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## 2025 Person of the Year: Holly Savoy



A look back at  
2025: the year  
in review  
- pg 10

Is Scott Bessent  
the Worst Queer  
of the Year?  
- pg 8





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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

- 5 Person of the Year:  
Holly Savoy  
10 Year in Review: 2025



## news

- 4 Biden honored with  
LGBTQ+ Leadership  
Award  
6 Trans federal worker sues  
Trump-Vance admin  
over bathroom ban  
6 DOJ halts use of LGBTQ  
safety standards in  
federal prison audits  
6 Congress adds ban on  
trans women in academy  
sports to defense bill  
7 Federal ruling forces  
Georgia prisons to restore  
transgender medical care  
7 Yiannopoulos says 'main-  
streaming homosexuality'  
his greatest regret  
7 A closer look at  
Pansexual Pride Day



## a&e

- 13 Out in Print:  
"The Dogs of Venice"  
15 Out on Film:  
Holding out for a Hero:  
an interview with  
Julia Jackman



## life

- 8 Is Scott Bessent the  
Worst Queer of the Year?  
9 Change afoot at Hearts  
United for Good  
14 Tasty Holiday Treats:  
Sweet Heat  
Gochujang Meatballs  
14 Why are so many  
people sick?



## views



## events

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



### Change afoot at Hearts United for Good

Hearts United for Good (HUG) is excited to announce they've made a move from their previous location on North Tryon Street to the Plaza-Midwood neighborhood near the corner of Central and Hawthorne. The space is smaller, but the program continues to provide food and other necessities for our community and others in need throughout the Charlotte Metro region.

PAGE 9

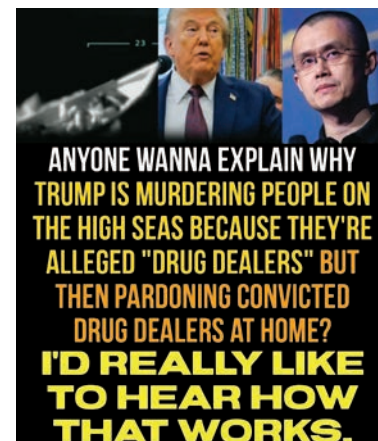
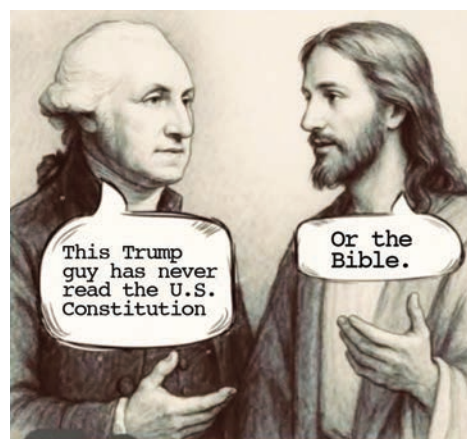
### Out in Print: "The Dogs of Venice"

"The Dogs of Venice" makes you think it won't take long to read. At under 100 pages, you'd be right, which gives you time to read it again. Because you'll want to. In the same way you poke your tongue at a sore tooth, Steven Rowley makes you recall what it's like to in a dead romance.

PAGE 13



### The People speak on Social Media



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# Biden honored with LGBTQ+ Leadership Award

Biden receives Victory Institute's Chris Abele Impact Award, tells LGBTQ+ leaders to 'get up and fight back' against Trump



by Liz Schob  
Qnotes Staff Writer

Former President Joe Biden attended the International LGBTQ+ Leaders Conference in Washington, D.C., where he accepted the LGBTQ+ Victory Institute's Chris Abele Impact Award. According to the Victory Institute, he is the first former United States president to appear at the conference, and the award recognizes his role in advancing LGBTQ+ equality and leading what the organization describes as the most LGBTQ+ inclusive administration in U.S. history.

During his remarks, Biden moved quickly from gratitude to a direct call to action. "This is no time to give up. Get up. Get up and fight back. Get up," he told the audience. "What's the fight all about? It's about protecting the Constitution." He also

warned that Donald Trump and the MAGA movement are driving efforts to undermine the fight for equality and deepen division.

Biden also reflected on his long record with LGBTQ+ policy. He recalled his 2012 appearance on "Meet the Press," when he voiced support for marriage equality, and joked, "I got myself in a bit of trouble, but good trouble." Event organizers and the Victory Institute highlighted that moment, along with his decision as president to sign the Respect for Marriage Act, when explaining why he would receive the Chris Abele Impact Award.

Biden addressed current political attacks on diversity, equity and inclusion efforts and what he described as an assault on transgender people. Donald Trump and



Biden is the first former U.S. president to attend the annual gathering hosted by the LGBTQ+ Victory Institute.  
CREDIT: Facebook

the MAGA Republicans are trying to distort and derail our fight for equality," he told the audience. "They are trying to turn it into something scary, something sinister." He said those messages are designed to stir fear about LGBTQ+ people among parents and religious communities.

Throughout the speech, Biden linked LGBTQ+ equality to everyday economic concerns. He said that at its core the work is "about making every American be treated with basic decency, dignity and respect." He went on to describe equality as a question of opportunity and affordability, mentioning the chance to make a decent living, pay rent, cover grocery bills, send children to college and obtain quality health-care. Separate reporting from Politico and research

firm Public First has found that 46 percent of Americans say the cost of living is the worst they can remember and that 46 percent of respondents blame Trump and his administration for the affordability crisis.

Biden spoke directly to young LGBTQ+ people who may feel isolated or uncertain about their futures. "You are loved. You are heard. You belong, you belong, you belong," he said. He described young people sitting alone at home wondering whether they will ever be loved, will ever marry or will ever be accepted for who they are.

He ended his remarks by urging the audience to stay committed and hopeful, saying the United States has historically emerged from crises stronger than before. "We just have to get up and remember who in the hell we are," he told the crowd, linking his call to action back to the award that brought him to the stage. ::

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# Person of the Year: Holly Savoy

Charlotte Trans Health executive director talks about advocacy, travel and overcoming challenges



by L'Monique King  
Qnotes Staff Writer

At the time of this interview, Holly Savoy was visiting Minneapolis. An avid traveler, she was there for the premier of "Purple Rain," a musical based on the iconic recording artist and performer Prince and his 1984 film "Purple Rain." It's now slated for Broadway in the near future, although no specific details are available yet about the location or dates.

Savoy had seen the musical the night before, and was enthusiastic. "It's different," she said. "Doesn't follow the movie exactly, but it was fun. As for the music, it's Prince – what more need be said?"

With that, our interview with the Texas-born Savoy began.

She is an advocate, avid coffee drinker and LGBTQ health care provider with a heart of gold. During this interview we learned a lot about Savoy's joys and challenges while navigating a political climate hostile to those she loves and proudly serves.

**L'Monique King: So, you were born in Texas and came to Charlotte from the Lone Star State?**

**Holly Savoy:** Not exactly. I was born in Texas and moved around a lot growing up. I came to Charlotte via Chicago.

**LMK: Where in Charlotte do you live?**

**HS:** The Sedgefield area. It's between Park Road and South Boulevard. It's convenient, and I really like living there. I've lived there for about 10 years now in a single-family two-story home.

**LMK: Is there anyone special with whom you share your home and life with?**

**HS:** My spouse and my fur baby – my yorkie.

**LMK: How are you connected to the LGBTQ community?**

**HS:** I would say I'm both part of it and an ally. I am a het-presenting bisexual who is very aware of my invisibility, though I'm known in the community as a trans ally.

**LMK: Tell us a little about your role with Charlotte Trans Health and how you got involved?**

**HS:** I've been involved since our first meeting in 2012; and I'm one of the 13

founding members. A community member, a mental health provider, Lisa Griffin, was in the midst of a move and prompted a gathering of other health care providers for the purpose of ensuring that there was continued care and resources to serve the trans community in Charlotte. Today I am the executive director of Charlotte Trans Health, continuing that mission.

**LMK: In light of all the recent anti-trans affirming legislation, what advice can you offer to concerned trans community members and those who support them?**

**HS:** <Labored sigh> Gosh, draw from the resilience of our community. There are many people and allies who are committed to standing up for trans people, trans rights and trans healthcare. It's an incredibly dark time, but we're going to do everything we can to get through this. We've got to keep finding our way back to the hope, resilience and the joy we find when we're able to get together in person.

**LMK: How are you faring as a nonprofit during this era of scrubbing all words and titles directly impacting the underserved?**

**HS:** Um, well, we're not scrubbing anything. It's hard to do given our name and our mission. We were initially a bit shielded but securing additional funding going forward has been harder.

