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Joyful Juneteenth Celebration in the City of Hawthorne

By Ricky Richardson
Contributing Writer

Hawthorne, CA- The City of Hawthorne hosted the 4th Annual Juneteenth Celebration, Saturday, June 13, 2026, at Holly Park (2058 W. 120th Street). The event was held from 11:00 am-3:00 pm.

The City of Hawthorne Juneteenth Celebration was a vibrant celebration of community, culture, connections, and heritage on another beautiful day in the "City of Good Neighbors."

The event was hosted by Aundrea Russell of KJLH Radio Free, 102.3. Back by popular demand, DJ Jiji Sweet served up a wonderful soundtrack to complement the day, playing tracks that had party people of all ages dancing between live performances.

City Council members Alex Monteiro and Katrina Manning gave opening remarks. Assemblywoman Tina McKinnor shared an inspiring testimonial about her family and growing up in Texas. Phil



Fernando Pullum Community Arts Center Choir, (Photo by Ricky Richardson)

Wilkes Fixico, member of the Los Angeles Chapter of Buffalo Soldiers 9th & 10th Horse Calvary, Seminole Indian Scout, gave a brief history of the origins of Juneteenth.

The program got underway with a fantastic dance performance by Fantasia Dance. The group debuted new dance routines to the delight of everyone in attendance.

The Fernando Pullam Community Arts Center Choir was up next. These talented young vocalists put their whole hearts into their performance. It was encouraging and inspiring to see that the choir members not only sang the songs, but that the lyrics resonated with them on a deeper level. They got off to a rousing start with their arrangement of "Lift Every Voice and Sing." They continued with "Not Gonna Let No One Turn Me Around," "Holy Spirit, We Welcome You," and "Emmanuel." The choir took the crowd and me on a musical journey to Africa during the Motherland Medley; "Siyahamba," "Jambo Bwana," and "Pata Pata." Narvel "Pooh" Mayo is the Musical Director and Piano Instructor.

JWB is an awesome trio that is a regular performers at many events in Hawthorne and around town. They thrilled the crowd as they performed a set of relevant, timeless, classic R&B, soul, and jazz classics.

The City of Hawthorne's Juneteenth Celebration concluded with a performance by Durti Ryce, featuring Devon. The crowd and I were grooving to the soulful R&B sounds of the ultimate Frankie Beverly & Maze tribute band. Durti Ryce delved into the extensive catalog of Frankie Beverly & Maze to entertain a captivated audience. The group opened with "Look at California," followed by "Happy Feelin' While I'm Alone," "Feel That You're



Fantasia Dance (Photo by Ricky Richardson)

Feelin' and "Joy and Pain." There was a brief pause for the cause, as the program segued into a Tina Turner Experience featuring the dynamic vocalist Monique Renee. Ms. Renee performed "I Need Your Lovin'," "Behind the Groove," and "Square Biz," with the audience singing along in unison.

Deron returned to the stage to perform "Silky Soul," "Golden Time of Day," "Before I Let Go," and a relevant, timely, and unifying classic track, "We Are One."

The vibes were festive in Holly Park as residents and visitors enjoyed mouthwatering treats served up by local food trucks, participated in engaging, interactive arts and crafts, and jumpers for children.

Woman Convicted for Throwing Dynamite at Her Boyfriend and Blowing Off His Hand

Keyonna Waddell, a 35-year-old woman from Suffolk County, New York, has been convicted after throwing a stick of dynamite into her sleeping boyfriend's bedroom following an argument. The blast caused him to lose his hand, and she now faces up to 25 years in prison.

A Suffolk County jury found Waddell guilty of first-degree assault and criminal possession of a weapon. District Attorney Raymond A. Tierney confirmed the verdict and described the case as a serious act of domestic violence involving explosives.

According to KGNS, prosecutors said the incident happened on March 22, 2024, after a dispute between the couple. Waddell allegedly entered her boyfriend's bedroom while he slept and threw a stick of dynamite inside before leaving.

The victim woke up to a hissing sound and noticed a flame on the floor of his room. He tried to put out the fire but could not stop the device from burning.

He then picked up the dynamite and attempted to throw it outside. It detonated in his hand, causing catastrophic injuries that led to the loss of his hand. Doctors later amputated part of his arm due to the damage.

After the explosion, the victim saw Waddell running out of the apartment. Police arrested her the following day. Investigators also said she had previously threatened him with dynamite during earlier arguments.

Waddell is scheduled to be sentenced on May 27. She faces a maximum sentence of 25 years in prison.

Black Man from Texas Gets 45 Years in Prison For Stealing LEGO Toys

Winston Love, a 28-year-old black man from Tarrant County, Texas, received a 45-year prison sentence after a jury convicted him of organized retail theft. Prosecutors say he stole hundreds of LEGO sets and other items from Target stores across North Texas during a 50-day crime spree.

A Tarrant County jury found Love guilty of organized retail theft with a deadly weapon. Prosecutors said he targeted multiple Target locations and stole more than 200 LEGO sets, along with coffee makers, vacuum cleaners, and PlayStation controllers.

According to Chron, authorities said the thefts took place over a 50-day period in 2025. During that time, Love repeatedly struck stores across North Texas, carrying out fast and coordinated thefts.

The case escalated on Oct. 27, 2025, when Love fled a Target in Mansfield after a loss-prevention officer identified him. He sped away in a vehicle, drove on the wrong side of the road, and endangered other motorists, including school buses.

In early November, police arrested Love after a report of stolen LEGO products worth more than \$1,200 at a Target in Watauga. Officers later took him into custody following a brief standoff at his home.

Investigators said Love operated across at least 14 cities in North Texas. He also had eight outstanding felony warrants for theft in multiple counties and was linked to a wider theft ring operating between Texas and Oklahoma involving large amounts of LEGO merchandise.

Prosecutors noted that this case was the first jury trial under Texas' updated organized retail theft law, which took effect on Sept. 1, 2025. Authorities credited Target loss prevention staff and police departments in Euless, Grapevine, Mansfield, and Watauga for helping secure the conviction.

Chinese People are Buying a Black Doll Designed to Be Abused, Burned, and Stomped to Help Relieve Stress

A Black doll called "Natasha" has gone viral on Chinese social media as a stress-relief toy. It is designed for users to hit, stretch, and stomp, and the trend has drawn backlash from Black communities online in Hong Kong and abroad.

The doll resembles a small child and is typically produced in dark skin tones with exaggerated facial features. Users have shared videos on platforms like RedNote and Douyin showing people squeezing, boiling, and stomping the toy. It is also sold on e-commerce sites such as Taobao and is commonly made from soft memory foam or thermoplastic rubber, according to Hong Kong Free Press.

Writer Monique Franz, founder of Kinsman Avenue Publishing, said the trend reflects deeper social concerns. She said, "By inviting people to take out their stresses on a Black body, we invite populations to abuse our Black bodies at their whims, robbing us of our actual humanity. While this is a game to others, Black people are experiencing widespread global abuse, which is the result of portrayals of us in such degrading ways."

African-American entrepreneur Jayne Jeje, who is based in Hong Kong, said the viral content shows a persistent pattern in how Black culture is viewed online. She described the videos as "absolutely diabolical" and added, "I'd find them offensive no matter who was being depicted, but this is deeply personal because I am proud of my beautiful dark skin. I refuse to accept the idea that it is something to be squeezed, slapped, mocked, or turned into entertainment for the masses."

Team USA Opens World Cup in Dominant Fashion, Defeats Paraguay 4-1

By Earl Heath
Contributing Sports

WriterThe U.S. Men's National Team opened its World Cup campaign in impressive fashion, overwhelming Paraguay 4-1 before a packed crowd at SoFi Stadium in Los Angeles. The Americans wasted little time taking control, building a 3-0 advantage and eventually recording their highest-scoring performance in a World Cup match.

Forward Folarin Balogun electrified the crowd with his play and helped lead an attacking unit that showed both speed and precision. Balogun is one of 13 players making their World Cup debut for the United States. Born in New York City to Nigerian parents and raised in London, he was eligible to represent three countries before committing to the United States in 2023. With family members watching from the stands, Balogun described the victory as unforgettable. "A real dream," he said. "It was a dreamy night." Fast Start Sets the Tone

The Americans kept constant pressure on Paraguay throughout the match. Their relentless energy paid off early when a pass from midfielder Weston McKennie deflected off Paraguay defender Andrés Cubas Bobadilla for an own goal in the seventh minute.

The U.S. attack continued to create chances and kept Paraguay on its heels for most of the evening.

Captain Christian Pulisic suffered a minor knock to his calf during the first half but said afterward he expects to be available for the Americans' next group-stage match against Australia.

"I got a bit of a kick in the first half," Pulisic told reporters. "I'm taking a little bit of precaution today, but I'm hoping I'll be fine in the next few days."



Folarin Balogun (20) celebrates his second goal during the team's World Cup 2026 opening match against Paraguay.

Head coach Mauricio Pochettino also expressed confidence that Pulisic would be ready for the next match.

Paraguay finally broke through in the 73rd minute when midfielder Mauricio scored the team's lone goal. However, substitute Giovanni Reyna answered in second-half stoppage time, adding the Americans' fourth goal and sealing the 4-1 victory.

U.S. Attack Shows Growth
The opening win highlighted the progress the U.S. offense has made since the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, where the Americans scored just three goals in four matches.

With the tournament expanded to 48 teams, advancing from the group stage has become more attainable. Following the opening victory, another win against Australia or favorable results in the remaining group matches could be enough to send the United States into the knockout round.

Finishing first in the group, however, would provide a more favorable path deeper into the tournament.

For one night, Team USA looked every bit the contender, opening the World Cup with a performance that was, as the old song says, "solid as a rock."

FIFA Fan Festival 2026 held at the Historic Los Angeles Coliseum

By Ricky Richardson
Contributing Writer

Los Angeles — It's a wrap, ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls. The first weekend of the FIFA World Cup 2026 is one for the records/history books. Hundreds of thousands of soccer fans, foodies, and cultural connoisseurs descended on the iconic Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum at Exposition Park for the FIFA World Cup Fan Festival, June 11-14, 2026.

It was a sight to see as the inside of the historic Coliseum was transformed into the largest FIFA World Cup Celebration in Los Angeles—bringing together fans from across the region and around the world to experience live match broadcasts, musical performances, immersive fan activations, international food offerings, and the unmatched energy of the FIFA World Cup atmosphere.

Soccer fans lined up several hours before the gates opened. The lively group was dressed in jerseys of Mexico, t-shirts, jewelry, the Mexican flag, other accessories, and memorabilia. All 40,000 tickets for the FIFA Fan Festival 2026 were sold in advance.

The Plaza of the Coliseum housed the LAFC, Bank of America, and Kaiser Activation stations. Fans were able to participate in soccer theme activation or received soccer theme keepsake swag.

The energy level on the field was palpable. The activation stations on the field engaged a steady flow of visitors to their respective booths. The activations on the field were Metro, LA Galaxy, Telemundo, Archer, Amgen, Fanatics, DoorDash, KIA, Hyundai, and Coca-Cola. Discover Los Angeles had several beautiful artwork stations on the plaza for selfies.

The previously mentioned 40,000 fans were spread out on the field, in the seating area, as well as people gathered on the Plaza. Everyone was on site for the same thing; to enjoy some great music, soccer-centric, family-friendly activities, and international flavors served up by a smorgasbord of food vendors.

On the Main Stage, DJ Mando Fresko was on the ones, and twos was tasked with firing up the crowd with an eclectic soundtrack of global tracks.

Next up were Mariachi Arcoiris de Los Angeles. The group took the crowd and me on a musical



Los Lobos (Photo by Ricky Richardson)



LA Galaxy Activation Station (Photo by Ricky Richardson)

journey through several regions of Mexico during their time in the spotlight.

The stage was set for East LA icons Los Lobos for their hour-long set. "It's an honor and a privilege to be playing as part of the FIFA World Cup festivities in Los Angeles," said Steve Berlin, of Los Lobos, in a statement. "We're happy to join with all of Los Angeles to present the best of what this city has to offer to all our guests, and we look forward to enjoying the games with everyone."

