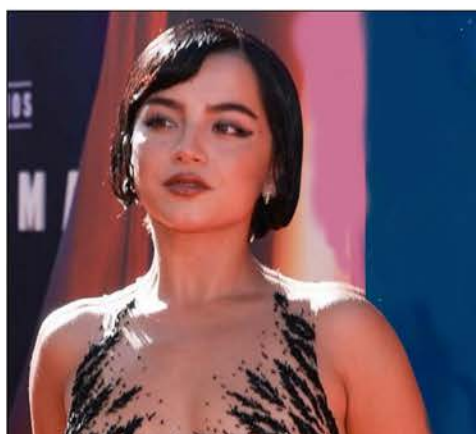
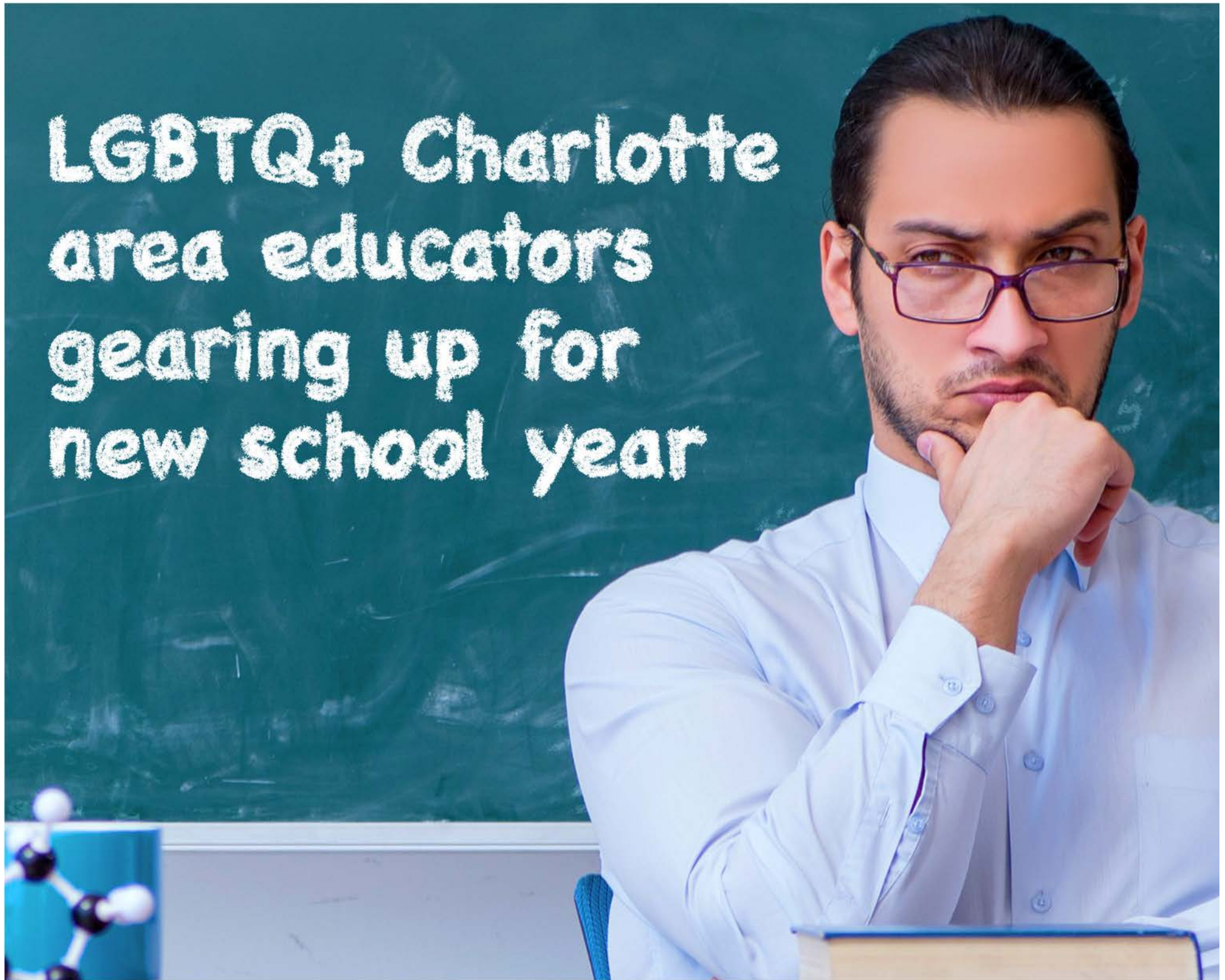


**Our democracy is at risk!  
If we are complacent it will FALL**



**Queer actress  
Isabella Merced  
as Hawk Girl  
in 'Superman'**  
- pg 15

**Center 360  
founders and  
partners in life  
offer help for youth**  
- pg 8



DRIPPING WITH PRIDE



SHOP  
WHITE RABBIT

FOR ALL YOUR PRIDE GEAR

WHITE RABBIT

920 CENTRAL AVE.

CHARLOTTE N.C. , 28204

(704) 377-4067

FOLLOW US @



WHITERABBIT



WRABBITNC



SHOPWHITERABBIT





contributors this issue

Writers: Jonathan Golian, L'Monique King, Taylor Heeden Larkins, Wendy Lyons, David Aaron Moore, Gregg Shapiro, Jennifer Shutt, Cassandra Stephenson, Anna Claire Vollers

on the cover

Graphic Design by Daniel A. Mannanov  
Illustration: Adobe Stock

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.

Pride Publishing & Typesetting, Inc.,  
dba *Qnotes*

P.O. Box 221841, Charlotte, NC 28222  
ph 704.531.9988 fx 704.531.1361

Publisher: Jim Yarbrough

Sales: x201 adsales@qnotescarolinas.com

Nat'l Sales: Rivendell Media, ph  
212.242.6863

Managing Editor: Jim Yarbrough, x201,  
editor@qnotescarolinas.com

Director of Strategic Initiatives:  
Liz Schob

Digital Engagement Specialist:  
Tim Kendra-Dell

Sr. Editor: David Aaron Moore,  
Editor@qnotescarolinas

Copy Editor: Bailey Sides

Production: Daniel A. Mannanov, x205,

production@qnotescarolinas.com

Printed on recycled paper.

Material in *Qnotes* is copyrighted by Pride Publishing & Typesetting © 2025 and may not be reproduced in any manner without written consent of the editor or publisher. Advertisers assume full responsibility — and therefore, all liability — for securing reprint permission for copyrighted text, photographs and illustrations or trademarks published in their ads. The sexual orientation of advertisers, photographers, writers, cartoonists we publish is neither inferred nor implied. The appearance of names or photographs does not indicate the subject's sexual orientation. *Qnotes* nor its publisher assumes liability for typographical error or omission, beyond offering to run a correction. Official editorial positions are expressed in staff editorials and editorial notations and are determined by editorial staff. The opinions of contributing writers and guest columnists do not necessarily represent the opinions of *Qnotes* or its staff. *Qnotes* accepts unsolicited editorial, but cannot take responsibility for its return. Editor reserves the right to accept and reject material as well as edit for clarity, brevity.

# inside this issue

## feature

- 8 Center 360 offers opportunities for youth at risk
- 10 GSAs, DEI, cultural oppression and the impact on LGBTQ+ students
- 11 LGBTQ+ teachers and the new school year

## news

- 5 Tom Tillis to retire from Senate, former Gov. Cooper and Lara Trump may run for the seat
- 6 Transportation Secretary pitches art removal initiative to state governors
- 6 Trump's 'Big Ugly Bill' passes and poised to become law
- 6 USA opts out of crafting worldwide statement celebrating LGBTQ rights
- 7 Federal judge rules in favor of Planned Parenthood over Medicaid funding
- 7 USNS Harvey Milk only ship renamed
- 7 SC law for K-12 bathrooms renewed as part of state budget

## a&e

- 15 Out on Film: 'Jurassic World Rebirth' and 'Superman'

## life

- 13 Know your LGBTQ+ history (Questions)
- 14 Know your LGBTQ+ history (Answers)

## views

- 4 SCOTUS rules students can 'opt-out' of LGBTQ+ lessons

## events

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



### LGBTQ+ students react to new laws

Students preparing for the upcoming school year share their thoughts about new policies and state and federal laws and the impact they're feeling. Some schools appear to be providing cover for LGBTQ+ youth, while others seem ready to abide by whatever laws and policies come their way, regardless of how they affect student privacy rights.

PAGE 10

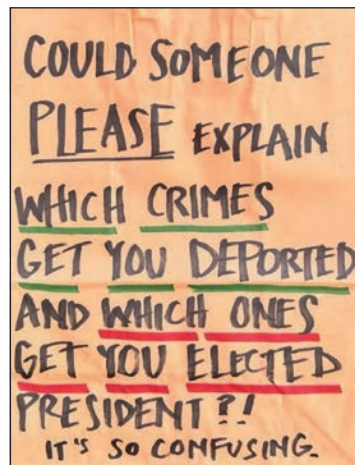
### Federal judge rules in favor of Planned Parenthood

Republicans included language in their "big, beautiful bill" that would block Medicaid payments from going to Planned Parenthood for the next year, a move that would effectively prevent enrollees in the state-federal health program for lower income people from visiting any of its clinics for routine health care. A Federal Judge says no.

PAGE 7



### The People speak on Social Media



For entertainment only. *Qnotes* does not vouch for factual authenticity.

**These rates only cover a portion of our true cost, however, our goal is to serve our community**

Mailed 1st class from Charlotte, NC, in sealed envelope.

Subscription Rates:  1 yr - 26 issues = \$48  1/2 yr - 13 issues = \$34

Mail to: P.O. Box 221841, Charlotte, NC 28222

name: \_\_\_\_\_

address: \_\_\_\_\_

city: \_\_\_\_\_ state: \_\_\_\_\_ zip: \_\_\_\_\_

credit card - check one:  mastercard  visa  discover  american express

card #: \_\_\_\_\_ exp. date: \_\_\_\_\_

signature: \_\_\_\_\_

SUBSCRIBE!

