

Caribbean Today

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Tel: (305) 238-2868
1-800-605-7516
editor@caribeantoday.com
sales@caribeantoday.com
www.caribeantoday.com

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THE MULTI-AWARD WINNING NEWS MAGAZINE WITH THE LARGEST PROVEN CIRCULATION IN FLORIDA GUARANTEED



Haitians In Limbo ... Page 4A



Elections Count-Down ... Page 6A



Jamaica At 64 ... Page 1B

WORLD CUP HISTORY MAKER

Curaçao goalkeeper Eloy Room returns to South Florida after record-setting FIFA World Cup performance - and says his historic heroics deserve a statue... Page 17A



ELOY ROOM
PRIDE OF CURAÇAO
HERO OF THE WORLD

Artistic rendering imagines Curaçao World Cup hero Eloy Room commemorated with a statue overlooking the Willemstad waterfront. Credit (Getty Images/Hard Beat Communications artistic rendering)

INSIDE

Regional News Page 2A	Food News Page 13A	Immigration News Page 16A
Features Page 8A	Health News Page 14A	
Viewpoint Page 9A	Travel News Page 15A	



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REGIONAL NEWS



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Here Are Some Of The Top Headlines Making Caribbean News:

REGIONAL

Caribbean Community (CARICOM) nations are mobilizing a major humanitarian relief effort for neighboring Venezuela following the devastating twin earthquakes that have claimed nearly 1,500 lives and left thousands more injured or missing.

Leading the regional response is Guyana, which is coordinating aid from across the 15-member bloc. An 8,000-ton cargo vessel is scheduled to depart on July 3 carrying food, water, clothing, medical supplies and recovery equipment to the disaster-stricken South American nation.

President Dr. Irfaan Ali said the Caribbean has a moral obligation to help its neighbor despite the longstanding border dispute between the two countries.

“As good neighbors, we must reach out,” Ali said, noting that Guyana has already mobilized nearly 100 containers of relief supplies, including pharmaceuticals, rice, milk products and diapers, while opening the operation to contributions from other CARICOM member states.

The regional effort is being matched by support from Canada, which has pledged C\$5 million in emergency humanitarian assistance. Canadian-based Atlas Cargo has also committed

approximately C\$1 million in food and relief supplies, including rice, flour, pasta, canned goods and ready-to-eat meals, and will transport up to 10 ocean containers of humanitarian aid free of charge.

Trinidad and Tobago has launched a nationwide relief drive, while Barbados Prime Minister Mia Mottley pledged her country’s support, saying, “Venezuela is our neighbor, and in this Caribbean family, pain does not stop at a border.”

CARICOM has expressed solidarity with the Venezuelan people, describing the relief operation as one of the region’s largest coordinated humanitarian responses in recent years

JAMAICA

The Jamaican government has dismissed reports that the first group of third-country nationals (TCNs) under a proposed United States migration agreement are being housed at a property in Grants Town, St. Mary.

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Security and Peace, Dr. Horace Chang, said no such arrangements have been made and urged residents to remain calm amid growing speculation.

“I’m very concerned because the reports have, in fact, raised the anger of the population in Grants Town,” Chang said, noting that police have been asked to



Residents walk amid the rubble of a building damaged in earthquakes the previous day in Catia La Mar, Venezuela. (Pedro Matthey/AP)

monitor the area to reassure residents and maintain public order.

Chang warned that the false reports have put the owner of the property - a retired public servant who operates an Airbnb - at risk, forcing her to consider canceling bookings due to concerns about the safety of her staff, guests, and business.

Chang, has defended the government’s deportation transit agreement with the United States, insisting it will not allow criminals to enter the island. Speaking in Parliament, Chang dismissed concerns over the Third Country Nationals (TCN) arrangement, which allows Jamaica to facilitate the temporary transit of non-Jamaican deportees from the U.S.

aboard the inter-island ferry Apple Syder were safely rescued on June 29th after the vessel sank shortly after departing Basseterre Harbour for Nevis.

Prime Minister Dr. Terrance Drew confirmed that everyone on board was accounted for after visiting the J.N. France General Hospital, where passengers were taken following the rescue. “I just left the hospital where I was updated that everyone from the ferry, Apple Syder, is safe,” Drew said, thanking emergency responders, hospital staff, civilians and “Almighty God” for the successful rescue.

Videos circulating on social media showed the ferry experiencing difficulties before it submerged, with passengers wearing life jackets floating in the water as Coast Guard personnel, fishermen, and other rescuers brought them to safety.

Nevis Premier Mark Brantley also confirmed that all passengers and crew had been rescued, while Foreign Affairs Minister Dr. Denzil Douglas said the incident brought back memories of the MV Christena disaster, in which 233 people died after the overloaded ferry sank in 1970. Authorities have launched an investigation into the cause of the Apple Syder incident.

- *Rewritten from CMC News*



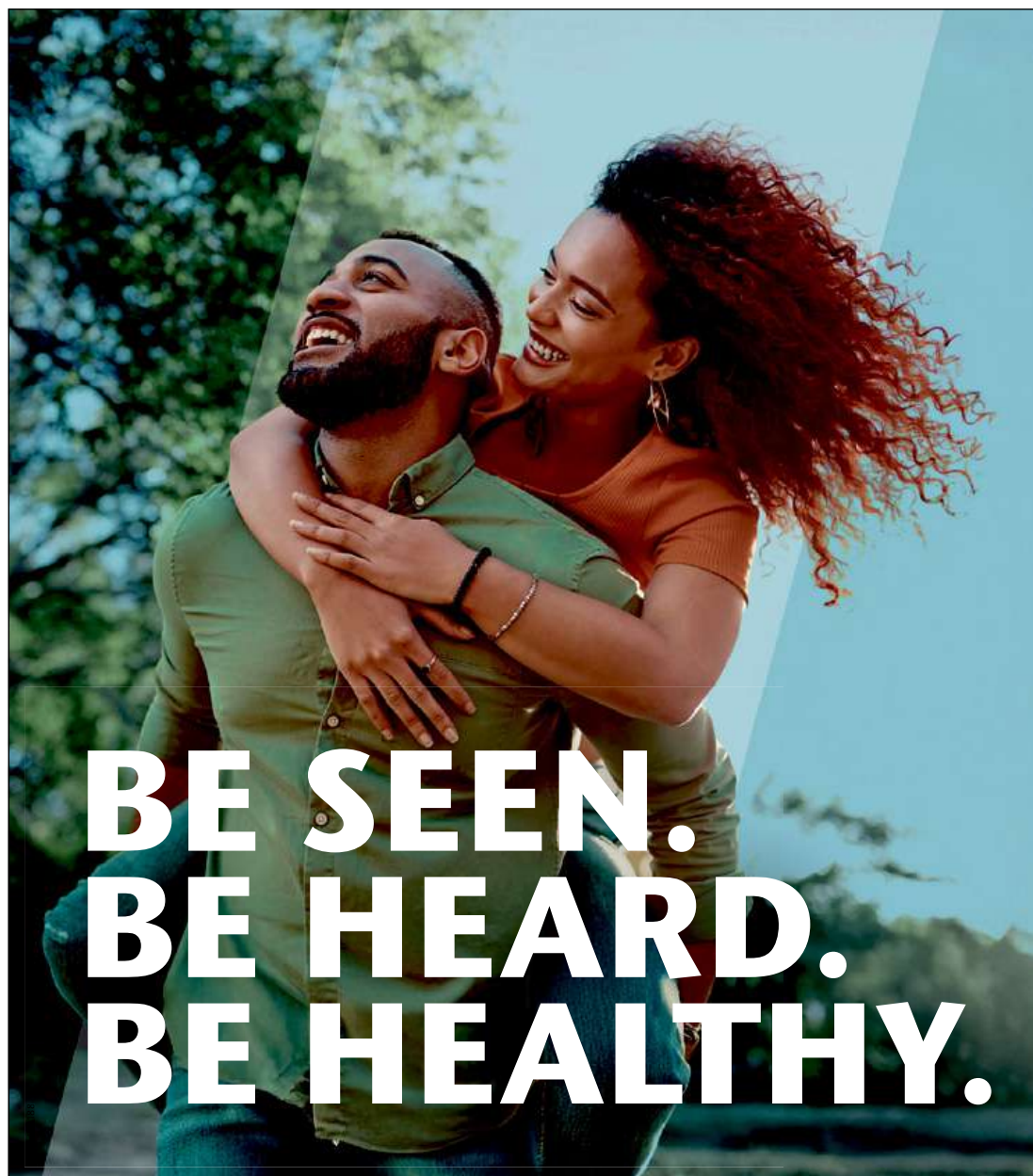
“To consider that I would bring criminals into Jamaica... is ridiculous,” Chang said, adding that “no criminal will find a safe haven anywhere in Jamaica” under the current administration.

The agreement has sparked public debate, with critics questioning whether it could pose security risks. However, the government maintains the arrangement permits only controlled, temporary transit and does not allow deportees to be resettled in Jamaica.

Chang also pointed to a 23% decline in homicides, crediting stronger policing and security measures for the country’s improving crime statistics.

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Jamaica, Guyana, Haiti and Trinidad Remain Among New York City's Largest Immigrant Communities

Immigrants from Jamaica, Guyana, Haiti, and Trinidad and Tobago continue to rank among New York City's 10 largest foreign-born communities, according to a new report released by the administration of Mayor Zohran Mamdani.

The report, *The Newest New Yorkers 2026*, found that the city is home to approximately 3.1 million immigrants, representing more than one-third of its population and 43 percent of its workforce.

Jamaicans remain the city's third-largest immigrant group, with 162,490 residents born in the island. While Brooklyn has traditionally been home to the largest Jamaican community, the report found the population is increasingly spread across Brooklyn, Queens and the Bronx, with Queens projected to become the largest Jamaican hub in the coming years. East Flatbush remains the city's largest Jamaican neighborhood.

Guyanese rank fifth among New York's immigrant communities, with 129,004 residents. Nearly half of all Guyanese immigrants living in the United States now reside in New York City, with the



The report comes as thousands are set to descend on Eastern Parkway in Brooklyn this Labor Day for the annual West Indian American Day carnival.

largest concentration in Queens, particularly South Ozone Park, often referred to as "Little Guyana."

The report also found 84,120 Haitian-born residents living in the city, making Haitians the eighth-largest immigrant group, while 69,332 immigrants from Trinidad and Tobago ranked tenth.

Although the populations of all four Caribbean communities have declined modestly over the past decade, each has remained among New York's top 10 immigrant groups for more than 30 years, underscoring the

region's enduring influence on the city's cultural and economic life.

Mayor Mamdani said immigrants continue to shape New York's future through the neighborhoods they build, businesses they create and communities they sustain, reaffirming the city's long-standing identity as one of the world's premier immigrant destinations.

- NewsAmericasNow.com



CARICOM Leaders Urged To Rethink Regional Integration

Caribbean Community leaders have been urged to accelerate regional integration, with a young St. Lucian scholar warning that closer unity is no longer optional but "existential." Addressing the opening of the 51st CARICOM summit, Rhodes Scholar Rahym R. Augustin-Joseph said regional institutions are failing to keep pace with the ambitions of Caribbean citizens, particularly young people seeking jobs and opportunities across member states.

"If ever there was a time for us to integrate, it is now," he told leaders, pointing to persistent barriers involving free movement, skills certificates, regional transportation and access to employment.

Augustin-Joseph called for action on five key areas: CARICOM's implementation deficit, freedom of movement, stronger partnerships with Canada and Africa, and treating food security as both a national and regional security priority.

He also urged renewed support for the Caribbean Court of Justice as the final appellate court across the region and called for a unified Caribbean strategy on Artificial Intelligence. "If we do not prepare together, we will once again become



Rahym R. Augustin-Joseph, addressing the opening of the 51st CARICOM summit on July 5th. (CMC Photo)

consumers of technologies designed elsewhere, instead of creators, regulators and innovators in our own right," he warned.

Augustin-Joseph urged regional leaders to move beyond rhetoric and fragmented national approaches, arguing that CARICOM is strongest when member states act with a unified voice.

The call came as the Caribbean celebrated CARICOM Day on July 6th and as Martinique became the newest associate member of the Caribbean Community.

- Rewritten from CMC



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Alina Garcia
Supervisor of Elections



Supreme Court Ruling Leaves 150,000 South Florida Haitians Facing Deportation

BY DAVID L. SNELLING
Edited By Felicia J. Persaud

As the United States Department of Homeland Security Secretary Markwayne Mullin declared that migrants in the US on Temporary Protected Status (TPS) should seek permanent residence or leave, Democratic leaders in South Florida and beyond are offering glimmers of hope despite the U.S. Supreme Court decision.

A 6-3 decision on June 25th - which allows the Trump

administration to strip Haitians and Syrians of their TPS in the case of Mullin v. Doe - has Mullin crowing and Haitians facing an uncertain future as some fear deportation and losing their jobs. The United States first provided temporary protected status (TPS) to Haitians after a devastating earthquake in 2010, and to Syrians after their country descended into civil war in 2012. "Either try to fill out the paperwork and be here under a permanent status, or we'll help you get back to your country," Mullin said on CNN's State of the Union program.

"We'll actually give you a plane ticket, plus roughly \$2,100 to help you re-establish when you get there, but temporary protective status, according to the courts and in its name itself, is not permanent status," he added.

But for many Haitians, including those who built new lives in Florida, the decision is devastating as they could be separated from their families and face imminent danger amid escalating gang violence and political turmoil in the Caribbean nation if they are forced to return to



Members of South Florida's Haitian community reacted with grief and defiance after the U.S. Supreme Court cleared the way for the Trump administration to end Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Haitians and Syrians on June 25, 2026.

Haiti.

South Florida is home to about 150,000 Haitians with TPS. In the wake of the court's decision, some were shedding tears with family members and friends in Miami, uncertain about their future.

One lady, who didn't want to give her name for fear of deportation, said she doesn't want to return to Haiti. "So many died with the gangs," she said, while adding that she's pursuing other legal options to stay in the U.S.

"The Supreme Court's decision will have deeply harmful and devastating consequences for hundreds of thousands of Haitian and Haitian American families, many of whom we hear from every day," said Paul Christian Namphy, political director of the Miami-based Family Action Network Movement (FANM). "This decision threatens their ability to work legally, support their families and maintain the stability they have worked so hard to build, and throws their lives into fear and uncertainty."

With limited legal options to remain in the U.S., Democrats in the U.S. Congress, who condemned the court's decision, are sponsoring legislation to protect Haitians from deportation.

Retiring U.S. Rep. Frederica Wilson (D-Miami), whose district constitutes a large Haitian population, introduced the Haitian Refugee Immigration Fairness Act of 2026 for permanent legal status, and Massachusetts Congressman Seth Moulton is sponsoring the TPS Relief Act to overturn the Supreme Court's decision.