Los Lobos delved into their catalog of classic hits to entertain the captivated crowd. Their set consisted of "Come On, Let's Go" (the title of this song would be a great FIFA World Cup Anthem). The band continued with Mas Y Mas, "Chuchos Cumbia," and "Volver Volver." This selection by Vicente Fernandez resonated with the crowd and the fans. Other selections performed were "Will the Wolf Survive," "Evangeline," "Flattop Joint" (by The Blazers), and the popular track "La Bamba/ Good Lovin'."

All eyes shifted to the big screens for the start of the match, Mexico vs. South Africa, broadcast live from Estadio Azteca in Mexico City, in front of 80,000 fans.

It didn't take long before Mexico got on the scoreboard. Julian Quiñones scored the first goal for Mexico with ten minutes of the match. The goal sent a surge of energy throughout the Coliseum. Mexico extended its aggressive strategy in the second half. Raúl Jiménez sealed the deal for the first opening match of the FIFA World Cup 2026.

DJ Deorro performed at the official FIFA Fan Festival, after the match, in what could be viewed as a victory party for the gathering of fans. The Coliseum grounds were electrifying as Deorro fired up the crowd with a mix of electronic music fused with World Cup spirit throughout the festivities. Manchester United icon Rio Ferdinand's surprise appearance on stage with Deorro received a thunderous welcome.

The FIFA Fan Festival 2026 concluded with a



Deorro and Rio Ferdinand (Photo by Ricky Richardson)

set by DJ Mads, who built on the massive World Cup energy fans were experiencing throughout the Coliseum.

The four-day FIFA Fan Festival 2026 continued each day with large crowds of soccer fans to watch FIFA World Cup matches and to party hearty with DJ sets and live cultural performances for lifelong memorable experiences.

World Cup fever continues until July 19th. I'm sure that you are ready to get caught up in the various watch parties or viewings around town to feel the excitement of the moment. You are guaranteed to feel the adrenaline-fueled atmosphere amongst other fans at FIFA World Cup Fan Zones (community watch parties and fan events) as the incredible matches of FIFA World Cup 2026 hit the fields for the next thirty days.



LAFC Activation Station (Photo by Ricky Richardson)

World & Nation

Donalds Inching Closer to Becoming First-Ever Black Florida Governor

By David L. Snelling
South Florida Times

MIAMI — In 2018, then-Tallahassee mayor Andrew Gillum upset U.S. Rep. Gwendolyn Graham in Democratic Primary in the Florida gubernatorial race.

Gillum won despite his opponent's massive endorsements, a campaign war chest and support from her father, former longtime U.S. Senator and Florida governor Bob Graham.

Gillum was poised to make history as the first-ever Black governor in Florida's history, but he narrowly lost to Republican Ron DeSantis, who was hand-picked by President Donald Trump during his first term.

As DeSantis is preparing to leave political office this year due to term limits, U.S. Rep. Byron Donalds (R-Fort Myers) is seeking the same history-making distinction as Gillum.

Buoyed by an endorsement from Trump, Donalds, 47, is the front runner for the GOP nomination for the 2026 midterm elections.

If he wins, it will most likely set up a showdown with potential Democratic nominee David Jolly, who's leading in the polls as the party's favorite.

But Trump's declining popularity, the GOP's latest actions including the war with Iran, high gas and food prices and an economic downturn might impact Donald's chances of making history, according to several political strategists.

In the latest poll, Donalds leads in the GOP Primary by 54 percent, according to Fabrizio, Lee and Associates.

The percentage represents a nine-percentage point lead over Investor James Fishback (nine percent), Florida's Lt. Gov. Jay Collins (7 percent) and former state House Speaker Raul Renners who has just 2 percent, which is less than the survey's 4.78 percent margin.

Donalds' chances of becoming Florida's first-ever Black governor has doubled since 2025.

The congressman has also outpaced his opponents, taking in roughly \$81 million as of May 2026.

Donalds is positioned to heavily invest in Florida's expensive television markets and ground operations.

"Undecideds have moved toward Byron Donalds at a greater rate than any other Republican candidate since January," a polling memo reads.



U.S. Congressman Byron Donalds speaking with attendees at the 2025 AmericaFest at the Phoenix Convention Center in Phoenix, Arizona.

"Despite their constant lies and attacks, Fishback and Collins are not gaining any real traction, and Byron Donalds is clearly the overwhelming favorite to be the GOP nominee in this year's election for governor."

During an interview with Orlando News 6 last week, Donalds said he would, if elected governor, continue to have local law enforcement agents work with ICE agents to continue the crackdown on undocumented immigrants.

Donalds said law enforcement had his full support, and ICE has been operating within the confines of the law, "beyond a shadow of a doubt," despite what critics say.

"We have a decision to make, every Floridian has to make that decision," Donalds said. "Are we gonna abide by the law and be a law and order state, or are we going to choose to not do that? I choose to follow the law, and I choose to make sure that Florida complies with federal immigration law."

We are going to continue that standard that Gov. DeSantis has set.

In previous interviews, Donalds said he had his eyes set on the Governor's mansion when he served in the Florida House of Representatives as a Democrat.

He switched parties in 2010 and became involved in the Tea Party movement.

GOP leaders encouraged him to run for U.S. House of Representatives in 2012, but he finished fifth in a field of six candidates.

He ran again four years later and won. But Donalds prompted backlash from several Black GOP and Democratic leaders for his comments about the Jim Crow era.

During a political outreach event in 2024, Donalds said that during Jim Crow, black families were together, and more black people were not just conservative.

"Black people have always been conservative-minded, but more black people voted conservatively," he said. "And then, HEW, Lyndon Johnson, and then you go down that road, and now we are where we are. What's happened in America the last ten years, and I say it because it's my contemporaries... you're starting to see more black people being married in homes raising kids."

After Black leaders pushed back on his remarks, Donalds denied "that Black people were doing better under Jim Crow" or that "Jim Crow is great", and also denied having been inaccurate when he said that black marriage rates were relatively high during that era.

During a campaign stop in Tampa this week, Donalds said his bid for governor is gaining momentum and is resonating with Black voters, even as he consolidates support within the GOP.

"We've actually been seeing a lot of love out there. I think there are people who, you know, they're Black, they live in Florida," he said. "They've kind of been watching for a while and now that we're taking this step, they're saying, you know what? Let me pay a little more attention. Let me hear what he has to say."

Donalds said he believes the Black community will get behind his campaign because his political platform addresses the issues that are impacting their lives each day.

"When we campaign, we're talking about insurance. We're talking about health care. We're

talking about education, about these policies that really impact people's lives. And, you know, I think when people are hearing that, especially when Black voters are hearing that, they're saying, 'Okay, you know what? He is talking about things that matter in my life as well, not just political talking points,' he said.

If Donalds wins the GOP nomination, Jolly is the presumptive Democratic nominee after Orange County Mayor Jerry Demings suspended his campaign following his cancer diagnosis.

Jolly previously served as a Republican Congressman representing Pinellas County before he was defeated in 2016 by former Gov. Charlie Crist.

Jolly became an outspoken critic of President Trump and left the GOP in 2018 before registering as a Democrat in 2025 and announcing his intent to run for Governor.

In several polls, Donalds leads Jolly by single digits, but in one poll among young people, Jolly had a four-point lead.

Jolly is seeking to become the first Florida Democratic governor in almost three decades.

He said Florida is moving in the wrong direction under the DeSantis administration.

"The 'Free State of Florida' is becoming one of the most expensive states in the country, and it is a place where you do not have the opportunity to exercise who you love or who you worship. You feel different in this state based on the color of your skin or where you were born, and that's wrong," Jolly said at a town hall meeting sponsored by the Tiger Bay Club in Orlando.

Jolly said Florida needs to create an economy that works for everybody, with a state government that provides services that stimulate the economy and where everyone is welcomed and empowered to participate.

"It doesn't matter 'whether you are from Pennsylvania, Ohio, or Mexico,'" Jolly said. "Those are the values that define this candidacy."

DeSantis has yet to endorse any gubernatorial candidate, including Collins.

DeSantis might not support Donalds as his GOP successor given the bitter history after Trump endorsed the congressman over the governor's wife, Casey DeSantis, who was rumored to be running.

Chicago 'Fibroid Slayer' Makes History with Biggest Case of His Career

By Jennifer Porter Gore

Word in Black

It was a case most gynecologists wouldn't touch—literally.

Brianna Johnson of Chicago, who was 17 weeks pregnant, had a fibroid tumor on her uterus that weighed 27 pounds. One gynecologist after another told her the growth had to come out, but the only way of doing that meant removing her uterus and ending her pregnancy.

Unwilling to lose both her child and her fertility, she traveled to Chicago's gritty South Side for one more consultation. It was an appointment with Dr. Pierre Johnson—the self-described Fibroid Slayer. [Doctor and patient had never met.]

A Black OB-GYN and surgeon who practices at Loretto Hospital, a facility that primarily serves low-income patients, Johnson examined the

woman's distended abdomen and saw what others didn't: a way to safely remove the giant fibroid without harming the fetus or removing her uterus.

And it worked: Johnson surgically removed the massive fibroid, and mother and fetus are doing just fine. Then, the doctor did something just as unusual in medicine's buttoned-up culture: he posted about it on Instagram.

"I'm the best at this," she had the most enormous fibroid I've ever seen," he said in the video, acknowledging that even the higher-ups at Loretto had trepidations about his plan. "There were so many people that tried to block the surgery" because it seemed too risky.

"But at the end of the day, there's so much that happens in medicine that people do not understand," he said, suggesting that—because the patient is a Black woman—racial bias likely played a role in other doctors' reluctance to operate.

Then, in an Instagram video, Johnson made it plain.

"I don't want to toot my own horn or get too big about it, but I'm the best at this," he said, breaking into a megawatt smile. "This right here, nobody could have done this. Nobody could have completed this but your boy... I'm just so happy to have helped her."

Though Johnson already has a substantial social media following—the bespectacled surgeon with the touches of gray in his goatee and short dreadlocks has 126,000 followers on Instagram—his triumph over a tumor the size of a small child went viral. That's arguably because Black women face some of the nation's worst reproductive health outcomes: high rates of fibroids, exorbitant maternal mortality rates and medical bias.

Patients failed by the system. With Black doctors making up less than 6 percent of the U.S. physician workforce—and even fewer specializing in obstetrics and gynecology—Johnson's work sits at the intersection of access, trust and advocacy. He has developed a following, using both the operating room and the algorithm to reach patients who say the system has too often failed them.

A Chicago South Side native himself and a graduate of Xavier University, Johnson earned his medical degree from the University of Illinois, where he was the only Black student in his class. He then returned to Chicago and joined the staff at Loretto.

"I'm at Loretto Hospital by design and by choice," Johnson says. The hospital, he says, "understands my vision. They respect what I do."

Word In Black spoke with Dr. Johnson about his origins, his groundbreaking surgical techniques, and what Black women need to know when seeking gynecological care.

The following has been edited for brevity and clarity.

Word In Black: How old were you when you knew you wanted to be a doctor?

Dr. Pierre Johnson: I was about five or six years old. I'm just a very purpose-driven person. When I was a senior in high school, my term paper for my career goal was literally titled 'My Life as an OB-GYN.'

As a [South Side] kid, I saw just disparities, racism, just poor health care, and experienced it. Through my mother, through my family, and just watched it. As a kid, I knew that one of my goals was to provide care for women all over the world—starting with Chicago.

Q: How did Brianna Johnson, the patient with

the 27-pound fibroid, find you, and how did you know you could help her?

A: She actually—through marriage—is related to a distant cousin of mine. When my relative reached out to me and told me about it, it just didn't sound right. Women with cases like hers typically have an issue getting pregnant. So, when I heard it, I said, 'I don't care how big it is, I can do it.' I'd already done 20-pound fibroids preserving the uterus. I've perfected a skill, a technique that no one taught me, that I taught myself.

Q: Can you explain fibroids in simple terms for people who may not be familiar?