# SCOTUS rules students can 'opt-out' of LGBTQ+ lessons

Ruling will impact teachers' ability to teach about LGBTQ+ historical figures and source material



by Taylor Heeden Larkins  
Qnotes Staff Writer

The date June 27 marked the end of the United States Supreme Court's docket term, meaning multiple precedent-making decisions were issued all at once on that Friday. The Supreme Court handed down legal victories to President Donald Trump and conservatives across the country on a myriad of issues, one of which involves LGBTQ+ curriculum in public schools.

In a divided 6-3 vote along ideological lines, the court ruled school systems were required to allow parents to opt their children out of classes with material "contradicting" their religious beliefs. This would allow for students to be excused from lessons involving LGBTQ+ history and stories.

In the majority opinion, Justice Samuel Alito sided with the parents who objected to the school board's use of "LGBTQ+-inclusive" storybooks and its refusal to allow opt-outs. He stated that the parents would be permitted to excuse their children from lessons involving the books while legal proceedings continue.

children must be insulated from exposure to ideas and concepts that may conflict with their parents' religious beliefs," she wrote.

While many in conservative circles believe this to be a victory for "traditional values," the reality is that students who are left out of these lessons will be less equipped to face the real world — one that includes the perspectives and culture of queer and gender-nonconforming people.

### The Case's Beginning

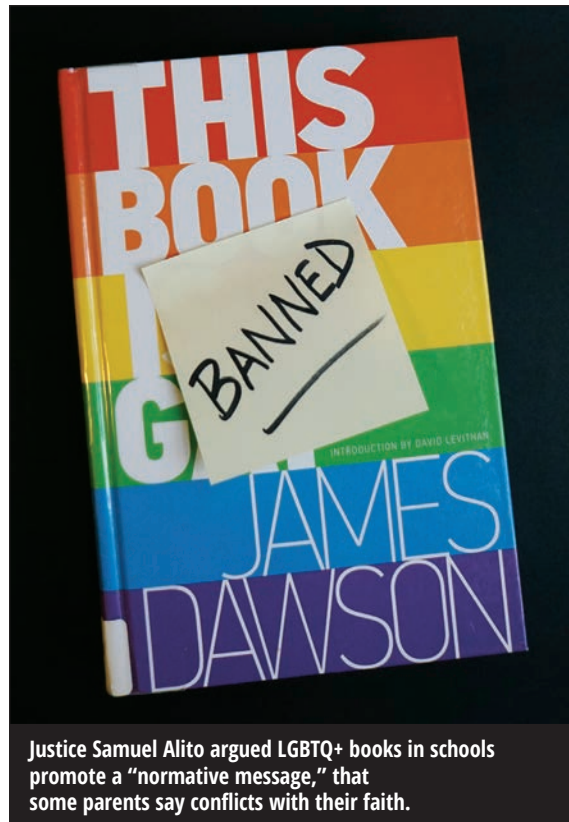
The case in question focused on the Montgomery County, Maryland, public school system — recognized as one of the most religiously diverse counties in the country with a student population of 160,000 from a wide range of faith backgrounds. A coalition of parents filed a lawsuit against the school board, requesting permission to exempt their elementary-aged children from lessons that featured reading materials with LGBTQ+ characters. The parents claimed that being denied the ability to opt out infringed on their First Amendment right to religious freedom.

The school board, supported by some parents, argued offering opt-out options was not practical. Initially, the district permitted parents to remove their children from certain lessons, but later eliminated that option, citing the growing difficulty of managing such requests and the resulting disruption to classroom instruction. The board explained, unlike sex education where single-lesson exemptions are straightforward, it's far more complicated to remove students every time a story includes references to same-sex parents or LGBTQ+ characters.

However, the parents opposing the books argued the Supreme Court has consistently recognized the right of parents to guide their children's moral and value-based upbringing. They continued to claim compelling children to engage with LGBTQ+ inclusive materials — despite parental objections — infringes on families' First Amendment rights to freely exercise their religion.

### What Is the Impact?

It's no secret schools are already often tasked with more than they can handle



Justice Samuel Alito argued LGBTQ+ books in schools promote a "normative message," that some parents say conflicts with their faith.

— in North Carolina, a majority of schools do not receive nearly the amount of funds needed to operate as it stands. With an additional requirement to have an "opt-out" program for students whose parents don't want to expose them to LGBTQ+ culture, schools will have to invest time, funds and the manpower to go through each and every request.

North Carolina Public Schools are already experiencing a teacher shortage, with 7,141 vacancies, a shocking 19 percent increase since last year. With capacity already being strained, placing another job on the shoulders of educators will only hinder them from doing what our taxpayer dollars pay them to do: teach students to prepare them for the "real world."

Aside from tolling on already strained education resources, the lack of a curriculum containing diverse perspectives sets students up for failure. There are LGBTQ+ people in almost every space a person exits in, from the library and grocery store to

even the very halls these students walk down everyday. So long as there are human beings, there will always be LGBTQ+ and gender-nonconforming identities.

Inclusive curriculum has been proven to lead to increased student safety in schools. According to a study conducted by the California Safe Schools Coalition, 78 percent of students who learned about LGBTQ+ issues felt safer in schools compared to the 67 percent in schools who didn't teach about such subject matter. The same survey revealed the rate of bullying went down at schools with inclusive curriculum — with only 22 percent of students saying they had been the victim of bullying, while 35 percent of students in non-LGBTQ+ inclusive schools said they experienced harassment or bullying.

Student success is dependent on many factors, including setting clear goals, developing effective study habits and fostering a positive learning environment. Lectures on the Stonewall Uprising and *Obergefell v. Hodges* are necessary to teach history. Learning about how William Shakespeare

plays often featured men dressed as women is critical in understanding the culture around theater and the art of acting. Reading books such as *Giovanni's Room* or *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in English class gives students a glimpse into how queer and gender-nonconforming folks were treated in the past. Learning about LGBTQ+ American activists such as Marsha P. Johnson, Pauli Murray and Harvey Milk gives students an example of people who stood tall in the face of adversity.

It's simple: Opting your child out of LGBTQ+ related lessons won't save them from the proverbial boogeyman that is queer identity. Rather, it deprives these students of the opportunity to learn more about the world they are expected to engage in. Ignoring or erasing entire perspectives goes against the very idea our Founding Fathers created this nation on — that *all* are created equal and are entitled to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. ::



Alito noted that the parents have a strong chance of proving that the board's actions placed an unconstitutional burden on their religious freedom. He argued the storybooks promote a "normative message" that separates gender identity from biological sex — something the parents say conflicts with their faith.

In a dissenting opinion, Justice Sonia Sotomayor, writing on behalf of the court's liberal justices, criticized the majority for attempting to shield students from the diverse perspectives found in American society. She emphasized that public schools play a vital role in promoting civic engagement and multicultural understanding.

"Yet it will become a mere memory if



God loves YOU,  
just the way you are!

NEW LIFE METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH  
SUNDAYS at 7:00 P.M. 1201 SOUTH NEW HOPE ROAD GASTONIA  
Rev. Dawn Flynn, Pastor [www.NewLifeMccNC.org](http://www.NewLifeMccNC.org) [NewLifeMccGastonia@gmail.com](mailto:NewLifeMccGastonia@gmail.com)

Relax...

to a  
therapeutic or erotic body rub  
given by attractive, experienced  
professionals.

704.651.6899

4 hands available, by longest couple doing so.

Jim Yarbrough  
GEMINI MANAGEMENT

Executive Offices For Rent

PO Box 221841 • Charlotte • NC • 28222

Ph. (704) 965-5214

Fx. (704) 531-1361

# Tom Tillis to retire from Senate, former Gov. Cooper and Lara Trump may run for the seat

Tillis makes announcement after refusing to support Trump bill



by Jonathan Golian & David Aaron Moore  
Qnotes Staff Writers

On the last Sunday in June, Tom Tillis, North Carolina's senior Republican Senator, announced his resignation after voting against Donald Trump's reconciliation bill.

Citing the impact that the piece of legislation would have on his state constituents as a result of the Medicaid cuts and after voicing his decision, Tillis added that it was "not a hard choice." He also indicated a desire to spend more time with his family.

Tillis criticized the lack of bipartisan cooperation currently found in American politics, saying, "In Washington over the last few years, it's become increasingly evident that leaders who are willing to embrace bipartisanship, compromise, and demonstrate independent thinking are becoming an endangered species."

The senator added: "Too many elected officials are motivated by pure raw politics who really don't give a damn about the

people they promised to represent on the campaign trail."

When it comes to the LGBTQ+ community, Tillis's record is mixed. As speaker of the N.C. House in 2012, Tillis pushed North Carolina Amendment 1, a state constitutional amendment that banned same-sex marriage and civil unions.

However, just a year later, the newly-elected Senator voted in favor of marriage equality so that same-sex couples could have access to government resources, no matter if a state recognized their union. Tillis also voted to codify same-sex marriage when the Respect For Marriage Act came through Congress, which was passed and enacted, completing the reversal on his position from where he began.

The N.C. Democratic Party met the news of Tillis's announcement with enthusiasm, with the

state party chair saying, "Thom Tillis spent years putting DC Republicans and corporate donors ahead of the people of North Carolina, and voters noticed."

"We look forward to next November when North Carolinians will finally elect a senator that will actually fight for North Carolina," Chair Anderson Clayton added.

As of July 1, Donald Trump announced

his desire for daughter-in-law Lara Trump to run for the seat. Although not currently a resident of the state, she was born in Wilmington and raised in Wrightsville Beach. Since voter registration requires state residency, and filing for candidacy is in December, Lara Trump would be required to reestablish residency in North Carolina by September to meet the 90-day party affiliation requirement.

A popular Democratic contender also has apparently thought of throwing his hat in the ring. Former two-term Gov. Roy Cooper is reportedly considering a bid, but the Raleigh-based NBC affiliate WRAL reported that he won't decide for at least a few more weeks.

