

Biden says Trump is lying about Cooper, NC Helene response. Here’s what’s really happening.

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RALEIGH
Former President Donald Trump complained about North Carolina’s disaster response on social media on Monday, claiming without evidence that Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper isn’t helping Republican-leaning areas of the state impacted by Hurricane Helene.

President Joe Biden told reporters on Monday that Trump is lying.

The Republican presidential candidate targeted Cooper in a social media post about how he was going to Valdosta, Georgia, “in order to pay my respects and bring lots of relief material.”

He goes on to say that he “was also going to stop into North Carolina, which has really been hit hard. I have a lot of supplies ready for them, but access and communication is now restricted, and we want to make sure that Local Emergency Management is able to focus on helping the people most affected, and not being concerned with me. I’ll be there shortly, but don’t like the reports that I’m getting about the Federal Government, and the Democrat Governor of the State, going out of their way to not help people in Republican areas. MAGA!”

In reality, federal, state and local governments are working together on relief. And relief is also coming from other states.

Trump did not explain where he was getting “re-

ports” of some people not being helped because of their political party affiliation. In general, urban areas like Asheville have concentrations of Democratic voters while Republican voters are in rural areas.

Biden, asked Monday about Trump’s comments on Cooper’s Helene response, angrily interjected before a reporter finished asking the question, according to the White House pool report.

“He’s lying, and the governor told him he was lying. The governor told him he’s lying. I’ve spoken to the governor, spent time with him, and he told him he’s lying. I don’t know why he does it ... that’s simply not true, and it’s irresponsible,” Biden said.

Cooper surveyed the damage Monday, joined by FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell and leaders of the departments of transportation, public safety and Health and Human Services, which are part of his Cabinet.

“People are working around the clock to provide help to them right now — food, water, working hard to make sure that we’ve got shelters open all across this area, and working to get power back on,” Cooper told reporters in a press briefing at the Asheville airport on Monday, when asked about the speed of the response. “When you have a situation where communities are completely cut off, when first responders can’t even get in, because water is still there, and rivers are rising right now, as we speak.”

“A lot of work is done. What we want to tell peo-

ple is that more help is on the way, and help is continuing. This is our main mission right now, and this is a massive coordinated effort to help this area, both in the short term and in the long term,” Cooper said.

REP. EDWARDS, SPEAKER MOORE SURVEY DAMAGE

Also at the briefing in Asheville with Cooper were Republican U.S. Rep. Chuck Edwards and Republican N.C. Sen. Tim Moffitt.

Edwards and Republican House Speaker Tim Moore surveyed damage via a helicopter on Monday, Edwards said in a news release.

“We’ve had a very disappointing response from FEMA, and a very disappointing response, initially, from the North Carolina Emergency Management services,” Edwards, who represents far western North Carolina, said in an interview with McClatchy. “But we’re seeing resources start to show up. Today, the governor has given us assurances that there will be more and I think we’re on our way to a good solid recovery.”

Edwards said he was frustrated because the storm ended at 10 a.m. Friday in the western part of the state.

“I’m only seeing resources brought into Western North Carolina today,” Edwards said. “We lost, I’m going to say 80 hours — and we knew the storm was coming, so 80 hours ago we should have seen FEMA deploying resources to the perimeter of where we expected the storm to

hit. But instead it looked like folks took the weekend off. They’re just showing up today.”

“The people in this district are hurting, and they’re really disappointed with the response from the federal government, and our state government.”

Edwards said it was Cooper’s responsibility to oversee North Carolina Emergency Management, which is responsible for the initial response in a disaster.

“I had a call from the White House earlier today, saying, Congressman, we know that the response from FEMA has been slow, but tell me what you need me to do,” Edwards said. “And my response is, ‘I don’t need people to continue to ask me what I need them to do. I need people to do things.’”

Edwards said to White House officials’ credit, they told him to put together a list of immediate needs and promised to help check things off that list.

Edwards asked for temporary cellphone towers, unprecedented amounts of water, meals ready-to-eat, a communication center and a grocery distribution warehouse to replenish stores.

“I’m giving the White House a chance to live up to their promise that they’ll help us get the things on that list,” Edwards said.

Republican Senate leader Phil Berger said Monday that he had been “briefed by Emergency Management officials on the impacts of Hurricane Helene and the emergency response efforts. This was an absolutely devastating

storm.”

“The General Assembly is evaluating what a disaster recovery package could look like and what other steps we can take. North Carolina has a healthy savings account that will help us respond to the catastrophic nature of this storm,” Berger said on social media.

‘MAJOR ACCESS CHALLENGES’

N.C. Emergency Management Director William Ray said that state officials are using ground routes to distribute water and food that they can access “reliably and safely,” including through Interstate 40 and Interstate 26.

“We know there are many areas of the western part of the state that still have major access challenges, which is why we put in place the operation you see here of moving, using aircraft to move commodities into those impacted areas,” Ray said at the Asheville airport.

“Right now, we are trying to surge as much of the commodities into the entire impacted region. Yesterday as an example, either via ground or by air, 30 counties had commodities delivered to them yesterday,” he said.

“We know that we’re not going to be able to meet right now, out of the gate, the universal need that everyone has, that’s why we are surging up both our distribution so we’re putting additional drivers on, to be able to get more trucks on the road, to get commodities in faster,” Ray said, as well as aircraft.

