.

A few of Charlotte's LGBTQ+ organizations following the case have spoken to local news outlets about the ramifications they see coming out of the trial, and what it means for the larger queer community.

Rell Lowery, Charlotte Black Pride's transgender liaison, told WCNC that the trial represents more than just the normal legal proceedings. The case will also have a say on the visibility, value and justice for the victims along with the community.

"They're all our brothers and sisters. What happens to one of us happens to all of us," said Lowery. "There are hundreds of trans women that are murdered, trans males that are murdered, and the majority [are] Black trans women. But the amount of cases that are actually brought to trial and individuals actually facing sentencing is so much smaller. It's a question of: Is he going to be held accountable, so that their families can get justice?"

Sarah Mikhail, who leads Time Out Youth, an LGBTQ community center that offers a safe space and services for young people, told WSOC-TV news that they remembered the week both trans women were killed. Having kept up with the case's progress, Brewer's denial of the plea deal deeply concerns Mikhail, not just for the possibility that Brewer gets acquitted, but



Jaida Peterson (left) and Remy Fennell are both believed to be murder victims of the same man. (Facebook)

for the part of the United States the trial is taking place in.

"What does it mean in the South right now to go to a jury when we don't know what people think about trans women?" Mikhail said. "It makes me feel like there is an emboldenment out there that says, 'I might be able to get away with this,' because we don't value trans women as women."

To date, these aren't the only crimes that Brewer stands accused and convicted of. In Union County, to the east of Charlotte, Brewer was charged with a third homicide during that same year.

That February, Joshua Tramaine Allen was found dead, with his body being disposed of in a wooded area near Wingate. Investigators linked Brewer to the case as the last person that Allen had been seen with the prior night and no evidence that Allen was ever seen alive after his encounter with Brewer, according to deputies at the time. The medical examiner found multiple gun wounds in Allen's body, determining

that to be the cause of death. Brewer stands charged with first-degree murder, possession of a firearm by a felon and concealment of death in that separate case.

Then, there's Brewer's role in a 2011 robbery that led to the death of an accomplice. In that case, police said that Brewer, along with three other suspects, had planned on robbing an alleged drug dealer when one accomplice was shot during the attack. Dying from the gunshots, his body was found dumped on the shoulder of a road in Monroe, similar to what happened in Allen's case, along with similar territory.

The collective story Brewer's serial crime record tells is not a good one, and a full jury will have to determine his fate going forward at the upcoming trial. That said, to Lowery and Mikhail's points, it will be the upcoming trial verdict that will decide how safe, or more dangerous, the Charlotte Metro region and its residents will be after the fact. ::

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Twenty-fifth anniversary World Pride set for Washington D.C.

The international celebration will blend with Capital Pride's 50-year milestone



by Jonathan Golian
Qnotes Staff Writer

In 2025, taking place alongside Washington D.C.'s Capital Pride events starting in late May will be WorldPride, an internationally celebrated series of events highlighting LGBTQ+ communities that work in conjunction with locally recognized Pride festival events.

This year, WorldPride will be celebrating 25 years of existence, along with Capital Pride hitting its own milestone of 50 years, turning the intertwining happenings into a super series of events spilling outside the confines of Pride month. For an in-depth look at everything WorldPride has to offer, visit their site on the internet at worldpridedc.org.

While it is hard to imagine in the United States' current political and cultural landscape how the city was chosen to host the world-over recognized set of events, the history preceding Capital Pride has much to do with that decision.

Let's go back to the beginning. In June of 1970, a year after the riots erupted at the Stonewall Inn on Christopher Street in New York City, four cities would hold some of the first pride marches ever recorded in a somewhat official capacity; Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and, of course, NYC. New York City would first dub the marches in recognition of "Christopher Street Liberation Day," in honor of the area Stonewall and its subsequent protests happened all around that street.

Fred Sargeant, one of the organizers of those events, voiced that the first gatherings were more in line with protests than celebrations, but that the one of the main points was to remind people that LGBTQ+ communities mattered.

Following the Stonewall Riots and the first Pride Marches and rallies, other cities started to also adopt similar big events in their towns and cities, including Washington, D.C. What was "Christopher Street Liberation Day" would slowly transform into other iterations in the nation's capital. The first event that would become known as Capital Pride was founded as Gay Pride Day, dedicating time and space in the city to also include



The first WorldPride, held in Rome on July 8, 2000. CREDIT: Giovanni Dall'Orto, Attribution, via Wikimedia Commons

block parties and street festivals, in addition to the marches.