"Haitian families deserve more than a lifetime of uncertainty. My bill creates a pathway to permanent residency, keeps families together, and provides lasting security," Wilson said in a statement. "Haitian families deserve to live without fear of being separated from the country they call home. I will not stop until that becomes a reality."

Massachusetts also has a massive Haitian population, with roughly 82,000 residents from the Caribbean nation residing in the state. Moulton said the Trump administration is pushing to send Haitians back to a country that Secretary of State Marco Rubio declared unsafe to travel due to the gang violence and political upheaval.

"This TPS ruling, they're basically saying that 350,000 people here should go back to a country that the State Department,

under Marco Rubio, has said Americans can't travel to because it's so unsafe," Moulton said in a statement after the Supreme Court's decision. "And, of course, for some of them, it's going back; for a lot of young kids who were born here in America with Haitian parents, they've never even been to this country before, a country that's deemed too unsafe, too dangerous for Americans to travel to."

Moulton said terminating TPS will have far more consequences than projected, including economic impacts. "It will tear apart families, it will upend communities," he said. "American citizens will see their classmates just ripped out of their schools. And on top of this, it's going to take away a lot of healthcare workers."

Another hope for Haitians is a TPS extension resolution passed by Congress in April 2026, in which Republicans broke ranks to side with Democrats. The resolution is waiting for the Senate's approval before the recess begins this month. The Senate, however, remains a tougher road. Any bill will need 60 votes to advance, a high bar even with leadership support.

State Rep. Ashley Gantt, a Democrat from Miami, said she reached out to Florida Republican Senators Rick Scott and Ashley Moody and urged them to push the Senate to vote to extend TPS for Haitian migrants.

"Following the Supreme Court decision, thousands of Haitian families in Florida face the possibility of losing their legal status, their jobs, and the homes and communities they have built over many years," she said in a statement. "These are our neighbors, our coworkers, our church members, and our friends. They followed the law, renewed their status, paid taxes, and contributed to our state."

The Supreme Court handed the US President his biggest victory on immigration, as terminating TPS for Haitians and other nationals was part of his 2024 campaign promise to launch the largest immigration deportation operation in U.S. history.

The Supreme Court's conservative majority concluded that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has broad discretion to end TPS designations when it determines that country conditions no longer meet statutory criteria, and that courts generally cannot review these decisions for non-constitutional claims.



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Jail For Former Virgin Islands Official

BY DAVID L. SNELLING

Former Virgin Islands budget director Jennifer O' Neal will spend the next seven years in a federal prison after she was convicted of misusing federal COVID-19 relief funds.

U.S. District Judge Mark A. Kearney of the Virgin Islands handed down the sentences, which also included three years of supervised release for O'Neal. She was ordered to pay \$34,345 in restitution, a \$50,000 fine, and forfeit \$17,730 in proceeds tied to the relief funds scheme. The court also ordered her to pay \$400 in special assessments.

O' Neal and co-defendant Ray Martinez, the former Commissioner of the Virgin Islands Police Department, were convicted in December 2025 on two counts of honest services wire fraud, one count of bribery concerning programs receiving federal funds, and one count of conspiracy to launder money.

Prosecutors recommended a 24- to 30-year sentence for Martinez for his alleged role in the \$1.48 million government contract scam. They alleged that Martinez accepted nearly \$100,000 in bribes from government contractor David Whitaker, owner of cybersecurity firm Mon Ethos Pros Support, in exchange for official actions benefiting Whitaker's business. He was sentenced to 10 years in prison for his role in the relief funds scandal.

Martinez used the money for luxury travel and hotel stays, private school tuition payments, rent payments, restaurant-related expenses, and a gambling fund.

According to a court filing, both O' Neal and Martinez informed the court before trial that they had not identified any witnesses to call in their own defense.

The prosecution's case hinged on testimony from Whitaker, who claimed O'Neal and Martinez accepted luxury gifts from him in exchange for helping expedite payments on government contracts.

Investigators determined that O'Neal personally benefited from the scheme by accepting \$17,730 generated from the inflated invoice. The money was used to satisfy lease obligations for her coffee shop, Java Grande, and to purchase her condo.

The fraudulent invoice was funded through the American Rescue Plan Act, a federal program designed to help the U.S. Virgin Islands and other jurisdictions recover from the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The trial lasted one week in which the jury found O' Neal and Martinez guilty on all counts. Whitaker was sentenced to 22 months in prison for his role in the scheme.

"Public corruption erodes trust in government and interferes with the provision of important services to the community," said United States Attorney Adam Sleeper. "These convictions show



Former Virgin Islands budget director Jennifer O' Neal will spend the next seven years in a federal prison after she was convicted of misusing federal COVID-19 relief funds.

that those who violate the public trust, whoever they are, will be held accountable."

A federal judge has denied a request by O'Neal to delay her prison surrender by eight weeks, while granting her a short extension to interview prospective appellate counsel before ordering her to self-surrender on July 1st.



Antigua PM Threatens More Legal Action Over Alfa Nero Story

BY CARIBBEAN TODAY STAFF

Antigua and Barbuda Prime Minister Gaston Browne has threatened to pursue further legal action after an online article questioning the government's handling of the sale of the superyacht Alfa Nero circulated widely on social media.

In a statement Tuesday, Browne described the article as "false and misleading" and defended both the government's seizure and subsequent sale of the Russian-linked luxury yacht.

The prime minister insisted there was "no missing money," saying the approximately US\$40 million generated from the 2024 auction was used to meet legitimate government obligations, including debts owed to regional financial institutions.

Browne also rejected claims that his personal financial records could be exposed through U.S. court proceedings.

He noted that the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit ruled in March in favor of himself and other Antigua



PM of Antigua & Barbuda Gaston Browne threatens lawsuit over story on superyacht Alfa Nero.

officials, upholding the quashing of subpoenas seeking banking records.

"The very discovery effort that the article presents as an expanding threat to my administration was rejected by the highest federal appellate court to consider it," Browne said. "That is not a backfire - that is vindication."

The prime minister also defended his defamation lawsuit against U.S. law firm Boies Schiller Flexner LLP and attorney Martin De Luca, saying he filed the case after what he described

as false statements made on behalf of interests connected to the yacht's former Russian owners.

Browne further alleged that the article was being promoted through a coordinated online distribution campaign rather than spreading organically, although he did not identify who he believes is responsible.

He maintained that the government acted lawfully in seizing and selling the vessel after it was abandoned in Antigua following international sanctions against its Russian-linked ownership.

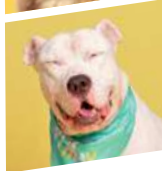
"I will continue to pursue all appropriate legal remedies against those who make false and damaging statements about me and my administration," Browne said.

The Alfa Nero sale remains the subject of legal proceedings in Antigua and the United States, with ongoing challenges over the seizure and auction of the superyacht.

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NEWS



Jolly Touts Civil Rights Agenda As Florida Governor's Race Intensifies

BY NONI HAYNES

Florida's 2026 race for governor is beginning to sharpen around issues of civil rights, equity and the state's political direction, with Democratic candidate David Jolly using the announcement of his running mate to draw a sharp contrast with Republican frontrunner Byron Donalds.

The campaign event followed a Sunday service at historic Bethel Missionary Baptist Church in Tallahassee, a congregation with deep roots in the civil rights movement. Over the decades, leaders including Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Rev. Ralph Abernathy, Rev. Jesse Jackson and Rev. Al Sharpton have appeared at the church, which has long served as a gathering place for civil rights activism.

During the service, Rev. R.B. Holmes delivered a sermon centered on mercy, drawing from James 2:13 while addressing concerns among many Black Floridians over recent debates surrounding race, education and public policy.

Holmes introduced former U.S. Representative Gwen Graham as Jolly's running mate, drawing enthusiastic applause



Gwen Graham, running mate to gubernatorial Democratic candidate David Jolly, Rev RB Holmes and David Jolly at the Capitol press conference announcement. (Contributed image)

from the congregation. Graham, the daughter of former Florida Governor and U.S. Senator Bob Graham, later joined Jolly for the campaign's formal announcement outside Florida's Historic Old Capitol.

Civil Rights At Center Of Campaign

Speaking to supporters, Jolly said he would make civil rights a

priority if elected governor. "I believe that for centuries, the racist, discriminatory policies that exist today have resulted in economic inequality, health inequality, education inequity and voter suppression," Jolly said. "I have a plan to address that and will establish the Civil Rights Commission in the Governor's Office as a start. I recognize these issues are a

serious problem that must be addressed, and Byron Donalds does not."

Jolly has made civil rights and community engagement central themes of his campaign, noting that he has participated in more than 275 public forums since launching his statewide campaign in 2025.

Polls Show Competitive Democratic Primary

Polling suggests Jolly has established an early lead in the Democratic primary. Recent surveys show him leading former Orlando Police Chief Val Demings by margins ranging from four to 15 percentage points. The Democratic primary is scheduled for Aug. 18.

On the Republican side, U.S. Representative Byron Donalds, who has been endorsed

by President Donald Trump, continues to dominate the GOP field. Multiple public polls place Donalds well ahead of his Republican challengers, making him the early favorite to secure his party's nomination.

Florida remains a challenging state for Democrats. President Trump carried the state by 13 percentage points in the 2024 election, and no Democrat has won the governor's office since Lawton Chiles' reelection in 1994.

With Governor Ron DeSantis term-limited, the 2026 contest will determine Florida's next governor in what is expected to become one of the nation's most closely watched statewide races.



Two Caribbean-American Women Join Florida Governor's Race

BY DAVID L. SNELLING
Edited By Felicia J. Persaud

Two Caribbean-American women are seeking to make history in Florida's 2026 race for governor, joining a crowded field of candidates vying to succeed term-limited Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis.

Florida State Rep. Dotie Joseph, a Haitian American attorney representing North Miami, has officially qualified to run in the Democratic primary, where she hopes to become Florida's first Caribbean-born and first woman governor.

Joseph, who was born in Haiti and has lived in Florida since 1982, was first elected to the Florida House in 2018 after defeating incumbent Roy Hardemon. A graduate of Yale Law School, she has sponsored legislation addressing unemployment compensation, homeowners' insurance, child sexual abuse cases and tougher anti-human trafficking laws.

She joins fellow Democrat Dayna Marie Foster, a second-generation Jamaican American educator from Broward County, who is also seeking the state's highest office.

Foster, whose family traces its roots to St. Elizabeth, St. Mary and Kingston, said she

entered the race because she believes Florida needs a new generation of leadership.

"There were too many career politicians treating this race as a steppingstone in their own careers," Foster told Caribbean Today. "I wanted to be the change I wished to see."

A graduate of Florida Atlantic University, Florida International University and Florida State University, Foster said she has raised more than \$17,000 through her grassroots campaign.

Both women face Democratic frontrunner David Jolly, a former Republican congressman who switched parties after becoming a vocal critic of President Donald Trump. Jolly has selected former U.S. Representative Gwen Graham as his running mate.

On the Republican side, U.S. Representative Byron Donalds, who has been endorsed by President Trump, remains the overwhelming favorite heading into the GOP primary. Campaign finance reports show Donalds has raised more than \$84 million, while Jolly has raised over \$5 million.

Florida's primary election is scheduled for August 18, 2026.



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Two Haitian Americans Vie To Make History In Florida Congressional Race

BY DAVID L. SNELLING
Edited By Felicia J. Persaud

Two Haitian Americans are among a crowded field of candidates seeking to succeed retiring U.S. Representative Frederica Wilson in Florida's 24th Congressional District, setting up a race that could make history for one of the nation's largest Haitian-American communities.

Former Miami-Dade County Commissioner Jean Monestime and physician Dr. Rudolph Moise are both seeking the Democratic nomination for the seat, hoping to become the first Haitian American elected to represent the district in Congress.

Wilson, who has represented the heavily Democratic district since 2013, announced she will not seek another term, triggering

a competitive race for the Miami-Dade and Broward County seat.

The Democratic primary field also includes former State Senator Shevrin Jones, Miami-Dade County Commissioner Oliver Gilbert III, who has received Wilson's endorsement, Kendrick Meek Jr., attorney Vereen Roderick, and Marshall Davis Sr., longtime director of the African Heritage Cultural Arts Center in Liberty City.

Monestime brings decades of public service to the race. Born in Haiti, he arrived in the United States alone at age 17 without speaking English. He later earned finance



Former Miami-Dade County Commissioner Jean Monestime is running for the seat.

and business degrees from Florida International University and Nova Southeastern University before becoming the first Haitian American elected to the Miami-Dade County Commission and later its first Haitian-born chairman.

During his 12 years on the commission, Monestime championed infrastructure improvements, economic development and neighborhood revitalization initiatives

throughout North Miami-Dade. Moise, a physician, attorney and entrepreneur born in Port-au-Prince, is making his third bid for the congressional seat after previously challenging Wilson.

After immigrating to the United States as a teenager, Moise served in the U.S. Air Force before earning degrees from the University of Illinois Chicago and the Chicago College of Osteopathic Medicine. In Miami, he established a medical practice serving many Haitian refugees and later expanded into business, media and community service, including founding Miami's first full-time Creole-language radio station, Radio Carnivale.

While the Democratic primary is expected to determine the district's next representative, Republicans have also fielded candidates, including Te Mayonna Brown and Andy Daro.

Florida's primary election is scheduled for Aug. 18, with the general election set for Nov. 3rd.

For South Florida's large Haitian-American community, the race offers the possibility



Also running is Haitian born physician Dr. Rudolph Moise

of electing one of its own to Congress for the first time, adding another milestone to the community's growing political influence in the state.



Mother of Slain Haitian-American Vice Mayor Seeks To Continue Daughter's Legacy

BY DAVID L. SNELLING
Edited By Felicia J. Persaud

The mother of slain Coral Springs Vice Mayor Nancy Metayer Bowen is seeking to carry forward her daughter's legacy by running for the City Commission seat left vacant following her tragic death earlier this year.

Marly Metayer, a longtime registered nurse and Haitian immigrant, has filed to run for Seat 3 on the Coral Springs City Commission in the November election after city leaders opted to let voters choose a successor rather than appoint someone to complete the remainder of Metayer Bowen's term.

If elected, Metayer would follow in the footsteps of her daughter, who made history as the first Haitian-American woman elected to the Coral Springs City Commission.

Campaign manager David Metellus, who also managed Nancy Metayer Bowen's successful campaigns, said Marly Metayer is motivated by a desire to finish the work her daughter began rather than pursue a long political career.

"She really felt like she wanted to continue the work that Nancy was doing," Metellus said. "She taught her kids to never leave a job undone."