Emergency Management officials have 40 trailers a day of food and water they are trying to distribute to the “entire impacted area,” he said.

NATIONAL GUARD RESPONSE

Cooper activated more than 400 service members in the N.C. National

Guard. The National Guard has rescued 422 people since the storm, out of more than 500 total rescues that includes search and rescue teams from 27 states and 18 federal teams. Of those rescued, 42 were critically injured people and four were infants. There were 64 animals rescued as well.

The Guard has also delivered 306 pallets of water and 230 pallets of food.

Republican U.S. Rep. Virginia Foxx of Banner Elk said Monday she wanted to see more from Cooper’s office. Only six members of the National Guard were on the ground in Avery County, she said.

“We don’t have enough National Guard,” Foxx told McClatchy. “Last night, they had sent out 400 National Guard for 25 counties. That’s a very small number.”

The North Carolina Department of Transportation posted several times on social media and on its website that “all roads” in Western North Carolina are closed and the only travel on them should be for emergencies, over the weekend and on Monday. NCDOT is a Cabinet agency of Cooper’s administration.

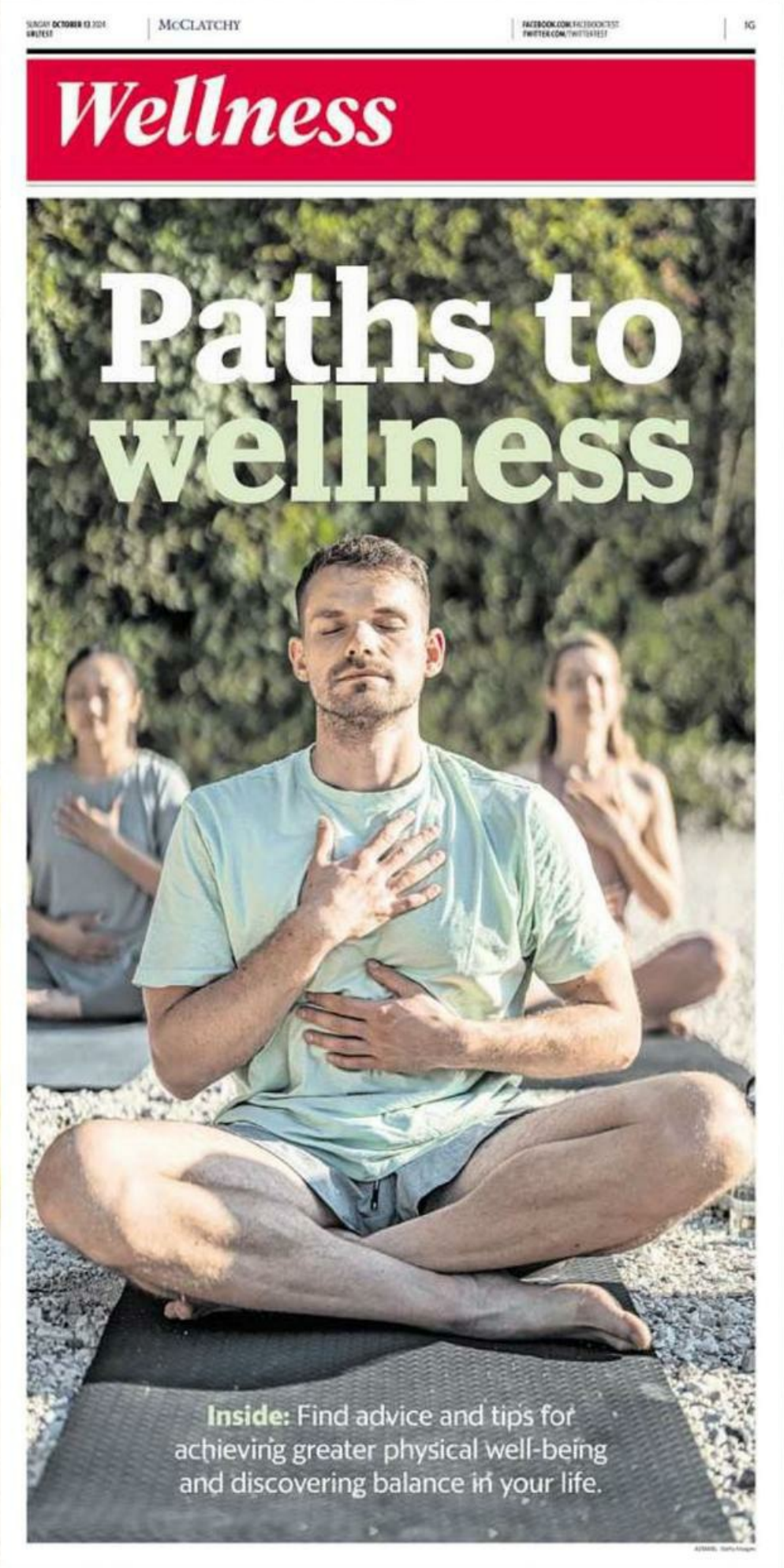
On Saturday, the North Carolina National Guard shared photos of the work they had already begun, joined by other states’ National Guard soldiers from Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Iowa and Maryland to support relief efforts by air.

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