Cooper is recognized as an ally to the LGBTQ+ community, and was the first North Carolina Governor to declare state-wide recognition of Pride month. He spoke at length with Qnotes in an interview shortly after winning reelection to the governorship in 2021 (see link below), and is currently the most likely candidate to fill Tillis's seat. ::

<https://qnotescarolinas.com/an-interview-with-gov-roy-cooper/>



Tillis (left) is out come '26. Former NC Governor Roy Cooper (center) and Trump daughter-in law Lara may run for the seat. CREDIT: Facebook

psst....

## Knowing Looks Good on You!

FREE TESTING: • RAPID HIV • HEP C • SYPHILIS

ASK ABOUT PrEP

Schedule an appointment online or call 704.237.8793

# SADU

BODY MODIFICATIONS

PROFESSIONAL BODY PIERCING & FINE JEWELRY

Experienced Piercers • Safe & Sterile • Award-Winning

[www.sadupiercing.org](http://www.sadupiercing.org)

1515 Central Avenue  
Charlotte, NC

Services By Appointment - Book Online

## Transportation Secretary pitches art removal initiative to state governors

At the start of July, Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy sent letters out to every U.S. state. In each letter was a plea to remove any politically charged displays and artwork from roadways, leaning heavily on LGBTQ murals and rainbow crosswalks.

In the letter, while acknowledging that traffic fatality estimates have been downward trending since 2023, decreasing 3.8 percent that year and further down in 2024 to 39,345 deaths, Duffy stated that he intends to push for even less.

His first step as the Trump appointed director to appoint openly gay Pete Buttigieg is to ask each governor to ask each governor to comply with the Federal Highway Administration's initiative titled "Safe Arterials for Everyone through Reliable

Operations and Distraction-Reducing Strategies," or "SAFE ROADS."

"The SAFE ROADS national initiative will focus on the non-freeway arterials within your state, including safety and operation at intersections and along segments, consistent and recognizable traffic control devices including crosswalk and intersection markings, and orderly use of the right-of-way that is kept free from distractions," Duffy wrote.

Each state leader addressed, including District of Columbia Mayor Muriel Bowser and Puerto Rico Gov. Jenniffer González-Colón, have 60 days to identify needed safety improvements and "to develop a list of arterial segments, including intersections, with the highest safety, operational, or

compliance concerns" to be addressed by the end of the next fiscal year.

Duffy specifically addressed what kind of distractions he was referring to in separate statements speaking on the letters. In a statement given on July 1, Duffy pointed toward any type of political messaging and artwork, most likely murals, as a key issue.

"Roads are for safety, not political messages or artwork," Duffy stated. "Far too many Americans die each year to traffic fatalities to take our eye off the ball. USDOT stands ready to help communities across the country make their roads safer and easier to navigate."

On a post from X (Twitter), Duffy pointed directly at LGBTQ+ cultural displays as part of the clean-up.

"Taxpayers expect their dollars to fund safe streets, not rainbow crosswalks," he wrote.

"Political banners have no place on public roads. I'm reminding recipients of [DOT] roadway funding that it's limited to features advancing safety, and nothing else. It's that simple." ::

— Jonathan Golian



In Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy's view, getting rid of LGBTQ+ murals and artwork (like these shown in Midtown Atlanta) will lead to fewer traffic fatalities. CREDIT: Facebook

## Trump's 'Big Ugly Bill' passes and poised to become law

After a marathon series of votes in both the United States Senate on Monday, followed by a few days of debates, backroom deals and campaigning by Donald Trump himself, the administration's massive agenda

legislation, known as the 'One Big Beautiful Bill,' has passed the house and is now headed to Trump's desk to be signed in to law.

Democrats, Independents and a small selection of Republicans have gone on record to speak out against the bill well before Trump was elected into office last November when many of the contents were pitched as a part of Project 2025.

One of the biggest programs the bill will impact is Medicaid. For the next decade, federal spending will be cut on Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) for low-income infants and children by more than \$1 trillion,

which is an 18 percent larger cut than the House-approved version, according to Georgetown University's McCourt School of Public Policy.

The Senate's version of the legislation package, like the House's, will impose a strict 80-hours-a-month work requirement for adults without children or disabilities, and will be completely implemented by December 2026. Three million Americans enrolled in Medicaid who are unemployed or unable to work due to caregiving responsibilities are set to be affected, according to various reports and an AARP analysis.

Through a provision approved by the Senate parliamentarian, Planned Parenthood and other reproductive health care clinics will be prevented from receiving Medicaid reimbursements for the provision of non-abortion care.

Parents with children over the age of 14 will also be required to work in order to receive the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), down from age 18 and up from the House's version of age six. Other exemptions added or maintained include disabled and pregnant people.

More than 670,000 North Carolinians have enrolled in Medicaid since the state

expanded access to the government-funded health insurance program in December 2023. As of June 2025, nearly 1.4 million North Carolinians and 577,000 South Carolinians rely on the SNAP program.

Ahead of the passage of the bill, North Carolina Governor Josh Stein warned that the agenda bill could increase electricity rates by 18 percent in the state. Michael Thomas, who runs the national tracking company Clean View, said the bill could spike electricity costs across the country due to provisions that eliminate tax credits for new green energy projects.

"There's no doubt this bill is going to increase electricity prices all over the country," Thomas said, speaking to news outlet WFMY. "In states like North Carolina, folks can expect their bills to go up about 18 percent."

A provision that would have prohibited Medicaid from covering gender-affirming care for transgender people, both minors and adults, previously existed in the original edition of the bill, but was stripped out by the Senate parliamentarian.

Qnotes will report on further developments regarding the bill as news continues to break. ::

— Jonathan Golian



## USA opts out of crafting worldwide statement celebrating LGBTQ rights

On Pride Day, during the last weekend of June, foreign ministries including those representing Australia, Canada, Brazil and a number of European Union countries came together to issue a joint statement celebrating LGBTQ+ rights.

The statement, which also included other South American countries like Colombia, along with Ireland, expressed that the group of figureheads spoke as one body "to champion the rights of LGBTQI people."

"At a time when hate speech and hate crimes are on the rise, and in view of efforts to strip LGBTQI people of their rights, we reject all forms of violence, criminalization, stigmatization or discrimination, which constitute human rights violations," the statement read. "We call on all States to join us on this path, repealing discrimina-

tory laws and refusing to adopt new laws that criminalize relations between persons of the same sex or punish people for their sexual orientation or gender identity."

Noticeably absent from the group, and one of the largest centers of recently decaying social acceptance of queer-identifying people, is the United States.

During the Biden presidency and the days prior Jan. 20, the USA could be seen as a champion of gay rights, given many of the opportunities extended to the community before Donald Trump's second inauguration.

Within the first six months of Trump's return to office, a slew of executive orders froze out multiple minority groups, including declaring that only two sexes exist and pushing other governmental bodies to embrace that notion. As well as, the Trump

admin has taken away protective rights from LGBTQ youth. Transgender people have been one of the biggest targets - with rights to serve in the military stripped away, along with participating in school sports in most states.

The United States is not alone in having its mark missing from the collective statement. Hungary is facing its own crisis with gay rights. Prime Minister Viktor Orban has attempted to ban LGBTQ-centric displays banned from the country, including Pride events (that was met with country-wide protests).



Under the Trump administration, is the US demonizing and destroying LGBTQ+ community and culture?

When asked for comments by the news platform Reuters about the statement, as of this writing, United States officials had not responded. ::

— Jonathan Golian

## Federal judge rules for Planned Parenthood over Medicaid funding

The federal government cannot withhold Medicaid funding from Planned Parenthood after a district court judge issued a temporary restraining order July 7, the same day the organization filed a lawsuit.

Republicans included language in their “big, beautiful bill” that would block Medicaid payments from going to Planned Parenthood for the next year, a move that would effectively prevent enrollees in the state-federal health program for lower income people from visiting any of its clinics for routine health care.

The ban began when President Donald Trump signed the bill into law.

Congress already bars federal funding from going to abortion services with limited exceptions.

Planned Parenthood filed a lawsuit over the change in federal law in U. S. District Court for the District of Massachusetts and quickly requested the temporary restraining order, which was issued later that day.

The suit alleges Planned Parenthood was singled out “in order to punish them for lawful activity, namely advocating for and providing legal abortion access wholly outside the Medicaid program and without using any federal funds.”

The filing also says more than one million Medicaid enrollees go to Planned Parenthood in a given year and that the organization received more than one-third of its total aggregate revenue from Medicaid reimbursement during fiscal year 2023.

District Court Judge Indira Talwani’s brief two-page temporary restraining order called on the Trump administration to file a status update and she set an in-person hearing for later this month to hear from Planned Parenthood and the Trump administration.

Talwani was nominated to the bench by former President Barack Obama.

The Trump administration has yet to file any documents in the case and the Department of Health and Human

Services did not immediately respond to a request for comment from States Newsroom about the judge’s temporary restraining order.

Attorney General Pam Bondi indicated during a Cabinet meeting that the Department of Justice plans to challenge the temporary restraining order.

“Absolutely, yes. We’re on it,” Bondi said.

Planned Parenthood Federation of America, Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts and Planned Parenthood Association of Utah — the three groups that filed the lawsuit — wrote in a statement

they were “grateful that the court acted swiftly to block this unconstitutional law attacking Planned Parenthood providers and patients.

“Already, in states across the country, providers and health center staff have been forced to turn away patients who use Medicaid to get basic sexual and reproductive health care because President Trump and his backers in Congress passed a law to block them from going to Planned



Planned Parenthood filed suit against the federal government, stating the service organization has been singled out ‘in order to punish them for lawful activity.’

Parenthood. There are no other providers who can fill the gap if the ‘defunding’ of Planned Parenthood is allowed to stand. The fight is just beginning, and we look forward to our day in court.” ::

*This article appears courtesy of the Virginia Mercury under Creative Commons license CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.*

— Jennifer Shutt / Virginia Mercury

## USNS Harvey Milk only ship renamed

In what was supposed to be a chain of naval ships being renamed in order to take “the politics out of ship naming,” as per Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, the project seems to be screeching to a halt after replacing the name only of the USNS Harvey Milk.