**LMK: When you look back over your life and career, what lessons learned can you share with our readers?**

**HS:** Find your voice and learn how to use it. That's been big for me. I think some of that comes with age and maturing. I think just being raised as a cis female in our society and overcoming the messaging that comes with that creates experiences of vulnerability. So, learning to be less afraid was absolutely a challenge. Look at what's happening right now in the world. People of all identities are just caving to various pressures. I talk a lot about authenticity to clients, and it applies to all of us to fully and unapologetically live as our authentic selves.

**LMK: With a life that causes you to be busy while working so diligently to secure health equity for trans community members, how do you find time for you and how do you use that time?**

**HS:** Finding that time is tricky, but I'm committed to fighting all that we're up against under the current administration and protecting access to care. Time with friends allows

me to decompress and enjoy connections.

**LMK: Let's get random for a few with some this or that questions. Ready to play?**

**HS:** Yes.

**LMK: Cats or Dogs?**

**HS:** Dogs.

**LMK: Books or Movies?**

**HS:** Movies.

**LMK: Beaches or Nature Walks?**

**HS:** Beaches.

[Particularly] Exuma in the Bahamas. It's a little island and there are all these little beaches and there's one in particular, Sand Dollar Beach. The tide goes out in a way that you can comfortably walk far out into the ocean, clear as a swimming pool and you can find zillions of sand dollars and just be on the beach by yourself.

**LMK: The beach sounds lovely. Switching gears a moment, what if I told you Qnotes has selected you as Person of the Year? What would be your response to that?**

**HS:** Wow! <Long pause> I'm speechless.

**LMK: Ok, let's fast forward while you're letting being Person of the Year sink in. What do you see yourself doing 10 years from now?**

**HS:** Hmmm. Hopefully being in at least early retirement. I would love to still be doing things to support the community but scale back on work in a way that allows me plenty of time for travel.

**LMK: What's your favorite travel spot?**

**HS:** Lately Portugal. The people, the food, the relaxed feel of being there. I've been a couple of times in the last couple of years.

**LMK: With so much joy in your life – music, travel, helping others – what makes you just want to curse?**

**HS:** Besides how the actions of this administration are affecting the trans community, not much. [It seems like a never-ending

cycle of] misinformation about identities making it seem as though trans people are at fault for just about everything from shut downs to shootings. [The pattern of] trying to lay blame on a vulnerable community incenses me. In general, it's about the blaming of the trans community for things that are inaccurate and harmful.

**LMK: What don't most people know about you?**

**HS:** I'm very much into Latin dance and have been dancing for many years now. It's a very social experience, and I love it. I appreciate that it's an activity wherein you can't be in your head [while dancing] you have to be present – in the moment – to dance. For someone who does so much mental work, it's freeing. It's an immersive intersectional experience that's diverse because it includes different cultures. ::



Holly Savoy is more than savvy when it comes to supporting vulnerable community members.

CREDIT: Jeremy Deal / LunahZon Photography



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# Trans federal worker sues Trump-Vance admin over bathroom ban

A civilian employee of the Illinois National Guard filed a class action lawsuit during late November in federal court challenging a Trump-Vance administration policy prohibiting transgender and intersex federal employees from using restrooms aligned with their gender.

The complaint was filed on behalf of LeAnne Withrow by the American Civil Liberties Union, the ACLU of D.C., the ACLU of Illinois, and Democracy Forward.

Plaintiff LeAnne Withrow of Springfield, Ill., is a lead military and family readiness specialist and civilian employee for the Illinois National Guard. Previously, she served as a staff sergeant for the National Guard and is the recipient of multiple commendations and awards, including the Illinois National Guard Abraham Lincoln Medal of Freedom.

Following a Jan. 20 executive order signed by President Trump, officials with the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, the U.S. Department of Defense, and the federal National Guard Bureau issued notices to all employees requiring use of designated restrooms strictly based upon



Transgender civilian federal worker LeAnne Withrow is suing the federal government because of the Trump 'bathroom ban.' CREDIT: Instagram

their "biological sex," as inaccurately defined in the executive order. Soon after, Withrow was told by supervisors within her chain of command that she could not use restrooms designated for women.

On May 5, Withrow filed a class action complaint to the Army National Guard Bureau

Equal Opportunity Office (NGB-EO), and later to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), challenging the federal order, but both the NGB-EO and EEOC failed to resolve the matter. Withrow has now gone to court to stop the discriminatory order.

The class action lawsuit alleges that the executive order and implementation actions violate Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits sex discrimination in employment. In a 2020 ruling, the U.S. Supreme Court held 6-3 that Title VII prohibits discrimination against transgender workers on the basis of their sex. The complaint also alleges that the order and implementation violate the federal Administrative Procedure Act.

"No one should have to choose between their career in service and their own dignity," said LeAnne Withrow, a civilian federal employee for the Illinois National Guard. "I bring respect and honor to the work I do to support military families, and I hope the court will restore dignity to transgender people like me who serve this country every day."

"No federal employee should have to face hostility and discrimination while they are working to serve the American people," said Shana Knizhnik, Senior Staff Attorney for the ACLU's LGBTQ & HIV Project. "We look forward to demonstrating to the court that this unlawful executive order not only denies the existence of transgender and intersex

employees, it is yet another attempt by the Trump administration to target and punish transgender people for simply being who they are. There is no place for such blatant discrimination in our government or society."

"We cannot let the Trump administration target transgender people in the federal government or in public life," said Michael Perloff, Senior Staff Attorney at the ACLU-D.C. "An executive order micromanaging which bathroom civil servants use is discrimination, plain and simple, and must be stopped."

"It is absurd that in her home state of Illinois, LeAnne can use any other restroom consistent with her gender—other than the ones controlled by the federal government," said Michelle Garcia, Deputy Legal Director at the ACLU of Illinois. "The Trump Administration's reckless policies are discriminatory and must be reversed."

"This policy is hateful bigotry aimed at denying hardworking federal employees their basic dignity simply because they are transgender," said Kaitlyn Golden, Senior Counsel at Democracy Forward. "It is only because of brave individuals like LeAnne that we can push back against this injustice. Democracy Forward is honored to work with our partners in this case and are eager to defeat this insidious effort to discriminate against transgender federal workers." ::

— Quotes Staff

# DOJ halts use of LGBTQ safety standards in federal prison audits

The Department of Justice has directed Prison Rape Elimination Act auditors to stop applying standards created to safeguard transgender, intersex and gender-nonconforming people from sexual assault during confinement. The instruction appears in an



Advocates warn the DOJ's PREA rollback endangers LGBTQ people in custody. CREDIT: Facebook

internal memo obtained by NPR, which says the department is rewriting federal PREA regulations to align with President Trump's executive order on what he calls "gender ideology extremism." That order declares that the United States recognizes only two sexes.

Under the memo, auditors who review prisons, jails, juvenile facilities and immigration detention centers will not evaluate compliance with LGBTQ-specific protections while the revision process is underway. These auditors are independent contractors hired by detention agencies and certified by the DOJ. The department did not respond to NPR's questions about the directive.

Advocates warn that halting these reviews will put LGBTQ+ people in custody at even greater risk, in systems where they already face disproportionately high rates of sexual violence. Linda McFarlane, executive

director of Just Detention International, told NPR the change "will immediately put people in danger," adding that when facilities become less safe for the most marginalized people, they become less safe for everyone.

The memo instructs auditors to stop reviewing several PREA requirements tied to gender identity. Auditors are told not to evaluate whether facilities consider gender identity when housing transgender people and not to assess whether reported assaults may have been motivated by gender identity bias.

Existing data shows why these protections were created. A 2015 survey by the criminal justice group Black and Pink found that LGBTQ incarcerated people were more than six times more likely to experience sexual assault than the overall prison population, based on responses from more than 1,110 people. Brenda Smith of American University Washington College of Law, who served on the National Prison Rape Elimination Commission, told NPR the memo disregards the evidence that shaped PREA's LGBTQ protections.

The policy change follows earlier cuts to programs supporting crime victims and PREA implementation. In the spring, the DOJ reduced funding for more than 360 grants nationwide, including support for the National PREA Resource Center, before restoring many of them.

The National Association of PREA Coordinators said in a statement that the current federal standards technically remain in place, but the memo instructs auditors to mark the LGBTQ protections as "not applicable" until new regulations are issued. The association noted that without separate state or local requirements, agencies can choose whether to keep following those rules. PREA auditor Kenneth L. James told NPR the directive makes the work "more confusing and more difficult" and will require auditors to reevaluate long-standing practices.