A: Look at a uterus as a house. You've got the inside [rooms], the drywall, and the roof. Fibroids could be inside where you are—those are intracavitary or submucosal fibroids, and they're a huge problem. They could be in the drywall, which is the muscle; they can be somewhat of a problem but not a huge one. Or they could be on the roof.

If a tree branch falls off a tree and hits your roof, you probably won't know it happened. For this particular patient, these enormous fibroids were on the roof—connected to the uterus through a big stalk. The baby is inside, unaware of everything on the roof. So, getting the fibroid off of the roof should not impact what's happening on the inside.

Q: What was the largest fibroid you had removed before this patient?

A: Before her, it was 20 pounds. A woman from the East Coast. Think about 20 pounds—that's just walking around with an extra 20-pound weight on your body. It's crazy. But for this patient, 27 pounds with this large mass, think about a carry-on suitcase—a 24-inch carry-on suitcase—and put that in your body.

Q: How did social media change your reach and the complexity of your cases?

A: When I finished residency in 2013 and was in central Illinois for three years, my mindset was: I'm not turning down any case. The hardest cases—I'm taking everything, no matter what it is. I will figure it out.

Then I moved to Chicago, word of mouth started growing [number of] cases, and I started getting active on social media, just teaching. People in Atlanta, Philadelphia started reaching out—I'm in Atlanta, I have a problem, I heard about you. Pre-pandemic, 2018, 2019, that's when people really started connecting with me from outside Chicago.

I started teaching people: if you have a problem, adjust your insurance so it can give you the opportunity to move around and choose your care. Don't let your geographical limitations hinder you. Invest in a PPO plan that allows you to move. As I started preaching this on social media, the cases got way more complex. When things opened back up in 2022, 2023—it was like floodgates. It just started to grow.

Q: What questions should women ask a surgeon before trusting them with fibroid care?

A: If you need surgery, the questions you have to ask are: What is your experience with dealing with these types of cases? What is your philosophy about removing all fibroids? From a complication standpoint, what complications have you experienced, and how have you dealt with them?

What is your percentage rate of success converting myomectomies to hysterectomies? Meaning, if the doctor goes into surgery planning to take out fibroids and restore the uterus, how many times has he or she ended up aborting that plan and having to take the whole uterus out? That's



A pregnant Brianna Johnson speaks with Dr. Pierre Johnson (off camera) in an interview after having a 27-pound fibroid removed, while preserving the life of her growing baby. (Photos courtesy of Tik Tok/Pierre Johnson, MD, FACOG and Loretto Hospital)

an excellent question that people don't ask.

Q: You mention a doctor's philosophy and mindset. How can a patient research that?

A: When people say they do research, what kind of research are you doing? ChatGPT and Google are really not research if you're looking at a provider. This person literally has your life in their hands for as long as you're on that table under anesthesia. The level of trust you have to have in this person is the highest level of trust you will ever have in another human being.

That research starts with their social media platforms. Whatever they're talking about, whatever they're professing they do, should be reflected in their personal life. If they have different types of views than you—views that are evident on their platforms—then maybe what they're telling you might not be exactly what it is. Do research on them as a person, not just as a physician. Don't just look at their Google reviews. Don't just look at a website.

Q: What are the red flags a woman should never overlook when choosing a provider?

A: If a person has ideals and thoughts that aren't in alignment with your cultural beliefs, they may not be the person you think they are. When you're looking at providers—people you're trusting with your life—don't think that because they wear a white coat, they're going to look at you differently than their actual beliefs.

If they think DEI is a problem, why do you think that now, when caring for you, they're going to treat you like they would treat their own mother or sister?

Q: You went viral for saying patients should look beyond gender and race when choosing a surgeon. Can you explain that?

A: As a women's healthcare specialist, I said that when you are choosing a surgeon, it should not matter the gender, the race, the sexual orientation—none of that matters. You have to look into the soul and the ideals of that person. I'm saying cut out race, gender, all of those things from your criteria.

There are Caucasian providers who are in this for the right reasons and will take care of you. Don't exclude someone you need because of a bias. Look at a person and look at what they bring to the table, and who they really are. If we did more of that, we would watch the numbers change.

Q: Any final advice for women navigating fibroid care and gynecological health?

A: Understand you have options. Get a second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth opinion. Somebody is going to talk to you, and you'll feel it—'Ah, this is my person.' Don't limit yourself.

Councilman Johnson calls for Action to Keep Mavericks in Dallas - Garland Journal

By Kamira LaNay, Correspondent
Texas Metro News

As discussions continue surrounding the Dallas Mavericks' plans for a new arena in North Dallas, Dallas City Councilman Maxie Johnson says the conversation is about more than basketball; it's about equity, community investment, and the future of Southern Dallas.

In a recent one-on-one, Johnson expressed concern that the proposed move could worsen longstanding economic and racial divides within the city.

"Moving Dallas north continues the historical racial divide that we have experienced," Johnson said. "For one of my colleagues to say on social media, 'Welcome to Fort North Dallas,' it's a slap in Southern Dallas' face."

The Mavericks recently announced plans to pursue a new arena and entertainment district at the former Valley View Mall site in North Dallas. While city leaders continue discussions about the team's future, Johnson believes Southern Dallas residents should not be overlooked in the process. "It promotes racial divide," Johnson said. "It says to the Mavericks, 'Come on up here. Don't worry about them.' And that's a problem for me. That's a problem for Southern Dallas."

Johnson emphasized the longstanding relationship between Southern Dallas and the Mavericks organization, noting that residents have consistently supported the team over the years.

"When we needed the Mavericks, they were here for us. When the Mavericks needed us, we were here for them," he said. "We helped get that vote across. Southern Dallas always shows up."

As uncertainty remains about the team's future, Johnson said community leaders are continuing to advocate for the Mavericks to remain connected to Dallas. "We're saying, don't abandon us," he said. "We know it's been ugly, but the people who have made it ugly are not Southern Dallas."

Johnson also pointed to support from fellow council members and Southern Dallas leaders who have publicly expressed their desire to keep the Mavericks in the city. "We're saying we want you here," Johnson said.

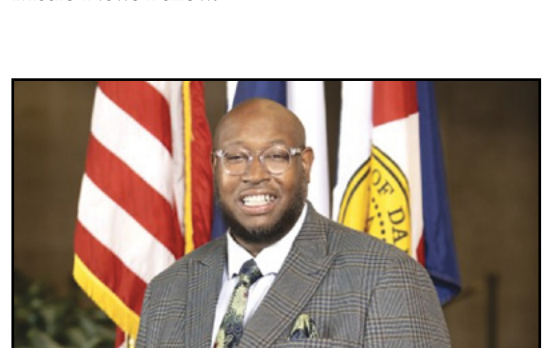
When asked what concrete steps city leaders are taking to keep the Mavericks in Dallas, Johnson acknowledged that the City Council still needs to make decisions about downtown development and the team's long-term home. "The council has to make a decision," Johnson said. "We have to take care of business. I understand where they're at. They're saying they don't know where they're going to be in downtown."

For now, Johnson said city leaders are continuing conversations with the organization while urging the team to remain committed to Dallas. "Don't leave us," he said. "We love you. We want you here."

As negotiations and planning discussions continue, residents and city leaders alike are

watching closely to see what decisions will be made and what they could mean for the future economic landscape of Dallas. Kamira LaNay is a 2026 Journalism and Communications graduate of Morgan State University. She will spend the next year as a Texas Metro News Fellow.

Kamira LaNay is a 2026 Journalism and Communications graduate of Morgan State University. She will spend the next year as a Texas Metro News Fellow.



Council Member Maxie Johnson announced he will hold a press conference regarding the Dallas Mavericks recent announcement about choosing the Valley View area for their new arena. Photo: City of Dallas.

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Entertainment

Barack and Michelle Obama Attend Portrait Unveiling After UFC Fighter Josh Hokit Calls Her a 'Man'

Barack and Michelle Obama Attend Portrait Unveiling After UFC Fighter Josh Hokit Calls Her a 'Man'

Barack and Michelle Obama unveiled their first commissioned portrait together at Barack's presidential library in Chicago, painted by Njideka Akunyili Crosby.

Barack Obama and Michelle Obama stepped out one day after UFC fighter Josh Hokit called the former first lady a "man" at a White House event.

The couple attended the unveiling of their portrait at Barack's presidential library in Chicago on Monday, June 15. The painting, which was the pair's first commissioned portrait together, was done by Njideka Akunyili Crosby. It features dense layers of embedded images alongside the imagery of Barack, 64, and Michelle, 62, as they sit in an office setting.

"Barack and I were so honored to have @NjidekaAkunyiliCrosby create our portrait for the Obama Presidential Center," Michelle wrote via Instagram on Monday. "Her artistic brilliance shines through — and the way she infused such life and joy into the piece is truly extraordinary. We love it, and we think everyone who visits the Center will too!"

Michelle also included a clip of her and Barack greeting Crosby, 43, and seeing the finished piece of art for the first time.

Dana White Responds to UFC Fighter Josh Hokit Calling Michelle Obama 'A Man' at White House Event

"Before we get any commentary in, we just got to soak it in," Barack said while Michelle pointed

out the art had all their "stories within the stories."

Michelle gushed, "You got everything in there!"

Barack, for his part, had one minor grievance with the portrait and teased Crosby for making his hair gray.

"My only real question is how come you didn't dye my hair in the photo?" he joked. "Don't they usually touch it up a little bit?"

Both Barack and Michelle applauded Crosby for her hard work on the portrait and were ecstatic with the end result. Barack shared he was going to get a suit made that resembled the one she painted him in. Michelle also gushed about the chance of getting to be involved with Crosby's work.

"You know how long I've been wanting this woman to do something with and for me?" she shared while giving the artist a hug. "We did it!"

Crosby added that it was "an honor" to create the portrait, which is featured in the presidential library.

Barack Obama Calls Wife Michelle 'The Love of My Life' in Adorable Birthday Tribute.

Barack and Michelle's outing comes one day after Hokit, 38, made a controversial remark about the former first lady following his victory at the UFC Freedom 250 event at the White House.

"Michelle Obama is a man," Hokit declared on Sunday, June 14, in a post-fight interview with Joe Rogan after defeating fellow heavyweight Derrick Lewis. "Am I right, America?"

The Obamas have not addressed Hokit's comment. Us Weekly previously reached out to Michelle's representatives for comment but did not hear back.



The White House later responded to Hokit's remark, with spokesman Steven Cheung telling CNN's Jake Tapper on Monday, "He had a great

win last night. He showed toughness and the ability to pressure his opponent both on his feet and on the ground."

Michael Jackson's Son Bigi 'Blanket' Jackson Lists Calabasas Estate With Elevator for Nearly \$4 Million



Michael Jackson's son Bigi "Blanket" Jackson "Blanket" Jackson may soon be saying goodbye to Calabasas.

Michael Jackson's son Bigi "Blanket" Jackson is selling his six-bedroom, seven-bathroom home in Calabasas for nearly \$4 million after purchasing it for \$2.6 million in 2019.

In Touch can confirm that the 24-year-old writer and director listed his six-bedroom, seven-bathroom home in California for just under \$4 million after purchasing the property for \$2.6 million in December 2019.

The 6,252-square-foot property is located in

the guard-gated Mountain View Estates community in Calabasas and is "designed for both grand entertaining and comfortable everyday living," according to a listing.

The home features a formal living room with coffered ceilings and a fireplace, a formal dining room with a butler pantry, an expansive family room with a fireplace and full-service bar as well as a custom wood-paneled elevator.

The chef's kitchen includes premium appliances with a large center island, walk-in pantry and spacious breakfast area. All secondary bedrooms feature private en-suite bathrooms, and the grand primary suite includes a fireplace, dual walk-in closets and separate his-and-her bathrooms connected by a walk-through shower and soaking tub.

Additional amenities include a laundry room with sink, a three-car garage, a pool and spa with an automatic pool cover, a covered patio, built-in BBQ center with countertop island and a spacious backyard area.

Earlier this year, Bigi's sister, Paris Jackson, sold her five-bedroom, five-bathroom property just months after she purchased the \$5.25 million home on June 12, 2025.