The move came at the beginning of Pride Month, almost in a way of fighting back against the celebration and fanfare within the LGBTQ+ community that would occur throughout June. The administration’s position under Hegseth has been that no ships should be named after civil rights leaders because that’s “ideologically motivated” and that the renaming was not about Milk in particular.

While Milk’s name being removed would be the first, others had been highlighted as well for removal, including many prominent

civil rights leaders like abolitionist Sojourner Truth, racial justice champion John Lewis, and Latina labor activist Dolores Huerta.

However, at the start of July, Defense officials told *Task & Purpose*, a news publication covering the U.S. military, that there were no further plans to rename the other ships originally mentioned, including the ones named after civil rights leaders.

“There are currently no plans to rename other ships in [the John Lewis replenishment oiler] class,” a defense official told *Task & Purpose*. For clarification, the boat class that Harvey Milk’s name had been a part of specifically gained their names from civilians with ties to the civil rights era.

Milk’s ties to the military come from him serving as a diving officer on a submarine

rescue ship during the Korean War. Even after being forced out of the military with a less-than-honorable discharge after being outed as gay, Milk continued to be an advocate and activist for the LGBTQ+ community well after his time in service.

“Like so many LGBTQ+ service members of his generation, [Milk] faced discrimination from the very institutions he served with loyalty and courage,” the group VoteVets said in a statement last month. “To erase his name now, during Pride Month, is no innocent bureaucratic decision. It’s part of Hegseth’s broader campaign to purge the military of anyone who doesn’t fit his narrow, outdated vision.”

Hegseth announced in June that the ship would be renamed for Oscar V. Peterson, who was a chief petty officer in the U.S. Navy and posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions during the Battle of the Coral Sea during World War II. ::

— Jonathan Golian



Harvey Milk, photographed as an ensign during his time with the US Navy. CREDIT: Facebook

## S.C. law for K-12 bathrooms renewed as part of state budget

Nineteen states now have a law or policy banning transgender people from using bathrooms that match their gender identity.

About one in four transgender people live in states with some form of bathroom restrictions, according to the Movement Advancement Project, a nonprofit research group that tracks LGBTQ+-related legislation.

South Carolina renewed its K-12 bathroom law this year as part of the state budget. The mandate — initially inserted into the budget last year during the Senate’s floor debate — applies to multi-stalled school restrooms and places where students undress, to include locker rooms and gym showers.

Such directives attached to South Carolina’s state spending package — called provisos — are officially one-year laws. But they roll over from one year to the next indefinitely, unless legislators vote to take them out. There was no debate at all this year on the bathroom rule, which has now

carried over into the latest fiscal year.

A lawsuit challenging it was filed in federal court last November on behalf of a transgender middle school student in Berkeley County. Attorneys for the national nonprofit Public Justice have asked for the law to be suspended pending the case’s outcome, but nothing has been decided.

So far this year, at least eight states have passed new transgender bathroom laws or expanded existing ones.

In March, Wyoming Republican Gov. Mark Gordon signed a pair of Republican-sponsored bills restricting the use of bathrooms and locker rooms in public buildings.

The House bill requires public school students and anyone in a government building to use the bathroom or locker room corresponding with their sex assigned at birth, regardless of their gender identity, appearance or the gender on their legal documents. The Senate’s bill, which requires

public school students to use facilities that align with their sex at birth, was introduced after a local school board called on lawmakers to restrict bathroom use.

Wyoming Republican Rep. Martha Lawley, who sponsored the House bill along with another one restricting transgender girls’ participation in sports, called them “commonsense measures.”

“As the first state to grant women the right to vote, we showed the nation that Wyoming leads when it comes to equal opportunity,” Lawley wrote in an op-ed she published online ahead of the legislative session. “Now, we can lead again, ensuring our daughters and granddaughters can pursue their dreams with the same sense of fairness and security.”

Earlier in the session, a local Wyoming basketball coach who is a transgender woman spoke against the bill because she said it would require her to share a restroom with teenage boys, WyoFile reported.

Arkansas, Idaho, Mississippi, Montana, Oklahoma, South Dakota and West Virginia have also passed or expanded similar bathroom laws this year.

In Arizona, the legislature passed a bill



in May that would have restricted school bathrooms and changing rooms, but Arizona Democratic Gov. Katie Hobbs vetoed it, along with two other GOP-backed bills targeting transgender people. ::

*SC Daily Gazette Editor Seanna Adcox contributed to this report, which is made available through Creative Commons license CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. It appears courtesy of the South Carolina Daily Gazette.*

— Anna Claire Vollers / SC Daily Gazette

# Center 360 offers opportunities for youth at risk

Organization provides life changing skills for middle school youth



by Wendy Lyons  
Qnotes Staff Writer

As students across the country prepare for another school year, community-based programs like Center 360 are stepping in to provide critical year-round support well beyond the classroom. Founded in 2015 by Akeilah and Keisha Hamilton-Stewart, **Center 360** is a Charlotte-based nonprofit that empowers middle school students who are at risk of disengaging from school. Over the past decade, it has become a lifeline for families and a launchpad for youth discovering their unique strengths and career potential.

## A Mission Rooted in Purpose

"We work with youth in grades five through eight," says Executive Director Akeilah Hamilton-Stewart, "and our goal is to connect them to career pathways aligned with their natural gifts."

Center 360's approach is anything but traditional. Rather than focusing solely on academics, the organization takes a holistic view addressing emotional well-being, life skills, and career exploration through hands-on experiences. Students are exposed to career exploration options like culinary arts, the construction trades and technology. This gives them an expanse of career alternatives, as opposed to narrow dreams of becoming professional athletes or social media influencers.

## Sustaining Impact in a Challenging Landscape

Like many grassroots organizations, Center 360 has been forced to accept some change in response to budget cuts, particularly under the current White House administration's reduction in support for after school and summer learning initiatives.

"We were very grant-dependent," says Hamilton-Stewart. "But with so many nonprofits competing for limited funding and donor hesitation due to economic uncertainty, we've had to get more creative."

The organization is now focusing on building a base of monthly donors, hosting fundraising events, and inviting community members to contribute time, talent or treasure. A major initiative currently underway is the 10th Anniversary Celebration: "Celebrating a Decade of Impact" set for Aug. 18, 2025 at The Auto Pour in Charlotte. The goal: to raise \$10,000 by Sept. 30, 2025.

"This event is about saying thank you to everyone who's supported us: volunteers, donors, board members, interns and staff. But it's also a push to ensure we can keep going another 10 years," Hamilton-Stewart explains.

## Intentional Expansion

Since its inception, Center 360 has prioritized meaningful, individual connection. Starting with just 10 students at Francis Bradley Middle School, the program now serves around 30 students, intentionally

keeping numbers manageable to preserve its hands-on, relationship-centered approach.

"Thirty has become our sweet spot," says Hamilton-Stewart. "It allows us to truly engage with students and their families. We want to be a resource not just for the kids, but for the whole household. Some of our families are struggling with housing, food insecurity, mental health issues. We're here to help connect them to what they need."

This whole-family model of care is one reason Center 360 is expanding. In addition to its presence at Francis Bradley Middle School, the organization has begun offering programs in Davidson through a partnership with the Ada Jenkins Center, with potential expansion into Fort Mill, S.C. in the near future.

"We've had people in Fort Mill approach us, asking us to bring Center 360 to their area," she says. "We'd love to but growth takes staffing, funding and capacity. Right now, we're a small team of three."

## The Power of Volunteers and Interns

With just three full-time staff members, Hamilton-Stewart, Program Supervisor Shanise, and Program Coordinator Aujenay, the organization depends heavily on volunteers and interns to run its programming.

Volunteers help supervise students, assist with homework and participate in activities. Interns from local colleges, especially those in social work, help with case management, connecting families to community services when needed.

"We always welcome volunteers 18 years and older," says Hamilton-Stewart. "You just need a background check, an interview, volunteer training and most importantly, a genuine passion for middle school youth."

She stresses the importance of understanding the developmental needs of this age group: "They're figuring out the world and themselves. It takes patience, care and intentionality to support them well."



Center 360's Akeilah and Keisha Hamilton-Stewart.  
CREDITS: Courtesy Center 360



Center 360 serves around 30 students, intentionally keeping numbers manageable to preserve a hands-on, relationship-centered approach.  
CREDIT: Courtesy Center 360

## What a Day at Center 360 Afterschool Looks Like

Center 360 operates during critical after school hours from 4 to 7 p.m.; a window when many youth are unsupervised and vulnerable to negative influences.

Students begin their day with snacks and homework help, followed by sessions on mental wellness, emotional awareness, or life skills. Then they participate in hands-on learning aligned with career pathways. The past year's focus areas included culinary arts and the construction trades.

"Even the girls loved the trades," Hamilton-Stewart says with a smile. "They were learning plumbing, fixing toilets, sinks and really enjoying it."

The culinary arts program has become a staple, not just because it's fun and engaging, but because it ties into long-term life skills and wellness. "We teach them how to cook, but also why nutrition matters; what food does to your body, and how that affects your adulthood."

The organization also offers summer programming from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., filled with field trips, nature outings, and enrichment activities designed to expand students' exposure to the world. One highlight was a visit to Microsoft's Blacks in Tech program, where students interacted with professionals and experienced the tech world up close.

## Inclusion and Representation

Akeilah and Keisha's experience as foster and adoptive parents is deeply embedded in Center 360's approach. "We've fostered children of different backgrounds—Black, White, Hispanic—and we've seen firsthand what these kids go through," says Hamilton-Stewart.

That perspective helps the staff recognize red flags and unspoken struggles that students may be facing.

"Sometimes kids act out in school because they don't feel safe or seen. We know how to ask the right questions, connect families with resources, and validate what

the child is experiencing."

As a Black lesbian couple, the Hamilton-Stewarts are also strong advocates for diversity and inclusion both in their personal lives and their organizational values.