Metellus said the veteran nurse hopes to earn residents' trust through service, compassion and preparation, while placing additional emphasis on mental and behavioral health alongside the issues her daughter championed, including

environmental justice, public safety, economic opportunity and community resilience.

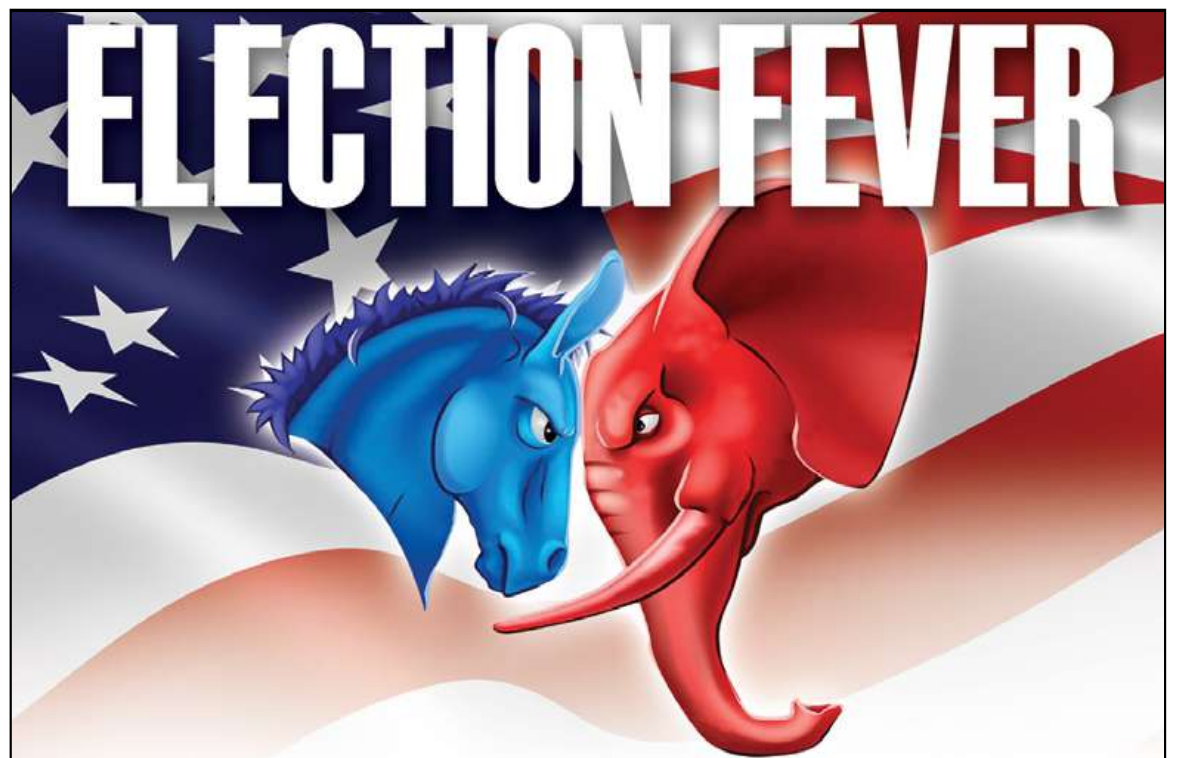
Born in Haiti, Marly Metayer immigrated to the United States at age 13. She graduated from Dillard High School and has worked as a registered nurse for more than 35 years. A Coral Springs resident since 1999, she raised four children, including Nancy.

Her decision to enter public service comes after an extraordinarily difficult period for the family. In late 2025, she lost her youngest son, Donovan Metayer, to suicide. Just months later, in April 2026, her daughter was fatally shot in what authorities described as a domestic violence incident.

Nancy Metayer Bowen, 38, was first elected to the commission in 2020 and re-elected without opposition in 2024. She became vice mayor in 2025 and emerged as a prominent advocate for civic engagement, environmental justice and Haitian-American political participation, serving as Florida's Caribbean Vote Director for Kamala Harris' 2024 presidential campaign.

Police charged her husband, Stephen Bowen, with first-degree murder in connection with her death. He has pleaded not guilty and remains in custody awaiting trial.

Other candidates who have qualified for the Coral Springs City Commission race include William (Bill) Capplis, Adeline Darius, Erick Nyatenya and Terry Williams Edden.



Caribbean Today will be spotlighting local and state elections in August 2026. Come with Caribbean Today as we introduce you to candidates who wish to earn your vote. This is a year like no other. The voting public needs to pay attention more than ever. Candidates, this is the time and Caribbean Today is the vehicle you need to present yourselves to the public. Your information will be presented in print and at www.caribbeantoday.com. It's time for that final push. Time to take your message to the people and Caribbean Today is the place.

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Diana McCaulay's Spirit Of Place

BY DAWN A. DAVIS

"I was absolutely frozen, honestly; I did not move... I was pretty sure which book would win. So, I was just sitting there looking at my hands, not being properly social, and thinking 'it'll soon be over, then you can congratulate whoever wins and go home.' And then, when they called my name, I just sat there. I just thought, I must have heard wrong; what's going on? And then somebody touched me and said: 'You have to go up there and accept the prize.'"

That was Diana McCaulay's reaction when she realized she had won the 2026 Royal Society of Literature (RSL) Ondaatje Prize for her book 'A House for Miss Pauline.' The UK-based charity, whose mission is the advancement of literature, chose McCaulay's book out of six shortlisted titles because of its distinctive spirit of place and sense of belonging.

The other titles included 'Greyhound' by Joanna Pockock, 'Helm' by Sarah Hall, 'Saraswati' by Gurnaik Johal, 'The Benefactors' by Wendy Erskine, and 'The Finest Hotel in Kabul: A People's History of Afghanistan' by Lyse Doucet.

Challenges

The Jamaican-born writer and long-time environmentalist, who still lives on the island, spoke about the challenges of promoting literary fiction. She noted that writing literary fiction like 'A House for Miss Pauline' does not attract the same attention as mass-market popular fiction, which means a low publicity budget for

books like hers, and that this is particularly hard for Caribbean writers.

"For people to tell you that the Caribbean experience is not valid, not interesting, the use of Jamaican language, or any language that is particular to the various islands, will not get international attention, is just not true anymore," the author told Caribbean Today shortly after her recent award.

In addition to luck, as McCaulay remarked, her award of the RSL Ondaatje Prize is a testament to the recognition of authenticity and the celebration of cultural voices outside the usual literary industry picks.

The protagonist, Miss Pauline, a true Jamaican country woman nearing her 100th birthday, jumped off the pages to tell her story in her own Patwa, sprinkled with Jamaican 'dutty bad wuds' in all the right places. This larger-than-life character came to McCaulay during a writers' workshop at Good Hope, one of Jamaica's famous and best-preserved 18th-century plantation great houses, owned by John Tharp, the largest slave owner at the time.

"I was in a little room under the front stairs. At night when I went to bed, I started to wonder about what this room had been used for in slavery time, whether it had been the bedroom of an enslaved woman who looked after the house, or whether it was a storeroom for tools, or maybe it had been empty, and there'd just been cockroaches. And this woman moved into my brain.

She was indeed somebody who was enslaved on this plantation and looking after the family in the house," McCaulay explained.

The author would later visit the ruins of Fontabelle Great House in the foothills of Cockpit Country, Jamaica, where she learned a foreigner had taken old bricks from this Great House to build his own luxury mansion. This didn't sit right with McCaulay, who has been conflicted about what should happen to these great slave-era houses. The beginnings of the story were now taking shape in her head; her great-aunt, who was born near Cockpit Country and lived in relatively good health to 102, became her muse, the character who would be the thread that wove the story together.

"Then the pandemic came, and we were in lockdown at home. So, I just decided I was going to let this woman out onto the page and see what happened," said McCaulay. "I was just writing to entertain myself, so the sensor had completely vanished, and Miss Pauline came out onto the page."

Authenticity

Having already written and published five books, McCaulay still did not have a literary agent, a publishing professional who helps authors pitch their work to publishing houses. Encouraged by a friend, she entered a competition for writers over 50. 'Miss Pauline' resonated with UK-based agent Laetitia Rutherford, who helped



Diana McCaulay on winning the 2026 Royal Society of Literature (RSL) Ondaatje Prize for her book 'A House for Miss Pauline.' (Photo Credit Jeremy Francis)

the author finesse the work, and it was accepted by two publishers. Ultimately, the authenticity, the emotional appeal, and the place are what made 'A House for Miss Pauline' stand out.

"My intention is first of all to tell a really good story. I'm pretty obsessed with stories as ways of navigating the world. I think it's a very old human tradition; it's very valuable," said McCaulay. "We devalue it to our own peril. Secondly, I don't want what I write to be too difficult to read. I want it to be accessible, because I come from a society, a country that's not very interested in books anymore. And therefore I want to reach out primarily to a Jamaican reader."

She added: "I also want to foreground the physical place in Jamaica, because I think we

leave that out. We write about the people, we write about something we might loosely call the vibe, the food, the music, our relationships with each other, the history. But very often the actual physical place - the rocks, mountains, rivers, the sea is not really so prominent. I want to foreground the actual physical place, which is why the Ondaatje Prize meant so much to me, because it meant they felt that they saw that."

So, what's the next chapter for Diana McCaulay? Look out for a personal account of her life, a memoir she is calling 'Uptown Memoir,' that will delve into her childhood, place in society, family, and ancestry. Interestingly, McCaulay's ancestry is one marked by enslavement, something she was totally unaware of until adulthood, events that will be explored in her memoir.

A parallel interest is land in Jamaica. Who possesses it?; who truly owns it?; how should land tenure and title be treated?; what are the rights of the descendants of the enslaved? McCaulay will address these issues in her next novel.



Legendary Jamaican Track Coach Stephen Francis Is No More

Vincent Stephen "Franno" Francis, the legendary Jamaican track and field coach who helped transform the Caribbean nation into a global sprinting powerhouse, died on July 4th at age 64, a day after his birthday.

The Maximizing Velocity & Power Track & Field Club (MVP), which Francis co-founded in 1999, announced that he died late Saturday. A cause of death was not disclosed, but Francis had been battling health issues in recent months. The club confirmed last week that he was receiving medical care in hospital, as concern grew across Jamaica's athletics community around the coach's health.

Francis coached generations of Olympic champions, world record holders and international medalists, including Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce, Elaine Thompson-Herah, Shericka Jackson, Asafa Powell, Kishane Thompson, Michael Frater, Sherone Simpson, and Tina and Tia Clayton

MVP Track & Field Club President Bruce James said: "Stephen Francis changed the trajectory of Jamaican athletics for the better. He proved that Jamaican athletes, guided by Jamaican coaches, supported by Jamaican management, and training in Jamaica, could become

the very best in the world.

"His vision, uncompromising pursuit of excellence, and belief in the potential of our athletes transformed not only countless individual careers, but also the standing of Jamaican athletics on the global stage. His legacy will endure for generations."

Prime Minister Andrew Holness also paid tribute, noting Francis' decision to leave a career in finance for coaching at a time when many elite Jamaican athletes trained overseas. "That choice helped shape one of the greatest legacies in track and field," Holness said.

Francis received the Order of Jamaica in 2017 for his contribution to the country's sporting success. Barbados Prime Minister Mia Mottley said his influence extended across the Caribbean, proving that "small islands can still shake the world."

After earning a BSC in management studies from the University of the West Indies and an MBA in finance from the University of Michigan, Francis decided to go into full-time



Late coach Stephen "Franno" Francis with mentee and Jamaican Olympian, Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce.

coaching and co-founded the MVP (Maximizing Velocity & Power) Track & Field Club in 1999.

Based in Kingston, the club's aim was to prove that Jamaican athletes, with Jamaican coaches, Jamaican facilities and Jamaican management, could be the best in the world. Francis - the MVP Track & Field Club's Technical Director - was known as a master for identifying talent.

Thompson-Herah took to Instagram on July 5th to share a series of photos and videos from her early days with Francis, writing, "Where it all started. I'm lost for words right now." In another post honoring the

celebrated coach, she added: "Thanks for paving the way. The greatest to ever do it. Rest in peace to an icon, you will surely be missed."

Fraser-Pryce, the double Olympic Gold Medalist-Beijing & London, five Olympic Games, 5x World 100-m Champion and 5 x Diamond League 100-m champion, was also among those to pay tribute to Francis. "Today, Jamaica has lost more than one of its greatest athletics coaches. We have lost a visionary, a mentor, and a man whose influence transcended the track," reads part of a statement shared on Instagram.

"He was not only my coach but a steady source of guidance during some of the most defining moments of my career. Coach Francis helped shaped an era that forever changed Jamaican athletics. Through his leadership, countless athletes rose to world and Olympic success, inspiring generations of young Jamaicans to believe that greatness could be achieved on Jamaican soil.

"His legacy is etched into every medal won, every record broken, and every young Jamaican athlete who dares to dream."



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Miami Office:

9020 SW 152nd Street
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PETER A WEBLEY

Publisher

publisher@caribbeantoday.com

FELICIA J. PERSAUD

Editor

news@newsamericasnow.com

BRANDON WEBLEY

Web Copy Editor

editor@caibbeantoday.com

LORNA ASENCOR

Accounting Manager

accounts@caribbeantoday.com

HYACINTH LEIBA

Account Executive

hyacinth@caribbeantoday.com

SABRINA G. ALEXANDER

Graphic Design

sabrina@gocreateart.design

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When Supreme Court Dissents Become Warnings

Supreme Court dissents seldom dominate the headlines. Most Americans remember only who won and who lost. But sometimes it is the dissent - not the majority opinion - that tells us where the country's deepest divisions lie.

Thursday, June 25th, was one of those moments. In two major immigration decisions, the Court's three liberal justices issued unusually forceful dissents that went well beyond technical legal disagreements. They warned about something larger: the human consequences of immigration policy and the role race may be playing in who receives protection under American law.



FELICIA J. PERSAUD

In one case, the Court cleared the way for the Trump administration to terminate Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for approximately 350,000 Haitians and more than 6,000 Syrians. The 6-3 decision held that federal courts have only limited authority to review the administration's decision to end TPS protections.

For hundreds of thousands of Haitian families who have lived and worked legally in the United States for years, the ruling represents far more than a legal setback. It threatens the stability they have spent years building.

But it was Justice Elena Kagan's dissent that may prove most remembered. Quoting President Donald Trump's own public statements, she pointed to his false claims during the 2024 campaign about Haitian immigrants in Springfield, Ohio, and later remarks describing Haiti as a "filthy,

dirty, disgusting" country. She concluded that the president's own words "fairly shout, in their racial undertones and overtones alike, that race entered into the president's resolve to remove Haitians from this country."