What the memo makes clear is that LGBTQ-specific safety checks will no longer be part of PREA audits, even as advocates and auditors say the need for those protections has never been more urgent. ::

— Liz Schob

# Congress adds ban on trans women in academy sports to defense bill

Congress has moved forward with a sweeping defense policy bill that includes a new federal ban on transgender women participating in women's sports at United States military service academies. The provision is folded into the National Defense Authorization Act, a 3,086 page package that authorizes about \$900 billion in military and national security spending for 2026. The House approved the bill in a 312 to 112 vote, sending it to the Senate for final approval and signaling that the measure has broad momentum.

The legislation directs the secretary of defense to ensure that military academies do not permit anyone "whose sex is male" to take part in athletic programs or activities designated for women or girls. It defines sex as "reproductive biology and genetics at birth."

This requirement appears alongside language aligned with several of President Trump's executive orders, including new limits on diversity, equity and inclusion efforts within the Department of Defense and other policy changes that reshape internal practices.

The addition arrives in a bill that had already been negotiated across party lines, which means there was little room to change or remove provisions once the compromise text was released. Earlier drafts included a ban on Defense Department funding for gender affirming surgeries, although that language was removed from the final version. Even without it, the NDAA continues a pattern in which restrictions on transgender people are layered into military policy. A previous House version also attempted

to bar "gender transition procedures" for minor dependents under the Exceptional Family Member Program, echoing restrictions written into last year's NDAA on certain TRICARE coverage for transgender youth.

Because the NDAA must pass each year, it has become a reliable venue for policy

fight that reach beyond core defense matters. Lawmakers often attach provisions that would face strong resistance in stand-alone votes. This year, the sports ban is one of the most prominent examples, reflecting how major federal legislation is being used to advance broader anti-trans policies.

The inclusion of the sports restriction underscores how far this campaign has extended. Transgender participation in athletics has become a central target in school districts, state legislatures and collegiate programs. With this NDAA, military academies have now been added to that national landscape of restrictions.

As the Senate prepares to vote, the bill remains on track to become law. For transgender students who hope to pursue military careers, the new restriction is another reminder that federal policy continues to narrow the boundaries of who is permitted to participate fully in public institutions and who is pushed out through statute. ::

— Liz Schob



The U.S. Capitol, where lawmakers have advanced a defense bill that includes a ban on transgender women in academy sports. CREDIT: Facebook



# Federal ruling forces Georgia prisons to restore transgender medical care

A federal judge has issued a permanent injunction against Georgia's law that cut off hormone therapy and other gender-affirming treatment for transgender people in state prisons, finding that the statute violates the Eighth Amendment's ban on cruel and unusual punishment. The ruling comes months after Senate Bill 185 took effect and barred state money from being used for hormone therapy, gender-transition procedures and cosmetic interventions meant to alter sexual characteristics. The law also prevented transgender inmates from paying for that care themselves while incarcerated.

U.S. District Judge Victoria Marie Calvert concluded that cutting off this treatment fails to meet basic constitutional standards for medical care behind bars. "The court finds that there is no genuine dispute of fact that gender dysphoria is a serious medical need," she wrote. "Plaintiffs, through their experts, have presented evidence that a blanket ban on hormone therapy constitutes grossly inad-

equated care for gender dysphoria and risks imminent injury." Her order requires Georgia prisons to continue providing hormones to people who had already been receiving them and to allow other incarcerated people diagnosed as needing hormone therapy to start treatment.

SB 185 was signed in May by Governor Brian Kemp and took effect in July. The Center for Constitutional Rights filed suit in August on behalf of five transgender inmates, arguing that the measure violated the Eighth Amendment and the Equal Protection Clause because it singled out treatments used by transgender people while leaving other uses of hormone therapy untouched. In public comments, staff attorney Celine Zhu compared the law to cutting off insulin for incarcerated people with diabetes and said that the state was denying care for a similarly serious diagnosis.

State officials responded that Georgia is not required to make gender-affirming care available and presented studies to



**'The court finds that there is no genuine dispute of fact that gender dysphoria is a serious medical need.' -U.S. District Judge Victoria Marie Calvert**  
CREDIT: Wikimedia Commons

argue that ending hormone therapy does not meet the legal standard of "deliberate

indifference" to serious medical needs. Calvert rejected those arguments and also discounted testimony from prison doctors, noting that they were following the terms of the statute rather than independently deciding that inmates had no medical need. "Defendants cannot deny medical care and then defeat an injunction by saying nothing bad has happened yet," she wrote.

The ruling shifts decisions about treatment back to medical professionals and patients, although it does not guarantee that every request for gender-affirming care will be approved. Instead, it requires that access to hormone therapy be determined through individual clinical assessments. Georgia's prison system began offering hormone therapy in 2016 after earlier litigation, and state records show that by mid-2025 more than 100 incarcerated people were already receiving this care.

Georgia's Department of Corrections has filed a notice of appeal to the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals, and Attorney General Chris Carr has pledged to continue defending the law. For now, the injunction ensures that transgender people in Georgia prisons retain access to medically necessary care while the case proceeds. ::

— Liz Schob

# Yiannopoulos says 'mainstreaming homosexuality' his greatest regret

Far-right media figure Milo Yiannopoulos told former Fox News host Tucker Carlson that he regrets "mainstreaming homosexuality in the Republican Party," calling it the "great regret" of his life. The comments were made in a newly released interview in which Yiannopoulos, who has described himself as "ex-gay" since 2021, repeated claims that sexual orientation is not real and promoted conversion therapy.

Yiannopoulos told Carlson that "mainstreaming homosexuality in the Republican Party" is the "great regret" of his life, saying he feels responsible for what he called a "generation of gay Republicans." He referenced Republican drag performer Lady Gaga and far-right commentator Nick Fuentes while describing the results of his past visibility as "horrors" that trouble him. Yiannopoulos added that he "hates" himself for having been openly gay within the party.

In the interview, Yiannopoulos repeated his claim that sexual orientation does not

exist. He said "nobody's gay" and described male homosexuality as a trauma response rather than an innate identity. He has supported conversion therapy since declaring himself "ex-gay" in 2021, aligning these statements with the views he has promoted in recent years. Yiannopoulos also told Carlson he has been celibate for five years, which he linked to his Catholic faith.

Yiannopoulos also used spiritual and supernatural language to describe LGBTQ+ people, calling homosexuality "demonic" and alleging that gay men have a "sinister" capacity to influence others' emotions or behavior. He claimed that this supposed power stems from feelings of personal powerlessness. These statements are not supported by evidence and stand in direct contrast to medical and psychological research.

Major health bodies, including the NHS and other global professional associations, have repeatedly affirmed that sexual

orientation cannot be changed. These organizations have also found that conversion therapy practices, which aim to alter a person's sexuality or gender identity, cause documented emotional, psychological and physical harm.

Yiannopoulos' latest comments add to a long record of public controversy. He first gained wide attention during the 2014 Gamergate harassment campaign and later worked as a writer and editor at Breitbart News. Over his career he has directed inflammatory rhetoric at women, LGBTQ+ people, Muslims and Black Lives Matter activists. He has been banned from several major social media platforms, including Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

His political and media involvement has included working for Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene and serving as chief of staff for Ye during the rapper's unsuccessful 2024 presidential bid. Yiannopoulos has also experienced canceled speaking tours, significant financial troubles and removal from multiple platforms and outlets.

In his interview with Carlson, Yiannopoulos continued to advance claims rejected by scientific consensus, further distancing himself from the LGBTQ+ com-



**Milo Yiannopoulos, a confused far-right commentator known for anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric.**  
CREDIT: YouTube Screen Capture

munity and reinforcing his advocacy for discredited practices. It was a reminder that, even after years of turmoil and reinvention, Yiannopoulos continues to circle the same orbit he created for himself, sustaining the same anti-LGBTQ+ narratives and debunked theories that have defined his public persona from the beginning. ::

— Liz Schob

# A closer look at Pansexual Pride Day

Pansexual Pride Day was recently held on Dec. 8, giving us a moment to celebrate pansexual people and bring visibility to a part of our community that is too often misunderstood or overlooked. The day is about pride and joy, but it is also about making sure people who identify as pansexual see themselves fully reflected in our movement and in our conversations about sexuality and gender.

Pansexuality describes attraction to people of all genders. For many pansexual people, the gender of the other person is — simply put — not the deciding factor in attraction. It does not mean being attracted to everyone. It means that connections can form with people across the full spectrum of gender identities.