"Kids don't care if you're gay or straight, Black or White. They care that you're real with them. That you listen. That you love them. That they feel safe," says Hamilton-Stewart. "The need for love is universal. That comes before anything else."

## Balancing Family and Leadership

Raising children, running a nonprofit and nurturing a marriage isn't easy but the Hamilton-Stewarts are committed to it all.

"We have to be intentional," says Hamilton-Stewart. "Sometimes that means finding a sitter and taking a night off for date night. It's not as often as before, but we make time when we can for our kids, for our relationship, and for Center 360."

She laughs, adding, "We're women. We make it work."

## Looking Ahead

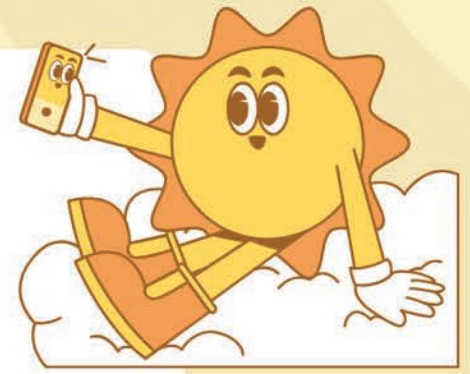
As Center 360 approaches its next decade, the focus is on sustainable growth and deepening impact. The team plans to rotate career focus areas with culinary arts returning next year and with theater arts also being introduced, based on student interest.

"We've learned not to overwhelm the students with too many topics. Two or three core programs a year works well," Hamilton-Stewart explains. "It gives them space to explore and go deeper."

She hopes more community members will support the cause by volunteering, joining the board, or becoming monthly donors. "Even if you can't give financially, spread the word. Share our posts. Show up. We don't want to be a secret anymore."

Center 360's after school programming resumes mid-September. Volunteer opportunities, and donation links are available on their website and social media. :

To learn more or donate visit [www.center360.org](http://www.center360.org)



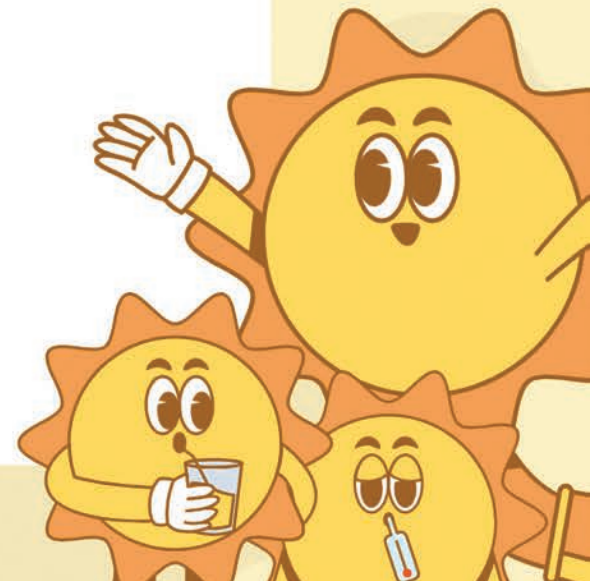
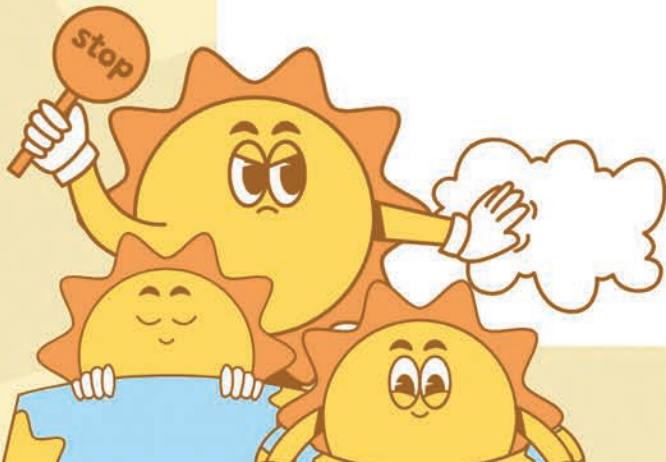
**Don't forget about your  
healthcare in all the sun and fun.**

**ROSEDALE**  
HEALTH + WELLNESS



**Rosedale Health and  
Wellness and Dudley's Place  
is now taking new patient  
appointments for LGBTQA+  
healthcare.**

**Call us today to schedule your  
first appointment.  
704-977-2972**



# GSAs, DEI, cultural oppression and the impact on LGBTQ+ students

No last names are used in this report because of the current political climate



by Wendy Lyons  
Qnotes Staff Writer

Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs), also known as Gender and Sexuality Alliances, have become a vital component of many high schools and colleges, serving as a platform for LGBTQ+ students and their allies to connect, share experiences, and support one another. The current political climate, along with legislation targeting DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) initiatives, presents significant challenges for these programs, directly impacting their operations and the level of support they can provide to students.

At its core, a GSA seeks to create a sense of belonging and community for students. These clubs allow students to openly express their identities, engage in discussions about LGBTQ+ issues, and foster friendships in a supportive environment. Across Charlotte, there has been a notable increase in participation within GSAs, as more students seek connection and understanding amid volatile political changes.

"Being a part of the GSA has been pivotal in my high school experience. It's a safe space where I can express myself without fear of judgment," explains Juanita, a 17-year-old senior at a local public high school. "With all the craziness happening in our world, I feel like we need this space now more than ever."

"I'm grateful there's a place for my daughter to feel accepted," says Juanita's mother, Lisa. "It's important for me as a parent to know that she has a support system of friends she can relate to, especially with the challenges they face today."

Unfortunately, the introduction of legislation like Executive Order 14190 issued in January 2025 threatens federal funding for schools deemed to be incorporating "gender ideology" and "discriminatory equity ideology" effectively censoring LGBTQ+ curricula. Thus targeting DEI initiatives and significantly impacting how GSAs operate.



'With all the craziness happening in our world, I feel like we need this space now more than ever.' - Juanita, a 17-year-old senior at a local public high school.

Bills like Senate Bill 49 in North Carolina aim to restrict discussions regarding gender identity and sexual orientation in education-

al settings, stifling the crucial conversations that GSAs are designed to promote.

The impact of DEI legislation on GSA operations have been substantial and frightening. Many schools are reassessing their policies, which can lead to a chilling effect on discussions and activities related to LGBTQ+ matters. This apprehension can discourage students from engaging fully in their GSAs, undermining the sense of community that these clubs strive to cultivate.

"I've seen many of my peers hesitating to voice their opinions or even join the GSA because of changes or threats of changes in the law," says Brian, a college freshman studying Social Work in Charlotte. "It's disheartening because we're students trying to get a college education while creating a safe environment, but the government makes it feel like we're always on edge and have to watch over our backs."



GSAs allow LGBTQ+ students to connect and support one another.

Several states, including North Carolina, have introduced bills aimed at limiting the rights of transgender individuals, particularly in educational and healthcare settings. These executive orders and legislative actions contribute to a climate that feels hostile for many students, creating social anxiety, adversely affecting their mental health and overall well-being.

Hearing students' perspectives is critical in understanding the real implications of these dehumanizing legislative changes. Their stories resonate of the difficulties they face firsthand as they navigate their identities in an increasingly complex country.

"Sometimes it feels like we're fighting against something that doesn't want us to exist," says Sammie, a 16-year-old high school junior actively involved in a GSA. "Our club is supposed to be a sanctuary where everyone can feel secure, but with all the changes, it becomes harder to discuss who we are. It feels like there are deliberate efforts to silence gay students."

"As a parent, it's heartbreaking to see my child worry about being who they are," explains Sammie's mother, Mava. "I just want them to feel safe and accepted,

but there are a lot of ruthless people that make it difficult."

This sentiment resonates with many students who believe that the progress made in recent years is now jeopardized. The fear of backlash from school leaders or community members can create an environment that makes students feel compelled to suppress their true identities. The same attack and intimidation strategy is occurring across our LGBTQ+ communities at large.

"There's a lot of misinformation regarding what GSAs actually do," adds Brian. "We're not trying to impose an agenda. We just want the freedom to be ourselves and be accepted for who we are. I thought the laws of this country should protect us, not muzzle our voices and our presence."

In addition to GSAs, organizations like Time Out Youth play a crucial role in supporting LGBTQ+ youth in Charlotte. This



'...the government makes it feel like we're always on edge and have to watch over our backs.'  
- Brian, a Charlotte area college freshman.

community. It feels good knowing that we're part of a larger movement that loves and supports all students."

The collaboration between local GSAs, Time Out Youth, and the National GSA Network creates a robust support system for LGBTQ+ students in Charlotte and surrounding areas. Together, these crucial organizations work to ensure that students like Juanita, Brian and Sammie have access to the resources and advocacy needed to navigate the challenges they face in today's political environment.

"The backing we get from our school and supportive teachers makes us feel like we matter," Juanita offers. "It's not just about surviving but it's about creating a space where everyone knows they matter."

In light of the current political climate, many GSAs are ramping up their outreach efforts, collaborating with local LGBTQ+ organizations to supply resources and advocacy. Such partnerships empower students and enhance the impact of their efforts within the broader community.

As our country continues to ride the political waves of anti-LGBTQ+ laws, the future of GSAs remains uncertain. Nevertheless, the commitment of students and allies to promote inclusive environments is unwavering. While laws and hatred may attempt to silence their voices, the dedication of LGBTQ+ students to their cause remains steadfast.

"Change may be slow, but we're not going to give up," Mava adds. "We're here to stay, and we'll keep advocating for our children's right to be who they are."

While GSAs are navigating a challenging environment, seemingly created to silence minority individuals and organizations, the voices of students like Juanita, Brian, and Sammie illustrate the vital importance of GSAs clubs in the CMS system for students, parents and educators.