The Court's majority rejected that argument. The dissent did not.

That same day, Justice Sonia Sotomayor delivered an unusually passionate dissent from the bench after the Court allowed the administration to revive a policy limiting access to asylum at ports of entry. "The consequences of today's decision are predictable," she warned. "More people will die."

Supreme Court justices rarely read dissents aloud. When they do, it signals profound disagreement - not simply about legal reasoning, but about the consequences of the Court's decision.

Taken together, the two dissents reveal a Court deeply divided not only over immigration law but over how the Constitution should respond to vulnerable people seeking protection.

Reasonable people can disagree about immigration policy; they can disagree about border security; they can disagree about the scope of executive authority.

But these dissents raise a different question. What happens when humanitarian protections created by Congress become increasingly difficult to defend in court?

And what happens when allegations that race influenced executive action receive no judicial review because courts conclude they lack the authority to examine the underlying decision?

Those questions extend far beyond Haiti. They touch every community that depends on humanitarian protections created

by Congress.

They also remind us that Supreme Court opinions are not merely legal documents; sometimes they become historical records.

Years from now, Americans may remember that the Court upheld these immigration policies. They may also remember that three justices warned the country about the

human cost.

History has a way of revisiting Supreme Court dissents. Whether these dissents ultimately prove prophetic remains to be seen. But by putting their concerns on the record, Justices Elena Kagan and Sonia Sotomayor ensured that if the human consequences of these decisions unfold as they fear, no one will be able to say the

warnings were never given.

Felicia J. Persaud is the founder and publisher of NewsAmericasNow.com, the only daily syndicated newswire and digital platform dedicated exclusively to Caribbean Diaspora and Black immigrant news across the Americas.



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A Rare Breed

Men are loved, hated, reviled, cursed, despised, wanted, sought after, chased away, yet chased after by women. Women seem to be so confused when it comes to men that either they don't know what they want, or don't want it when they have it.



TONY ROBINSON

We often see many attractive women at functions, either by themselves or in groups.

Whatever, there they were, all dressed up with no man beside them. It is a common scenario,

and while I would not dare to ask them about their plight on that occasion, I have spoken to them at different times about their 'manless' existence. Usually the response was the same: "I just can't find a good man, I want a good man, why can't a good man come into my life?" 'A good man a rare breed.'

Well, good men are rarely born but are made. A young man growing up has to be molded the right way, steered in the right direction if he is to become a good young man. There are a few parents who recognize this and pass on these values to their sons. The mothers make sure that the boys can cook, sew on buttons if need be, wash and iron, and generally take care of

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 10)

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A Historic Number Of Black Women Are Seeking Office In Georgia - Democracy Must Meet The Moment

BY GLYNDA C. CARR

The field is set. After months of campaigning, organizing, and voter engagement, Georgia's primary and runoff elections have concluded, and voters have delivered a clear message: Black women are not only participating in democracy, but they are also helping shape its future.

With the November ballot now finalized, Georgia is poised to witness one of the most significant displays of Black women's political leadership in its history. Seven of Georgia's nine statewide offices will feature Black women candidates, while five Black women are seeking seats in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Former Atlanta Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms secured the Democratic nomination for governor and remains positioned to become the first Black woman governor in American history. Tanya Miller advanced as the Democratic nominee for attorney general, seeking to become the first Black woman elected to that office in Georgia. This week, Judge Penny Brown Reynolds won the Democratic nomination for secretary of state, placing a nationally respected jurist and voting rights advocate one step closer to overseeing elections in one of the nation's most closely watched battleground states.

In Georgia's 1st Congressional District, Amanda Hollowell won her runoff election and now advances to

the November election. Voters will also see Keisha Sean Waites for commissioner of insurance, Nikki Porcher for commissioner of labor, Dr. Lydia Powell for state school superintendent, Shelia Edwards for public service commissioner, and Katherine E. Juhan-Arnold for commissioner of agriculture. At the federal level, Nikema Williams, Lucy McBeth, Jasmine Clark, Hollowell, and Ceretta Smith are seeking seats in Congress.

These victories build upon another historic milestone achieved earlier this year when Alicia Johnson became the first Black woman ever elected to statewide office in Georgia after winning a seat on the Public Service Commission.

Taken together, these candidacies represent one of the strongest showings of Black women's political leadership in Georgia history. Black women are competing for executive offices, regulatory positions, and congressional seats that will help shape everything from voting rights and public education to economic opportunity and energy policy.

This moment did not happen by accident. For generations, Black women have been the backbone of Georgia's democracy. They have registered voters, mobilized communities, built civic infrastructure, and expanded participation in elections across the state. Today, more Black women are moving

from organizers to officeholders, from advocates to policymakers, and from movement leaders to elected leaders.

The significance extends far beyond Georgia's borders. This November, Georgia voters will help determine the outcome of one of the nation's most closely watched U.S. Senate races, all 14 congressional seats, and every statewide constitutional office. As they have in recent election cycles, Black voters, and particularly Black women voters, are expected to play a decisive role in shaping those outcomes.

Yet, as voters finalized the November ballot, another fight emerged. Georgia lawmakers were expected to consider new congressional and legislative district maps during a special legislative session called by Governor Kemp. Voting rights advocates warned these maps could weaken Black voting strength and dilute representation. The leaders of the Georgia legislature pulled the plug on gerrymandering away U.S. House seats held by Black Democrats just hours before a special session was to begin.

The decision represents an important pause, but not necessarily the end of the debate. Legislative leaders have indicated that redistricting could return in the future, and voting rights advocates remain vigilant about efforts that could weaken representation for Black communities.

The timing is impossible to ignore. Just as voters have elevated a historic number of Black women candidates, lawmakers are preparing to redraw the maps that determine how political power is translated into representation.

The juxtaposition is striking. At the very moment Black women are expanding representation, efforts are underway that could diminish the voices of the very communities driving Georgia's democratic progress.

The November ballot is set. Historic candidates are advancing. A record number of Black women are seeking statewide and federal office in one of the nation's most consequential battleground states.

Georgia voters will once again help shape the direction of the country. Democracy must now meet the moment. The voters have spoken. Now the

nation is watching.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Glynda C. Carr is Founder, President and CEO of Higher Heights, a national organization dedicated

to expanding Black women's political leadership, voting participation, and elected representation.



A Rare Breed

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9)

themselves.

A good man has manners, and that too has to be learned and cultivated from an early age. I heard stories of young men coming to pick up young ladies that were simply horrifying. One parent told me how this young man drove up to his gate to attend his daughter's sweet sixteen party. The lad was dressed in a wash-rag-type T-shirt, torn, rolled-up jeans, uncombed hair, and more rings through every part of his body than a circus freak.

A good man respects his

fancy either, but most women love to dress up and go out once in a while. That's why going to the movies is still so popular, even though we have cable and Internet.

A good man has eyes only for his woman when he's around her. She must feel special; he can't be with her yet, but he can ogle other women. As long as he's with her, she must be the one and ignore other flirtatious females. A good man must deal with only his woman and nobody else.

"I want my man to only be with me alone; I don't want to share him with any other



woman. I always find it strange how many American black males have this habit of calling their women bitches and ho's. Caribbean men don't use those terms, but the lyrics of some songs are often worse. This lack of respect towards women makes you wonder if those guys were spawned in a test tube, motherless. But then again, you'll say that some women welcome it.

A good man has etiquette, and good etiquette goes a long way and is sought after by many women. Many ladies expressed how it's so refreshing when a man takes them out and displays good etiquette. He opens the car door, holds it open for her when entering a building, pulls out her chair, offers her food and drink, and generally makes her feel comfortable and secure.

And that's another thing: a good man takes out his lady, and it doesn't have to be anywhere

woman," A good man commits.

Women are forever seeking this rare breed that somehow keeps slipping from their grasp. Some women meet good men who eventually turn out to be dogs, while others just can't seem to meet even a hint of a good breed.

Others caught the rare man but couldn't hold on to him, as their jealousy and insecurity drove him away. Still, there are others who will never stop looking for this rare breed, the man who will fulfill all their needs, their desires, their wants, their obligations.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Tony Robinson is an independent contributor to Caribbean Today, and the views expressed here are his own. He can be reached at seido1yard@gmail.com for feedback.



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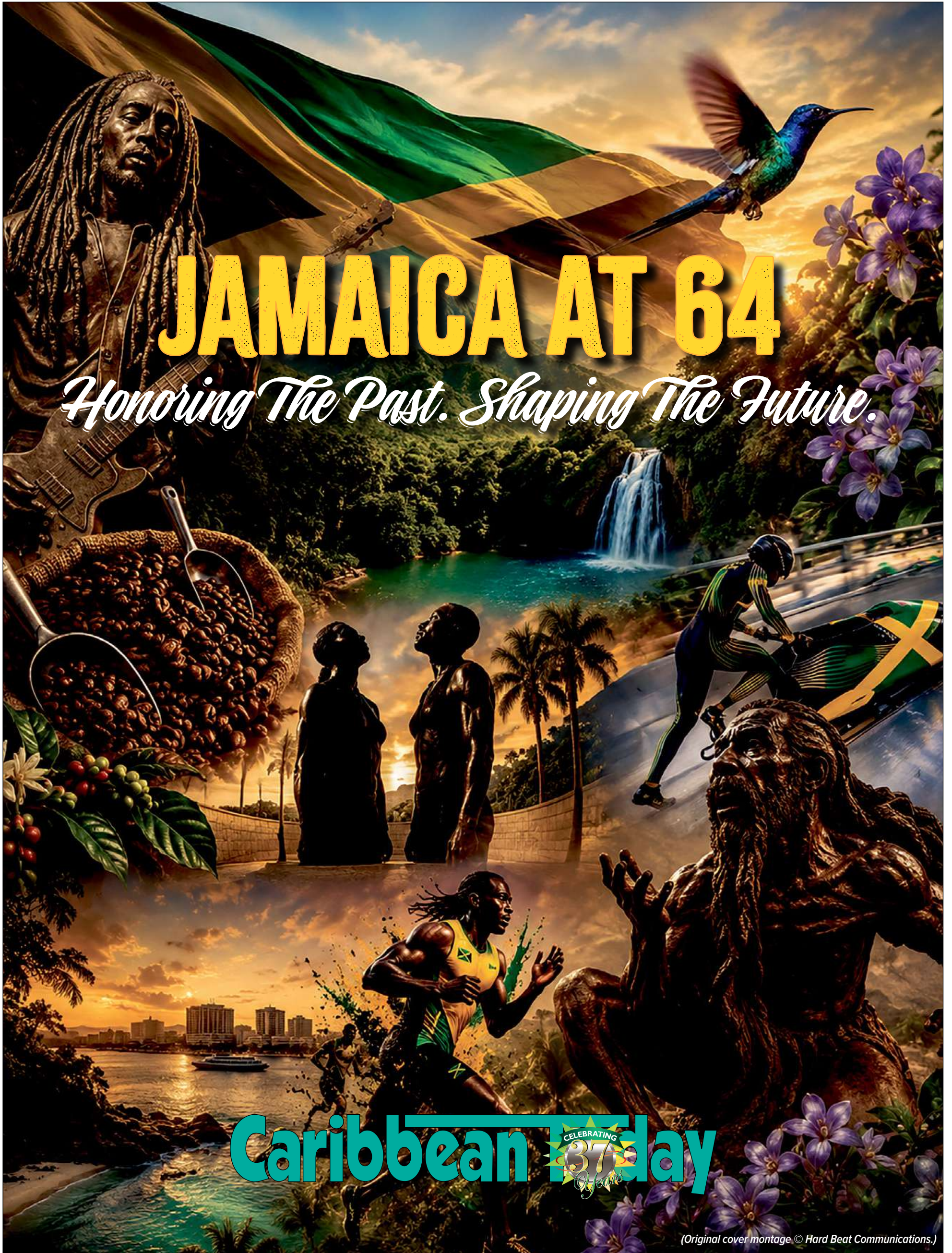
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Jamaica Advances Reparations Quest As Independence Journey Continues

As Jamaica marks 64 years of Independence, the country is preparing to take another historic step in its long campaign for reparatory justice, with plans to formally petition King Charles III to refer key legal questions on slavery reparations to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council.

Jamaica's Culture, Gender, Entertainment and Sport

Minister, Olivia Grange, told Parliament recently that the petition will be presented on September 6th, marking the anniversary of the departure of the infamous slave ship Zong in 1781. During that voyage to Jamaica, more than 140 enslaved Africans were murdered after being thrown overboard in one of the most notorious atrocities of the transatlantic slave trade.



Jamaica's Culture, Gender, Entertainment and Sport Minister, Olivia Grange at the Ghana conference. (Instagram image)

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The petition will ask the King, in his role as Jamaica's Head of State, to refer three legal questions to the Privy Council, Jamaica's final appellate court. The questions seek clarification on whether the forced transportation and enslavement of Africans were lawful under common law, whether slavery constituted crimes against humanity for which Britain bears responsibility, and whether the United Kingdom has a legal obligation to provide

reparations for slavery and its lasting consequences. Grange said the initiative has the full backing of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and complements the region's broader political campaign for reparatory justice.

The legal move represents another chapter in Jamaica's ongoing pursuit of justice more than six decades after gaining political independence from Britain in 1962.

As the nation celebrates

its achievements at home and across the diaspora, the reparations initiative underscores that for many Jamaicans, the journey toward full justice remains unfinished, with the legacy of slavery continuing to shape conversations about equality, development and historical accountability.

Grange was in Accra, Ghana in June for a historic gathering on reparatory justice under the theme Next Steps.

At that event she stated: "I proudly stood on the shoulders of the Right Excellent Marcus Mosiah Garvey, in the presence of his son Dr Julius Garvey, as I boldly reaffirmed Jamaica's unwavering commitment to and solidarity with Africa and her Diaspora as we continue the global pursuit of justice for the gravest crime against humanity, the transatlantic trafficking and chattel enslavement of African peoples.

"We will be unrelenting in our pursuit of truth, equity, reconciliation and repair, while paying tribute to our ancestors whose resistance, resilience and triumph made our presence possible today."

The landmark three day conference brought together Heads of State and Government, Ministers of Government, civil society representatives, historians, researchers and legal experts from more than 80 countries. It was the first major global gathering on reparatory justice since the adoption of the historic UN resolution.



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Celebrating Jamaica at 64

64 Years Of Independence – But Who Paid The Bill?

BY CARIBBEAN TODAY STAFF

On August 6, 1962, Jamaica became an independent nation as the Union Jack was lowered and the black, gold and green flag was raised.

Sixty-four years later, the nation celebrates its achievements while a new book is reigniting debate over Britain's role in slavery - and whether the conversation about reparations is far from over.