Paris — who has an estimated net worth of \$150 million, according to Celebrity Net Worth — also owns two other properties in California.

The news of the Jackson siblings comes after the recent release of Michael, the new biographical film featuring Jaafar Jackson as their late father.

The King of Pop died on June 25, 2009, at age 50.

Naomi Osaka Responds to Backlash Over Dinner Event for Other Black Tennis Players

Naomi Osaka defended her decision to host a Black tennis players' dinner ahead of the French Open. She co-hosted the event with Taylor Townsend to highlight inclusion, shared experience, and connection off the court amid online criticism.

Naomi Osaka and Taylor Townsend organized a private dinner in Paris, France, during French Open week. The gathering brought together Black players and tennis figures to highlight community beyond competition.

The dinner, known as "The Black Party," took place at Soho House Paris with support from CCG Social. Guests included Gaël Monfils, Coco Gauff, Christopher Eubanks, and Asia Muhammad.

At the event, Osaka said, "To be a minority in a sport like tennis makes most days feel really isolated, but when I see other players that look

like me, I feel a sense of fellowship that cannot be described."

Townsend also explained the goal behind the dinner, saying, "It's important for us to come together because this sport is naturally very isolating and selfish. I feel like it's important to break that mold, support each other outside of the sport and away from the courts, and build genuine friendships that last beyond the court."

Osaka has consistently spoken about identity and inclusion throughout her career. The Paris dinner continued that focus by highlighting shared experiences among Black athletes on tour.

On May 23, 2026, Osaka shared photos from the event on Instagram and described it as a moment to appreciate Black players in tennis. The post sparked criticism online, with some questioning

why the dinner was limited to certain athletes.

She responded the next day on Threads, writing, "First of all I do love everyone for who they are no matter their race + ethnicity, (I'm literally half Japanese lol). I can only speak from my experiences in my own life though, growing up as a tennis player I didn't see many people that looked like ME and I feel like it's important to celebrate them. I don't know how else to tell you this, I literally seen them all the time and never had an issue with it at all. To the people who ask this question I want to ask you this question too, 'What is it about POC getting together that unsettles you so much?'"

Osaka also said she will not apologize for recognizing the achievements of athletes of color. She said, "This is not about exclusion, this is a celebration about how far we have come."



Naomi Osaka Black-only tennis dinner

Founder Who Sold Over 700,000 Black History Flashcards Says Business May Soon Close

Freddie Taylor, the Founder and CEO of Urban Intellectuals, one of the most recognized independent Black history education companies in the world, says his company is now in danger of closing down. The company has faced mounting financial pressure from rising costs of materials, shipping, advertising, fulfillment, warehousing, logistics, tariffs, and increased competition from scammers and knockoff products that have driven up advertising costs and siphoned revenue away from the company.

In an attempt to save the company, Taylor has launched the Save Urban Intellectuals campaign, an urgent community-powered effort to prevent the company from going under, stabilize operations, and preserve access to independent Black history education for families, children, schools, churches, and communities.

He began his mission in 2016 with a clear purpose: to make Black history easier to learn, teach, share, and celebrate. Over the past 10 years, the company has delivered more than 700,000 Black History Flashcards to customers in all 50 states and 64 countries, while serving more than 250,000 customers around the world.

His company, Urban Intellectuals, is known for making Black history accessible and empowering through its widely recognized Black History Flashcards, Sankofa Club for children, Sankofa Circle for adults, books, live classes, playing cards, cultural resources, and community education programs.

"My company is in danger, and we are telling the truth about it," says Freddie. "This company has served the community for 10 years, but the costs of doing business have risen dramatically. Shipping, materials, ads, fulfillment, tariffs, and bad debt have created a chokehold around our operations. We need the community's help right now so we can stabilize the company, remove the financial weight, and continue doing this much-needed work."

The Save Urban Intellectuals campaign is calling for 1,000 Defenders to contribute \$100 each. In return, Defenders receive 100 days of access to either Sankofa Circle, Urban Intellectuals' adult Black history education membership, or Sankofa Club, its children's Black history education program.



Freddie Taylor

The campaign has already gained meaningful momentum, with 350 Defenders stepping forward to help save the company. Urban Intellectuals first raised its emergency goal of \$30,000, which helped the company address immediate obligations, including warehouse and fulfillment costs, ensuring that shipments could continue going out and customers could receive their Black history products.

Now, Urban Intellectuals is pushing toward the larger goal of 1,000 Defenders. According to Taylor, reaching the \$100,000 goal would allow the company to eliminate significant bad debt, including revenue-based loans that have been draining cash flow and choking profitability.

"The first \$30,000 helped us keep the doors open and make sure shipments continued," Taylor said. "But the larger \$100,000 goal is what truly helps us save the company. It allows us to remove the bad debt that is strangling our cash flow and start working our way back into profitability. Without that debt, Urban Intellectuals is in a much

stronger position to survive, grow, and serve our community."

Urban Intellectuals' current challenge comes at a time when Black history education is facing growing pressure nationally. With debates around curriculum, DEI, book bans, honest history, and the role of race in education, Taylor says independent Black-owned education companies are more necessary than ever.

"This is not just about saving a business," Taylor said. "This is about protecting independent Black history education at a time when our history, our culture, our economics, and our future are under attack. Black history is world history. It is the missing pages of world history. Our people need access to this knowledge in our homes, schools, churches, and communities."

The next phase of Urban Intellectuals' plan is to rebuild around membership, digital education, and recurring membership support. The company is placing renewed focus on Sankofa Circle and

Sankofa Club, which Taylor describes as the foundation of Urban Intellectuals' future.

"Physical products like flashcards and books will always be part of what we do," Taylor said. "But the future of Urban Intellectuals must be built around membership, education, community, and recurring support. We need our Defenders to not only help save the company, but to prioritize Black history education in their homes."

The Save Urban Intellectuals campaign is both a fundraiser and a community call to action.

Supporters can become Defenders by contributing \$100, which provides 100 days of access to Black history classes for adults or children. Contributions of any amount are also being accepted, and every supporter will receive an invitation to Urban Intellectuals' private Juneteenth event.

"Urban Intellectuals has touched hundreds of thousands of people around the world," Taylor said. "We have delivered Black history tools to families in all 50 states and 64 countries. We have served more than 250,000 customers. We have helped parents teach their children. We have helped adults learn what school never taught them. Now we need the community to help make sure this work does not disappear."

Freddie Taylor is available for interviews on the state of Black history education, the challenges facing Black-owned education companies, why independent cultural institutions matter, and the Save Urban Intellectuals campaign.

About Urban Intellectuals is a Black-owned education company committed to making Black history easy, accessible, and empowering for families, children, adults, schools, churches, and communities. Founded by Freddie Taylor, Urban Intellectuals began its mission in 2016 and has spent the past 10 years creating educational products, memberships, live classes, books, flashcards, playing cards, cultural resources, and learning experiences designed to write Black people back into the pages of world history and into the minds of the community. Learn more and/or support the campaign at UrbanIntellectuals.com

For press inquiries, contact tameko@urbanintellectuals.com or 718-791-2887

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FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT
FILE NO: 2026115015
 Doing business as:
E.T. LAUNDROMATS at 2028 N SANTA FE AVE, COMPTON, CA 90221
 Mailing Address: 17041 MIRACLE LANE, RIVERSIDE, CA 92503
 County: Los Angeles
 Full name of registrant(s):

THOMAS MIXON at 17041 MIRACLE LANE, RIVERSIDE, CA 92503
 The business is conducted by: an Individual
SIGNED: THOMAS MIXON, OWNER
 The registrant commenced to transact business under the fictitious business name or names listed above on: 05/2026
 This statement filed with the

County Clerk of Los Angeles County on: May 26, 2026
DEAN C. LOGAN
 Los Angeles County Clerk
 By: **JAMIE FU**, Deputy
 This fictitious Business Name Statement expires five years from the date it was filed in the County Clerk's Office. A new fictitious business name statement must be filed before

that time. The filing of this statement does not of itself authorize the use in this state of a fictitious business name in violation of the rights of another to a trademark or trade name under federal, state, or common law (see section 14411 ET SEQ., business and professions code). I declare that all information in this Statement is true and correct. (A) Registrant who

declares as true information which he or she knows to be false, is guilty of a crime
 This statement expires on: May 26, 2031
LOS ANGELES NEWS OBSERVER
PUB: Jun 4, 11, 18, 25, 2026

LIEN SALE
NOTICE OF LIEN SALE
 Lien Holder:
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 Vehicle:
73 CHEV CAMARO
 Vin: 1Q87T3N183965
 License #:
 Date of Sale: **6/29/26**

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PUB: Jun 18, 2026
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Lien Sale will take place at 10:00 AM at **PANORAMA TOWING**
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Features

Are We Giving Enough Attention to the People Around Us Who Quietly Influence Lives Every Day?

By Marion Apio
Contributing Writer | California Local News Fellow

Recently I felt a strong urge to reconnect with a close friend, Owekitinisa Sylas Ruhweza Atwooki, a passionate Ugandan leader whose life touched hundreds of people through leadership, mentorship, and community service. We had not spoken frequently since I moved to the United States to pursue my dream of becoming a journalist.

I sent a text to Sylas on March 21 checking in. The following day, I found out from a friend that my 32-year-old brother had been in and out of hospitals. He chose to keep his condition private. I was shocked and saddened, wishing I had known earlier so I could offer support.

At first, reports from family and friends were hopeful. Sylas was receiving treatment in Kampala for malaria and low blood platelet counts. However, his condition worsened, and after countless tests, the terrifying news arrived via WhatsApp on May 29.

Sylas had passed away. His death sparked an extraordinary outpouring of love and solidarity. Friends, colleagues, and former scholars mobilised to support his family, settle medical expenses, organise virtual vigils, and plan a dignified farewell. Hundreds gathered at St. Augustine Chapel in Kampala to pay their respects. Within three days, the Mastercard Foundation Scholars and Alumni community raised approximately \$2,900, a testament to Sylas' impact on countless lives.

In the days that followed, I found myself wrestling with difficult questions. In a world where we spend so much time following people online, are we paying enough attention to those quietly transforming lives around us? Why do we invest so much emotional energy in distant personalities while overlooking the people God has placed right in front of us?

Sylas lived with humility and served with grace. His passing exposed a fundamental contradiction in modern life: We live in an era of unprecedented connectivity, but often less connected personally.

According to the Uganda Communications Commission, the country has over 17 million mobile internet subscriptions and 10 million WhatsApp users. The average internet user now spends more than 16 hours a week on social media alone, yet many of us are becoming increasingly disconnected from the people who matter most.

Sylas resisted this trend. Through mentorship, service, and community building, he remained deeply present in others' lives.

As president of the Mastercard Foundation Scholar's Alumni Association, which helps young Africans access education and dignified work, Sylas embodied the values the program instills.

Every year, young Africans leave home to pursue education and professional opportunities abroad. Distance, time zones, and rising travel costs make it difficult to maintain relationships and remain actively involved in the communities that helped shape us. This challenge is especially relevant



for Mastercard Foundation scholars and alumni.

For Sylas, the answer was simple: show up. Celebrate others. Offer support. Stay connected.

He never allowed geographical or personal barriers to become excuses for disengagement. Even while facing his own struggles, he invested in others. He embodied the values of ethical leadership, service, and community empowerment.

Sylas did not wait for a perfect platform to create change; he simply served where he was. He also served as Minister of Information in the Toro Kingdom in Uganda, building bridges between education, culture, and professional development.

Since his passing, social media has been filled with memories of his infectious smile and unwavering commitment to others. Those tributes

reveal an important truth: people gave generously because Sylas had first given himself generously to them. People from different backgrounds, generations, and communities showed up because he had spent his life showing up for them.

That is the heart of his story, and his legacy now challenges all of us. The greatest tribute we can offer is not simply to mourn his loss but to continue his work.

The tragedy of modern life is that too often our attention to distant lives comes at the expense of meaningful relationships nearby. Genuine connection is being replaced by passive digital interaction. Families and communities cannot thrive on likes, retweets, and emojis alone. They require presence—phone calls, visits, conversations, and the

willingness to notice when someone is struggling.