Organizations like Time Out Youth and the National GSA Network ensure that LGBTQ+ students have access to the resources they need. Despite the obstacles, the resilience and determination of student advocates and our community organizations demonstrate the capabilities they bring to the table, and the critical role they will play in the continuing battle to protect our own and preserve our culture. ::

# LGBTQ+ teachers and the new school year

Area educators face the new school year with angst and hope



by L'Monique King  
Qnotes Staff Writer

Summer is in full swing and we're one national holiday away from the beginning of the 2025-26 school year. This year there's more than pickup schedules and needed supplies to be concerned about. There's been tons of new legislation which has and will continue to impact students and educators – in a very unsettling manner for many. It's enough to have some folks wondering if the U.S. Constitution's 14th Amendment (affording protection from discrimination based on factors such as national origin, sex or race) has been redacted.

With all the anti-DEI mandates, anti-LGBTQ+ rulings and the attitudes that follow it's no surprise these ills are finding their ways from conference rooms to classrooms.

Considering these daunting facts, we decided to speak with a few community educators to gain greater clarity on what there is to be concerned about for this upcoming school year and what, if anything, can be done to mitigate damages. But first, let's take a quick glimpse at some of the legislation that's been applauded by some while creating angst and hardship for others.

According to a 2024 study conducted by The Williams Institute, a think tank at UCLA's School of Law (dedicated to conducting rigorous, independent research on sexual orientation and gender identity law and public policy): A substantial percentage of these bills specifically target transgender youth, such as by limiting access to gender-affirming care, participation in sports and school programs, access to bathrooms and other facilities, or by discouraging the use of gender-affirming pronouns for transgender youth.

- Senate Bill 227 (Eliminating "DEI" in Public Education): This bill, passed by the General Assembly, prohibits instruction and training deemed "divisive" and would impact DEI-related offices and hiring practices.

- House Bill 595 (Parental Rights for Curriculum and Books): Boosts parental control over health education, sex education and school library materials.

- House Bill 806: Would eliminate K-3 class size limits and allow districts to hire unlicensed teachers.

Again, this is just a sampling of what educators will be subjected to, need to be aware of and will have to contend with. *The Charlotte Observer* recently reported on a UNC-Charlotte Administrator who seemingly saw the need for DEI on the school's campus. According to the article's author, Rebecca Noel; Janique Sanders (an assistant director of UNCC's Office of Leadership and Community Engagement), is "no longer employed" following the release of a viral undercover video by the conservative group Accuracy in Media (AIM). In the video, Sanders appears to suggest that DEI-related efforts are ongoing on campus, despite political and public scrutiny. She states that while the language has changed, the underlying equity work continues—something she



Educators in our community who work for the CMS system or area colleges and universities may be entering uncharted territory.

nods to but says she's "not allowed to say."

The video gained traction after being shared by Corey DeAngelis, an education policy advocate, and was amplified by figures such as U.S. Assistant Attorney General Harmeet Dhillon and N.C. Senate Leader Phil Berger. In response, the university distanced itself from Sanders' comments, saying they "do not reflect the University's actions," but would not confirm whether she was fired or resigned, citing personnel privacy.

Many students and educators have supported Sanders and shown their disdain over the backlash while others brace themselves for what they may face when school doors reopen this fall. Of the educators (all LGBTQ Community Members) *Qnotes* had the opportunity to speak with, it became apparent these brave souls had greater concern for their students than themselves.

One educator, an area high school English teacher, confirmed that she was nervous about returning to teaching after the summer break. "But good teachers do their best to always be prepared to pivot and still present material their students need." However, she added how important mental health and supportive partnerships will be – especially as it concerns immigrant students.

"ICE is one of my biggest concerns, but there's so much to deal with – like the lack of accessibility to free or reduced lunch, and support for multi-divergent learners and multilingual learners."

With all that to contend with though, there were also encouraging words of advice for parents, guardians and loved ones. "Find easy to read literature that talks about civil rights, laws and resources for families who may have lost family members detained and/or deported by ICE. We have to give real life solutions, because it's about surviving and building empathy. Helping students grow and understand diverse perspectives is crucial to their development."

While reflecting on all the issues she'll face when she returns

to her high school classroom, she made it clear where her concerns were focused. "My LGBTQ kids. When it comes to my LGBTQ kids, that [anti-LGBTQ legislation] has been a daily concern for a while. We've already seen a decline in GSAs and LGBTQ student visibility. I feel as though my role as a teacher hasn't changed but I know I'll need to provide more support for my LGBTQ kids, considering all this [nonsense] and hope the community will come together to do the same. We have to love on our kids extra hard this year."

Not so ironically, this educator had to be prompted to mention any concerns about whether or not her livelihood would support her identity. Like many compassionate educators, her focus was geared toward issues she felt directly impacted her students – not her, a Black lesbian academic.

Eventually, she confirmed what we were thinking. "Hell yes I'm concerned, because I could be fired at the rate we are going [with hateful legislation, attitudes and actions becoming so prevalent]. But please add this, I am concerned but *I ain't scared!* I will definitely not be in the closet. I will still be me – loud and proud! If I don't show my kids how to stand in my truth through it all, who will?!"

In conclusion, she drew on the strength of her identity to get her and the students



Some lesbian and gay educators are concerned about new rules and regulations and how their jobs could be impacted.

through it all. "It helps that we've been through this before and so we are more prepared, especially those of us who face struggles on a daily basis. In all the madness, I do expect the world to see good people, resilient people flourish."


At another high school, a white gay male teacher shared how he has less concern about the impact of the new rules, mandates, laws and emboldened attitudes. He disagreed with those who might say, perhaps it's not the best thing to be openly gay and expressing yourself in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school system as an employee right now. He stated that he feels, how a CMS LGBTQ teacher is treated and supported is most likely dependent upon "...where you are. We have a very liberal base [where I teach]." He continued to explain, "I'm very comfortable in my skin. We have a lot of gay employees and students, here, and in other schools that I know of, who have not changed their policies."

As it applies to his students, he stated (with some relief) that the school he teaches at and others he knows of have maintained their GSAs along with "safe space" signage in classrooms. In addition, he's witnessed no negative reaction to anything related to LGBTQ+ students or staff, so far.

Lastly, we checked in with yet another Queer-identified educator. This time, we received some perspective from the lens of a higher education professional who is also the parent of two secondary school students. When asked what her concerns were for her own children she stated, "That their teachers won't get the support they need to engage with students, my children. When you change their educational practice, like class sizes, being able to lead effectively, students aren't able to get the individual attention they need. With my kids, I've been very intentional and involved but the more support that is taken away from teachers, the more you risk losing teachers and students." Addressing her concerns from the perspective of an educator she lamented, "I am concerned especially for those who may not have as much of a foundation, that we as educators won't only not be able to do our jobs but are targeted in being able to teach effectively. That includes content. It's upsetting that any subject or content that could possibly make someone uncomfortable is now subject to review. It's miseducation."

She went on to express her concerns that providing students with any academics or support based upon identity has been threatened, erased or dismantled. With a lengthy list of concerns and consequences she continued to share her trepidation. "What happens to the students who actually need that attention and information? Students who have the highest risk of not being successful won't have what they need because we're now in a position to not [be able to] identify, pay attention to or solve problems. That's what happens when you ignore data that informs and promotes the success of our students." With all that said, she implored parents to remain committed to their child's success regardless of the current [political] climate. She encouraged parents to "ask questions, stay involved and teach them what you want them to know." ::

**We buy interesting & worthwhile used books & Compact Discs.**



**Books Do Furnish A Room**  
1809 W Markham Avenue • 286-1076  
(Between 9th & Broad) Durham



**HOME OF THE EMPTY PLATE CLUB!**

2718 Monroe Rd.  
Charlotte, NC 28205  
704-374-1232  
101-A Old Statesville Rd.  
Huntersville, NC 28078  
704-948-3959  
Email: lupie@lupiescafe.com  
www.lupiescafe.com

**Connie J. Vetter, Esq.**  
Attorney at Law, PLLC  
Your LGBTQ+ Law Attorney  
serving Clients from across  
North Carolina  
Talk/Text 704-333-4000 or online




**TAKE CHARGE OF YOUR HEALTH**

**GET TESTED**  
FREE Confidential Testing  
Rapid HIV | Rapid HEP C  
Chlamydia & Gonorrhea

**WALK-IN TESTING**  
Monday - Thursday  
8:30 am - 6:00 pm  
Friday 8:30 am - 4:00 pm



**STAY HEALTHY**  
Gay Friendly Primary Care  
HIV Specialty Care  
PrEP and PEP



**Affinity HEALTH CENTER**

877.647.6363  
455 LAKESHORE PKWY.  
ROCK HILL, SC 29730

[affinityhealthcenter.org/get-tested](http://affinityhealthcenter.org/get-tested)

**Sponsored Content**

**DISABILITY PRIDE MEANS NO ONE LEFT BEHIND**

by Freedom Center of Social Justice Staff

Every July, we celebrate Disability Pride Month. It is a time to honor the leadership, brilliance, and resilience of disabled people, and to recommit ourselves to the ongoing fight for equity and inclusion. This month also marks the 35th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), a landmark civil rights law signed on July 26, 1990. What many people may not know is that this historic bill almost left out protections for people living with HIV.

In the late 1980s, as fear and misinformation about HIV/AIDS swept the country, some lawmakers tried to exclude HIV from the protections outlined in the ADA. There were concerns that including HIV would make the bill too controversial to pass. Some opponents argued that adding HIV protections would create too much political risk or lead to unnecessary public backlash.

But activists and advocates stood firm.

Disability rights leaders, HIV advocates, and legal experts refused to accept a bill that protected some people while leaving others behind. They knew that people living with HIV were being fired from their jobs, denied housing, refused healthcare, and pushed out of public life. They also knew that true civil rights protections must include those who are most stigmatized.

One of the biggest battles came in the form of the Chapman Amendment, a proposal that would have excluded people with HIV from ADA coverage. Advocates pushed back with everything they had. They organized, lobbied Congress, testified before lawmakers, and made it clear that a version of the ADA without HIV protections would be a betrayal of the movement's core values.

Thanks to that organizing, the ADA was passed with explicit protections for people living with HIV. That victory was not inevitable. It was the result of a clear and courageous stance by people who believed in collective liberation.