The years proceeding D.C.'s first events would expand to include a more definitive recognition of women (Gay and Lesbian Pride Day, 1981), the African American gay community (Black Lesbian and Gay Pride Day, May 25, 1991), queer people of younger ages (Youth Pride Day, 1997) and transgender individuals (Trans Pride, 2007). Eventually, given the growth of representation among the LGBTQ+ community, along with the crowds it inspires to make the pilgrimage to D.C. each year, the city's events spread outside of June, making the destination a go-to spot in celebrating all things Pride.

D.C.'s inclusion into the structures of WorldPride will mark the second time the international Pride event will take place in the United States. Previously it was held in NYC in 2019, connecting it with Stonewall's 50th anniversary. That year's event, given the estimated five million people that attended celebrations held throughout Manhattan at the time, was recognized as the largest Pride event ever held. Given D.C.'s own history with Pride events, there could be a similar record-breaking this year.

The only possible obstacle is the shadow cast by Donald Trump and his administration.

Earlier this year, after Trump's inauguration, the promised crackdown on DEI initiatives threatened during the Republicans came to pass at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. In February, Trump abruptly fired several members of the Kennedy Center Board of Trustees in February and filled each empty seat with loyalists, but not before making himself chairman. The president had written in a Truth Social post at the time, "Just last year, the Kennedy Center featured Drag Shows specifically targeting our

youth. THIS WILL STOP."

In response, performers that had dates at the Kennedy Center would go on to drop them, while the center itself would cancel others that did not fit with Trump's vision for the venue. The WorldPride events scheduled at the center were among those that got the ax. The affected events include an International Pride Orchestra concert, a performance by the DC Gay Men's Chorus, a drag story hour and Pride-related art exhibits, including one featuring panels from the AIDS Memorial Quilt.

Ryan Bos, executive director of the Capital Pride Alliance, a group that is one of the main organizers of WorldPride, had described Trump's ravings about the Pride-centric events as the "writing on the wall" that had prompted his group to move the gatherings it planned to host at the Kennedy Center elsewhere.

"The Kennedy Center, as an arts and cultural institution, this is a type of space that has been a safe haven for our communities from the dawn of time," Bos said, speaking with NBC News and also adding that Trump's message "goes counter to what Pride is about."

While the Kennedy Center events will not be taking place at the original venue, the silver lining is that attendees to this year's super event won't have to travel too far to still attend the various happenings.

Much of the WorldPride group's programming will instead take place in downtown Washington, while one of the major music events of the festival, the International Pride Orchestra's Pride Celebration concert, will be taking place at Strathmore, a concert venue in Bethesda, Maryland on June 5.

While admitting that the orchestra's members were "heartbroken" when they realized they would not be able to perform at the Kennedy Center during World Pride, Michael Roest, the founding artistic director of the International Pride Orchestra, was thankful for Strathmore's outreach to save the concert. Roest wrote in a

statement, "Their willingness to host our Pride Celebration Concert ensures that our message of love, pride, and resilience will be heard on the doorstep of the nation's capital."

Capital Pride's Bos echoed Roest, emphasizing the importance of moving forward with plans for WorldPride, especially as Washington celebrates 50 years of hosting annual Pride celebrations. "WorldPride is not canceled," Bos said. "Every year WorldPride is important, but this year there's a very strong historic moment that we must meet ... to ensure our community is not scared back into the closet."

With the shocking speed of which Trump's administration is dismantling many government protections and institutional progressions that brought quality of life to LGBTQ+ communities around the United States, WorldPride, along with the similarly-sized Capital Pride, could not happen in this country at a more vital moment. Not only is history being celebrated, along with how far we've come as a nation and around the world, the very roots of our community are being recognized.

From May 17 to June 8, WorldPride will be celebrated in multiple ways. From June 4 to the 6, the WorldPride Human Rights Conference will be take place on 1331 Pennsylvania Avenue, bringing together change makers, advocates, and allies from all corners of the world. From Friday, May 30 to June 4, the Capital Cup Sports Festival will be in full swing, bringing sports competitions of all types to the city, offering to create a space for connection and belonging in the LGBTQ+ community through each event. And, of course, the parties will still go on, whether at the WorldPride Global Dance Party Music Festival on June 6 and 7, or at many of the daytime events like the WorldPride Parade, kicking off at 2 p.m. on June 7.