Pansexuality is frequently compared to bisexuality, and the two identities sit close to each other. The simplest and most accurate distinction is this: bisexuality is attraction to more than one gender, while pansexuality is attraction to people of all genders. Some bisexual people may be attracted to men

and women. Others might be attracted to men and nonbinary people, or women and nonbinary people, or several genders but not all. Pansexual people describe their experience as inclusive of all genders, rather than multiple genders. Both identities are valid. Both have deep community roots. And many people use the label that feels truest to their lived experience, which means the language can overlap depending on the person.

The history of Pansexual Pride Day is not well documented. What we do know is that it began as a community-led effort to create visibility, recognition and solidarity. Even without a clear origin story, the day carries real meaning: It encourages people to learn about pansexuality, challenges common myths and makes space for pansexual people to feel seen and supported.

This day also fits into a longer timeline of pansexual identity becoming more visible

in public culture. The word first appeared in 1914 as "pansexualism," but it was being used in a very different context. In the 1970s, people began applying the term to their own identities. A 1974 article in the New York Times helped the word reach a wider audience. By the 1990s, the idea of sexual fluidity made it easier for people to talk openly about attraction that did not fit strictly into gay, straight or bi categories. In 2010, a creator known as Jasper designed the now familiar pansexual pride flag. Its colors represent attraction to women (pink), men (blue), and nonbinary people (yellow).

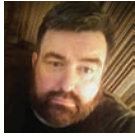
Pansexual Pride continues to grow in visibility because people deserve language that reflects who they are. The day is a reminder that our community is expansive, diverse and at its best when everyone's identity has room to breathe. ::

— Liz Schob



# Is Scott Bessent the Worst Queer of the Year?

Wealthy gay South Carolina investor appointed U.S. Treasury Secretary, shows disregard for LGBTQ community



by David Aaron Moore  
Qnotes Staff Writer

What makes a person justifiably recognizable as one of the worst of the year? Some from years past selected by various media entities speak for themselves. Such individuals as former North Carolina Lieutenant Governor Mark Robinson, former North Carolina State Representative Madison Cawthorn and former U.S Representative George Santos (R-NY) immediately come to mind.

In 2025 there are other well known individuals with Carolina roots that deserve at least a *dishonorable mention*, among them U.S. Representative Tim Moore (R-NC), U.S. Representative Nancy Mace (R-SC) (and wannabe Palmetto State governor) and N.C. House of Representatives member Tricia Cotham (R).

None of them, however, hold a candle to seemingly self-loathing United States Secretary of the Treasury Scott Bessent, who is fifth in line to succession to the office of the president, and the first openly gay man to hold such a high federal level governmental position in American history.

A wealthy and openly gay man from South Carolina (his net worth is projected to be \$600 million by Forbes), he was appointed to the position of U.S. Treasury Secretary by Donald Trump, and is known as the founder of Key Square Capital Management. He is also recognized for his background in finance, his devoted support for Trump and his role as the first openly gay cabinet member in a *Republican* administration. Bessent lives in Charleston with his husband, John Freeman, and their children.

For many, the appointment came as a surprise because Bessent has no previous experience in politics, focusing primarily on high dollar dealing. As a financier, he formerly worked for George Soros, making mad money beginning in 1992 through such efforts as the "Black Wednesday"

bet. Working alongside Soros and Stanley Druckenmiller, Bessent helped orchestrate the legendary trade of shorting the British pound against the Deutsche Mark, a move that is said to have earned the firm over \$1 billion in profit.

He repeated that success in 2013 by betting against the Japanese yen, which generated additional substantial profits. Another financial gamble that came about in the late 1990s reportedly made nearly \$500 million in profits by betting on the convergence of European government bond yields as the Eurozone was forming.

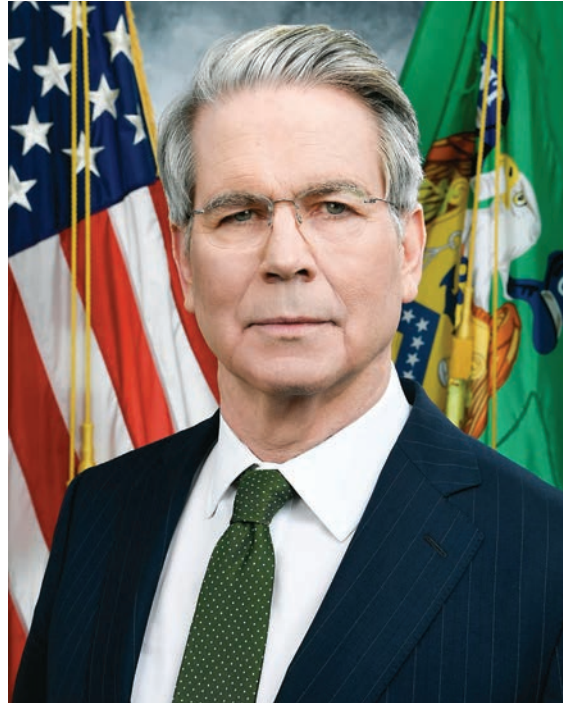
Bessent's personal connection to Donald Trump stems from a long-standing friendship with Trump's sister-in-law, Blaine (previously married to Donald's deceased brother Robert Trump). That relationship and Bessent's significant financial support to the Trump campaign led him to become a key economic advisor who helped shape Trump's vision before Bessent was nominated as Treasury Secretary in late 2024.

Clearly, Bessent's appointment reeks of nepotism, along with wealth and white privilege. But those factors can be identified as opinion. Why is he so stupendously unpopular in the LGBTQ+ community?

Despite making history as the highest-ranking openly gay official in U.S. history, he has faced criticism regarding his silence on actions that undermine LGBTQ+ protections.

Key actions and issues cited by critics include:

- **Proposal to remove LGBTQ+ protections from EEO forms:** Bessent's Treasury Department has proposed removing sexual orientation and gender identity from the list of protected categories on Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) complaint forms, a move that critics argue would make



U.S. Treasury Secretary, openly gay and Charleston resident Scott Bessent.  
CREDIT: Public Domain

it harder to combat workplace discrimination.

- **Silence on Trump administration's anti-LGBTQ+ policies:** Despite being an influential figure, Bessent has been publicly silent on a number of the Trump administration's actions targeting the LGBTQ+ community. These actions, which have been described as escalating attacks on gay and trans people, include a ban on transgender people serving in the armed forces, the elimination of funding for an LGBTQ+ suicide hotline, and pressure on corporations not to support Pride events.

- **Collaboration with oppression:** Some advocates and commentators view Bessent's silence and actions as a form of collaboration with an administration that is actively rolling back LGBTQ+ rights and

progressive policies. Critics argue that his presence in the cabinet provides political cover for the administration's broader anti-LGBTQ+ agenda.

Bessent has stated that President Trump chose him for his skills and not for his sexuality, and that he is focused on his role as Treasury Secretary. However, his actions and lack of public opposition towards specific anti-LGBTQ+ measures have led many to consider his tenure as problematic for progressives.

Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) has criticized Bessent's economic policies, which is a key area of Democratic opposition to his role. Warren stated that a billionaire supporting tax cuts for other billionaires is not looking out for hardworking families. "Wall Street may be breathing a sigh of relief at Scott Bessent's nomination, but working people see no help coming their way. Mr. Bessent's expertise is helping rich investors make more money, not cutting costs for families squeezed by corporate profiteering."

Democratic strategists and LGBTQ+ advocacy groups have raised concerns about Bessent's involvement in an administration with an anti-LGBTQ+ agenda. Kelley Robinson, President of the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) offered a somewhat positive take on Bessent: "We need pro-equality LGBTQ+ nominees and LGBTQ+ people at all levels of government. The LGBTQ+ community is counting on openly LGBTQ+ nominees like Scott Bessent to step up for the community," Robinson wrote. "HRC has a long history of working across the aisle to advance equality and this appointment may be an opportunity to continue."

To date, Bessent enjoys his wealth and privilege and has expressed his gratitude and astonishment for advances in LGBTQ+ rights, although there has been no "stepping up" for our community.

Does being wealthy, white, cisgender and enjoying those advantages make him the worst queer of the year? No. But remaining silent in a position of power, when members of our community without such entitlement see their rights stripped away *does*.



## Do You Like MONEY

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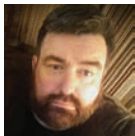
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# Change afoot at Hearts United for Good

Non-profit food and goods provider moves to Plaza Midwood



by David Aaron Moore  
Qnotes Staff Writer

Hearts United for Good (HUG) Executive Director Bethany McDonald is excited. You can tell by the look on her face as she whips a recently donated forklift around the new storage area for the non-profit organization.