In *The Crown's Silence: The Hidden History of the British Monarchy and Slavery in the Americas*, historian Professor Brooke N. Newman argues that Britain's monarchy was not a passive observer of slavery but an active participant in building the system that made Jamaica Britain's wealthiest Caribbean colony.

Drawing on records from Britain's Royal Archives, colonial papers and state documents, Newman concludes that the Crown played a direct role in the transatlantic slave

trade and Jamaica's plantation economy.

According to Newman, the Royal African Company, chartered by King Charles II and governed by his brother James, Duke of York, transported more than 150,000 enslaved Africans to the Caribbean, with Jamaica becoming one of its principal destinations.

"Jamaica would later become Britain's most valuable Atlantic colony," Newman said during a recent public lecture. "It's developing plantation economy drove up the demand for enslaved labor."

Her research also documents how customs duties generated by Jamaican sugar and tobacco became a significant source of revenue for the British Crown, while royal officials were directly involved in administering the island's slave system.

Perhaps most striking, Newman notes that when slavery ended in 1833, Britain compensated slave owners - not the formerly enslaved. The



Historian Professor Brooke N. Newman, author of *The Crown's Silence: The Hidden History of the British Monarchy and Slavery in the Americas*.

British government paid £20 million to slaveholders, while emancipated Jamaicans received no financial compensation, no land and were forced into an unpaid apprenticeship system until 1838. British taxpayers only finished repaying that

compensation debt in 2015.

As Jamaica marks 64 years of nationhood, the publication comes as the Caribbean's reparations movement gains renewed momentum.

In June, CARICOM leaders endorsed an updated reparations

agenda, while Jamaica is preparing to petition King Charles III to refer key legal questions on slavery reparations to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council.

Buckingham Palace has declined to comment on Newman's research, saying only that "the King does not respond to research."

For many advocates, however, the historical record continues to fuel calls for accountability.

"The historical record is clear," Newman said. "The evidence of royal involvement in the transatlantic slave trade and in slavery itself is unambiguous. It is extensive, and it is impossible to ignore."

As Jamaica celebrates another Independence anniversary, the question raised by Newman's work is one increasingly echoed across the Caribbean: political independence was achieved in 1962, but has the legacy of slavery ever truly been addressed?



GraceKennedy Foundation Highlights Kingston Harbor Cleanup Success



From left: Michael McCarthy; Professor Mona Webber; Caroline Mahfood and Professor Michael Taylor. (PHOTO CREDIT- RYAN SCOTT)

The GraceKennedy Foundation (GKF) is celebrating major progress in restoring Kingston Harbor, revealing that nearly six million kilograms of waste have been prevented from entering the historic waterway since the launch of the Kingston Harbor Cleanup Project (KHCP) four years ago.

The milestone was highlighted during the Foundation's 36th Annual Public Lecture, held at The University of the West Indies (UWI) Regional Headquarters under the theme, "The Kingston Harbor Cleanup Project: From Vision to Reality."

The project, a partnership involving the GraceKennedy Foundation, Clean Harbors

Jamaica Limited and The Ocean Cleanup, combines innovative waste interception technology, scientific research and community engagement to combat marine pollution.

GraceKennedy Foundation CEO Caroline Mahfood said the initiative demonstrates the impact of collaboration.

"This project demonstrates what can be achieved when organizations and communities work together around a common goal," Mahfood said. "Sustaining and expanding this progress will require continued national commitment."

Michael McCarthy, managing director of Clean Harbors Jamaica Limited, said the project has removed (CONTINUED ON PAGE 5B)

Jamaica Launches J\$27 Billion Hurricane Melissa Recovery Program

The Jamaica Social Investment Fund (JSIF) is launching a J\$27 billion (US\$170 million) recovery program over the next five to six years to help communities rebuild following the devastation caused by Hurricane Melissa in October 2025.

JSIF Managing Director Omar Sweeney said the initiative will focus not only on repairing damaged infrastructure but also on restoring the social fabric of communities, particularly in western Jamaica, which was

hardest hit by the storm that caused an estimated US\$9.9 billion in damage.

"That reduction in social capital that would have been caused by such a natural disaster is something that is of our primary concern," Sweeney said. "We have looked at the physical damage, but we have also mapped the communities... to develop a program of recovery."

The program will include rebuilding schools, revitalizing educational programs, restoring safe access routes and

strengthening school resources in partnership with the Ministry of Education, Skills, Youth and Information.

Sweeney said the initiative is designed to improve community cohesion, livelihoods, confidence and overall well-being, while helping families recover and rebuild their futures in the wake of one of Jamaica's most damaging hurricanes in recent years.



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Celebrating Jamaica at 64

Building Jamaica Together: Diaspora Looks Beyond Recovery

BY HOWARD CAMPBELL

With the ghost of Hurricane Melissa still hovering, the 11th Biennial Jamaica Diaspora Conference took place in Montego Bay from June 14-18th. Over 1,000 delegates attended the event, which was held at the Montego Bay Convention Center.

Government officials, led by Prime Minister Andrew Holness, spoke about the encouraging recovery Jamaica has made since the Category 5 hurricane devastated the country's southwestern region last October. It caused 45 deaths and damage to roads, farms and hospitals.

The Jamaican Diaspora donated millions of dollars in assistance to the recovery effort, which Holness acknowledged. However, he stated that more needs to be done.

"We have the financing to pursue our recovery and resilience building, but now we must push forward quickly. We must focus on getting the families who are still in distress after Hurricane Melissa back on their feet. The question is how we can do it faster, better, and stronger," said Holness.

He and his ministers also addressed the continued



Panelists participate in one of several discussions held during the 2026 Jamaica Diaspora Conference in Montego Bay.

reduction in crime and perceived gains in the health and education sectors.

Eddy Edwards, vice-mayor of Miramar, attended the four-day summit as a member of the South Florida delegation. He gave his opinion on what transpired at the conference.

"There wasn't any real high point for me; a number of the speakers presented a positive image of Jamaica's development, highlighting the

resilience and quick recovery from Hurricane Melissa," he said. "Several of the panels offered ideas on opportunities to invest in real estate and other growing industries. I found the Marketplace to be a source of networking and connecting with businesses and government agencies and having one-on-one conversations to be most beneficial."

The Jamaica Marketplace, which comprised 80

government and private sector booths, was one of the conference's highlights. It offered delegates investment ideas and opportunities in areas such as real estate, agriculture and tourism.

For all the positives espoused by the government, Edwards said there was no clear-cut plan to improve the ease of doing business in Jamaica for members of the Diaspora. Or Jamaica accepting

assistance from overseas in the technical and healthcare sectors.

There were some efforts to address these concerns, but in my opinion more discussion is needed," said Edwards.

Dr. Rosemarie Lewis, a perennial presence at the conference, lauded the post-Melissa unity. But she believes that issues affecting Jamaicans overseas still need clarity.

"The biggest concerns were sustainable impact, real inclusion, trust, transparency, and engaging the next generation. Also, building resilient housing, green infrastructure, and integrating major financial institutions to produce vetted and safer execution of creating good real estate and business investments," Lewis noted.

"We kept asking, 'How do we move from talk to measurable action that actually benefits Jamaica?'"

She was encouraged that those issues were acknowledged by the government.

"The commitment to selfless collaboration was real. The conference laid the foundation; now the follow-through has to match the spirit we showed," said Lewis.



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Jamaica Unveils “Tourism 3.0” Strategy To Drive Industry’s Next Phase Of Growth

BY CARIBBEAN TODAY STAFF

Jamaica is embarking on a new chapter in its tourism development with the launch of Tourism 3.0, an ambitious strategy designed to strengthen the island’s global competitiveness while ensuring that more Jamaicans benefit from the industry’s continued growth.

Tourism Minister Edmund Bartlett unveiled the vision during the opening of the Caribbean Tourism Organization’s (CTO) Caribbean Week in New York, highlighting Jamaica’s resilience in overcoming global challenges ranging from the COVID-19 pandemic to other disruptions affecting international travel.

“In every instance, the real resilience that is the essence of tourism manifested itself in Jamaica,” Bartlett said. “These disruptions have bent us a little bit, but they have not broken the spirit of the Jamaican people.”

Bartlett noted that Jamaica welcomed more than one million visitors and generated US\$1.5 billion in tourism earnings within a year of reopening after the pandemic. Before global disruptions slowed travel, the island had also achieved 4.5

GraceKennedy Foundation Highlights Kingston Harbor Cleanup Success

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3B) everything from household appliances to motor vehicles from Kingston’s gullies before they reached the harbor.

“The scale and complexity of the challenge has required practical, locally developed solutions to prevent waste from reaching the Harbor,” McCarthy said.

Meanwhile, Professor Mona Webber, head of the Department of Life Sciences at UWI Mona, said ongoing scientific research is now assessing how reduced waste inflows are contributing to the harbor’s environmental recovery.

The lecture also featured a video message from Boyan Slat, founder and CEO of The Ocean Cleanup, who praised Jamaica’s contribution to global efforts to reduce pollution in rivers and oceans.

Established in 1982, the GraceKennedy Foundation continues to support education, healthy lifestyles and environmental stewardship, with the Kingston Harbor Cleanup Project now recognized as one of its flagship sustainability initiatives.



million visitors and US\$4.3 billion in earnings under its ambitious “5 x 5 x 5” growth strategy, which aimed to attract five million visitors and generate US\$5 billion in revenue within five years.

“Now it is time for reimagining,” Bartlett said. “This reimagining has begun under the Tourism 3.0 framework.”

Central to the new strategy is investing in Jamaica’s tourism workforce. Through the Jamaica Centre of Tourism Innovation (JCTI), more than 25,000 tourism workers have received professional training and certification over the past seven years.

The government has

also established specialized academies in gastronomy and entertainment, with the

first group of Executive Sous Chefs recently graduating as part of efforts to prepare

more Jamaicans for leadership positions within the industry.

“We are ensuring that Jamaican professionals take their rightful place in the leadership of the sector,” Bartlett said.

The minister also highlighted progress under the Tourism Workers Pension Scheme, which has accumulated approximately J\$6 billion in savings since its launch two-and-a-half years ago, while initiatives to expand affordable housing for tourism workers also remain a priority.

Bartlett said Tourism 3.0 represents a broader vision of sustainable development that places Jamaicans at the center of the country’s tourism success.

“Tourism 3.0 is about building a stronger, smarter and more inclusive tourism sector, which places our people at the center of development and ensures that the benefits of tourism are shared more broadly than ever before,” he said.



Jamaica Minister of Tourism, Edmund Bartlett addresses delegates at the Caribbean Tourism Organization’s (CTO) Caribbean Week at the Intercontinental Hotel in New York on June 1, 2026. (Contributed image)

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Jamaican Student Filmmaker Earns International Recognition With Award-Winning Documentary

A young Jamaican filmmaker is earning international acclaim after his debut documentary, Tyrone, captured top honors at film festivals across the United States and Canada.

Shavoy Alcock, an 18-year-old from Elizabeth, Jamaica, who now studies Entertainment Media at Monroe University in New York, directed the award-winning short documentary that tells the inspiring story of artist Tyrone Grant, whose life was transformed after overcoming incarceration and personal tragedy.

The 5½-minute film has quickly built an impressive list of accolades, including Best Student Documentary at the Toronto Short Film Festival, Best Documentary Short at the Los Angeles Film Awards, a Silver Telly Award, official selections at the Los Angeles International Short Film Festival and New York Short Film Festival, and most recently, selection for the 2026 Newark Independent Film Festival.

Alcock moved to the Bronx from Jamaica at age 14 and enrolled in Monroe University's Entertainment Media program despite having no previous filmmaking experience. He credits a life-changing conversation with Grant for inspiring him to pursue higher education and tell stories



Jamaican student filmmaker Shavoy Alcock has earned international recognition with his directorial debut, Tyrone, an award-winning documentary produced at Monroe University that has been honored at film festivals across the United States and Canada. (Monroe University image)

that matter.

Tyrone chronicles Grant's journey from growing up on the streets of New York and serving time at Rikers Island to rebuilding his life through art and becoming a respected member of the city's creative community.

The documentary was produced entirely by Monroe University students, with Zackary Padilla serving as producer, Ezekiel Ashiagbor as camera operator, Liv Coleman overseeing audio, and Darrin Tarulli editing the film. Executive producers were Dorothy Toran and Jacob Huddleston.

"Festival recognition of this caliber is an achievement many filmmakers spend years pursuing," said Dorothy Toran, Monroe University's Executive

Director of Entertainment Media and Strategic Initiatives. "For a student team to earn awards and selections across North America with a first major film project speaks volumes about their talent,

determination and commitment to authentic storytelling."

Monroe University said the documentary's growing international success highlights the strength of its Entertainment

Media program and demonstrates how emerging filmmakers can produce compelling work that resonates with audiences far beyond the classroom.



Jamaican Students Benefit From Award-Winning Art Therapy Project

BY CARIBBEAN TODAY STAFF

Students in St. Elizabeth, Kingston and Trelawny are among dozens of young people benefiting from an award-winning mental health initiative created by a South Florida teenager.

Kana Reynolds, a freshman at North Broward Preparatory School and member of the Girl Scouts of Southeast Florida, recently earned the organization's prestigious 2026 Gold Award - the highest honor in Girl Scouting - for her project, Art for the Heart: Mindful Masterpieces for Emotional Wellbeing.

As part of the initiative, Reynolds conducted art therapy workshops for more than 80 students in Jamaica and more than 100 students in Broward County, Florida.

Designed to make art therapy more accessible, the project

includes a free website, Instagram page, YouTube channel, and an illustrated guide featuring more

media. Each lesson combines creative expression with techniques designed to reduce anxiety, improve emotional regulation, and promote overall mental wellness.

Reynolds collaborated with professional artists and faculty from Florida Atlantic University to develop the program before leading workshops in northern Broward County and Jamaica.

Her project addressed barriers that often prevent young people from accessing mental health support, including cost, location, and lack of awareness about the benefits of art therapy.

The Girl Scouts Gold Award is presented to only five percent of eligible Girl Scouts nationwide and recognizes outstanding leadership and community service projects that create lasting change.

Reynolds became the first member of the Girl Scouts of Southeast Florida to earn the Gold Award as a high school freshman.