As Capital Pride's Bos had said, 2025's two interwoven Pride events happening in D.C. could not have come at a more vital or impactful time. As the Trump administration has tried to seize on the advances the LGBTQ+ population have made since the Stonewall protests in 1969, flooding the streets of the nation's capital with all forms of representation is not only to celebrate who we are, but what we as a nation still stand for, even in this dark time. ::



WorldPride in New York City, 2019
CREDIT: Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Generic



WorldPride in Sydney, Australia, 2023.
CREDIT: Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International

“When the Harvest Comes”

Out In Print



by Terri Schlichenmeyer
Qnotes Staff Writer

‘When the Harvest Comes’
by Denne Michele Norris
c.2025, Random House
\$28.00
304 pages

Of all the cliches that exist about weddings, that’s the one that seems to make you smile the most. Just invoking good weather and bright sunshine feels like a cosmic blessing on the newlyweds and their future. It’s a happy omen for bride and groom or, as in the new book “When the Harvest Comes” by Denne Michele Norris, for groom and groom.

Davis Freeman never thought he could love or be loved like this.

He was wildly, wholeheartedly, mind-and-soul smitten with Everett Caldwell, and life was everything that Davis ever wanted. He was a successful symphony musician in New York. They had an apartment they enjoyed and friends they cherished. Now it was their wedding day, a day Davis had planned with the man he adored, the details almost down to the stitches in their attire. He’d even purchased a gorgeous wedding gown that he’d never risk wearing.

He knew that Everett’s family loved him a lot, but Davis didn’t dare tickle the fates with a white dress on their big day. Everett’s dad, just like Davis’s own father, had considerable reservations about his son marrying another man – although Everett’s father seemed to have come to terms with his son’s bisexuality. Davis’s father, whom Davis called the Reverend, never would. Years ago, father and son had a falling-out that destroyed any chance of peace between Davis and his dad; in fact, the door slammed shut to any reconciliation.

But Davis tried not to think about that. Not on his wedding day. Not, unbeknownst

to him, as the Reverend was rushing toward the wedding venue, uninvited but not unrepentant. Not when there was an accident and the Reverend was killed, miles away and during the nuptials.

Davis didn’t know that, of course, as he was marrying the love of his life. Neither did Everett, who had familial problems of his own, including homophobic family members who tried (but failed) to pretend otherwise.

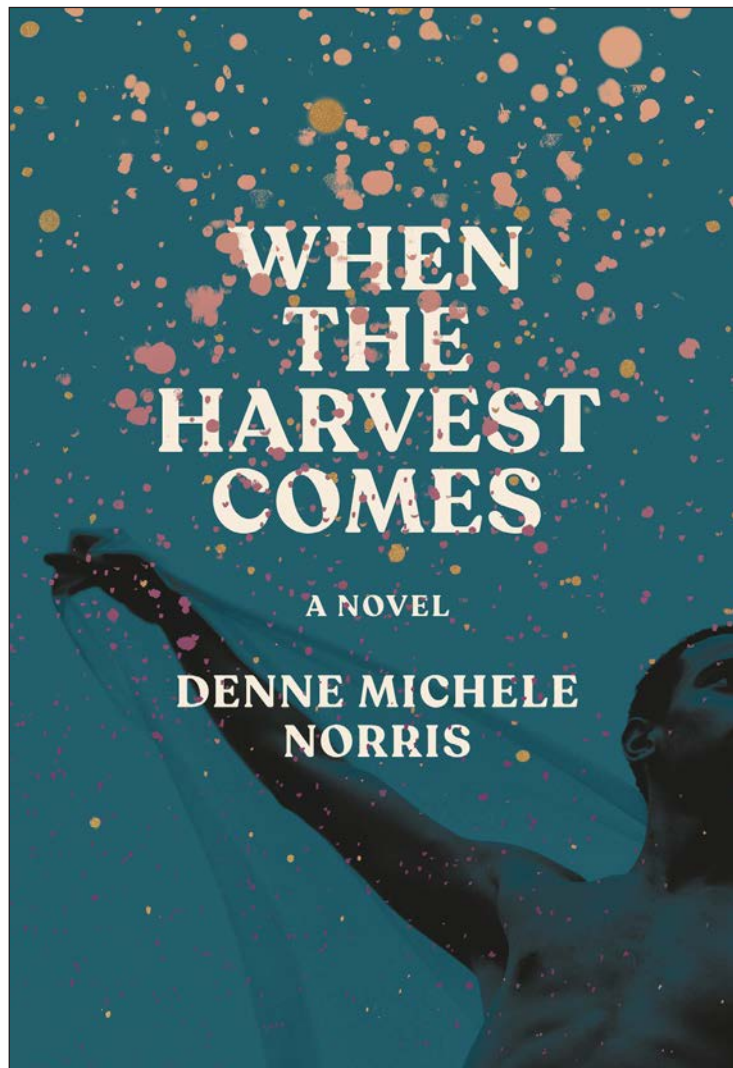
Happy is the groom the sun shines on. But when the storm comes, it can be impossible to remain sunny.