Hearts United for Good Executive Director Bethany McDonald piloting a forklift at their new location.  
CREDIT: Jim Yarbrough

Dedicated to assisting individuals and families with essential resources, the organization provides food, home furnishings, pet assistance and toys for children to residents in need in the Charlotte Metro area. In addition to the hand truck McDonald seems to be having fun with and the new space, HUG is also the beneficiary of \$60,000 from various private individuals to cover rental costs for their new location in the Plaza Midwood neighborhood. Previously located on North Tryon Street, HUG has seen much change over the past few years.

Starting this month, they're now in their new home at the corner of Central and Hawthorne. In a conversation with Qnotes, McDonald explained the reason behind the recent move. "The landlord sold the building. Part of it is going to be demolished. And I believe that's for the city's greenway, but it depends on if you ask the owners or the property manager," she chuckled. "They gave us a couple of months to find a good place and make the move. That

area was getting really bad. We got robbed for the sixth time in that very spot so it was amicable." The change of address has led to a change of available space and some of the services they are offering. "It's a double edged sword, I guess I would say, but mostly on the good side," McDonald explained. "We're not able to do the one night, pantry night anymore because we don't have the luxury of the

huge parking lot that we had at our last place. "We were the only tenants in a 300,000 ft building," she continued. "So there was plenty of space for shipping, storage and parking. We were giving away 700 bags every Wednesday night within an hour and a half time frame. It was a lot of volunteers and a lot of chaos, but the good kind." McDonald is enthusiastic that the new address has led to a largely positive change in direction. "The new place has allowed us to switch to an appointment model, which is easier for us, it's easier on volunteers and it's much

easier for our clients, because they don't have to sit in line for two to three hours at a time." As HUG has done its best to provide for our community and many others in need throughout the Charlotte Metro area, individual donors, entrepreneurs and other organizations have returned the favor. Along with dry goods, HUG is able to return their kindness by offering cold and frozen foods. "We were lucky enough to get a partnership with Second Harvest last year," McDonald explained. "It was last year in July, I believe, we were finally accepted. We've been trying to get in as a beneficiary with them and be an official partner for about four years, but because we didn't collect the required data they wanted and we didn't want to change our model, I mean that's what makes us, you know? If you're a human being and you're hungry, we're going to feed you regardless. And we didn't want to change our model. We find the people that nobody else takes care of and the people who fall through the cracks. So we wanted to stick to our guns and to our principles. "Eventually we kind of came together and they saw what we were doing and the impact we were making, so we partnered together. It helps so much; our cost is down by about 95%, so it's incredible." Currently HUG is serving upwards of



In addition to dry goods, the organization is able to provide cold and frozen foods.  
CREDIT: Jim Yarbrough



No one should go hungry: HUG provides food and other goods for an estimated 1200 individuals and families.  
CREDIT: Jim Yarbrough

1,200 individuals and families with food assistance and homeless outreach combined. "I don't think we'll see an increase in the number of people we're helping because of the relocation," McDonald offered. "But I do think our new neighborhood is going to be great for volunteers. Plaza Midwood is a very philanthropic community, so we're really hoping to get more people on board to help with the people that we're already helping." For more information on Hearts United for Good, visit their website at <https://www.hugclt.org/>.



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# Year in Review: 2025

A look back at the politics, cultural erasure and achievements of the past year



by David Aaron Moore  
Qnotes Staff Writer

In 2025 we saw a decided increase in disturbing and frightening activity aimed at our community. Despite warnings about a second Trump presidency armed with a MAGA guide book, few of us expected so much. Here's our look back at the good, bad and ugly.

## JANUARY

### 1. LGBTQ+ marriages surge before Trump inauguration day



In a National Public Radio (NPR) report from New York City, not only had the metropolitan hub seen an increase of vows taken, there were also 33 percent more licenses issued compared to the same time last year, according to the city clerk.

### Trump's potential cabinet picks are detrimental to the lives of LGBTQ+ Americans



On Jan. 20, Donald Trump was sworn in as the 47th President of the United States. His cabinet picks, Marco Rubio (Secretary of State), Scott Bessent (Secretary of the Treasury), Pete Hegseth (Secretary of Defense), Pam Bondi (Attorney General) and Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. (Secretary of Health and Human Services), read like the cast of a horror movie hell-bent on erasing the entire LGBTQ+ community.

### Trump erases actions on LGBTQ+ equality and orders withdrawal from Paris climate agreement



Just hours into his second term, President Donald Trump signed some of his first executive orders as an arena crowd of thousands cheered a U.S. withdrawal from the Paris climate agreement. Among his other moves, he reversed Biden's executive orders on Preventing and Combating Discrimination on the Basis of Gender Identity or Sexual Orientation; Advancing Equality for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex Individuals; and signed an executive order recognizing only two sexes, male and female.

## FEBRUARY

### Mark Robinson dismisses own suit against CNN



After denying allegations made by CNN and a former porn store clerk, Louis Money and suing each for libel, former NC Lieutenant Governor Mark Robinson officially dropped all lawsuits against both parties and announced he would not run for office next year, "nor do I have plans to seek elected office in the future."

### Trump signs executive order banning transgender athletes from women's school sports



The orange elephant in The White House signed an executive order Feb. 5 prohibiting transgender athletes from competing on women's sports teams he deemed as

inconsistent with their gender. Throughout his campaign he pledged to "keep men out of women's sports," signing the order just two weeks after he took office.

### South Carolina gay investor confirmed as Trump's treasury secretary



Among the confirmations made by Congress during the early part of the year, Scott Bessent, an openly gay billionaire hedge fund manager and investor, was voted in as President Donald Trump's Treasury secretary. His confirmation makes Bessent the highest-ranking LGBTQ+ official in United States' history. The position places him fifth in line to the presidency, following the secretary of state. Said Massachusetts Senator and LGBTQ+ ally Elizabeth Warren: "A billionaire who supports more tax cuts for every single billionaire in America, is not someone who is watching out for hardworking families."

### Kennedy Center and Stonewall monument join the list of organizations affected by Trump's administration



Following orders from Donald Trump, the National Park Service joined in on the trans and queer erasure train when it removed references to transgender individuals and people who identify as queer from the National Park Service website for the Stonewall National Monument. The entire board of the Kennedy Center (18 individuals) were dismissed and replaced by conservative Trump appointees in order to block any presentations related to LGBTQ+ culture.

## MARCH

### Gallup poll finds nearly 1 in 10 in U.S. identify as LGBTQ+

The polling of 14,000 adults showed that 9.3 percent identified as LGBTQ+, including 5.2 percent identifying as bisexual, two percent as gay, 1.4 percent as lesbian and 1.3 percent as transgender. Applied to a national population of 341 million people,



that would be 31.7 million LGBTQ+ adults, including 17.7 million bisexual people, 6.8 million gay people, 4.8 million lesbians and 4.4 million transgender people.

## APRIL

### Disney refuses to opt out of HRC's Corporate Equality Index



In an annual meeting for Disney shareholders, investors overwhelmingly voted to turn down a proposal that would pull the company out of the Human Rights Campaign Foundation's (HRC) Corporate Equality Index.

### Mural of N.C. drag legend Brandy Alexander accidentally painted over



A significant part of Charlotte's queer history vanished when, according to new property owners, a mural at the rear side of a structure located at 1510 Central Avenue, an homage to the late drag legend Brandy Alexander was painted over accidentally.

### Carolina's LGBTQ+ Chamber of Commerce announces grand opening of Impact Center

The Carolinas LGBTQ+ Chamber of Commerce announced the grand opening





and rainbow ribbon cutting ceremony for the Impact Center, located at 2838 Queen City Drive, Suite A, in Charlotte. With 2,800+ square feet, the center serves as the administrative home of the Carolinas LGBTQ+ Chamber of Commerce & The 628 Foundation; a non-profit incubation space supporting emerging organizations dedicated to social impact; a co-working and training hub providing resources and guidance for entrepreneurs and small business owners; a multipurpose room for educational programs, events, workforce development initiatives and professional training; a Wi-Fi lounge and collaboration space and a pod and media space for content creation and education.

**Journalists who use pronouns are the latest reason for White House Press to avoid questions**



White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt stated the following: "As a matter of policy, we do not respond to reporters with pronouns in their bios." Her explanation? "Any reporter who chooses to put their preferred pronouns in their bio clearly does not care about biological reality or truth and therefore cannot be trusted to write an honest story."

**MAY**

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



Pope Francis, the first Jesuit and Latin American pontiff in the role, passed away at the Vatican's Casa Santa Marta. He had just met the day before with American Vice President JD Vance.