Kana Reynolds, a freshman at North Broward Preparatory School and member of the Girl Scouts of Southeast Florida, recently earned the organization's prestigious 2026 Gold Award - the highest honor in Girl Scouting - for her project, Art for the Heart: Mindful Masterpieces for Emotional Wellbeing. (Contributed image)

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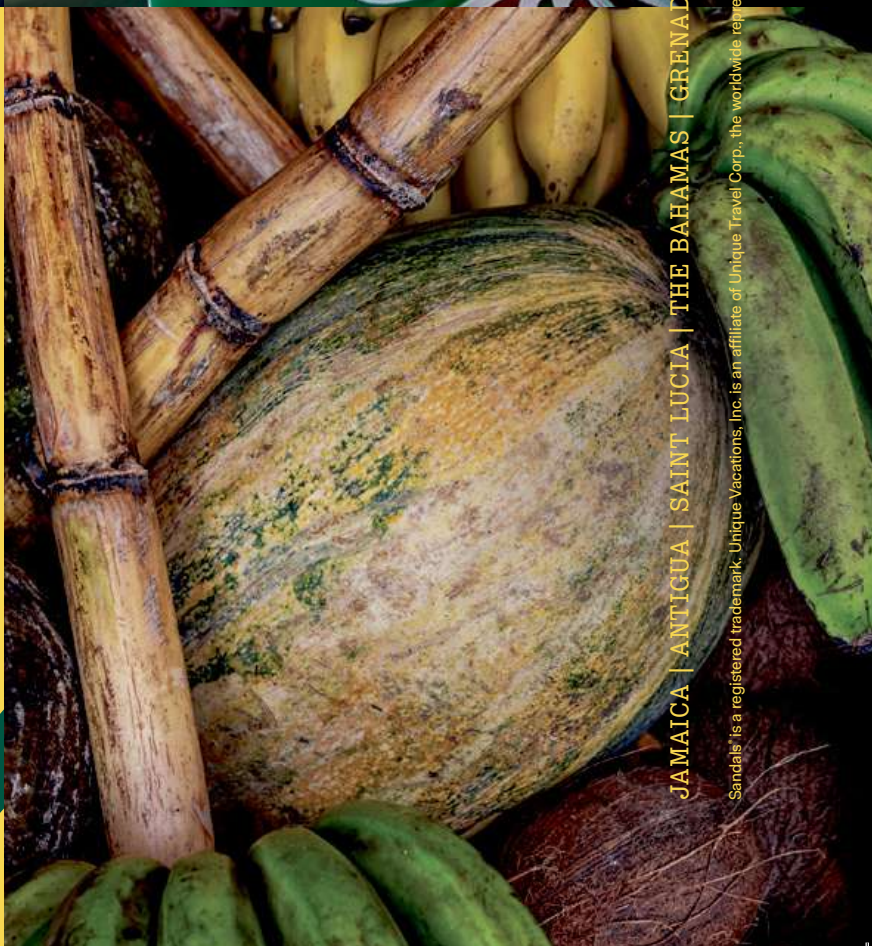
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Reggae Sumfest Goes One Night Only as Festival Adapts After Hurricane Melissa

BY CARIBBEAN TODAY
STAFF

Jamaica's premier reggae festival will take on a new look this year as Reggae Sumfest 2026 returns as a one-night event, with organizers promising a memorable celebration despite the challenges posed by Hurricane Melissa.

Branded "A Taste of Sumfest," the festival is scheduled for July 18 at Plantation Cove in St. Ann, marking a temporary move from its longtime home at Catherine Hall in Montego Bay.

Organizers said the scaled-down format was necessary after Hurricane Melissa damaged Catherine Hall and surrounding infrastructure in western Jamaica last year. While rebuilding efforts continue, they said the goal is to preserve the festival's legacy while supporting the region's recovery.

Headlining the event will be dancehall icons Vybz Kartel and Mavado, whose appearance together is expected to be one of the biggest attractions of the summer entertainment season. The two stars, known respectively as the "World Boss" and the "Gully God," defined one of dancehall's most memorable rivalries during the late 2000s, culminating in the legendary Gaza versus Gully clash at Sting.

DownSound Entertainment CEO Josef Bogdanovich, whose company has managed Reggae Sumfest for the past decade, said the festival remains committed to showcasing Jamaica's music and culture on the world stage.

Since taking over the event in 2016, Bogdanovich said organizers have worked to transform Reggae Sumfest into a world-class entertainment brand while maintaining its authentic Jamaican roots.

He also emphasized the festival's economic importance, noting that it generates income for thousands of Jamaicans, including hotel workers, vendors, transportation providers, production crews, stylists, creatives and small business owners.

To help patrons travel safely to the event, the Jamaica Urban Transit Company (JUTC) has partnered with organizers to provide round-trip transportation from key locations across the island.

JUTC Marketing and Sales Manager Nathalia Palomino said the initiative is designed to make travel easier while reducing traffic congestion and parking challenges.

"At JUTC, we are always seeking opportunities to connect Jamaicans with the experiences they love in a safe and convenient way," Palomino said.

Despite this year's abbreviated format, organizers say "A Taste of Sumfest"



Vybz Kartel and Mavado will take the stage for "A Taste of Sumfest" on July 19th.

will celebrate the resilience of Jamaica's entertainment industry while keeping alive one of the Caribbean's most iconic music festivals.



Shaggy Brings Caribbean Vibes To Central Park With Star-Studded "Shaggy's Yaad"

Fresh off the release of his new album Lottery, Grammy Award-winning reggae superstar Shaggy is bringing the sounds of the Caribbean to the heart of New York City with "Shaggy's Yaad," a free outdoor concert celebrating Jamaican music, culture and community.

The event is set for July 9 at Rumsey Playfield in Central Park as part of the venue's 40th anniversary season and will feature an all-star lineup of reggae, dancehall and R&B performers. Joining Shaggy on stage will be Robin Thicke, Tanto Metro & Devonte, Rayvon, Noah Powa, NESTA, Amber Lee, Matthew Malcolm, and Shuga, along with additional special guests.

Presented in association with VP Records and Shaggy's Boombastic Radio on SiriusXM Channel 332, the concert promises an evening of classic hits, new music and Caribbean energy in one of New York City's most iconic parks.

Inspired by the Jamaican concept of "yaad," meaning home, the event is designed to bring together people of all backgrounds through music, food, culture and

shared community spirit. The celebration will also feature music from DJs Tropical Blendz and Afrique, while DJ Norie, Roxy Romeo and Li'l Nat will serve as hosts throughout the evening.

The free, all-ages event comes as Shaggy continues to expand his influence beyond the recording studio. In addition to releasing new music, the Jamaican-born entertainer has remained a global ambassador for reggae while using his Boombastic Radio platform to spotlight Caribbean artists and culture.

With performances spanning reggae, dancehall and contemporary Caribbean sounds, Shaggy's Yaad is expected to draw thousands of fans for what organizers describe as an unforgettable summer celebration of the islands in the middle of Manhattan.

Doors open at 6 p.m., with the concert beginning at 7 p.m. Admission is free on a first-come, first-served basis.

- NewsAmericasNow.com



Roots & Rhymes Tour Brings Reggae Royalty To New York

Some of Jamaica's biggest names in reggae and dancehall will take the stage at UBS Arena in New York on July 18 as the Roots & Rhymes Summer Tour 2026 wraps up with a star-studded finale.

Headlined by reggae legends Buju Banton and Stephen Marley, the concert has expanded its lineup to include dancehall star Skillibeng, reggae singer Lila Iké, Gramps Morgan, DJ Norie, and Splackavelli Softouch, creating a multigenerational showcase of Jamaican music.

Gramps Morgan said joining the tour alongside Buju Banton and Stephen Marley fulfills a longtime dream, while remembering his late brother and Morgan Heritage lead singer Peetah Morgan.

"It is a very big deal to me, knowing that I get to share a stage with two of my music brothers," Morgan said. "I wish my brother was here to share this moment, but I know he's watching down and smiling."

The tour celebrates the evolution of Jamaican music, blending roots reggae, dancehall and contemporary sounds. Organizers say the addition of Skillibeng and Lila Iké brings two of Jamaica's most exciting modern artists to a lineup already featuring two of reggae's most influential global ambassadors.

The July 18 concert is expected to be one of the summer's biggest celebrations of Jamaican music in the New York metropolitan area.



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Lauderdale Lakes Honors Reggae Star Tarrus Riley With Official Day

BY CARIBBEAN TODAY STAFF

International reggae star Tarrus Riley has received one of South Florida's highest civic honors after the City of Lauderdale Lakes proclaimed June 5, 2026, as "Tarrus Riley Day."

The proclamation was presented by Mayor Veronica Edwards Phillips during the city's 2026 Caribbean American Unity Fest, where the Jamaican singer headlined the annual celebration of Caribbean culture.

Joined by members of the Lauderdale Lakes City Commission, Mayor Edwards Phillips praised Riley for using his music to inspire audiences

around the world while promoting messages of unity, empowerment and cultural pride.

"Tarrus Riley's music has inspired millions through messages of unity, empowerment, love and cultural pride," Edwards Phillips said. "His commitment to uplifting communities through his artistry and philanthropic efforts embodies the spirit of the Caribbean American Unity Fest and reflects values that resonate deeply within our community."

The proclamation recognized Riley's celebrated musical career, including



Roger Steffens, c., with actor Leo DiCaprio, I., and model Giselle Bundchen at r. (Contributed image)

acclaimed albums such as *Challenges*, *Parables*, *Contagious*, *Mecoustic* and *Love*

Situation, as well as hit songs including "She's Royal," "Stay With You," and "Lion Paw."

City officials also honored Riley for his commitment to youth empowerment, education, charitable outreach and his role in promoting reggae music and Caribbean culture on the international stage.

The son of legendary reggae singer Jimmy Riley, Tarrus Riley has established himself as one of Jamaica's leading contemporary reggae artists, earning global recognition for his soulful vocals, socially conscious lyrics and commitment to preserving the genre's rich traditions.

The proclamation also highlighted his contributions to

advancing Black consciousness, social awareness and positive community values through music.

Lauderdale Lakes' Caribbean American Unity Fest is one of the city's signature cultural events, bringing together residents and visitors for an evening of Caribbean music, food and heritage.

Joining Mayor Edwards Phillips in presenting the proclamation were Vice Mayor Sharon Thomas, Commissioner Tycie Causwell, Commissioner Easton K. Harrison, and Commissioner Karlene Maxwell-Williams.



Yaksta Drops Powerful Sophomore Album *The Microphone Saved Me*

BY CARIBBEAN TODAY STAFF

Jamaican reggae artiste Yaksta is back with a powerful new project that blends conscious lyrics, spirituality and personal reflection, as he releases his sophomore album, *The Microphone Saved Me*, now available on all major streaming platforms.

Known to fans as "The Bush Lawd," Yaksta, born Kemaul

Martin, has built a loyal following with music that champions cultural awareness, resilience and authenticity. His latest 15-track album continues that tradition while showcasing his evolution as both an artist and storyteller.

Anchored by the singles "Roar" and "The Return," the album explores themes of revolution, gratitude, accountability, faith, love and self-discovery. Other standout tracks include "Order," a call

for unity within the Rastafari community; "Thankful" featuring Dre Tegs; "For Sale" featuring Silk Boss; "Life" featuring The Gideon; "Splinters in My Heart" featuring Troyton Music; "Through It All," "Jah Live," "It's Okay," and "Next To Me."

Together, the songs chronicle a journey through struggle, perseverance, redemption and personal growth while delivering the socially conscious messages that have become Yaksta's

trademark.

"This presents a journey of divine consciousness as a man," Yaksta said. "Every song comes from a real place. This is more than music; it's a call to remain conscious in a world full of distractions, to stand firm in truth when compromise is celebrated, and to remember that growth, accountability and purpose are still revolutionary."

With *The Microphone Saved Me*, Yaksta delivers more than just another reggae album. It is a deeply personal testimony of survival and transformation, reflecting how music became both a refuge and a vehicle for truth, healing and self-expression.

Widely regarded as one of Jamaica's most authentic



Jamaican reggae artiste Yaksta is back with his sophomore album, *'The Microphone Saved Me.'* (Contributed image)

contemporary reggae voices, Yaksta continues to push the genre forward by combining roots reggae traditions with modern influences and thought-provoking storytelling.



Film Honors Memory Of Slain Jamaican Sisters

BY HOWARD CAMPBELL

The murders of Marsha and Tami Ottey in Toronto 31 years ago, is one of the most gruesome incidents in Canada in the last 30 years. Avis Ottey, their Jamaican mother, returned home from work in August 1995 and discovered their lifeless bodies.

That brutal episode is recalled in *Ottey Sisters*, a movie written and directed by Dwight Benjamin. It was released on May 29th on Theater Giant, a pay-per-view streaming service.

Ottey Sisters is close to home for Benjamin, who plays himself in the movie.

"I was involved in this story and it's very personal to me. I was dating the younger sister Tami when the two sisters tragically passed away, so this is to honor her memory and also a healing process for me at the same time," he told Caribbean Today.

Benjamin said it took five years to complete *Ottey Sisters* which also stars Tamara Gilmore as Tami. He put up the \$150,000 to make the film, with Randy Biglow, Sheree Butler and Dexter Davis completing the cast.

Tami was 16 years-old at the time of her death, three years younger than Marsha. The older sister was a promising student athlete who graduated from Sir Winston Churchill Collegiate in Toronto, and earned a track scholarship to the University of Arkansas.

Tami was a Grade 11 student at Agincourt Collegiate Institute, also in Toronto.

Rohan Ranger, Marsha's ex-boyfriend, and his cousin Adrian Kinkead, were found guilty for their murders. Ranger was granted parole in 2022, while Kinkead is still incarcerated.



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Ocala Jerk Fest To Celebrate Jamaica's Independence With Authentic Island Flavors

Lovers of authentic Jamaican cuisine will have the chance to savor the island's world-famous jerk flavors when Ocala Jerk Fest returns on August 1, combining food, music and culture in celebration of Jamaica's 64th Independence anniversary.

Hosted by the Ocala Jamaica Cultural Alliance, the all-day festival at the Southeastern Livestock Pavilion will showcase one of Jamaica's most celebrated culinary traditions - jerk cooking -featuring smoky, spice-rubbed chicken and other authentic Caribbean dishes prepared using recipes that have been passed

down through generations.

Festivalgoers can also enjoy tropical beverages, Caribbean desserts and other island favorites while exploring Jamaican culture through music and entertainment.

Beyond the food, the event will feature performances by reggae stars Everton Blender, Glen Washington and Anthony Malvo, alongside Noah Hunton and DJ Acid Sound, creating an authentic soundtrack for the Independence celebration.

Guests can also participate in a traditional domino tournament, browse vendors

and compete for door prizes throughout the day.

Organizers say the festival offers Floridians an opportunity to experience the flavors, hospitality and vibrant culture that have made Jamaican cuisine one of the Caribbean's most recognized culinary exports.