What can be said about “When the Harvest Comes”? It’s a romance with a bit of ghost-pepper-like heat that’s not there for the mere sake of titillation. It’s filled with drama, intrigue, hate, characters you want to just slap, and some in bad need of a hug.

In short, this book is quite stunning.

Author Denne Michele Norris offers a love story that’s everything you want in this genre, including partners you genuinely want to get to know, in situations that are real. This is done by putting readers inside the characters’ minds, letting Davis and Everett themselves explain why they acted as they did, mistakes and all. Don’t be surprised if you have to read the last few pages twice to best enjoy how things end. You won’t be sorry.

If you want a complicated, boy-meets-boy, family-mess kind of book with occasional heat, “When the Harvest Comes” is your book. Truly, this novel shines. ::



I DID NOT BIRTH THEM...BUT THEY ARE MINE!

A Queer Mother’s Journey to Parenthood

by Bishop Tonyia Rawls

May 1, 2025, Charlotte, NC...In 2000 I moved to Charlotte with my then fiancé Gwendolyn, to open our denomination’s first church in the Bible Belt. I had just closed my marketing consulting business in Washington, DC and transitioned from the trade show for the global Black retail and manufacturing arenas that I co-founded with my partner Kuumba Collectibles. Six months after arriving, I went for my regular annual physical and was told that the pelvic pain I felt was likely ovarian cancer. After a series of tests, I was rushed into emergency surgery where all of my reproductive organs and a portion of my colon were removed.

Part of the healing process in the hospital involved daily walks around the floor I was on. Ironically, the nursery was on that same



floor. Yes, every day I had to walk by a room full of babies knowing that the option to bear a child was gone. I was devastated. One day, while looking at the babies, God whispered to me, “you are going to be a mother and raise multiple children”.

While I heard that, I just quietly filed the message away and went on with my healing journey.

I experienced three miracles related to this experience.

The first miracle, the doctors found that I had endometriosis and not ovarian cancer, so after surgery I did not need chemo or radiation.

The next miracle came when our first child, a brilliant, inquisitive, queer child came to us troubled and suicidal. She entered our lives through a connection with my wife, Gwen. She served first simply as a source of support in school and life for the child. As

as our love and relationship for and with her grew, her birth parents gave permission for her to come live with us so we could support the next phase of her development process. That child opened my heart and our family to a next level of love. We had four more children that we would help raise and several others that became God children. What God promised had come true. I was a parent!

I thought parenting was the prize until the grandkids started coming. The first set came in a fascinating way. I got three at one time. One of the families in my church had three young children, all under the age of 12. The eldest told his mom that he and his sisters wanted a formal meeting with me. Their mother did not know what they wanted to discuss, but it was important to them that the meeting be private and at their home. We honored that request and set the date and time for the meeting. When the day came, I went to their home and the kids came downstairs in their Sunday best clothing. Their mom left the room, and they presented to following...“We have two sets of grandparents, and we love them, but they live so far away and we feel we need a grandma that is closer. Will you be our grandmother?” I cannot express what happened in my heart that day, but it ended with our family expanded by three grands.

There is something special that happens when we dare open our hearts, minds and spirits to the varied ways we may receive the desires of our heart. I did not know how important it was for me to pour the special love that a mother, grandmother and femme guardian holds. I Am A Mother and am loved by each child and grand I am blessed to call mine!

From my own experiences and through the pastoral counseling I’ve provided over the years, here are a few things I’ve learned about motherhood.