**25th anniversary World Pride held in Washington, D.C.**

WorldPride 2025, marking the 25th anniversary of WorldPride and DC's 50th Pride, took place in Washington, D.C. from late May to early June 2025, featuring huge events like the Capital Pride Parade on



Pennsylvania Avenue, concerts with artists like Shakira and Khalid, numerous festivals, art exhibits and community gatherings.

**Supreme Court sides with Trump on transgender military ban**



On May 6, 2025, the Supreme Court, in an unsigned 6-3 order, allowed the Trump administration to enforce its ban on transgender people in the military while legal challenges continue in lower courts. The order lifted nationwide injunctions that had previously blocked the policy's implementation.

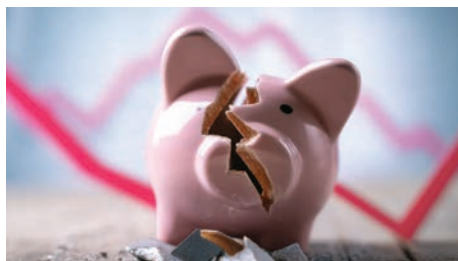
**JUNE**

**'Big Beautiful Bill' spells big ugly trouble for LGBTQ+ healthcare**



The law cuts nearly \$1 trillion from Medicaid, which disproportionately affects the LGBTQ+ community, as an estimated 19% of LGBTQ+ adults and 28% of trans adults rely on Medicaid for health insurance. The cuts are projected to cause 11.8 million people to lose health coverage by 2034.

**Sponsorships drop for US Pride events**



Major corporations like Mastercard, Nissan, Boeing and Comcast reduced or pulled support because of economic pressures, political shifts around Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) and backlash from conservatives threatening to withhold expenditures.

This led to budget shortfalls for many Pride organizations across the country.

**JULY**

**North Carolina County elections boards shift from democratic to GOP control**



Under a new law that took appointment power away from Democratic Gov. Josh Stein, State Auditor Dave Boliek appointed a Republican majority state elections board that extended to all 100 counties flipping local boards from Democratic to GOP control.

**Trump admin cuts LGBTQ+ suicide prevention hotline**



The specialized "Press 3" option for LGBTQ+ youth on the national 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline was terminated by the Trump administration July 17. While the action was viewed largely as anti-LGBTQ+ pandering to Trump's MAGA support base, the service continues to offer counseling for anyone of any sexual orientation or gender identity. Community members in need have also been encouraged to contact The Trevor Project directly.

**Trump's big (ugly) beautiful bill passes and poised to become law**



The legislative package known as "Trump's big beautiful bill" was signed into law by Donald Trump in July 2025. The bill passed the House by a narrow margin of 218-214, after passing the Senate 51-50 with Vice President JD Vance casting the tie-breaking vote.

**USNS Harvey Milk only ship renamed**

Initially the Trump administration claimed it was going to rename several ships



that were viewed by conservative staffers and supporters as "woke" or "divisive," however, in the end, only one ship name was changed: The USNS Harvey Milk, a Navy ship honoring the slain gay rights icon. Renamed the USNS Oscar V. Peterson by Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, the renaming, timed during Pride Month, sparked criticism from LGBTQ+ advocates who recognized it as an erasure of Milk's contributions.

**AUGUST**

**As culture wars flared up under Trump, North Carolina lawmakers pass anti-trans bills**



In the wake of Trump and his minions' anti-trans tirades, North Carolina's Republican party just couldn't wait to follow suit. North Carolina Republicans successfully passed bills in 2025 with provisions that restrict the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals, particularly transgender people, primarily by overriding gubernatorial vetoes. Key legislation passed into law in 2025 includes **HB 805, "Prevent Sexual Exploitation/Women and Minors."** This act defines "sex" based on reproductive anatomy and function at conception or birth for administrative rules and public policies. The law also changes the process for updating sex designations on birth certificates, and prohibits state funding for gender transition treatments for incarcerated individuals. SB 442, the **"Parents Protection Act"** states that a parent or caregiver is not considered abusive or neglectful solely for raising a child according to their biological sex or not affirming a child's gender identity. It also prohibits adoption agencies from denying placements based on a prospective parent's stance on gender transition.

**Andry Romero released from El Salvador, returned to Venezuela**



Venezuelan citizen and openly gay man Andry Hernández Romero was arrested by U.S. immigration authorities in August 2024 after entering the U.S. legally at the border to attend a prearranged asylum appointment. He was held in a U.S. detention center for several months before being deported to El Salvador in mid-March 2025. He was later released from the CECOT prison after 125 days in detention, and arrived back in Caracas, Venezuela, shortly after. Since his return, Romero has been working to rebuild his life and is speaking out about the abuse and torture he and others endured in the Salvadoran prison.



**American airlines defends pro LGBTQ+ policies, reject opposing stockholders**



American Airlines successfully defended its pro-LGBTQ+ policies and commitment to diversity by overwhelmingly rejecting a shareholder proposal that sought to end its participation in the Human Rights Campaign's (HRC) Corporate Equality Index, with shareholders voting nearly 98% against the anti-DEI measure, reinforcing AA's stance as a leader in LGBTQ+ inclusion despite growing political pressures.

**SEPTEMBER**

**Trans gun ban would show further disregard for the Constitution**



Officials in the Trump Justice Department *reportedly* weighed the idea of banning gun ownership by transgender people in September 2025. The idea came about in response to a mass shooting in Minneapolis carried out by a person identified as transgender. To date no such law has been passed. Surprisingly, the idea was even panned by the NRA.

**Tennis icon Martina Navratilova joins Carolina Ascent as minority owner**



It's true! Tennis legend Martina Navratilova is a minority owner of **Carolina Ascent FC**, the Charlotte-based women's professional soccer team in the USL

Gainbridge Super League. She bought a minority stake, about 3-5%, and was attracted by the club's determination and focus on gender equity, a cause she's championed throughout her career.

**Pope Leo XIV reaffirms welcome for LGBTQ+ Catholics**



Pope Leo XIV met privately with Jesuit Father James Martin in a half-hour audience inside the library of the Apostolic Palace. The meeting marked one of the first significant signals from the new pontiff regarding his pastoral approach to LGBTQ+ Catholics. Martin, known internationally for his LGBTQ+ ministry described the encounter as both "very consoling and very encouraging." By granting a publicized audience to Father Martin and endorsing his ministry of outreach, the pope sent a message of continuity to LGBTQ+ Catholics worldwide.

**'LGBTQ+ Americans less religious' survey finds**



Pew Research Center data showed that just under half of LGBTQ+ adults in the U.S. (48 percent) identify with a religion, compared with 73 percent of non-LGBTQ+ adults. That leaves 52 percent of LGBTQ+ individuals describing themselves as atheist, agnostic or "nothing in particular," while only 26 percent of non-LGBTQ+ Americans fall into those categories.

**OCTOBER**

**Conversion therapy for LGBTQ+ minors goes before SCOTUS**

As of this writing, the U.S. Supreme Court (SCOTUS) has heard oral arguments



in the case of *Chiles v. Salazar*, a challenge to Colorado's ban on **conversion therapy** for LGBTQ+ minors. The core legal question is whether the state law violates a licensed therapist's First Amendment right to free speech. A decision has yet to be reached.

**NOVEMBER**

**Creators of project 2025 urge FBI to designate members of trans community as terrorists**



It shouldn't come as a surprise, The Heritage Foundation, the conservative think tank behind **Project 2025**, formally petitioned the FBI to create a new domestic terrorism category called "**Transgender Ideology-Inspired Violent Extremism**" (TIVE). The FBI has not yet shown the request to be a priority.

**New presidential poll shows Pete Buttigieg ahead for Dems**

A Granite State poll showed that former Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg



leads among likely 2028 Democratic primary voters in the state of New Hampshire.

**Trump releases gay Republican George Santos, state may send him back to jail**  
Donald Trump commuted former Rep.



George Santos's federal prison sentence for fraud, releasing him immediately from federal custody. However, the federal release doesn't stop state charges. Santos can still face separate state-level investigations or potential charges, which could still lead to state jail time.

**Supreme Court dismisses Kim Davis's same sex marriage argument**



The Supreme Court, rejected an appeal from former Kentucky county clerk Kim Davis in which she asked the justices to overturn the landmark 2015 ruling that legalized same-sex marriage nationwide. The decision not to hear the case leaves the right to same-sex marriage established by *Obergefell v. Hodges* in place and Davis responsible for \$360,000 in damages and attorney's fees.