Before spending another hour immersed in the lives of strangers online, look around. Call the friend you have not spoken to in years. Check on a family member. Reach out to a colleague who seems withdrawn. Communities are not built by algorithms or celebrities. They are built by ordinary people who choose, day after day, to care for those within their reach.

While his death is deeply painful, his life remains a powerful example of how we should live, with a simple truth that people gave generously because Sylas had first given himself generously to them.



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Every Vote Counts — Even When the Count Takes Time

By Joe W. Bowers Jr.
California Black Media

The President of the United States appeared on national television and was asked a simple question: What evidence do you have that California's election was rigged?

His answer: "All I have to do is look."

Pressed for something more, he said he listens to people — unnamed, unspecified and unverifiable. Then he called the journalist "crooked" and "stupid" for asking.

That is the entirety of his case.

What makes the response particularly troubling is that Republicans routinely accept the same election procedures in states they control. Utah conducts its elections almost entirely by mail. Florida counts millions of mail ballots. Alaska, Montana, Wyoming and Kansas all allow votes to be counted after Election Day under certain circumstances. When Republicans win those states, there are no accusations of fraud and no demands for federal intervention.

Yet, when California counts legal ballots after Election Day, some critics who accept those rules elsewhere begin questioning them here.

The stakes are not small. A Trump-appointed federal prosecutor in Los Angeles announced election fraud investigations and dispatched a

federal representative to observe ballot counting, despite the absence of publicly identified evidence of wrongdoing.

California Attorney General Rob Bonta responded that no specific allegation of voter fraud had been identified.

What is striking is that even many Republicans are not making Trump's case. Steve Hilton, the Republican gubernatorial candidate endorsed by Trump, acknowledged that his campaign had found no evidence of wrongdoing.

"We've seen nothing," Hilton told reporters. California Secretary of State Shirley Weber offered a different perspective on the criticism surrounding the state's vote count.

"Accuracy comes before speed," Weber said, explaining that California must count millions of ballots while protecting voters' rights and ensuring election integrity. California's election laws are built around a simple idea: maximizing participation while making sure every eligible voter has an opportunity to be heard.

That matters because every audit, recount, court challenge and review conducted over recent election cycles has reached the same conclusion: widespread voter fraud is extraordinarily rare.

For Black Californians, attacks on the legitimacy of lawful ballots strike a familiar chord. Black Americans spent generations fighting poll taxes, literacy tests, intimidation and violence for the right to vote and have those votes counted. When elected officials question legal ballots without

evidence, that history does not feel distant. It feels current.

The irony is that California's election results unfolded exactly as election officials said they would.

Consider what the counting actually produced. In the Los Angeles mayoral race, Councilmember Nithya Raman, who had been polling ahead of Spencer Pratt before Election Day, found herself trailing Pratt — a former reality television personality running his first campaign for public office. On Election Night, Pratt was ahead by more than 40,000 votes. As legally cast mail ballots continued to arrive and be processed, she steadily erased that deficit and secured a place in the November runoff.

That outcome surprised some observers, but it should not have. Election officials process ballots roughly in the order they are received, and election data showed that large numbers of Democratic voters held onto their mail ballots and returned them in the final days before the election. The same pattern helped Karen Bass overcome an Election Night deficit against Rick Caruso in 2022.

The result also carries historic significance. Bass is the first Black woman elected mayor of Los Angeles. Raman now has an opportunity to potentially become the city's first South Asian mayor. Whatever voters decide in November, the primary demonstrated that California's election system worked as designed and produced a result that reflected the choices of the people who voted.

Rep. Ted Lieu (D-CA-36) offered perhaps the

simplest explanation. Election Night, he said, is like halftime in a football game. The score at halftime is not always the score at the end of the game. California's election system counts votes until the count is complete, not until a television audience grows impatient.

In the governor's race, Xavier Becerra trailed Steve Hilton on Election Night before moving into first place as additional ballots were counted. Election analysts have a name for this phenomenon: the "red mirage." Early returns create the appearance of a Republican lead, only for later-counted mail ballots to reveal a different outcome.

California has seen the pattern repeatedly. What happened to Hilton in the governor's race is what happened to Pratt in Los Angeles and Caruso in 2022. The red mirage faded as more legally cast ballots were counted.

The question is why some politicians embrace mail voting and extended counting periods when the results favor them, but question those same processes when the outcome changes.

For Black Americans, that debate carries particular weight. Generations fought for the right to cast a ballot and have it counted. The legitimacy of a vote does not change because the counting continues after Election Day or because the final result differs from the early returns.

If there is evidence of wrongdoing, it should be presented. If not, the public should have confidence in a process that counted every legal vote. In California, that is exactly what happened.

Political

Political Playback:

California Capitol News You Might Have Missed

By Bo Tefu and Antonio Ray Harvey
California Black Media

Assembly Honors Dr. William "Bill" Burke as Family Returns to Capitol Where His Legacy Began

The first Black woman elected to the California Legislature, Yvonne Brathwaite Burke, her daughters, former Assemblymember Autumn Burke Adams and Christine Burke Adams, and her granddaughter, visited the California State Capitol on June 8 to attend an Assembly floor session honoring the life and legacy of Dr. William "Bill" Burke.

The Assembly adjourned in memory of Dr. Burke, Brathwaite Burke's husband of 54 years and a prominent civic leader who began his public service career at the Capitol. Dr. Burke, founder of the Los Angeles Marathon, died May 29 at the age of 87.

"Thank you to the members of the California State Assembly for adjourning in memory of my dad," Autumn Burke posted on LinkedIn.

"His first job in the Capitol was working for Speaker Jesse Unruh. It was there that he met my mom and began a lifetime of service to the State of California, both in the Capitol and far beyond it."

Members of the California Legislative Black Caucus (CLBC) joined fellow lawmakers, including Assemblymember Jacqui Irwin (D-Thousand Oaks), in paying tribute to Dr. Burke. Assemblymembers Mike Gipson (D-Carson), Isaac Bryan (D-Ladera Heights) and Tina McKinnor (D-Inglewood) delivered remarks celebrating his life and contributions.

"Dr. Burke was a giant, not only for his accomplishments, but because of his generosity in sharing his knowledge, wisdom, and encouraging others," McKinnor said, fighting back tears. "I am deeply grateful for learning from him. To Yvonne, Autumn, Christine, Isabella and the entire family, please know that California mourns with you. We pray that God grant you peace, comfort, and strength during these difficult times."

In Los Angeles, Dr. Burke was widely recognized as a pioneering entrepreneur, civic leader and advocate for environmental justice. He is perhaps best known as the founder of the Los Angeles Marathon, which became one of the nation's premier road races and a symbol of the city's resilience and unity.

He was also chair of the South Coast Air Quality Management District Governing Board.

The Capitol holds deep personal and historical significance for the Burke family. Yvonne Brathwaite Burke served as an assemblymember from 1967 to 1973, a member of Congress and Los Angeles County supervisor, while Autumn Burke represented the 62nd Assembly District from 2014 to 2022, continuing the family's tradition of public service.

Rep. Sydney Kamlager-Dove Introduces Bill to Restore Free Admission to Federal Parks Free on Juneteenth, MLK Day

U.S. Rep. Sydney Kamlager-Dove (D-CA-37) introduced legislation June 11 that would restore Juneteenth and Martin Luther King Jr. Day as fee-free admission days at national parks and other federal recreational lands.

Kamlager-Dove's district covers parts of Los Angeles County, including Culver City, Ladera Heights, View Park-Windsor Hills, Leimert Park, Baldwin Hills, Crenshaw and West Adams.

The measure, known as the Encouraging Public Service in Our National Parks and Public Lands Act, comes after the Trump administration removed the two holidays from its list of fee-free days and replaced them with President Donald Trump's birthday and other dates centered on patriotic themes.

The bill would amend federal law to permanently designate Juneteenth and MLK Day as free admission days while preserving other long-standing fee-free dates intended to encourage volunteerism and public service on federal lands. Supporters say the change would prevent future administrations from altering the list without congressional approval and restore the program's original focus on community engagement and stewardship.

"It's ridiculous that Donald Trump thinks that he deserves more recognition than MLK Jr. or the millions of enslaved Black Americans who realized they had independence on Juneteenth," said Kamlager-Dove. "Not only do these fee-free days recognize important days in American history, they are also used to promote public service within our public lands."

Under the legislation, fee-free admission days would include Martin Luther King Jr. Day, the first day of National Park Week, Juneteenth, Great American Outdoors Day, National Public Lands Day and Veterans Day.

Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto (D-Nev.) introduced companion legislation in the Senate. She said free admission days have helped build partnerships between visitors and park staff while encouraging volunteer projects and conservation efforts across public lands.



Yvonne Brathwaite Burke, the first Black woman elected to the California Legislature, joins members of her family at the California State Capitol during a tribute honoring her late husband, Dr. William "Bill" Burke. The California State Assembly adjourned in his memory to recognize his lifetime of service to the state. Shown from left to right are daughter Christine Burke Adams, Yvonne Brathwaite Burke, daughter and former Assemblymember Autumn Burke, and granddaughter Isabella. CBM photo by Antonio Ray Harvey.

"Free entry days in our National Parks have promoted cooperation between park rangers and visitors for decades," Cortez Masto said. "We need to make sure that these days continue to reflect our commitment to working together and being good stewards of our public lands through volunteering and service."

The legislation has garnered support from more than a dozen House Democrats and several Senate Democrats.

Democrats Rally Behind Becerra After Primary Victory, Setting Stage for November Showdown With Hilton

Former U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra is entering the general election with a growing wall of support from some of California's most influential Democratic leaders, signaling a rapid consolidation of the party following the June 2 primary.

Becerra, who finished first in the crowded gubernatorial primary field, will face Republican businessman and commentator Steve Hilton in November after vote counting confirmed the two candidates as the top finishers.

In recent days, Democrats from across the party's ideological spectrum have lined up behind Becerra, portraying him as the candidate best positioned to keep California in Democratic hands.

Former Vice President Kamala Harris praised Becerra's record of public service and described him as a leader who understands California's diverse communities, while Gov. Gavin Newsom highlighted Becerra's experience as attorney general, cabinet secretary and longtime public servant, urging Democrats to unite for the November contest.

Newsom, who remained neutral during the primary campaign, endorsed Becerra shortly after the race was called.

"I'm proud to support Xavier as our nominee for Governor and look forward to helping ensure a smooth transition," Newsom said. "He will stand up to Donald Trump, defend our families, and keep California moving forward."

Former Vice President Kamala Harris also threw her support behind Becerra, emphasizing his leadership credentials and his historic candidacy.

"I know as Governor, he will do whatever it takes to stand up to Donald Trump, defend our rights, and protect our communities," Harris said. "I look forward to standing with Xavier as California makes history by electing our first Latino governor in 150 years."

Harris also praised Becerra's "calm, steady brand of leadership," according to her endorsement statement.

One of the most notable endorsements came from former Congresswoman Katie Porter, who competed against Becerra in the primary. Porter said Becerra shares California values and has demonstrated a willingness to stand up to former President Donald Trump and defend the state's interests. Her endorsement was viewed as an important signal of Democratic unity after a contentious primary campaign.

Even billionaire environmental activist and former rival Tom Steyer, who narrowly missed advancing to the general election, urged Democrats to rally behind Becerra. Following his concession, Steyer endorsed Becerra and called on voters to unite to prevent a Republican victory in November.

California Attorney General Rob Bonta, whom Newsom appointed to succeed Becerra as attorney general in 2021, also joined the growing list of supporters, praising Becerra's leadership and experience.

Former State Controller Betty Yee, another former gubernatorial candidate, has also expressed support for Becerra following the primary, adding to the coalition of elected officials and former rivals now backing his campaign.

California State Controller Malia M. Cohen Appoints Council of Economic Advisors

California State Controller Malia M. Cohen announced the formation of a new Council of Economic Advisors that will provide independent economic analysis and policy recommendations to help guide decisions affecting the state's fiscal health and economic future.