1. Children care less about who you choose to love, and more about do you both love ME and am I safe with your choice.

2. Even when their parents are not good, children often long for love from them. If you are a birth parent, even if the child or children do not live with you, be a good parent by supporting the child if possible, and if not,

use the time to become the best version of yourself you can be.

3. It is never too late to do better.

We live in a time when so many challenges are before us as parents, however, this is also a powerful time to imagine and reimagine

what it means to be a parent and what it will take for you to do it well. For same gender couples and for parents raising trans and LGBTQ people, know that you can do it! I found that with help from God, mental health professionals, school staff, family and friends, any situation can turn around.



Living With Long COVID

Charlotte 'Dimples' Foster's story of resilience



by Wendy Lyons
Qnotes Staff Writer

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, our world was irrevocably transformed, with millions grappling not only with the immediate health crisis but also the long-term repercussions of long COVID. Charlotte "Dimples" Foster, a devoted wife, mother and advocate, shares her personal journey through the lingering effects of the virus, highlighting the often-overlooked struggles faced by those still suffering. As a longtime friend of Charlotte, it is this writer's privilege to share her story and uncover the resilience of the human spirit and the urgent need for awareness and support in navigating this ongoing challenge.

Wendy Lyons: Are you considered as having long COVID, and when was it that you were first diagnosed with COVID?

Charlotte Foster: Well, I assume so because I still have different symptoms that are so unexplainable. It was in the middle of July. I'm not sure of the exact date in 2020-2021. I don't know whether it's part of menopause or what, but I experience a lot of brain fog, and I still have the trach. I guess that's the major thing because I've done my best to overcome the physical challenges. Right now, I'm still trying to deal with the mental and emotional aspects of it. My spouse and I were conversing the other day about things I remember from when I was in the coma. She was kind of shocked because the things I was telling her that I thought were part of a dream were actually reality. I was somewhat coherent.

WL: How long were you in the hospital?

CF: I went in for a breathing treatment in the middle of July, and I think I actually came home on Oct. 13th, 2021.

WL: I remember we had a group chat going, praying and loving on you and



CREDIT: Courtesy Charlotte Foster

your spouse Angie, and just being very supportive.

CF: Those prayers really meant a lot to me. It was heartwarming to see people come in and tell me how grateful they were to see me still here; not just here, but choosing to live and not be defeated by my circumstances,



Thriving and surviving: Charlotte 'Dimples' Foster
CREDIT: Courtesy Charlotte Foster

which is inspiring.

WL: How has living with long COVID affected your daily routine and overall life?

CF: Oh yes, every day. Because of the trach, it's challenging. With the brain fog, sometimes it's hard for me to concentrate. They told me I would have scar tissue in my lungs for the rest of my life, so I get very winded. With the trach, I was advised not to raise my arms or bend over because I could strangle myself. However, I developed methods to manage. I didn't want to wait for someone to pick things up for me or reach for something, so I found ways to be self-sufficient. It was important for me to regain my independence because I felt I relied too much on Angie when I first came home.

WL: What was the rehabilitation process like for you?

CF: I actually left the hospital and was sent to rehab in Greensboro. It was a horrible experience for me, mentally and emotionally. I had to wait daily for Angie to drive that distance just to see me. Not everyone in healthcare is caring or compassionate, and I experienced a lot of that during my time there. I had to rely heavily on prayers, and God sent me angels to look out for me.

WL: Did you have to go through speech therapy, physical therapy or occupational therapy?

CF: Yes, I had to do it all. When I woke up, I couldn't speak, walk or even do essential things. My physical therapist was

tough on me, but I needed that. I had to learn everything all over again, even how to eat.

WL: How critical has your support system been during this time?

CF: Oh my gosh, let me tell you about the woman I married. Angie stood by me when things weren't okay with her. She had her own issues at work, and then I got sick. She put aside her struggles to take care of me. I don't know how I would have made it without her.

WL: Some marital vows include "in sickness and in health." You and Angie are the epitome of living and remaining together as a solid union in sickness and in health. You mentioned you were in a coma. Can you tell me more about that?

CF: Yes, I was in a coma from July to September. I woke up with a high fever and pneumonia. It was a scary time, and I couldn't talk or walk initially.

WL: How has your relationship with Angie evolved through all of this?