Ocala Jerk Fest runs from noon to midnight at the Southeastern Livestock Pavilion, 2232 NE Jacksonville Road. Advance tickets are US\$30, US\$40 at the gate, with VIP admission available for US\$60.



Broward's Only Mango Festival Draws Record Crowd, Sells More Than 5,000 Pounds of Mangoes

South Florida's love affair with mangoes was on full display as approximately 1,200 people gathered for the third annual Island SPACE Mango Festival, making it the largest event yet for Broward County's only mango festival.

Held on Father's Day at the Charles F. Dodge City Center in Pembroke Pines, the festival nearly doubled attendance from last year, attracting food lovers,

home gardeners, families and Caribbean culture enthusiasts from across South Florida, with visitors traveling from as far as Tampa and Port St. Lucie.

Organizers said the event has quickly become one of South Florida's premier mango celebrations while showcasing the Caribbean's deep cultural connection to the tropical fruit.

"For many people from the Caribbean, mangoes are part of our cultural DNA," said Island SPACE Caribbean Museum Executive Director Calibe Thompson. "Mango season brings back memories of childhood, family, community



Mango and Tree Vendor at Island SPACE Mango Festival, 2026. (Photo by David I Muir/Island Syndicate)

and home."

The festival featured chef demonstrations by Chef Irie, Chef Thia, Chef Winston Williams and Chef Guillermo, alongside educational workshops on mango cultivation and home gardening. One of the day's biggest attractions, the Mango Sommelier Experience, proved so popular that organizers added a third tasting session to accommodate demand.

More than 40 vendors participated, offering mango-inspired foods, beverages and artisan products. Organizers said vendors sold more than 5,000 pounds of mangoes, with several selling out before the festival

ended.

Grace Foods, the event's lead sponsor, hosted the popular Mango Eating Contest and welcomed guests with Tropical Rhythms mango beverages, while Father's Day celebrations included a special "Daddy's Kingdom" experience honoring dads.

Island SPACE officials said planning is already underway for an expanded 2027 festival as the event continues to grow while supporting the museum's mission to preserve and celebrate Caribbean heritage in South Florida.



Golden Krust Launches US\$50,000 School Recovery Initiative In Hurricane-Hit Jamaica

Jamaican-founded restaurant chain Golden Krust Caribbean Restaurants has returned to Jamaica with a US\$50,000 "Feeding Futures" initiative to help restore school canteens damaged by Hurricane Melissa and improve student nutrition across the island.

The initiative, implemented in partnership with the National Education Trust (NET), will support the rehabilitation of canteens at seven schools in six hurricane-affected parishes, including Hanover, St. Elizabeth, St. Mary, Trelawny, St. James and Westmoreland.

Golden Krust executives

recently toured the schools, meeting with principals and students to assess reconstruction efforts already underway.

The project follows the company's December 2025 hurricane relief mission, when it partnered with the American Friends of Jamaica to provide US\$20,000 in recovery assistance to farmers whose livelihoods were devastated by the storm.

"When we first visited Jamaica after the hurricane, we saw the devastation with our own eyes," said Steven Clarke, Golden Krust's Vice President of Marketing. "We made a promise that we would return, and it was

important for us to follow through in a meaningful way."

NET Executive Director Latoya Harris-Ghartey welcomed the initiative, saying restoring school canteens will provide safer, more supportive spaces for students while strengthening communities still recovering from the hurricane.

Golden Krust said the program reflects its long-standing commitment to supporting Jamaica through education, community development and long-term recovery efforts.



Miramar To Serve Up Authentic Bahamian And Jamaican Flavors At Summer Festivals

Caribbean cuisine will take center stage in Miramar this summer as the city hosts two free cultural festivals celebrating the rich culinary traditions of The Bahamas and Jamaica.

The inaugural Bahamas Goombay Broward

Festival takes place on July 18 at City Hall Plaza and will

showcase authentic Bahamian food alongside Junkanoo performances, live music, a cultural village and craft market. Festival organizers say visitors can expect island favorites while experiencing the vibrant sights and sounds of Bahamian culture, including two colorful Junkanoo rushes.

The celebration will be followed by the Jamaica Ole Time Fair on August 1 at the Miramar Regional Park Amphitheater, commemorating Jamaica's 64th anniversary of independence.

Food will play a starring role with the return of the Coronation Farmers' Market, a



Bahamas cuisine will take center stage at the inaugural Bahamas Goombay Broward Festival on July 18 at City Hall Plaza, Miramar.

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Peter A. Webley
Publisher

HEALTH NEWS



Broward Health Honored For Maternal Mental Health, Community Care Initiatives

BY CARIBBEAN TODAY STAFF

Broward Health has been recognized by both Broward County and the City of Lauderhill for its efforts to improve maternal mental health and expand access to healthcare services throughout the community.

The Broward County Board of County Commissioners recently proclaimed May 2026 as Maternal Mental Health Awareness Month, highlighting the importance of addressing mothers' mental and physical health needs during pregnancy and the postpartum period. The proclamation also recognized Broward Health and its community partners for their work to reduce maternal health disparities.

"It is an honor for Broward Health to be recognized as a champion of maternal mental health," said Broward Health President and CEO Shane Strum. "Maternal mental health services are vital to moms, expectant

mothers, babies and families." The City of Lauderhill also declared April 27, 2026, as Broward Health Appreciation Day, recognizing the health system's Stay Healthy Together

Healthy Together community wellness event in Lauderhill attracted more than 600 residents. Broward Health's mobile clinics provided primary care visits and preventive



Broward County Board of Commissioners and recipients of Maternal Mental Health Awareness Month proclamation. (Photo Courtesy Of Broward Health)

initiative, which delivers preventive and primary care directly into underserved neighborhoods.

The program, a partnership between Broward Health and Memorial Healthcare System, offers mobile medical services, health screenings, education and food assistance regardless of a patient's ability to pay.

Earlier this year, a Stay

screenings, while volunteers distributed 700 nutritious food bags and 700 hot meals.

Broward Health officials said they remain committed to expanding access to healthcare and strengthening community partnerships to improve health outcomes across Broward County.



Nine Charged In Multi-Million Dollar Florida Healthcare Fraud Crackdown

Federal prosecutors have charged nine individuals in Florida as part of a sweeping crackdown on healthcare fraud schemes that allegedly defrauded Medicare, Medicaid and Veterans Affairs healthcare programs of millions of dollars.

The charges, announced by the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Middle District of Florida, include healthcare fraud, kickback schemes, money laundering and wire fraud involving unnecessary medical procedures, fraudulent COVID-19 testing, telehealth scams, medical equipment fraud and patient steering.

Among the largest cases is a US\$118 million wound care fraud scheme in which Medicare was billed for expensive skin grafts allegedly performed on terminally ill patients that were unnecessary or never provided. Authorities said they have seized US\$11.8 million in assets linked to the case.

Other defendants are accused of submitting millions of dollars in fraudulent claims for COVID-19 test kits, orthopedic braces and genetic testing, while one Orlando clinic owner allegedly paid kickbacks to a Department of Veterans Affairs employee in exchange for referring military veterans, resulting in US\$14 million in false claims.

The Florida cases are part of the U.S. Department of Justice's 2026 National Health Care Fraud Takedown, which has resulted in charges against 455 defendants, including 90 doctors and other licensed healthcare professionals, across 56 federal districts.

Federal officials said the investigations are aimed at protecting taxpayer-funded healthcare programs and holding accountable those who exploit vulnerable patients for financial gain.



Jackson Health Foundation Surpasses \$100 Million To Expand Emergency Care

Jackson Health Foundation has reached a historic \$100 million fundraising milestone to support the expansion of emergency services at Jackson Memorial Hospital, marking one of the largest philanthropic investments in public healthcare in South Florida.

The funding will help advance the hospital's new emergency department and support future phases of expansion planned for 2027 and beyond, as demand for emergency medical services continues to grow.

Foundation officials said the achievement reflects the increasing role philanthropy is playing in strengthening public healthcare infrastructure across the region.

"This milestone demonstrates the growing belief that investing in public healthcare is investing in the future of Miami," said Flavia Llizo, CEO of Jackson Health Foundation.

"As our community continues to grow on an international scale, so does the importance of ensuring we have the healthcare infrastructure necessary to support residents and visitors who rely on

Jackson every day," she said.

Llizo noted that the fundraising momentum will help accelerate access to high-quality, patient-centered emergency care while laying the groundwork for additional improvements in the years ahead.

The milestone comes as South Florida experiences rapid population growth and rising international visibility, increasing demand on hospitals and emergency departments.

Jackson Health Foundation said the campaign underscores how private philanthropy is becoming an increasingly important partner in supporting public healthcare systems, helping fund large-scale projects that improve access to care and enhance patient services beyond what public funding alone can provide.

"We are incredibly grateful to our donors whose generosity is helping transform emergency care for our community," Llizo said, adding that the support will benefit generations of patients throughout Miami-Dade County and the wider South Florida region.





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Antigua Gears Up For 11 Days Of Carnival Celebration

BY CARIBBEAN TODAY STAFF

Travelers looking for the ultimate Caribbean summer escape are being invited to experience the sights, sounds and energy of Antigua Carnival 2026, as the destination prepares for its biggest cultural celebration from July 25 to August 4.

Held under the theme “Feel the Rhythm,” this year’s festival will transform Antigua and Barbuda into an island-wide celebration of music, culture and masquerade, with visitors enjoying everything from colorful street parades and steelpan performances to calypso, soca and all-night fetes.

Antigua and Barbuda Festivals Commission Chair Ambassador Elizabeth Makhoul



Colorful masqueraders and revelers are expected to fill the streets of St. John’s when Antigua Carnival returns from July 25 to August 4. (Contributed image)

said the festival offers visitors an authentic Caribbean cultural experience.

“Antigua Carnival is more than a festival; it’s a rhythm you feel, a culture you experience, and memories you carry long after the music fades,” Makhoul

said, noting that this year’s event also builds excitement ahead of the carnival’s 70th anniversary celebrations in 2027.

Chief Marketing Officer of the Antigua and Barbuda Tourism Authority Charmaine Spencer said Carnival combines

the destination’s world-famous beaches with one of the Caribbean’s premier cultural festivals.

“Visitors can spend relaxing days on our stunning beaches and enjoy evenings filled with the rhythm and excitement of

Carnival,” Spencer said.

Among the highlights are the Opening of Carnival, T-Shirt Mas, J’ouvert, the Parade of the Bands, Panorama, Calypso Monarch, Party Monarch, and Last Lap, along with performances by regional stars including Machel Montano, Patrice Roberts, Voice, Skinny Fabulous, Triple K International, Burning Flames, Tian Winter, and Tizzy.

Tourism officials are encouraging visitors to book flights and accommodations early as Antigua prepares to welcome thousands of revelers for what is widely regarded as one of the Caribbean’s premier summer festivals.



Turks and Caicos Expands Canadian Airlift With New Porter Airlines Service

BY CARIBBEAN TODAY STAFF

Canadian travelers will soon have even easier access to the Turks and Caicos Islands as Porter Airlines launches new non-stop service from Toronto and Ottawa to Providenciales later this year.

Beginning November 6, Porter will operate five weekly flights between Toronto Pearson International Airport and

Howard Hamilton International Airport in Providenciales. A second route from Ottawa International Airport will launch on December 17 with twice-weekly service.

Tourism officials say the expanded airlift is expected to boost winter visitor arrivals from Canada, one of the destination’s fastest-growing tourism markets.

Tourism Minister Zhavargo Jolly welcomed the new service, describing it as a major

investment in the islands’ tourism future.

“Canada has become one of our most valuable tourism markets, and the addition of Porter Airlines service from both Toronto and Ottawa represents a significant investment in the future of the Turks and Caicos Islands,” Jolly said.

He noted that increased marketing, travel advisor training and partnerships with Canadian tour operators have

helped drive growing demand for the destination.

Minister with responsibility for Aviation, Arlington Musgrove, said the expanded service reflects confidence in the Turks and Caicos Islands and supports the country’s long-term tourism and economic development goals.

The new routes will be operated by Porter Airlines’ Embraer E195-E2 aircraft, which feature 132 seats and no

middle seats.

Known for its award-winning beaches, luxury resorts, world-class diving and vibrant culinary scene, the Turks and Caicos Islands continues to attract growing numbers of Canadian visitors seeking warm-weather escapes during the winter season.



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IMMIGRATION NEWS



Supreme Court Upholds Birthright Citizenship, Delivering Major Victory For Caribbean And Immigrant Families

In a landmark decision with major implications for Caribbean immigrant families across the United States, the U.S. Supreme Court has struck down President Donald Trump’s executive order seeking to end automatic birthright citizenship for children born on American soil to undocumented immigrants and certain temporary visa holders.

The ruling reaffirms the protections of the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, ensuring that children born in the United States remain American citizens regardless of their parents’ immigration status.

The decision marks a significant defeat for one of the Trump administration’s signature immigration policies and provides certainty for thousands of immigrant families, including many from the Caribbean, who have long relied on birthright citizenship protections.

What Caribbean Immigrants Need To Know

The US Supreme Court in Washington, DC, US, on Monday, June 29, 2026. President Donald Trump is on

the brink of learning whether the US Supreme Court will bless two of his most audacious gambits, his bids to oust a Federal Reserve governor and roll back automatic birthright citizenship.

For Caribbean families living in the United States, the ruling means:

- Children born in the U.S. remain U.S. citizens at birth, regardless of whether their parents are undocumented or are legally present on temporary visas.
- President Trump’s executive order will not take effect, preserving decades of constitutional precedent.
- The Fourteenth Amendment continues to protect birthright citizenship, maintaining a principle that has been part of American law for more than 150 years.

Why The Court Ruled This Way

Writing for the majority, Chief Justice John Roberts said the executive order violated the Constitution’s Citizenship Clause, reaffirming that children born in the United States are



Demonstrators at the U.S. Supreme Court, Wednesday, April 1, 2026, in Washington, D.C. (Tom Brenner/AP Photo)

entitled to citizenship regardless of their parents’ immigration status. Justice Brett Kavanaugh joined the majority, while Justices Clarence Thomas, Samuel Alito, and Neil Gorsuch dissented. Chief Justice Roberts Jr., writing for the majority, explained that Mr. Trump’s executive order violated the 14th Amendment of the Constitution. Children born in the United States to undocumented parents or to parents temporarily in the country, he wrote, are citizens at birth.

“Citizenship, then and now,

was the right to have rights – to freely participate in our political community,” Chief Justice Roberts wrote. “The framers of the 14th Amendment extended that promise to ‘every free-born person in this land.’”

The case was brought shortly after the executive order was signed, with civil rights organizations and immigrant advocacy groups arguing that the order violated one of the Constitution’s clearest guarantees. The Supreme Court agreed, leaving intact the long-established interpretation of the Fourteenth Amendment.