**DECEMBER**

**Disco artist, historic gay icon Gloria Gaynor accepts Kennedy Center award from Trump**

Dance music and LGBTQ+ icon Gloria Gaynor, 82, accepted a 2025 Kennedy Center Honors medal presented by Donald Trump in December 2025. The announcement unearthed that Gaynor is a MAGA donor and supporter, despite the fact her career success was largely due to her LGBTQ+ fan base. Known for such seminal gay anthems as "I Will Survive," "I Am What I Am" and "Never Can Say Goodbye," Gaynor had previously indicated in a mid-1990s interview that her religious beliefs were at odds with the LGBTQ+ community. ::





# “The Dogs of Venice”

Out in Print



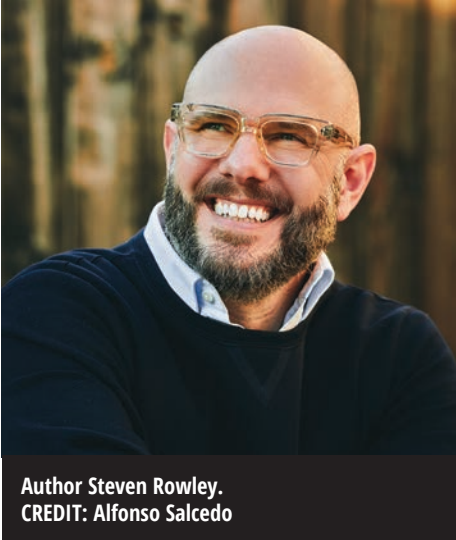
by Terri Schlichenmeyer  
Contributing Writer

“The Dogs of Venice”  
by Steven Rowley  
©2025, G.P. Putnam & Sons  
\$20.00  
65 pages

One person. Two, twelve, twenty, you can still feel alone in a crowded room if it's a place you don't want to be. People say, though, that that's no way to do the holidays; you're supposed to make merry, even when your heart's not in it. You're supposed to feel happy, no matter what – even when, as in **“The Dogs of Venice”** by Steven Rowley, the Christmas tinsel seems tarnished.

Right up until the plane door closed, Paul held hope that Darren would decide to come on the vacation they'd planned for and saved for, for months.

Alas, Darren was a no-show, which was not really a surprise. Three weeks before the departure, he'd announced that their marriage wasn't working for him anymore,



Author Steven Rowley.  
CREDIT: Alfonso Salcedo

and that he wanted a divorce. Paul had said he was going on the vacation anyhow. Why waste a perfectly good flight, or an already-booked B&B? He was going to Venice.

Darren just rolled his eyes.

Was that a metaphor for their entire marriage? Darren had always accused Paul of wanting too much. He indicated now that he felt stifled. Still, Darren's unhappiness hit Paul broadside and so there was Paul, alone in a romantic Italian city, fighting with an espresso

machine in a loft owned by someone who looked like a frozen-food spokeswoman.

He couldn't speak or understand Italian very well. He didn't know his way around, and he got lost really often. But he felt anchored by a dog.

The dog – he liked to call it *his* dog – was a random stray, like so many others wandering around Venice unleashed, but this dog's confidence and insouciant manner inspired Paul. If a dog could be like that, well, why couldn't he?

He knew he wasn't unlovable but solo holidays stunk and he hated his situation. Maybe the dog had a lesson to teach him: Could you live a wonderful life without someone to watch out for, pet, and care for you?

Pick up “The Dogs of Venice,” and you might think to yourself that it won't take long to read. At under 100 pages, you'd be right – which just gives you time to turn around and read it again. Because you'll want to.

In the same way that you poke your tongue at a sore tooth, author Steven Rowley makes you want to remember what it's like to be the victim of a dead romance. You can do it here safely because you simply *know* that Paul is too nice for it to last too long. No spoilers, though, except to say that this novel is about love – gone, resurrected, misdirected – and it unfolds in exactly the way you hope it will. All in a neat evenings' worth of reading. Perfect.

One thing to note: the Christmas setting is incidental and could just as well be any season, which means that this book is timely, no matter when you want it. So grab “The Dogs of Venice,” enjoy it twice with your book group, with your love, or read it alone. ::



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# Sweet Heat Gochujang Meatballs

## Tasty Holiday Treats



by **Liz Schob**  
Qnotes Staff Writer

Nothing disappears faster at a party faster than my sweet and savory gochujang meatballs. This recipe is one of my personal favorites and a guaranteed crowd pleaser. It is incredibly easy to make since it comes together in a crockpot, which makes it a set it and forget it appetizer that is perfect for busy holiday gatherings. You can toss everything in, let it simmer and focus on getting ready for the celebration.

I lived in South Korea for three years in my twenties, and it remains one of the most transformative chapters of my life. I fell in love with the country, the warmth of the people and the food that brought everyone together. I developed this recipe myself be-

cause I love to cook, and I often catch myself recreating the flavors I enjoyed most during those years. Korean dishes taught me how exciting and comforting a meal can be, and this recipe is my way of bringing a little of that joy to my own kitchen. It is not a traditional Korean dish, but it is inspired by the flavors I came to love. It has spicy gochujang, sweet honey, and a rich sauce that coats every bite.

With freezer meatballs and a quick stovetop sauce, this crockpot dish brings a touch of Korean flavor to any potluck spread



or holiday celebration. These meatballs are delicious, full of flavor, and always the first thing to disappear.

### Sweet Heat Gochujang Meatballs

**Prep Time:** 10 minutes

**Cook Time:** 3 hours

**Servings:** about 8

### INGREDIENTS

- 1 (26 ozs.) bag frozen meatballs
- 5 cloves garlic, minced
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 1 teaspoon onion powder
- 3 tablespoons honey
- 2 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce
- 4 tablespoons low sodium soy sauce
- 2 tablespoons gochujang (adjust to heat preference)
- 3 tablespoons ketchup
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1/3 cup water

salt and pepper to taste

- 1/4 cup scallions, thinly sliced
- 1 tablespoon toasted sesame seeds

### DIRECTIONS

1. In a small saucepan over medium heat, melt the butter. Stir in gochujang, garlic, honey, Worcestershire sauce, ketchup, sugar, onion powder, soy sauce and water. Season with salt and pepper to taste.
2. Add the frozen meatballs to your crockpot. Pour the sauce over the meatballs and toss until evenly coated.
3. Cover and cook on high for 3 hours.
4. Garnish with toasted sesame seeds and fresh scallions before serving.
5. Enjoy!

Note:

These meatballs can be made a day ahead. The flavors deepen overnight, and they reheat well in the crockpot on low. ::

# Why are so many people sick?

Be aware of these four illnesses in North Carolina this winter

by **Evan Moore** | *Charlotte Observer*



Getting immunized for flu will help reduce the strain on the health system.

Respiratory illness season is here in North Carolina, and one virus is already spreading at a rapid pace. We spoke with Dr. David Weber, an infectious disease expert at the UNC School of Medicine, to break down which illnesses are circulating in North Carolina and how to stay protected this holiday season.

Which respiratory illnesses are going around North Carolina? Flu cases at UNC Health have doubled for two consecutive weeks, Weber said, with the peak not

expected for at least another six weeks. According to the News and Observer, COVID, RSV and walking pneumonia are also common during this time of year.

**COVID-19:** A contagious and easily spreadable respiratory illness caused by a virus. Anyone infected can spread it, even if they don't have symptoms. Over one million people in the U.S. have died from it, and its complications include "long COVID," which is a chronic condition that can cause permanent disability.

**Influenza (flu):** A contagious and spreadable respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses that infect the nose, throat and lungs. The illness can be mild to severe. (Info: CDC)

**Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV):** A common respiratory virus that causes mild symptoms in most people, but it's the leading cause of infant hospitalization in the U.S. It infects the nose, throat and lungs and can be difficult to tell apart from the common cold. (Info: CDC)

**Walking pneumonia:** A contagious respiratory illness caused by a bacteria. Most infections are mild, although the cough may last for several weeks (and people might not stay in bed when they have it, coining it "walking pneumonia"), but it can cause serious lung infections and require hospitalization. (Info: CDC)

### Can you get COVID and flu at the same time?

Yes, 3-5% of people end up with more than one respiratory virus at once, Weber said. Some at-home tests can detect both COVID and flu, and medical offices routinely check for multiple viruses.

### How to avoid COVID, flu and RSV

The CDC says there are several ways to protect yourself.

**Wear masks:** These illnesses spread through airborne particles, so masking is especially important indoors and in crowded spaces as cases rise.