Charlotte: We've been married for 18 years and [will have been] together for 25 years come May 2025. The experience definitely tested our relationship. I realized the depth of her love and support, which helped me trust her more, especially with my past trust issues. Thank God I have a voice, and I want to be allowed to try and take charge of my recovery. It was tough for Angie to let go, and that was especially evident when I went back to Jersey for a while. It was a challenge for me to regain my independence, and I fought hard to do so, even to the point where Angie might have felt like I didn't need her anymore. I



Foster (right) with wife Angie.
CREDIT: Courtesy Charlotte Foster

take pride in my efforts, and I didn't want to succumb to my limitations. While I recognize that I have certain restrictions, I still strive to rise above them as best as I can. Some days are harder than others, and I do struggle mentally, but overall, I push through. My rehabilitation process was significant for me, and it involved a lot of hard work.

WL: How do you manage your mental health throughout this process?

CF: Lots of prayer and keeping positive things around me, like books. I want my mind, body and spirit to align. Menopause adds another layer of challenges, but I try to stay focused. I love to dance and house music. It's therapeutic for me. Angie played it in my room during my recovery, and I also received uplifting tracks from some wonderful DJ friends. The music helped drown out the bothersome noise of the machines that haunted me while I lay there unable to talk or connect with anyone. I'm truly grateful for the power of prayer and music, which kept me going during tough moments when I felt like breaking down.

WL: Have you encountered any challenges in accessing healthcare services as a long-term COVID patient?

CF: So far, no. I still see my ENT doctor because of the trach, but otherwise I have been released from other medical care. I also participate in two support groups, which is so helpful to me.

WL: What do you do to keep yourself active? Any hobbies or other points of interest?

CF: I have so many that it's becoming overwhelming. Because of my illness, I am on disability and with all this time, I create projects. However I don't always see it through so I'm having difficulty trying to put things in perspective. I'm the type of person, when I talk to you and you have an issue, I easily make your issue my issue. It becomes a distraction from what I should be doing. I should be concentrating on myself but I'm so busy trying to help someone out of their situation. I have a few people that I care deeply for that [are] going through health issues and it has become a concern of mine.

WL: How do you think being part of the LGBTQ+ community influences your experience with long COVID compared to others who may not share that identity?

CF: For me, I knew Angie was someone that I loved and wanted to spend the rest of my life with. I don't even look at us as a same-sex couple but two people who fell in love. We were actually good friends first and didn't expect this to come about, but it [did].

WL: What message would you like to convey to others in the LGBTQ+ community or anyone who might be struggling with long COVID or similar health challenges?

CF: Research as much as you can on your own. Trust in a higher power, and don't give in to negativity. My faith has gotten me through some of the darkest days. Remember that trouble [doesn't] always last!

Keep your eyes peeled for Charlotte at local house music events. Don't be surprised to find her dancing and playing her cowbell.::

Our People: Scott Weaver

A local artist and business owner talks about career change during trying times



by L'Monique King
Qnotes Staff Writer

Charlotte has many long-term residents who have richly contributed to the area's growing inclusivity. It's no secret that the LGBTQ+ community contributes to community richness in a multitude of ways. From Nonprofit CEOs to artists, we are the threads that create a rainbow so rich it shines brightly for all residents.

One of those threads can be found in a 1926 quadruplex in Charlotte's Plaza Midwood neighborhood. From the comfort of his home nestled on a peaceful tree line street Scott Weaver spoke with QNotes while recuperating from his annual battle with Spring allergies.

During the interview, Weaver, an accomplished musician and small business owner, talked to us about his love for his faithful furry companion Roy, new business ventures and his concerns relating to this year's Pride celebrations.

L'Monique King: How'd you meet Roy?

Scott Weaver: He's a rescue, a pit-pointer mix, and he provides a lot of love and laughter. I'm all about animal rescue - I've had him for three years now.

LMK: How about human companionship - are you partnered?

SW: No, I am not. I am a very content single man. I've had romance in my life throughout the years, and I'm not opposed to it but currently [being partnered], it's not on my vision board.

LMK: Are you originally from Charlotte?

SW: No. I moved to Charlotte in 1995 from northwest North Carolina. I lived in an area called The Shoals, it's close to the Tennessee state line, though I was born in Georgia.

LMK: What brought you to Charlotte?