The council, chaired by Dr. Jerry Nickelsburg, faculty director emeritus and senior economist at the UCLA Anderson Forecast, brings together six economists and policy experts from across California. Members will advise the controller on global, national, state and local economic trends and their impact on California's finances.

The move comes as the Controller's Office seeks to expand its use of data-driven analysis following the release of California's audited financial statements ahead of key state budget discussions. The advisory panel will assess economic conditions across California's regions and industries and recommend policy solutions related to affordability, tax policy, healthcare, education, workforce development, small business growth and equitable economic development.

"While we continue to reimagine financial transparency in order to give Californians a clearer understanding of the state's financial condition, we need to call upon expert talent that has its fingers on the pulse of what is driving global, national, statewide and regional markets," Cohen said.

According to the Controller's Office, the council will combine economic expertise with real-time fiscal information, including state cash receipts and expenditure data, to help identify challenges and opportunities affecting California's economy. Officials said the group will serve as a resource for developing policies that support long-term fiscal stability and economic opportunity.

Nickelsburg said council members are honored to provide economic insights and recommendations that could have a meaningful impact on California residents and the state's financial resources.

In addition to Nickelsburg, the council includes economists from California State University, Fullerton; the Bay Area Council Economic Institute; Global Economic Advisors; Claremont McKenna College; the Inland Empire Economic Partnership; and the State Controller's Office.

As California's chief fiscal officer, Cohen oversees the state's financial resources, manages state cash flow, issues financial reports and conducts audits of agencies that spend state funds.

Disability Advocates Rally at Capitol to Stop \$367.7 Million "Gutting" of In-Home Health Care Funding

Disability advocates, caregivers, families and state lawmakers gathered at the California State Capitol on Monday to oppose Gov. Gavin Newsom's proposed \$367.7 million reduction to the state's In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS) program, warning the cuts could jeopardize care for thousands of seniors and people with disabilities.

The rally, led by Assemblymember Jeff Gonzalez (R-Indio), focused on provisions included

in the governor's May budget revision that would reduce spending on IHSS, a program that helps eligible Californians remain in their homes and communities rather than move into institutional care settings.

Advocates said the proposed reductions would shift significant costs to counties, eliminate safeguards for some recipients and reduce access to critical services that allow people with disabilities and older adults to live independently. Speakers urged lawmakers to reject the cuts as budget negotiations continue in Sacramento.

"The governor's proposal would shift nearly \$370 million in costs onto counties, creating uncertainty for those who rely on approved care hours," Gonzalez said during the rally. He added that the proposal would also eliminate protections that help recipients maintain services during Medi-Cal transitions, reinstate restrictive asset limits and eliminate the backup provider system used by many families when caregivers are unavailable.

Additional savings are expected to come from ending temporary IHSS coverage for some recipients who lose Medi-Cal eligibility, restoring a \$2,000 Medi-Cal asset limit for individuals and eliminating the IHSS Backup Provider System.

Several speakers argued that the changes would disproportionately affect vulnerable Californians who depend on consistent in-home care. Elizabeth, a disability advocate who addressed the crowd, described herself as "a proud immigrant's daughter and proud to be part of California's diverse disability community."

Gonzalez pledged to continue fighting the proposal and called on state leaders to protect services that support independent living. "I will continue standing with this community and fighting to protect these critical services," he said.

According to the governor's office, proposed reductions are part of broader efforts to address California's budget challenges.

\$3 Million in Refunds: Defrauded Homeowners in Covid Mortgage Scam to Get Payback

More than 1,800 consumers will receive nearly \$3 million in refunds after state and federal regulators secured restitution in a mortgage assistance scam that targeted struggling homeowners during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The California Department of Financial Protection and Innovation (DFPI) and the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) announced the refunds on June 8, saying the payments stem from a multiyear enforcement action against companies that falsely promised to reduce mortgage payments and prevent foreclosures.

About half of the affected consumers are in California, officials said.

Regulators said the scheme operated under multiple business names, including Golden Home Services and Home Matters USA, and used telemarketing operations to target homeowners facing financial hardship. Victims were told they were participating in legitimate mortgage relief programs, but a federal court later found the operators engaged in deceptive practices and collected millions of dollars without delivering promised relief.

A 2024 court ruling banned the companies and their operators from the telemarketing and debt relief industries and ordered them to pay restitution.

"This case shows what's possible when state and federal partners work together with purpose to crack down on fraud, hold bad actors accountable, and deliver justice for victims," said Gov. Gavin Newsom.

DFPI Commissioner KC Mohseni said the refunds are part of ongoing efforts to protect consumers from financial scams targeting homeowners in distress.

"We are pleased to be able to give refunds to people who have been scammed out of their hard-earned money," said Mohseni. "We will continually pursue all avenues to prevent scammers from preying on and profiting off Californians."

The FTC said refund checks are being mailed to affected consumers. Recipients are advised to cash checks within 90 days, as indicated on each payment.

Officials warned consumers that the FTC will never require payment or personal financial information in order to issue a refund.

Consumers with questions about their payments can contact refund administrator JND Legal Administration at 1-833-674-0067 or visit the FTC's refund information page for assistance.

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Features



Matthew Parham listens to proceedings during a hearing of the California Senate Privacy, Digital Technologies, and Consumer Protection Committee on the AI Copyright Transparency Act. Parham is a Los Angeles-based voice actor and director of operations for the National Association of Voice Actors (NAVA). CBM photo by Antonio Ray Harvey.



Chudi Iregbulem, founder and CEO of the social app Beatmatch, leaves a hearing of the Senate Privacy, Digital Technologies, and Consumer Protection Committee on AB 412. Iregbulem, an AI developer, opposes the bill, saying it would impose costly and complex compliance requirements that disproportionately burden tech startups and small developers. CBM photo by Antonio Ray Harvey.

California Senate Votes to Advance AI Copyright Bill Backed by Voice Actors, Other Creators

By Antonio Ray Harvey
California Black Media

Matthew Parham, a professional voice actor, was among dozens of artists and creators from across California who traveled to Sacramento to witness the Senate Privacy, Technology and Consumer Protection Committee vote in favor of legislation that would require developers of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) models to disclose the copyrighted materials used to train their systems.

Authored by Assemblymember Rebecca Bauer-Kahan (D-Orinda), Assembly Bill (AB) 412, the AI Copyright Transparency Act, passed the Senate committee with a 6-2 vote on June 8 at the Capitol Annex Swing Space. The measure now moves to the Senate Judiciary Committee for consideration.

Parham told California Black Media (CBM) that he serves as director of operations for the National Association of Voice Actors (NAVA), a coalition of performers who use their voices to portray characters, provide narration or create sound effects.

"Voice actors are in a unique situation. No one in America owns their right to their voice. You can legally steal someone's voice," Parham told CBM. "This bill is essential. There is no legal protection for your voice right now."

Parham elaborated on the challenges voice actors face in protecting their work.

"For example, I voice video games. I can't copyright it because I'm not the developer, but my

biometric data is contained within that video game," Parham added.

Artists and creators from Los Angeles, San Diego, Oakland, San Francisco, Sacramento and other communities attended the committee hearing.

AB 412 is co-sponsored by the Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA), which represents approximately 160,000 media professionals worldwide.

Bauer-Kahan, SAG-AFTRA and the Transparency Coalition argue that the bill does not alter federal copyright law. Instead, AB 412, supporters argue, establishes state-level transparency requirements.

At its core, AB 412 would require GenAI developers to document the copyrighted materials used to train their models, including systems capable of replicating a person's vocal characteristics to generate synthetic speech that sounds like professional voice talent.

"I introduced AB 412 for one simple reason. I believe in copyright law, and I believe in the right of copyright owners to have a right to know whether their materials are used to train GenAI," said Bauer-Kahan, who is an attorney.

According to Parham, AB 412 would allow voice actors and other creators to request comprehensive lists of their registered works used in AI training datasets. The bill would also authorize creators to sue developers who refuse to provide that

information.

"AI scrapes from everyone's face, voice, paintings, photographs, and everyone's music," Parham said. "And now they are trying to sell it back to us without any ownership at all, claiming eminent domain over things they didn't create."

AB 412 was retained as a two-year bill after stalling in the Senate last year. Bauer-Kahan told CBM on June 11 that she accepted committee amendments that narrowed the measure by "removing prescriptive technical language" to make compliance more feasible.

Bauer-Kahan emphasized that the AI Copyright Transparency Act does not interfere with federal copyright law.

"Most copyright laws are in the federal purview. So, whether the rights holder has a right to be protected from models being trained under federal copyright laws is not for us to determine here in California," Bauer-Kahan said. "However, transparency is not in the federal purview. That, we can actually do."

Not everyone supports the measure.

Chudi Iregbulem, a former Amazon engineer and disc jockey, founded Beatmatch, a Los Angeles-based mobile dating and social networking app that connects users through shared musical interests and alerts them to concerts and events in their area.

Iregbulem told the Senate committee he opposes AB 412 because "it imposes costly and complex requirements that could significantly harm

startups" like Beatmatch.

He added that he respects copyright protections and that Beatmatch does not copy songs or use them to generate music for the platform.

"We're a team of three. We have over 10,000 users and startups like mine don't have the funds or the bandwidth to meet compliance requirements," Iregbulem said. "Even the cost of hiring lawyers to simply determine which AI outputs may no longer trigger compliance with the law would be substantial."

Parham said he is deeply committed to protecting and advancing the entertainment industry. During his career, he has performed voice-over work for brands and organizations including Nike, Marvel, ESPN, Amazon and Shakey's Pizza Parlor, helping promote products and services through persuasive communication, tone and pacing.

If AB 412 becomes law, Parham said, voice actors and other creators would finally have a way to determine whether AI companies used their protected performances to train artificial intelligence models.

"I'm essentially a blue-collar worker. I put in my 40 to 50 hours every week to make enough to pay my rent," Parham told CBM. "It's not about being rich and famous. It's about loving the art and having the right to protect that art."

Why Does California Take So Long to Count Votes? Election Officials Say Accuracy Comes First

By Solomon O. Smith
California Black Media

As California continues counting ballots weeks after the primary election, some political leaders are raising questions about election integrity. But election officials say the lengthy process reflects safeguards designed to ensure every eligible vote is counted accurately — not evidence of fraud.

California's vote-counting process has come under renewed scrutiny after some Republican leaders questioned why election results take weeks to finalize. Election officials insist the timeline reflects safeguards meant to protect voters and ensure every eligible ballot is counted.

The criticism intensified following comments from President Donald Trump, who repeated the debunked claim that the 2020 presidential election was stolen and alleged, without evidence, that California was engaging in election fraud.

"They're dropping fast because it's a rigged election," Trump said about California Republican voters. "They're crooked. You're crooked."

Vice President J.D. Vance also raised concerns about the Los Angeles mayoral race, calling it "shady" during an interview with Jesse Watters.

Michael Sanchez, communications director for the Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk's Office, disputed those claims, saying California's timeline reflects safeguards designed to

ensure accurate and secure elections.

California law allows ballots postmarked by Election Day to be counted if they arrive within the state's designated acceptance period. Election officials say that process, combined with extensive verification requirements, contributes to the time needed to finalize results.

"I would challenge the premise that the count is slow," Sanchez wrote in an email to California Black Media (CBM). "Ballot counting itself is very fast. In fact, Los Angeles County processed and counted more ballots more quickly in this election than in any election."

Sanchez said California's election process includes "multiple layers of oversight, public observation, reconciliation, and auditing."

Counting ballots involves more than feeding them through a machine. Election workers verify signatures, review ballots with voter errors and contact voters whose ballots require correction through a process known as ballot curing.

According to the California Secretary of State's Office, every ballot undergoes signature verification before it is counted. Ballots with signature discrepancies or other issues are flagged for further review by election workers.

Ballot curing allows voters to correct certain mistakes and verify their ballots so that otherwise valid votes are not rejected because of technical errors.

For many Black voters, whose communities have historically fought for equal access to the ballot box, confidence that every vote is counted remains critical. Civil rights advocates have long argued that safeguards such as signature verification and ballot curing help ensure voters are not disenfranchised because of technical mistakes.