That courage is what we honor during Disability Pride Month.

The ADA was not handed down as a gift. It was won through decades of protests, lawsuits, sit-ins, hunger strikes, and tireless advocacy. Many remember the powerful image of disabled activists crawling up the steps of the U.S. Capitol to demand access. But just as powerful were the behind-the-scenes moments — advocates making difficult decisions, coalition partners pushing for inclusion, and people with lived experience speaking truth to power.

The inclusion of HIV was a powerful message. It said that civil rights should not be determined by popularity or political convenience. Everyone deserves protection, care, and access, simply because they are human.

That message still matters today.

In this political moment, many of the same communities protected by the ADA, including disabled people, trans people, immigrants, and people living with HIV,

are under coordinated attack. Lawmakers continue to introduce legislation that strips people of their autonomy, dignity, and access to care.

This is why we must return to the spirit of the ADA and the movement that made it possible. Disability justice is not only about curb cuts or ramps. It is about access to healthcare, housing, education, and community. It is about recognizing that all bodies and minds are valid. It is about centering people who are often pushed to the margins, including Black and Brown disabled people, LGBTQ+ folks, and undocumented community members.

Disability justice calls us to stand together, especially when it is difficult.

At the Freedom Center for Social Justice, we carry this legacy forward every day. Our work centers on the belief that no one is disposable, and that true freedom is built



when we stand together across identities and issues. We uplift trans people, immigrants, people living with HIV, and people with disabilities, not in separate silos, but as part of one interconnected struggle.

Disability Pride Month is more than a celebration. It is a reminder of what it takes to build lasting change. It asks us to remember the risks that were taken so others could be included. It calls on us to follow the example of those who refused to compromise, even when the pressure was intense.

One of the most powerful ideas to come from this movement is simple: no one should be left behind.

This July, let us reflect on that truth. Let us honor the history of the ADA, not just as legislation, but as a promise that we must keep fulfilling. Let us uplift the voices of disabled activists and continue expanding what justice means. And let us move forward with boldness, clarity, and care, knowing that when we fight for all of us, we build a world worth living in.



# Know your LGBTQ+ history

Part 2 of 2 Q&A examines local, regional, national and global aspects of queer culture

by Jonathan Golian, Wendy Lyons, David Aaron Moore | Qnotes Staff Writers

Looking back at events in our history and taking note of happenings in the here and now can sometimes provide us with insight about how we should proceed in the future. Here's our second installation in a series of two that looks at key aspects of LGBTQ+ culture and related events in Charlotte and the United States at large. Take a look at our questions here, then **flip the page** to find the answers and test your own level of knowledge.



How can we know where we're going, if we don't know where we came from?

1. What figure of India's royalty was the first to come out as openly gay and has gone on to be a prominent LGBTQ advocate in the country?
2. What legendary drag queen, revered by fans during the 1980s, literally *flipped her wig* at a long gone LGBTQ+ nightclub in uptown Charlotte?
3. What famous Mexican painter was a trailblazer in non-conformity, due to their choice to occasionally wear men's clothing during the early 1900s?
4. Who was the first person to come out publicly as gay on television, and has also contributed to helping make Taiwan the first Asian nation to legalize same-sex marriage?
5. Willi Ninja is a famed figure from the New York club scene in the 1980s, going on to work with "Paris Is Burning" director Jennie Livingston and singer Janet Jackson during his lifetime. What famous dance form did he help bring to prominence on concert stages across the world?
6. Who was Charlotte's first mayor to acknowledge the political power of Charlotte's LGBTQ community?
7. What's the history behind the AIDS Memorial Quilt?
8. What was the first national Black gay periodical to come out in the United States, existing from 1979 to 1985?
9. From 1972 until his death in 1978, Harvey Milk had transformed himself into an LGBTQ icon through his time in San Francisco. Based on the area he finally settled in, what neighborhood did he call himself the mayor of in his first city campaigns?
10. Jane Addams was a multifaceted social rights advocate over the course of her life, capturing the Nobel Peace Prize as a result of her work. What community-focused establishment did she open in 1889 and where?
11. In Charlotte queer culture history, who was Oleen Love?
12. Who is the South Carolina native that turned their military background into an activism career, primarily advocating for equal treatment for trans people in the military?
13. Who was the Raleigh native to win a prominent spot during American Idol's second season?
14. Who is Charlotte Black Pride's first Transgender Community Liaison?
15. What is North Carolina based activist Mandy Carter best known for?

Carolinan  
LGBTQ  
Journalism Fund

Donate at [notesCarolinas.com](https://notesCarolinas.com)

"It's about creating a more connected community!"

Support LGBTQ Local News  
[QnotesCarolinas.com](https://notesCarolinas.com)

The program is administered by Local Media Foundation, tax ID #36-4427750, a Section 501(c)(3) charitable trust affiliated with Local Media Association.

LOW COUNTRY BLUE RIDGE MIDLANDS GRAND STRAND TWIN CITY GATE CITY METRO

[clgbtcc.org](https://clgbtcc.org)

CAROLINAS LGBTQ Chamber of Commerce

WE ARE THE CAROLINAS

JOIN TODAY!

Sweeten your love life!

**Peaches**  
Adult Boutique & Arcade

OPEN 24/7

115 Swain Street, Fayetteville, NC, 910-339-2770  
[facebook.com/PeachesAdultBoutique1](https://facebook.com/PeachesAdultBoutique1)

# Know your LGBTQ+ history

Part 2 of 2 Q&A examines local, regional, national and global aspects of queer culture

by Jonathan Golian, Wendy Lyons, David Aaron Moore | Qnotes Staff Writers

**1. Prince Mavendra Sing Gohil** is India's first openly gay royal figure. Gohil has been a trailblazer in LGBTQ advocacy and the spearhead behind the Lakshya Trust which is an organization dedicated to supporting the LGBTQ community. Gohil is credited with inaugurating the Euro Pride festival in Stockholm, Sweden and also known for his work educating people about HIV/AIDS.



**2. Toni Lenoir** was performing the 1980 dance and R&B classic "Take Your Time (Do It Right)" by the SOS band at the old Brass Rail Disco, a short lived LGBTQ nightclub (better known for its time as the Odyssey and previously the site of the intown restaurant Honey's) located at the corner of Morehead and Tryon Street. During her lip sync and dance number her braided Bo Derek-style wig suddenly took flight for parts unknown, leaving Lenoir with only rubber-banded tufts of her own hair to finish up the number. To Lenoir and audience members, it appeared as though the wig simply vanished. Three hours later, it was found lodged between the ceiling and a large Disco ball.



**3. Frida Kahlo** was an astonishing self-taught painter who dared to defy gender-conformity. Her artwork were primarily



self-portraits that reflected her non-gender conforming and openly bisexual lifestyle. Frida remained in the shadows as an unknown figure, until the late 1970s when her popularity soared. She is still a well celebrated international LGBTQ+ icon.

**4. Chi Chia-Wei** was the first person to come out openly on National TV in 1986. He did extensive work campaigning for prevention of HIV/AIDS and safer sex among the Taiwanese LGBTQ Community. Wei helped make Taiwan the first nation in Asia to legalize same-sex marriage.



**5. Willi Ninja** was known as the grandfather of **Vogue**, a dance form that he helped move from the New York club scene of the 1980's to the concert stage. Ninja was featured in the film "Paris is burning." Members of the House of Ninja keep Ninja's legacy alive with voguing and bringing awareness to HIV on behalf of their Mother, Willi Ninja.



**6. Mayor Harvey Gant.**

Though it was not publicly announced, Gantt made an appearance at the former Scorpio Lounge on Freedom drive in 1987. He told patrons at the club that night how they were an important part of the city, and he hoped to do all he could to improve the quality of their life. He also tripped the light fantastic with a former Charlotte drag diva who was extremely popular at the club during the era.



**7. The idea for the AIDS Memorial Quilt came from gay rights activist Cleve Jones in 1987.** Because of its size (54 tons

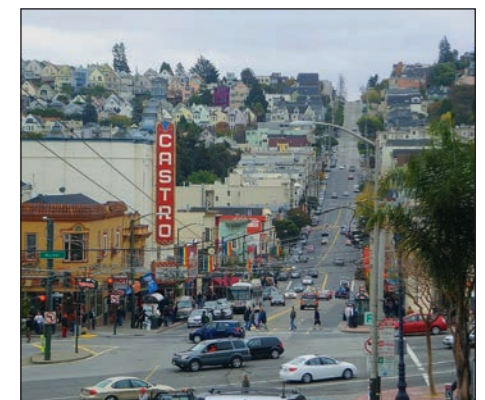
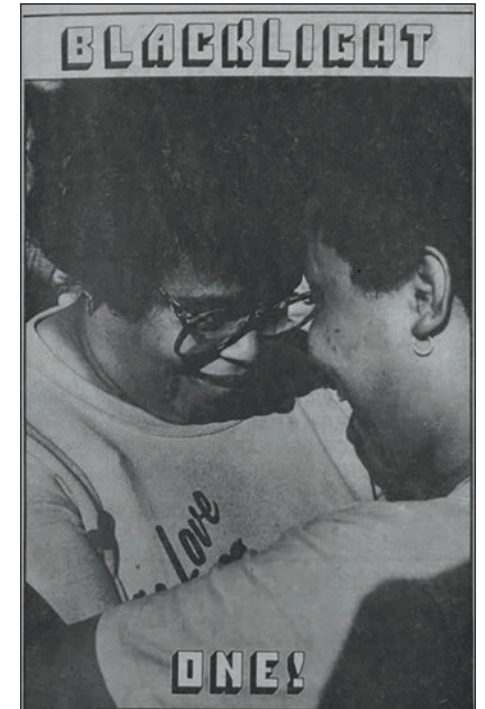
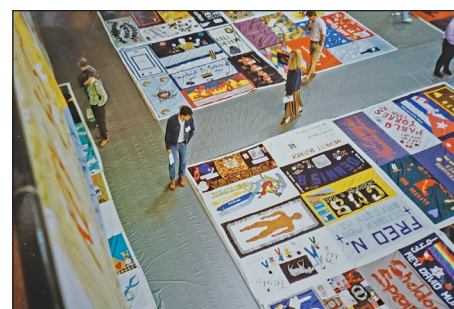
representing 100,000 individuals) it has not been exhibited in its entirety since it was last displayed in October 1996. At that time, it covered the entire National Mall in Washington, DC. Portions of the quilt have been displayed in North Carolina multiple times beginning in 1990 in Charlotte. In the years that have followed it has been displayed in NC towns and cities such as Asheville, Greensboro, Chapel Hill and Wilmington, among others. It is currently stored in a warehouse in San Francisco when not on display.