SW: An opportunity for change and circumstances related to my interest. There wasn't a lot of nightlife back then for someone in their 20s in The Shoals where I lived. Then, I met someone who was an established musician who worked in alternative fashion. Around that time, I started booking shows at local establishments. Later, my new friend was about to embark on a large tour and she asked me to come to Charlotte to house sit, watch her dog and run her boutique. In a month I packed up, moved, very quickly got involved in the happenings of Charlotte and have been here ever since.

LMK: Where does your musical talent lie?

SW: I play trumpet, percussion and sing. I've performed as a DJ at numerous Charlotte Pride events.

LMK: How do you currently make your livelihood?

SW: I'm co-owner of Cltch [Pronounced Clutch] an independent quirky gift, jewelry

and accessories boutique. We're having a giant sale next week in preparation for dissolving the business. We've been here for 10 years and during that time I've been working on the side doing interior design work, which is becoming a more consistent job. There's also a lot of change in Plaza Midwood and something is telling me to listen to the creative pull I'm feeling to go deeper into design. I'm also ready to work independently and not just in one spot - interior design has taught me a lot and provides the flexibility of not having to be in one location all day.

Again, economic projections aren't looking good right now (for retailers) with all the tariffs and other things. So, I feel fortunate to have a choice to leave one business and move on to the next thing instead of letting the decisions of our government dictate my future - in a most unmanageable type of way.

LMK: Sounds like you have concerns with the current administration.

SW: My concerns are legion. I'm concerned about everything. I wasn't a supporter or voter for Trump on his first campaign and certainly not this time, I'm concerned about the economy, wealth inequality and of course our general social issues. As a gay person who has a nephew that is mixed race, I worry about everyone's rights and safety from racism, women's rights to trans issues. I certainly don't want to feel like I've been transported back in time to living like we saw captured in "Fellow Travelers" [media streamed mini-series].

LMK: Share something with our readers most folks might be surprised to learn about you.

SW: <Thoughtful pause> I think because I've been in the industry or music and fashion that people assume I'm a city guy, but I'm a big nature guy who walks in the woods at least five days a week. I take my dog and we walk and hike about five days a week before work, exploring Greenways and nature trails. I love spotting hawks, eagles and other birds. It's just great!

LMK: Looking back over your life and decisions you've made, what's the dumbest thing you've ever done?

SW: <With laughter and no hesitation> Follow a total stranger down an alleyway in Chinatown New York to buy a bag of weed - only to find out it was oregano.

LMK: Aside from being duped, what gets under your skin and makes you just want to bite a brick?

SW: Locally speaking, traffic. When you live in a neighborhood that used to be slower and more relaxed and then go to heavy traffic, constant construction and a large influx of people it's just a little harder to navigate.

LMK: Speaking of navigating crowds, any thoughts on Charlotte's Pride this year - especially considering the current administration and all we're hearing about the cancellations and push back toward the DC World Pride Celebration?

SW: I think Charlotte Pride will happen.

I think people will participate with more caution and I wonder if there will be a stronger element of the anti-pride protesters. Charlotte has economically benefited from Pride [for years]. Generally speaking, the parade has been a family friendly event - with the more adult activities taking place in the evening and at private venues. It's brought so much joy for LGBTQ+ community members and many of our straight allies. It's not as though uptown turns into Folsom Street in San Francisco <laughter>. We have to find a way to continue to find joy in our community - celebrating not just ours but others. If we don't do that, then darkness wins. Don't get me wrong, Queer safe spaces need to be respected, but I'm also for inclusion. When you welcome people, they are more likely to be accepting - [because] the fear of the unknown no longer exists - as it does with othering.

LMK: If you could go back and speak to 15-year-old Scott, what would you tell him?

SW: If you stay true to who you are but continue to be mindful of those

around you, both younger and older, you're going to be fine. And never stop learning. ::



Co-owner of Cltch, Scott Weaver can make music with instruments, fashion and interior design.
CREDIT: Instagram

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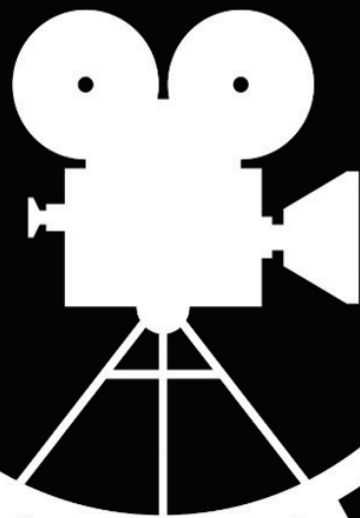


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