According to Ballotpedia, 34 states allow some form of ballot curing, and 24 states permit voters to correct ballot issues after Election Day. While the process reduces the number of rejected ballots, it also extends the time needed to complete the count.

Under California law, election results must be certified within 30 days of Election Day. This year's certification deadline is July 10.

California Secretary of State Shirley Weber has repeatedly defended the state's election procedures against allegations of fraud and delays.

Speaking on DIA Live Studio hosted by Sen. Akilah Weber Pierson (D-San Diego), Weber said repeated allegations of fraud risk undermining public trust in elections.

"We had one congressman say the longer they count the more we lose," said Weber. "That means you were losing anyway because you didn't get enough votes. So, they literally wanted us to stop voting at a certain date even if all those votes hadn't been counted."

Questions about election integrity have continued beyond the vote count itself.

Bill Essayli, First Assistant U.S. Attorney for the Central District of California, recently announced an investigation into election fraud, citing concerns about election safeguards.

"We believe that California does not have sufficient safeguards to make sure that only California citizens are voting," said Essayli, referring to allegations that noncitizens are casting ballots.

Essayli has also promoted a civil lawsuit seeking access to voter information that he argues is necessary for election oversight. A federal court blocked the effort, citing voter privacy protections.

Meanwhile, Trump's executive order titled "Ensuring Citizenship Verification And Integrity In Federal Elections" has drawn criticism from voting-rights advocates and election law experts, who argue that some of its provisions could affect access to mail voting and voter-registration information.


The nonpartisan Brennan Center for Justice has warned that the order could have significant consequences if implemented.

"If implemented, the executive order would inject chaos into our elections, block eligible American citizens from voting, undermine voter privacy, and expose election officials and others to criminal prosecution simply for doing their jobs," states a Brennan Center analysis.

As California works toward its July 10 certification deadline, election officials maintain that taking time to verify ballots is not a sign of a broken system but of one designed to balance security with access. The debate, they say, is less about whether votes should be counted quickly and more about ensuring every eligible vote counts.

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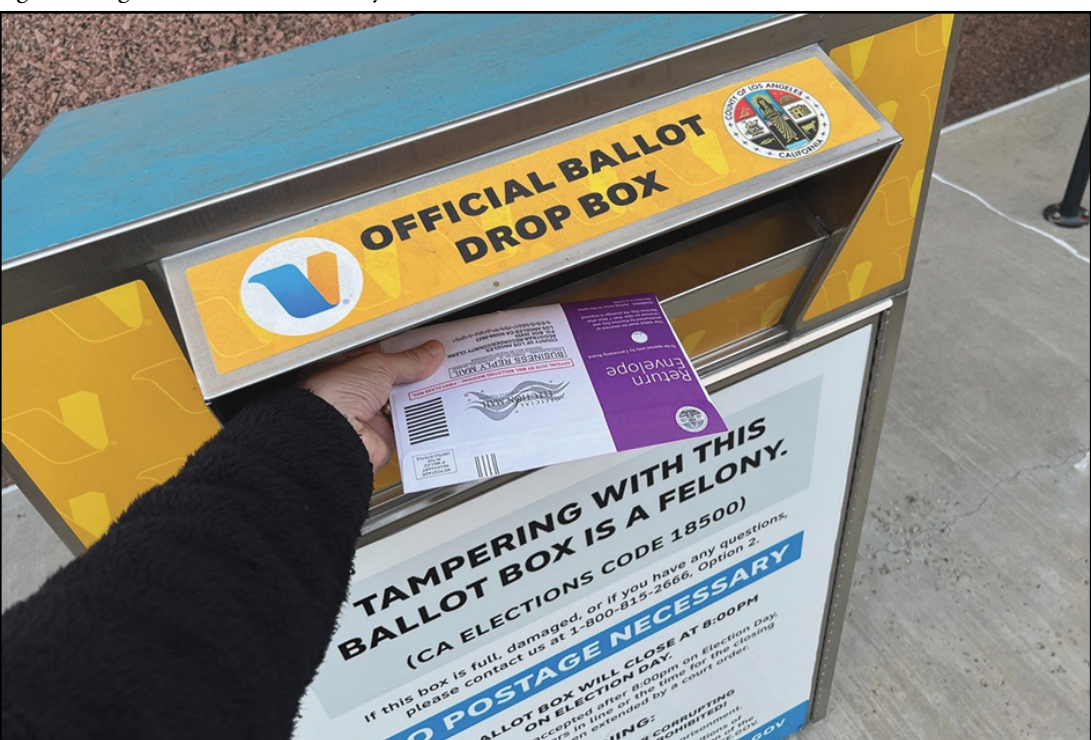
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Sports



RAM Office Staff take part in beautification project at Watts Elementary. Photo by Earl Heath



RAMS Rookies. Photo by Earl Heath

Rams Rookies Lend a Hand in Watts Ahead of Juneteenth

By Earl Heath
Contributing Sports Writer

The Los Angeles Rams continued their longstanding commitment to Southern California communities as members of the team's 2026 rookie class spent part of the offseason giving back in Watts.

Twenty-three rookies, including quarterback Ty Simpson of Alabama, Chad Lindberg of the University of North Carolina and Matthew Caldwell of Texas, participated in a school beautification project at Grape Street Elementary School in

partnership with City Year Los Angeles.

The event marked the fourth consecutive year that the Rams and City Year LA have joined forces on a campus improvement project in recognition of Juneteenth.

Rams Cheerleaders, mascot Rampage and staff volunteers joined the rookies in painting colorful murals throughout the campus. The artwork is designed to inspire students and provide encouragement during the school day.

Players Embrace Opportunity to Give Back "They always support the team," said Lindberg,

a free agent from League City, Texas. "You want to show them some appreciation."

Caldwell, an Auburn, Alabama, native who signed with the Rams as a free agent, said he has quickly become fond of his new home.

"The best thing about Los Angeles is the weather," Caldwell said. "It's really beautiful here."

First-round draft pick Ty Simpson also shared his appreciation for Southern California.

"This is some of the best food anywhere," Simpson said.

Continuing a Tradition of Service

Community outreach has become a hallmark of the Rams organization, which has maintained a strong presence throughout Southern California. Following the event in Watts, the team plans to participate in additional community activities in Pacific Palisades in the coming weeks.

For the young players, the opportunity to connect with local residents and help create a positive environment for students proved to be as rewarding as any work taking place on the football field.

Dodgers Find Their Edge in a Tight, Testing Week

By OGNCS Staff
Los Angeles News Observer

The Dodgers' past week offered a little bit of everything: late-inning stress, uneven pitching, missed opportunities, and enough star power to steady the club as it moved through a demanding June stretch.

Through Tuesday night's completed games, Los Angeles went 4-3 over seven games, beginning with a 9-8 loss at Pittsburgh on June 10 and ending with a 1-0 win over Tampa Bay at Dodger Stadium on June 16. In between, the Dodgers beat the Pirates 8-6, lost two of three to the Chicago White Sox, then returned home to take the first two games of their series against the Rays.

Tuesday's win was the kind that can matter later in the season. Shohei Ohtani broke a scoreless tie with a solo home run in the sixth inning, and Justin Wroblecki delivered six shutout innings in a crisp 1-hour, 52-minute pitchers' duel. Wroblecki allowed only three singles, struck out five and did not walk a batter. Will Klein, Kyle Hurt and Tanner Scott each followed with a scoreless inning, with Scott earning his ninth save.

It was also a reminder that the Dodgers do not always need a lineup explosion to win. The club's identity remains tied to big swings and big names, but championship-caliber teams also win the 1-0 games in June. For a Los Angeles fan base that expects October baseball, Tuesday's formula — one timely swing, clean starting pitching and an efficient bullpen — was a welcome sign.

Ohtani's performance carried extra attention because of his recent left knee inflammation. He left last Thursday's game in Pittsburgh, sat out Friday in Chicago, then returned as designated hitter over the weekend and earlier this week. Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said the swelling had "completely dissipated," giving the club confidence Ohtani would be fine.

The Dodgers' week was not perfect. The White Sox series showed how quickly momentum can shift. Los Angeles followed Friday's 8-2 loss with a 7-1 win Saturday, only to drop Sunday's game 6-4. That inconsistency is worth watching, especially as the club balances the demands of a long season, a rotation shaped by health questions and a lineup expected to carry heavy expectations.

Still, the home series against Tampa Bay helped reset the tone. The Dodgers won 4-3 on Monday before Tuesday's shutout, giving them consecutive one-run wins against a Rays team that pushed them deep into close-game situations.

The bigger picture is simple: the Dodgers remain one of baseball's measuring-stick teams, but this week showed the work required to stay there. Some nights will be powered by Ohtani's bat. Others



Los Angeles, California, USA; Los Angeles Dodgers designated hitter Shohei Ohtani (17) reacts after hitting a home run during the sixth inning against the Tampa Bay Rays at Dodger Stadium. (Photo Credit: Kirby Lee-Imagn Images)

will depend on six clean innings from Wroblecki, a bullpen that does not blink, and a defense that avoids giving away extra chances.

As summer deepens, Los Angeles is not chasing headlines as much as habits. This past week showed both the flaws and the foundation — and for the

Dodgers, that foundation remains strong enough to keep the city believing.

Clippers Have Lottery Chance, Lakers Seek Value as NBA Draft Nears

By OGNCS Staff
Los Angeles News Observer

The NBA Draft arrives next week with both Los Angeles teams facing very different questions.

The 2026 NBA Draft will be held over two nights, with the first round set for June 23 on ABC and ESPN and the second round scheduled for June 24 on ESPN. The Washington Wizards hold the No. 1 overall pick after winning the draft lottery.

For the Clippers, this draft could shape the next era of the franchise. LA owns three picks — No. 5, No. 36 and No. 52 — with the fifth selection coming from Indiana. The NBA's official draft order also shows Oklahoma City holding the No. 12 pick from the Clippers, while Brooklyn owns No. 43 from the Clippers.

That No. 5 pick gives the Clippers something they have not often had in recent years: access to a high-end young player. According to the NBA's official team preview, the Clippers finished 42-40, third in the Pacific Division, after overcoming a 6-21 start, then lost in the SoFi NBA Play-In Tournament.

The same preview lists AJ Dybantsa, Darryn Peterson, Cam Boozer and Caleb Wilson as the consensus top four prospects, meaning the Clippers could be choosing from the next group of potential impact players. The NBA mentioned guards Brayden Burries, Keaton Wagler and Darius Acuff

Jr. as names to watch if LA looks to add a backcourt partner next to Darius Garland.

The Lakers, meanwhile, enter the draft from a different position. They hold only the No. 25 pick.

The team went 53-29, finished first in the Pacific Division and lost in the conference semifinals. But their official draft preview notes that Los Angeles enters the offseason with only two of its top 10 scorers under contract, creating a roster-building challenge around Luka Dončić.

At No. 25, the Lakers may not be hunting for a franchise face, but they still need a player who can help the roster become younger, deeper and more affordable. The NBA's preview says the Lakers could target frontcourt help — especially a pick-and-roll partner who can protect the rim — or perimeter shooting that can benefit from Dončić's playmaking.

That makes this draft important for both teams, but for different reasons. The Clippers need to maximize a rare lottery opportunity. The Lakers need to find value late in the first round, or decide whether that pick is better used in a trade package for veteran help.

For Los Angeles basketball fans, draft night will not simply be about prospects walking across a stage in Brooklyn. It will be about direction. The Clippers can add a young cornerstone. The Lakers can add a needed piece around Dončić. Either way, next week's decisions will help shape what basketball in Los Angeles looks like when the new season begins.



Barclays Center in Brooklyn will again serve as host for the 2026 NBA Draft. (Courtesy Photo)

Final Rules for Medicaid Work Requirements Are Out. Here's What You Need To Know.