**8. Blacklight** was founded in Washington D.C. in 1979 by Sydney Brinkley. Blacklight began as a four page newsletter in 1979 (with a circulation of 300 copies) and expanded to 16 pages by the end of 1980. Blacklight primarily covered the lifestyles and concerns of Washington's Black, gay men, although it occasionally addressed issues affecting the greater LGBTQ community.

**9. The Castro** was a neighborhood that experienced a mass immigration of gay men and lesbians. Milk dubbed himself the "Mayor of Castro Street."

**10. Addams** founded Chicago's **Hull House** in Chicago at a time when many new immigrants lived and worked in harsh conditions. The settlement house created a model for social welfare by providing multiple services including health care, day care, education and vocational training.

**11. Love** was a heterosexual woman who **opened one of the city's earliest LGBTQ clubs known as Oleen's.** A long time friend to the drag and gay and lesbian community of the day, Oleen's (the nightclub) reportedly opened in 1968 and closed in 1997. During that time it wasn't uncommon to see Love accompanied by drag queen pals (often painted just as heavily and dressed just as flashy) at local restaurants and retail stores, in addition to tending bar at the historic Charlotte gay watering hole.



# 'Jurassic World Rebirth' and 'Superman'

Out on Film: A look at the latest entries into the classic franchises



by **Gregg Shapiro**  
Contributing Writer

Calling **"Jurassic World Rebirth"** (Universal) an unnecessary installment in a franchise that should, pardon the expression, go the way of the dinosaurs, might be a bit extreme. Because where else can you see a quick close-up of Jonathan Bailey's khaki-covered impressive lower region in a mountain climbing harness? Pretty sure we all know which scene will be paused the most when the movie arrives on streaming.

The "Jurassic" juggernaut, launched more than 30 years ago, has seen better days. The reawakening of the title probably has something to do with the absence of Gadsden flag t-shirt-wearing Chris Pratt and Bryce Dallas Howard's limited acting abilities. There's a whole crew of fresh faces in "Jurassic World Rebirth" beginning with Big Pharma whore Krebs (Rupert Friend) who is looking to recruit people on a mission to a forbidden island where mutant dinos (designer-saurs, if you will), who slaughtered the humans that created them, may hold the key to human cardio health, and by extension a pharma fortune.

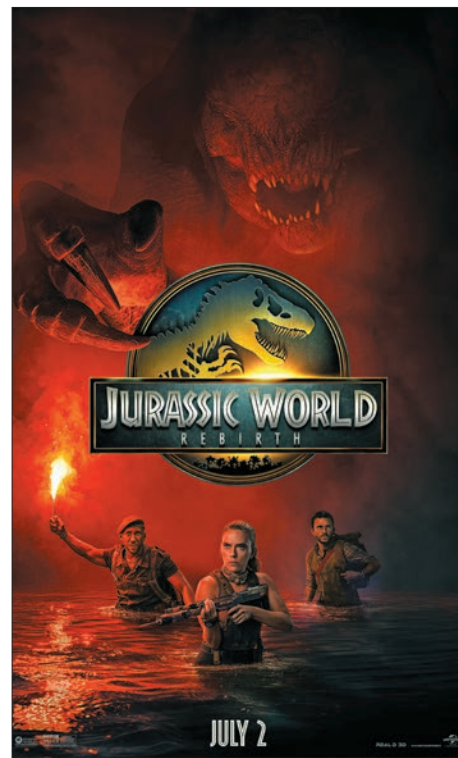
Krebs recruits mercenary Zora (Scarlett Johansson), who can be had for a substantial price. Krebs and Zora then make their way to Altoids-munching, museum-based paleontologist Dr. Henry Loomis (Bailey), who's in a funk. Turns out, dinosaurs have lost their luster with the public (read: kids), and his exhibit is being dismantled and put into storage. He has the knowledge and equipment to get the necessary blood samples from the three different dinosaurs, so he agrees to join them. Finally, Zora enlists fellow daredevil Duncan (Oscar-winner Mahershala Ali of "Moonlight" fame) and three of his crew members.

Traversing the same dangerous body of water is Reuben (Manuel Garcia-Rulfo), his

young daughter Isabella (Audrina Miranda), her teenage sister Teresa (Luna Blaise), and Teresa's goofy boyfriend Xavier (David Iacono). They survive a terrifying encounter with some aquatic dinosaurs and are then rescued by Duncan and company. But the worst of their nightmare has just begun when they all arrive on the island.

In a familiar Jurassic scenario, the bad guys get it good, a few innocents are sacrificed, and those who've earned the right to survive do so. But buried amidst the pile of bodies is a rebellious message of doing the right thing, when Loomis suggests that he and Zora hold onto the blood samples and use them for good (give them away) not evil (profit). It's a nice touch in an otherwise bombastic, predictable and boring movie.

**Rating: C-**



In the most recent version of **"Superman,"** I'm not just throwing you a bone when I tell you that Krypto, the CGI version of dog-actor Jolene (the foster-dog of Superman, breathtakingly portrayed by David Corenswet), is the best part of James Gunn's insanely OTT reboot of the movie from DC Studios (in IMAX no less).



In a movie packed as tightly as Corenswet in his suit and cape, this version of Superman is unexpectedly fragile (physically and emotionally), and surprisingly open about his identities.

When we first see Superman, he's been beaten to a pulp by the Hammer of Boravia, an indestructible killing machine created by Lex Luthor (Nicholas Hoult, who some may remember from Tom Ford's "A Single Man"). Lying in the frozen Antarctica terrain, near his palatial, glacial fortress, he manages a weak, but distinctive whistle to summon Krypto, and the faithful and playful pup drags the wounded superhero to safety. Repaired by his robot assistants, Superman listens to the surviving part of the holographic message left by his Kryptonian

parents (voices provided by Bradley Cooper and Angela Sarafyan) while he recovers.

In his drag as mild-mannered Daily Planet reporter Clark Kent (Corenswet), he's involved in a tempestuous romance with fellow reporter Lois Lane (Rachel Brosnahan, playing the part like Mrs. Maisel with a journalism degree). Unlike previous such relationships, Lane is fully aware of Kent's alter-ego.

Of course, Superman's problems are bigger than juggling multiple identities. His interference in the international conflict between Boravia and a neighboring country gets him in trouble with the US government. He's also dealing with competing superheroes Green Lantern (Nathan Fillion), Hawkgirl (queer actor Isabela Merced), and Mister Terrific (Edi Gathegi), who provide much of the necessary humor in the movie. But nothing can compare to the devious and determined Luthor.

Luthor's maniacal and envious personality, as well as his talent for distraction and quest for world domination, recalls Trump and Musk at their worst. Additionally, his disdain for Superman's alien status is so reminiscent of Trump that you'd think he was a consultant on the script. His seemingly endless array of destructive subordinates, including The Engineer (María Gabriela de Faria), who might be the most terrifying of all, as well as the imprisoned Metamorpho (Anthony Carrigan) and the ultimate secret weapon Ultraman (who shares Superman's DNA) make the Man of Steel's life hell on earth. Nevertheless, he prevails, and good triumphs over evil.

Many LGBTQ+ folks will remember Corenswet from his portrayal of River, ex-lover of Payton (Ben Platt) in Ryan Murphy's "The Politician." As Clark Kent/Superman, he feels closest in spirit to the universally adored Christopher Reeve, and it's easy for audiences to connect with him. But did we really need another Superman movie? As far as I'm concerned, DC stands for "Don't Care."

**Rating: C ::**

## 12. Monica Helms

is a transgender Navy veteran born in Sumter, S.C. After undergoing their transition and encountering resistance for applying to the Phoenix chapter of the US American Submarine Veterans Group, they were eventually admitted as the first women to ever join the organization. In 1999, Helms created the iconic Transgender Pride Flag.



13. In 2003, **Clay Aiken** came in a close second to Ruben Studdard on American Idol. In the same year, Aiken along with Diane Buber, created the Buber/Aiken Foundation which



was later renamed the National Inclusion Project.

14. **Rell Lowery** became Charlotte Black Pride's first Transgender Community Liaison advocating for the rights and dignities of non-binary and transgender individuals. Rell starred in "Eden's Garden," a film series now streaming on Tubi, told from the perspective of transgender men.

15. The list is endless! Accomplished Durham resident Mandy Carter is a former executive director and **one of six co-founders of Southerners On New Ground (SONG)**, which was conceived at the



1993 National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Creating Change Conference in Durham.

In addition to consistent political LGBTQ activism throughout North Carolina and the South in the 1990s and the 2000s, **she is**

**co-founder of the National Black Justice Coalition (NBJC)** and she was inducted into the International Federation of Black Pride's LGBT Hall of Fame. For more information on Carter, visit the website of Duke University. ::



**2**  
**SEATINGS**

Seating  
11am

Showtime  
Noon

Seating  
2pm

Showtime  
2:30pm



OFFICIAL

**CHARLOTTE**  
**PRIDE**

KICKOFF

# DRAG BRUNCH

**SAT AUG 9**

PRESENTED BY

**catalú**

*the* **Vanity House**

MR CHARLOTTE PRIDE  
DALLAS COLE COUTOUR

MISS CHARLOTTE PRIDE  
ERICA CHANEL

MX CHARLOTTE PRIDE  
REBECCA STARDUST

DJ VANNA VANITY

DORAE SAUNDERS

21 AND UP

TICKETS : EVENTBRITE