**Get vaccinated:** Though official guidance from the CDC has shifted, health professionals recommend that most people six months and older get the latest flu and COVID shots. RSV vaccines are recommended for adults 75+, very young children and pregnant people. Older adults can also get a high-dose flu shot. (Note: There's no vaccine for walking pneumonia.)

**Use early treatments:** Oral antivirals for flu and COVID work best when started quickly — within 48 hours of symptoms for flu and within five days for COVID. Walking pneumonia can be treated with antibiotics.

**Stick to basic precautions:** Cover coughs and sneezes, wash your hands, improve airflow by opening windows and stay home when you're sick.

### Is it too late to get a flu or COVID vaccine?

No, it's definitely not too late, Weber said. It takes one to three weeks to develop immunity from a vaccine, so if you're going to travel for Hanukkah in one week, Christmas in two weeks or New Year's in three weeks, there's still time to get that vaccine and immunity. Flu cases are on the rise, especially in the South.

### Where to get a COVID or flu vaccine in North Carolina?

Visit [covid19.ncdhhs.gov/vaccines](https://covid19.ncdhhs.gov/vaccines) and enter your zip code to find a vaccine near you. In general, you can also check out:

- **Pharmacies:** Walk in or schedule appointments at national pharmacies like CVS and Walgreens. You can also inquire with local neighborhood pharmacies.
- **Grocery and big box stores:** Walk in or schedule appointments at stores like Walmart, Target, Harris Teeter, Publix and Carlie C's.
- **Your healthcare provider:** Of course, you can contact your doctor for an appointment. ::

*This article appears courtesy of our media partner The Charlotte Observer.*

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# Holding out for a hero: An interview with Julia Jackman

Out on Film



by Gregg Shapiro  
Contributing Writer

Sometimes the arrival of a movie into our lives is so perfect, it feels like a wish coming true. Such is the case with queer filmmaker Julie Jackman's **"100 Nights of Hero"** (IFC). A fantastical romance with potent queer and feminist messages, the movie is as entertaining as it is enlightening, equal parts hilarious and heartwarming. The primary cast, including Emma Corrin as the titular Hero, along with Maika Monroe and Nicholas Galitzine (who has more than a few shirtless scenes – swoon!), look as though they had as much fun making the movie as audiences will have watching it. Writer/director Jackman was kind enough to make time for an interview before it opened in theaters.

**Gregg Shapiro:** Julia, I'd like to begin by saying how much I enjoyed your sweetly queer feature film debut, **"Bonus Track."**

**Julia Jackman:** Thank you so much!

**GS:** The movie is based on a story co-written by actor Josh O'Connor. How did that project come about?

**JJ:** That was actually during a particularly bleak lockdown. My agent wrote to me and said, "There are these lovely producers," who I also ended working with on ("100 Nights of Hero"), "Erebus Pictures, and this actor Josh O'Connor, and they would like to meet with you to talk about this film, 'Bonus Track.'" I read it, and I wished I'd had more stuff like that when I was going through my own first experiences. I felt really drawn to the warmth of it. Of course, there's a certain element of wish fulfillment in all romantic comedies, but I felt like I wanted more of that. I was intrigued, because I'd never made a romantic comedy. Having met Josh now, it makes sense. But I was like, "Why me?" I was very intrigued. I guess we all were 16 at that exact time, as well, and it was this massive nostalgia trip for all of us.

**GS:** You go from present day in **"Bonus Track"** to a fantasy world set in an unnamed time period with **"100 Nights of Hero."** What was that transition like for you?

**JJ:** It was definitely interesting. I think that it was tempered by the fact that while "Bonus Track" had been brought to me, I had adapted this one actually before I made "Bonus Track," [and] put it in a drawer for later and had had time to sit with the challenge of that. It was still fast, surprising and challenging. Weirdly, it didn't feel as different as I thought it would. It made me feel so old that the kids in the film (which is set in 2006) were calling it a period film. That obviously made me feel absolutely ancient. There was still some world crafting, like what phones, what clothes, someone would use at that time. Building a fantastical world in "100 Nights," I felt like I had to pick some epic details, but then lean into the intimacy because it's an indie film. The three moons did a lot of heavy lifting of the parallel universe. Because it was mostly unfolding in a castle, costumes and moons did the heavy lifting. I'm really indebted to the crew.



Nicholas Galitzine, Maika Monroe and Emma Corrin in a scene from '100 Nights of Hero.'  
CREDIT: Screen Capture/IFC

**GS:** It does look great! When did you first come upon Isabel Greenberg's graphic novel **"The One Hundred Nights of Hero,"** the basis for your film, and did you discover it on your own, or was it recommended to you?

**JJ:** A friend of a friend, not in film, recommended it to me. I just loved it. I really enjoyed the playfulness of it. Again, it was the kind of thing I would have enjoyed when I was growing up. I liked films that had their own oddity to them but still a hopefulness and funniness, like "The Princess Bride."

**GS:** Good example.

**JJ:** The idea of getting to do a queer iteration of the fairy tales and myths that I so enjoyed growing up, and the feeling of being transported to another world instead of staying in social realism, felt like freedom and really exciting.

**GS:** Would you say the story's pro-woman message was also something that appealed to you?

**JJ:** It was hugely appealing. It's interesting to me because, and definitely something I tried to bring forward, is that certainly the patriarchy hurts women. But I think it was really important to me that, while not excusing the actions of some of the men in this, it's not a women versus men issue. No one's having fun. Even if they think they're benefiting from it, as soon as they want something that deviates from it, it's such a slippery slope. No one's gonna adhere to those rules for their whole lives. No one's going to be able to keep that up. It's not fit for purpose for anyone. I wanted to show the pressure. Obviously, it's not fair, and it's not balanced, but it puts an enormous amount of pressure on absolutely everybody and creates this painfully rigid environment.

**GS:** Seeing Emma Corrin as Hero, Nicholas Galitzine as Manfred, and

Maika Monroe as Cherry was one of those moments when you realize how perfectly cast a movie is, that no other actors could have possibly played those characters. Would you agree?

**JJ:** I was so lucky with the cast. Because it's such a big ensemble piece, I had an amazing casting director called Olivia Grant, who was wonderful. The core trio was something I had to think about before we even brought a team on board, because that was going to be the way that the film got made, since I've been sitting with it. I hadn't gone through a traditional development process. I had optioned it on my own. It was developed first and then brought on producers down the line. It was all done in a less traditional way. To be honest, I was absolutely thrilled. I think those three all met properly for the first time on set. Indie film, again. I thought they would all have good chemistry, but I was delighted to see that that was the case.

**GS:** Being a filmmaker who identifies as a member of the LGBTQ community, how important is it for you to bring stories featuring queer characters to audiences?

**JJ:** Really important! But, also, I think it's only in hindsight do you realize just how intrinsically that's what you gravitated towards. When I was growing up, my first crush was Frank-N-Furter in "Rocky Horror" [laughs]. Child me was like, "There's just something I find incredible about this person!" I would just watch that song, again and again.

**GS:** "Sweet Transvestite?"

**JJ:** Yes, yes! That was the whole film for me. I also remember my babysitter, whom I also idolized, when she was 16, and I was eight, putting on "Velvet Goldmine," and telling me to hide during some of the parts. These are things that I remember because

there was something about those that made me pay very close attention. When I was a teenager, my friends joked that every time I liked a character or a thing in a film, they'd end up being gay, even if they weren't out. My entire friend group when I was a teenager, now everyone is out. There was a time when I was the only out person. It's what you gravitate towards. I don't even necessarily intend to do it, but I've noticed that a lot of times the things that I can find my way into the most or that excite me or that I come across just are queer.

**GS:** Without giving away too much, **"100 Nights of Hero"** has a kind of **"Thelma and Louise"** moment, but one that is more hopeful.

**JJ:** 'Hopeful' was really important to me. Even though I know sincerity sometimes can invite eye rolls a little bit more. But that was a sincere part of the graphic novel that I gravitated towards: hopeful anger, basically. Which I think is a tone that a lot of people in marginalized communities feel. We're angry, but we're hopeful. It was also the fact that they were never going to let them go. They love to dangle a choice. This feeling of defiance and living life on your own terms and that being an expression of hope. This idea that when people offer you a false choice or try and take something away from you, all you can do is say, "I know what's happening here, and you're not going to make me feel like you control me."

**GS:** Have you started working on or thinking about your next film project?

**JJ:** Yeah. I'm developing a couple of things. I've got some stuff that it's too early to talk about. There are a couple of things that I'm excited about. I only delivered the film ("100 Nights of Hero") a few months ago. I'm still in that frazzled state. But, yes, watch this space. ::





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