By Sam Whitehead

The Trump administration has issued final rules on how states should ensure that millions of Medicaid enrollees prove they're working or completing other activities, such as job training, volunteering, or being enrolled in an educational program. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services released the rules on June 1. That deadline was set last year in the GOP tax-and-spending law known as the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, which established a work requirement for certain people enrolled in Medicaid, the state-federal health insurance program for people with low incomes or disabilities. Medicaid agencies are scrambling to rework IT systems and make sure they have staff to effectively enforce the rules, while also keeping enrollees from losing coverage for administrative reasons, such as difficulty navigating state eligibility portals. The newly announced regulations offer a clearer picture of what roughly 18.5 million Medicaid enrollees will have to do to prove they qualify for benefits. Jim Torres, who helps people enroll in health coverage at the Samuel U. Rodgers Health Center in Kansas City, Missouri, said a "very small percentage" of his clients have heard of the changes coming to Medicaid. "These folks have very busy lives. They're doing the best they can to get by," he said. "It's just not a top-of-mind thing for most of them." Health policy researchers and consumer advocates said enrollees should keep a few things in mind as the Jan. 1, 2027, rollout approaches in most states. 1. The work rules won't apply to everyone.

The new rules will apply to people covered through what's known as Medicaid expansion. Since 2014, more than 40 states and the District of Columbia have decided to allow more people into their Medicaid programs, generally low-income adults without dependents. Georgia and Wisconsin offer coverage to some people in this group, so they'll be subject to the rules. Children and pregnant people, as well as individuals with disabilities who receive Social Security payments — all groups that already qualify for Medicaid — won't be subject to the rules. Nor will people determined to be "medically frail," or too sick to work. People subject to the work rules are "crowding out" people in the

Medicaid program who are "truly in need," CMS Administrator Mehmet Oz claimed during a June 1 press call. "Work requirements are going to turn this around, we hope." The rules are set to take effect in most places in January. Nebraska started enforcing them in May. Montana plans to start in July but won't kick people off until October. Arkansas will do a "soft" launch in July — it will start enforcing the rules but with no penalties until next year. 2. States will take your word that you're too sick to work. For now.

Federal officials have stressed that states should make the process of reporting hours and requesting exemptions as simple as possible for Medicaid enrollees by creating automated systems and using existing data sources, such as unemployment and education records.

If states cannot determine you're performing 80 hours of qualifying activities a month using those data sources, you may be allowed to "self-attest" to that in 2027, health policy researchers said.

People will also be allowed to "self-attest" that they are too sick to work in 2027, and do so one time in 2028. Then states will start asking for proof, if they can't find it through available data.

But after the initial rollout, the burden of proof is likely to still fall on many enrollees, said researchers and consumer advocates.

People may need to dig up pay stubs, medical records, and doctors' notes and submit them for state review, said Morgan Henderson, who has studied Medicaid work programs in Georgia and Arkansas at The Hilltop Institute, a research center at the University of Maryland-Baltimore County.

"The higher this manual reporting burden, the less people are going to do it," he said. "That means that we're going to see coverage drop-offs."

3. The rules are tougher than expected for people too sick to work.

One of CMS' primary goals has been to "protect vulnerable populations" through "strong exemptions to make sure people who can't reasonably be expected to work are not subject to the requirements," Dan Brillman, a deputy administrator at the agency, said during the June 1 press call.

Consumer and patient advocates, however, said

Most States Will Have To Implement Medicaid Work Rules

The federal budget reconciliation law passed in July will require Medicaid enrollees in 42 states and the District of Columbia to show they're working, volunteering, or attending school for 80 hours a month starting Jan. 1, 2027, to keep their coverage. The eight states that did not expand their Medicaid programs to cover additional low-income adults won't have to implement the work rules.

- States with Medicaid expansion under the Affordable Care Act
- States with partial adult coverage expansion under 1115 waivers
- States that did not expand their Medicaid programs



*Georgia currently has an active work requirement program.

Source: KFF

Credit: Sam Whitehead, Samantha Liss, and Lydia Zuraw/KFF Health News

the final rules' exemptions are more restrictive than expected. Enrollees will eventually have to provide documentation, such as a statement from a medical professional, to prove that a health condition keeps them from working. And each individual state will have to determine the severity of beneficiaries' medical conditions.

"Someone could be medically frail in Nebraska but not medically frail in Delaware," said Carolyn Sheridan, associate director of state policy for the National Organization for Rare Disorders, which lobbies for patients with rare diseases. She said her group had hoped the rules would offer a standardized definition of who counted as medically frail and not leave the decision up to states.

Trump administration officials have publicly crusaded against fraud in government health programs, such as Medicaid, and states could face financial penalties for incorrectly granting people exemptions from the work rules, said Jennifer Tolbert, who researches Medicaid at KFF, a health information nonprofit that includes KFF Health News.

"States may be more cautious," she said. "That will likely lead to people losing coverage who may still be eligible."

4. Only certain qualifying activities count.

Enrollees can satisfy the rules by working 80 hours a month. They can also be enrolled in college courses, volunteer through a community organization, or do "in-kind" work that doesn't result in pay.

The rules set out, in detail, how many academic credit hours translate to 80 hours a month — students need to be enrolled in six credit hours per semester to meet the "half-time" requirement. An unpaid internship can count toward the 80 hours.

People can also prove they're volunteering with "a document from a community service

organization."

Consumer advocates say it might be hard for people to obtain proof they're performing these kinds of informal activities. But supporters of the rules say volunteerism can already be tracked.

"If you run into trouble with the law and the judge says, 'Hey, you need some volunteering and community service to serve your time,' there are already ways that we verify that," said Niklas Kleinworth, who works on state health policy for the conservative Paragon Institute.

5. You have time to prepare.

Make sure your state Medicaid agency has your current mailing address and keep your eye on your mailbox, said researchers and consumer advocates. State Medicaid agencies must inform you in two ways if you'll be subject to the rules — by either regular mail or email, and by one other form of communication, such as a text or phone call or by posting a notice online.

"The important stuff comes by mail," Henderson said.

And check in with your state Medicaid agency, said researchers and advocates. Some states, including Arkansas, California, and Wisconsin, have already posted information about the work rules on their websites. If you can't find what you're looking for there, visit or call a local office. A caseworker should be able to tell you whether you'll be subject to the rules. "Get ahead of this," said Joan Alker, who is executive director of the Georgetown University Center for Children and Families and studies Medicaid. "So that you don't end up going to the pharmacy one day and they say, 'Oh, you're not insured anymore' when you're trying to get your prescriptions refilled."

The Wood Cup in the "City of Champions"

By Ricky Richardson

Contributing Writer

Inglewood, CA—Thousands of soccer fans arrived in Los Angeles, in general and specifically in the City of Inglewood, June 9-14, 2026.

FIFA World Cup Fever has finally arrived. People of all ages, races, and nationalities have gotten caught up in the excitement. These include soccer enthusiasts and casual observers like me.

The price to attend FIFA World Cup games has proven to be out of reach for most fans. They either weren't able to purchase tickets in advance or, as in most cases, the prices of tickets were too expensive for local fans.

"As the world turns its attention to the FIFA World Cup, The Wood Cup will give visitors and residents alike an opportunity to experience the culture, creativity, and spirit of our city," Inglewood Mayor James T. Butts Jr. said in a statement. The USA vs. Paraguay match at the SOFI Stadium began at 6:00pm. "The Wood Cup is a free alternative to attending the very expensive World Cup soccer match in person, and there will be family-friendly fun, turf soccer, and interactive games," stated Mayor Butts.

The City of Inglewood, in partnership with Metro Los Angeles, joined other cities in hosting no-cost or low-cost FIFA World Cup Fan Festivals or FIFA World Cup Viewing /Watch Parties.

The City of Inglewood hosted a free, family-friendly Watch Party for the FIFA World Cup 2026, with a match featuring the USA vs. Paraguay, on Friday, along with a street festival for fans to enjoy all things soccer and more. The event celebrated the intersection of sports, culture, and community as the global soccer community shone the spotlight on the City of Inglewood for the kickoff of the FIFA World Cup.



Barbara Williams and Don Russell (Photo by Ricky Richardson)

The festivities on Friday were held from 2:00pm-6:00pm, on Market Street, between Florence Avenue to the north and Hillcrest Blvd. to the south, for a vehicle-free festival zone. This fantastic event was funded through a Metro Open Street Grant, with the K-Line conveniently stopping directly at the Market Street Festival.

Of course, you already know the outcome of the first FIFA World Cup game at the Los Angeles Stadium: USA 4- Paraguay 1!!!

A steady flow of soccer fans descended on Market Street for some engaging, interactive activations and to test their soccer skill level at interactive stations. The crowd consisted of local residents, visitors, and members of the global soccer community.

The Wood Cup had several venues along Market Street, where fans could watch the opening match at Los Angeles Stadium, which is less than a mile from Downtown Market Street.

The Wood Cup was a great celebration and a way to support local businesses and enjoy the game

of soccer with family, friends, the local community, and an influx of national and international soccer fans.

Inglewood Mayor James T. Butts, Jr., Council members Alex Padilla and Eloy Morales Jr., gave opening remarks to kick off the festival. DJ Ray provided an eclectic soundtrack between live acts. Aundrea Russell, KJLH Radio Free 102.3, served as emcee.

The South Side Symphony got the show underway with a set filled with a lot of soul. They performed several original tracks, "Loud" and "Cornbread," followed by a brilliant arrangement of I'm Sprung by T-Pain. They concluded their crowd-pleasing set with a bang! They ended by giving the audience all they got, or their musical version of mic toss, popular in church choirs. This final selection reminds me of how jazz musicians stretch out during a performance, or a descarga in salsa music.

Dr. Marcus Norris is the conductor of South Side Symphony. It was a pleasant surprise seeing Chris Powe (saxophone), Kenneth Brown II (trumpet, flugelhorn), Joshua Childress (saxophone), and Isaac Green (bass) in the symphony. These are talented jazz musicians and leaders in their own right, who are making noise (this is a compliment) in the jazz community.

A member of the Showtime Lakers of the 1980's, Byron Scott made a brief appearance to greet the crowd.

Blanco & Negro were up next. They entertained the crowd with the infectious sounds and vibes of the Caribbean. They performed a set of Reggae, roots rock reggae, ska, and a tinge of salsa. This talented and tight band performed "Run from Hell," "Latin Blues," "Please Me Baby," and "Place Like This," to name a few.

The next segment of the program was a great segue from the previous band. Up next was a salsa dance performance and dance lesson led by Don Russell and Barbara Williams. They led the crowd in basic



Cumbia Dragons (Photo by Ricky Richardson)



Deitrick Haddon & Hill City Collective, (Photo by Ricky Richardson)

salsa steps, followed by a group performance.

We were about to have church on Market Street. Deitrick Haddon and Hill City Collective brought the energy and Praises to God. The spirit of the Lord could be felt on Market Street throughout their handclapping, foot stomping, roof-raising set.

The Cumbia Dragons, featuring Gabriel Gonzalez (vocals), Alfred Ortiz (congas), Joey de Leon (timbales), and Albeniz Quintanilla (keyboards), closed out the festival with the infectious and contagious sounds of Cumbia. Their set brought out the dancers. They concluded their set just minutes before the vibes shifted on Market Street, as fans prepared to watch the FIFA World Cup match between USA-4 vs. Paraguay-1!!! Earlier in the afternoon, Canada vs. Bosnia-Herzegovina played to a 1-1 tie.

The global soccer community has caught the FIFA World Cup Fever during the opening weekend, June 10-14, 2026. You, too, should have been swept up into the hoopla of the FIFA World Cup by now. If not, the symptoms have just begun. You can join your neighbors at a local venue for upcoming matches. There's nothing like watching your favorite team with other like-minded fans at a local watch party or fan zone.

There are nine different fan zones in Los Angeles that host celebrations for the FIFA World Cup this summer. Below are the nine zones:

- The Original Farmers Markets---June 18-21
- City of Downey---June 20
- Hansen Dam Lake---July 2-5
- LA County's Ervin "Magic" Johnson Park---July 4-5
- Los Angeles County Whittier Narrows---July 9-11
- Venice Beach---July 11
- Fairplex---July 14-15 & July 18-19
- West Harbor---July 14-15 & July 18-19



Byron Scott (Photo by Ricky Richardson)