Why It Matters To Caribbean Families

The ruling is particularly significant for Caribbean immigrant communities in states such as Florida, New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Georgia, where large Jamaican, Haitian, Trinidadian and Tobagonian, Guyanese, Dominican, Bahamian, and other Caribbean populations have made the United States their home.

Immigration advocates welcomed the decision, saying it protects families from uncertainty and preserves equal citizenship rights for children born in America. Civil rights groups also noted that the Fourteenth Amendment, originally adopted following the Civil War, remains a cornerstone of equal protection under the law.

“Today, our children know what we have always known: they belong,” said Gladys Vega, Executive Director of La Colaborativa on June 30th. “This decision protects generations of families and the promise that every child born in this country deserves the same rights and the same future.”

“Today is a victory for our children and for every family that had the courage to stand up for them,” added Lenita Reason, Executive Director of the Brazilian Worker Center. “No child should grow up wondering whether they belong in the country where they were born.

Today’s decision ensures they won’t have to.”

“The Fourteenth Amendment constitutionalized the longstanding common-law rule of birthright citizenship. The children of immigrants are fully subject to U.S. jurisdiction, and they are citizens at birth,” said Ivan Espinoza-Madrigal, Executive Director of Lawyers for Civil Rights. “Birthright citizenship is more than a legal status. It is the foundation of belonging, security, and equal opportunity. The Fourteenth Amendment promises children certainty from the moment they are born – not years of fear and uncertainty. Every child deserves the security of knowing that the Constitution protects them from their very first day.”

Glenn Harris, president of Race Forward, the national racial justice organization, added: “The Supreme Court’s ruling to protect birthright citizenship, as guaranteed by the 14th Amendment, affirms a foundational principle of our democracy: that citizenship cannot be denied based on race, ancestry, immigration status, or the circumstances of one’s birth.”

The ruling also avoids what legal experts warned would have been a costly and complex overhaul of the nation’s birth registration and citizenship verification systems. The legal battle over birthright citizenship began on the first day of Trump’s second term, when he announced an executive order titled “Protecting the Meaning and Value of American Citizenship.” In the order, he declared that citizenship would no longer be automatically granted to babies born on U.S. soil. In particular, children born to immigrants who entered the country illegally would no longer be citizens, nor would those born to parents here on a lawful but temporary basis, such as those on student, work or tourist visas.

The president’s order faced immediate legal challenges, as civil rights organizations, immigrant advocacy groups and expectant parents sued, successfully winning in court to block the order while lawsuits unfolded. It never went into effect, and there were few signs that the administration had been preparing the dramatic overhaul of the citizenship system that would have been necessary had it been allowed.

For Caribbean families, the decision provides clarity that children born in the United States continue to enjoy the same constitutional protections that have existed for generations.

- NewsAmericasnow.com



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History-Making Curaçao Goalkeeper Returns To Miami FC After Record-Setting FIFA Heroics

BY CARIBBEAN TODAY STAFF

Fresh off one of the greatest goalkeeping performances in FIFA World Cup history, Curaçao captain and Miami FC goalkeeper Eloy Room is back in South Florida after joking that his historic display deserves to be immortalized with a statue in his homeland.

"I think I need a statue in Curaçao now," Room said with a smile after leading the tiny Caribbean nation to its first-ever FIFA World Cup point in a scoreless draw against Ecuador.

The 37-year-old goalkeeper was expected to return to the starting lineup when Miami FC hosts Birmingham Legion FC on July 5th in USL Championship action, giving South Florida fans the chance to watch one of the Caribbean's newest sporting icons just days after his record-setting World Cup performance.

Room delivered one of the tournament's defining moments by making 15 saves against Ecuador, earning FIFA's Man of the Match honors while helping Curaçao secure the first World Cup point in the country's history. His performance etched his name into football history.

The 15 saves are the most

ever recorded by a goalkeeper during a regulation 90-minute FIFA World Cup match since official records began in 1966. Only former United States goalkeeper Tim Howard has made more saves in a World Cup match - 16 against Belgium in 2014 - but four of those came during extra time.

"It means everything. It feels like a victory," Room said after the match. "It's the first point at the World Cup. It means everything."

Although millions of football fans are only now discovering him, Room has quietly built one of the Caribbean's most accomplished football careers.

Born in the Netherlands on February 6, 1989, Room chose to represent Curaçao through his father's heritage and has become one of the island's greatest sporting ambassadors. Since making his international debut in 2015, he has grown into Curaçao's joint all-time most-capped player while helping transform the island into one of CONCACAF's rising football nations.

Before arriving in South Florida, Room spent 15 years with Dutch club Vitesse, helping the team capture its first KNVB Cup title in its 125-year

history in 2017. He later joined PSV Eindhoven before moving to Major League Soccer with the Columbus Crew, where he won the 2020 MLS Cup and captured Major League Soccer's Save of the Year award for a spectacular double save.

Following additional spells with Vitesse and Belgian side Cercle Brugge, Room signed with Miami FC in December 2025.

He also played a pivotal role in helping Curaçao qualify for its first-ever FIFA World Cup, keeping a clean sheet against regional rival Jamaica in the decisive qualifier before stepping onto football's biggest stage alongside fellow Miami FC teammate Jürgen Locadia.

While Curaçao opened the tournament with a heavy loss to Germany, Room responded with a performance for the ages against Ecuador, repeatedly denying the South Americans and frustrating one attack after



Miami FC goalkeeper Eloy Room's historic FIFA World Cup performance has already sparked calls for a statue in Curaçao after his record-setting 15-save display earned the Caribbean star FIFA Man of the Match honors. (Getty Images/Hard Beat Communications artistic montage)

another in what many observers described as one of the finest goalkeeping displays in World Cup history. His remarkable performance quickly resonated far beyond the pitch.

Artists created murals, illustrations and digital tributes celebrating the Curaçao captain, while his social media following exploded from just over 122,000 followers to more than one million in the days following the match, making him one of the tournament's biggest breakout stars.

Now, after making history for Curaçao and elevating Caribbean football on the world's biggest stage, Room returned to South Florida Sunday, where Miami FC tied with Birmingham Legion FC as supporters had the opportunity to welcome home the goalkeeper whose unforgettable World Cup heroics have already inspired calls - and his own playful suggestion - for a statue honoring one of the Caribbean's greatest football moments.



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SPORTS NEWS



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Cayman's Jaxon Cover Makes History As First NHL Draft Pick

The Cayman Islands celebrated a landmark moment in sporting history on June 26 when 18-year-old Jaxon Cover became the first Caymanian ever selected in the National Hockey League (NHL) Entry Draft.

Cover was chosen by the Ottawa Senators with the 32nd and final pick of the first round, marking a breakthrough for both the young forward and Cayman Islands sports.

The achievement is especially remarkable given Cover's unlikely journey. Raised on Grand Cayman, an island without a single ice rink, he did not begin skating on ice until he was 13 years old. Before that, he honed his skills playing ball hockey and roller hockey.

"It went down to the



18-year-old Jaxon Cover has become the first Caymanian ever selected in the National Hockey League (NHL) Entry Draft.

wire," said his mother, Nanalie Cover, president and CEO of the University College of the Cayman Islands, who watched the historic moment unfold in Buffalo alongside family members and friends.

"We are very thankful, grateful and humbled by Jaxon's journey, and where he is this morning," she told Cayman media following the draft.

She said her son's accomplishment should inspire

young people throughout the Cayman Islands.

"The people of the Cayman Islands have this as a symbol of what we can do, and what is possible for all, irrespective of where they originate," she said.

Cover recently starred for the London Knights of the Ontario Hockey League. Rather than joining the NHL immediately, he will continue his development at Penn State University, where he has

committed to playing collegiate hockey. Penn State is also the alma mater of this year's No. 1 overall NHL draft pick, Gavin McKenna.

For the Cayman Islands, Cover's historic selection represents a powerful reminder that world-class athletes can emerge from even the most unexpected places.

- *Rewritten from CMC*



Saint Lucia Scores Big With Multi-Year Arsenal Partnership

BY CARIBBEAN TODAY STAFF

Saint Lucia is taking its tourism brand to the global stage after signing a multi-year partnership with Arsenal Football Club, the English Premier League and UEFA Champions League champions.

The Saint Lucia Tourism Authority (SLTA) announced that the agreement, which begins with the 2026-27 football season, designates Saint Lucia as Arsenal's Official Destination Partner, providing the Caribbean island with unprecedented exposure to the club's millions of supporters worldwide.

As part of the partnership, Saint Lucia's brand will be featured at Arsenal's Emirates Stadium during Premier League, Women's Super League and cup matches, as well as across the club's digital platforms and international marketing campaigns.

Tourism Minister Dr. Ernest Hilaire said the partnership aligns one of the Caribbean's fastest-growing tourism destinations with one of the world's most recognizable football clubs.

"We are entering an exciting term as Arsenal's Official

Destination Partner," Hilaire said. "We look forward to showcasing Saint Lucia's vibrant culture, dynamic events calendar and natural beauty to Arsenal supporters worldwide."

Beyond tourism promotion, the agreement includes plans to establish an Arsenal Academy Hub in Saint Lucia to provide mentorship and development opportunities for young footballers.

Arsenal Chief Commercial Officer Juliet Slot described Saint Lucia as "a world-renowned destination with a rich history and culture," adding that the partnership will strengthen the club's global community while supporting its future growth.

The collaboration also reinforces Saint Lucia's growing investment in sports tourism, adding Arsenal to an impressive list of international partners that includes the New York Yankees, Toronto Raptors, Toronto Maple Leafs and Brooklyn Nets.

The island hopes the partnership will boost visitor arrivals, promote football development, and expand its international profile.



Winston Benjamin Warns West Indies Cricket Is "Literally Dead"

Former West Indies fast bowler Winston Benjamin has issued a sobering assessment of Caribbean cricket, warning that the region's once-dominant game is "literally dead" because of years of neglect at the grassroots level.

Benjamin, an Antiguan who now serves as head coach of the Leeward Islands and operates the Grassroots Cricket Academy, said the region is failing to properly develop young players before pushing them onto the international stage.

"Our cricket is literally dead, and we have nothing coming through," Benjamin said. "We don't have the patience, and we're not promoting cricket from the grassroots level upwards. We're hoping that somebody comes

through the crack, and when they come through, they have a lot of incorrect fundamentals."

He pointed to Windward Islands batsman Alick Athanaze as an example of a talented player who needs time to develop. "He has talent, youth and all that it takes to become an international great, but I think we just don't have the patience," Benjamin said.

Benjamin also cited teenage prospect Jewel Andrew, suggesting he was introduced to top-level cricket too soon. "They have a young Jewel Andrew that we throw in... it's either sink or swim. Patience again, now he's on the outside looking in," he said.

The former pacer also criticized the growing emphasis on T20 cricket at youth level,

arguing that players are being encouraged to specialize in the shortest format before mastering the game's fundamentals.

"When we look at the fundamentals of the players that we call elite, it's found wanting," Benjamin said. "We are failing our youngsters... We are not providing them with the necessary tools to face the outside world in terms of cricket."

Despite his concerns, Benjamin believes West Indies cricket can recover if the region recommits to patient, structured development beginning at the grassroots level.

- *Rewritten from CMC*



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A Caribbean Celebration: AJ Dybantsa And The Future Of Jamaican Basketball

BY NYAN REYNOLDS

Like millions of basketball fans around the world, many people of Caribbean descent tuned in recently to watch the 2026 NBA Draft. For Jamaicans and the wider Caribbean Diaspora, however, this draft carried a significance that extended far beyond basketball - especially this Caribbean American Heritage Month.

With the first overall selection, the Washington Wizards chose AJ Dybantsa, the highly touted forward from BYU, making him the top pick in the 2026 NBA Draft. It was a historic moment, not only for Dybantsa and his family but also for a region that has long sought greater representation at the highest levels of professional basketball.

For many Caribbean basketball fans, the moment immediately brought back memories of Jamaican-born legend Patrick Ewing, whose rise to basketball greatness inspired generations throughout the region. Since Ewing emerged as one of the defining figures of his era, the Caribbean has produced talented players and influential contributors to the game, but few moments have resonated quite like seeing a player with Jamaican roots hear his name called first overall on draft night.

Dybantsa's connection to Jamaica is well known. His mother traces her roots to Jamaica, while his father has Congolese roots. That heritage has made him a source of pride for many throughout the Caribbean diaspora. Reports indicate that his mother grew up in Hanover, Jamaica, before moving to the United States.

Yet, the excitement surrounding Dybantsa extends beyond heritage alone. Many Caribbean fans have followed his journey closely because he has already demonstrated a willingness to engage with Jamaica. Through basketball clinics, community outreach, and charitable efforts, he has built connections with young people on the island. For those children, seeing someone with Jamaican roots rise to the pinnacle of the sport reinforces the belief that global success is possible regardless of where one begins.

There is also a larger conversation taking place throughout Jamaican basketball circles.

For years, supporters have debated what the future core of the Jamaican national basketball program might look like. The discussion includes NBA talent and players with Jamaican ancestry spread across the league. Names such as Norman Powell, Isaiah Stewart, and the highly regarded Thompson twins are frequently mentioned as potential contributors to Jamaica's international ambitions. The hope is that a growing pool of talent with Jamaican heritage can help elevate the national program onto larger stages such as FIBA competitions and future Basketball



Former BYU star, AJ Dybantsa, was selected by the Washington Wizards with the no. 1 overall pick in the 2026 NBA Draft. (AP Photo/NBA.com)

World Cups.

Whether those dreams materialize remains to be

seen. International basketball eligibility, personal decisions, and professional commitments all play

a role. But the mere possibility has energized basketball fans across the Caribbean.

For now, the focus remains on AJ Dybantsa's future with the Wizards. Washington selected him because of his immense talent and potential. After a dominant season at BYU, where he averaged 25.5 points per game and established himself as one of the premier prospects in the country, he entered the draft as the consensus top prospect and lived up to expectations. The journey ahead will not be easy. Every first overall pick enters the league carrying enormous expectations. Comparisons will come quickly. Critics will emerge just as fast. But for many Jamaicans and members of the Caribbean diaspora, last

night's celebration was not about predictions.

It was about possibility. It was about seeing a young man with Caribbean roots reach the highest position available on basketball's biggest draft stage.

And it was about imagining what that success might mean for the next child in Hanover, Kingston, Montego Bay, Port of Spain, Bridgetown, Nassau, or Georgetown who picks up a basketball and dreams of following the same path.

June 23rd belonged to AJ Dybantsa. But in many ways, it also belonged to the Caribbean and its Diaspora.

- NewsAmericasNow.com



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