

Lighting the way - The Moravian Star is relit as a symbol of hope for people in western North Carolina

October 17, 2024 | Winston-Salem Journal (NC) Author: JOHN HINTON Staff Reporter | Section: A | 611 Words Page: 1 OpenURL Link

The Moravian Star at Atrium Health Wake Forest Baptist Medical Center was relit early Tuesday night as a symbol of hope for the survivors of the recent flooding in western North Carolina.

Dr. Keith Stirewalt, a chaplain and physician assistant at the medical center, called for a moment of silence.

"This evening, we light our magnificent Moravian Star as a symbol - as a reminder of the healing so desperately needed in our state and in our world," Stirewalt said afterward.

The star with its shining light "reinforces the knowledge through us that light can overcome even the darkest of times," Stirewalt said. "Let this light of hope shine, warming all in its radiance."

Steady rain fell on the handful of people who attended the star-lighting event. The rain forced organizers to cancel a candlelight vigil for the flood survivors.

Since 1992, Wake Forest Baptist has celebrated the lighting of the 31-foot Moravian Star atop the medical center to encourage the holiday spirit within Winston-Salem, the organization said.

The star will be lit again in early December to observe Advent, which marks the beginning of the Christmas season.

The star weighs more than 3,000 pounds and has 27 points that range 7 feet to 11 feet in length and weighs from 30 pounds to 60 pounds each, the medical center said in a statement.

Each of the 27 points is illuminated by a 100-watt bulb.

This is the second time in recent years that the medical center officials lit the star in the months before December.

The star was lit in March 2020 to uplift local residents amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

At Tuesday's night ceremony, Cathleen Wheatley, the president of Atrium Health Wake Forest Baptist Medical Center, said that lighting the star in mid-October is a special moment.

"We are lighting the Moravian star early - to share a sign of hope, strength and solidarity with our western neighbors, and to show our ongoing support for all impacted by Hurricane Helene," Wheatley said.

Stars hold different meanings for many people, Wheatley said.

"But at the core, they are symbols that give us hope and lead us forward with light," Wheatley said. "They unite us together. Now more than ever, this spirt of unity is needed."

The medical center has accepted more than 135 patients from western North Carolina at its local hospital and clinics, and its AirCare and ambulance teams have transported more than 640 patients to hospitals across the region, Wheatley said.

Earlier Tuesday, Baptist employees donated household items and clothes to the United Way, which will deliver the

items to people in western North Carolina, Wheatley said.

jhinton@wsjournal.com336-727-7299@jhintonWSJ

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Feds approve funding for hurricane recovery - Feds approve funding for hurricane recovery

October 17, 2024 | Winston-Salem Journal (NC) Author: REBECCA SANTANA Associated Press | Section: B | 170 Words Page: 1 OpenURL Link

WASHINGTON - The federal government has approved nearly \$2 billion in assistance across six states to help people hit hard by hurricanes Helene and Milton, the White House said Wednesday.

The federal government has been under intense pressure to show that it is getting help to areas devastated by the back-to-back hurricanes in late September and early October as it warns that more money will be needed to fund the response.

Helene was a Category 4 storm that struck Florida's Gulf Coast on Sept. 26, dumped trillions of gallons of rain and left a trail of destruction for hundreds of miles across several states. Hurricane Milton swept across Florida two weeks later.

Hurricane response has become a key part of the upcoming presidential election with former President Donald Trump and Vice President Kamala Harris both positioning themselves as the best candidate to respond to such calamities.

About \$911 million has gone toward damage caused by Hurricane Helene, while about \$620 million has gone toward recovery from Hurricane Milton, according to the White House.

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Disasters test leaders.Trump fails every time. - LZ Granderson: Disasters like Helene and Milton test leaders. Trump fails every time

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In 2019, residents of Alabama were unnecessarily alarmed after then-President Donald Trump incorrectly said Hurricane Dorian was headed their way. However, instead of acknowledging he made a mistake, Trump questioned the National Weather Service and showed Americans a falsified weather map - which is against the law.

Today the former president is spewing lies about relief efforts and federal resources at a time when those affected by Hurricanes Helene and Milton need guidance and aid. State and local Republicans have asked him to stop, because apparently misinformation mucks up rescue and relief efforts. Of course, Trump doesn't care so long as his lies also muck up the election.

What can I say? Same Trump, different year.

After he intentionally played down the threat of COVID-19 in those initial months of 2020, Trump said he purposefully misled the public to prevent panic. As a result, we were ill-prepared as a country. Our hospitals became quickly overrun, with people dying in school gyms and bodies held in refrigerated trucks as morgues overflowed.

The pandemic began with him lying to us about the severity of the virus. Four years later, and once again Trump's instinct as a leader during a national crisis is to lie to the American people and complain about "The View."

Elections have consequences. The first Trump term added \$8.4 trillion to the national debt and forced rape victims to give birth after the overturning of Roe vs. Wade by Trump justices. If you flip through Project 2025, the plan conservatives put together to reshape the federal government under a second Trump administration, you'll see that Round 2 would be much worse.

Trump would even make natural disasters worse.

The 2025 blueprint calls for chopping up and selling off large chunks of the federal government's agency devoted to gathering data about weather - the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. That's where the National Hurricane Center is housed. The expert who suggested that Trump scrap this agency for parts, Thomas F. Gilman, was a lifer in the automobile industry before joining Trump's Commerce Department in 2019, the same year Trump redrew the route of a hurricane with a Sharpie.

Project 2025 sets out to replace tens of thousands of experienced civil servants who have relevant expertise with political appointees who are first loyal to Trump - people like Gilman. If you're still wondering how bad that could be, consider that while the nation was bracing for Hurricane Milton - on the heels of Hurricane Helene - one of Trump's allies, Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, R-Ga., used her platform to tell Americans "they" control the weather.

She didn't say who "they" are, how "they" are doing it or what House Republicans would do to stop ... "they." It sounds nonsensical because it is. But do not conflate nonsensical with inconsequential. Elections have consequences.

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That's how the party of Lincoln has sadly become the party that responds to national emergencies by scapegoating

others: claiming "they" control the weather; "they" are eating pets; "they" are paid actors rather than traumatized survivors of a school shooting. To this day, House Speaker Mike Johnson refuses to say who won the 2020 election. Instead when reporters ask, he accuses them of hurling "gotcha questions" at him.

All of which brings me here: For more than 50 years, since Richard M. Nixon faced off against John F. Kennedy, televised debates have been a benchmark in presidential politics. With Trump at the center of attention, the first Republican primary debate of 2016 gave Fox the most-watched nonsports event in cable history. The second debate also brought high ratings. Trump didn't start skipping debates in the primary until Fox News announced it would be using video of previous appearances to hold candidates accountable for their words.

That's why he and his running mate, Sen. JD Vance (R-Ohio), oppose fact-checking during debates and interviews. Accountability is why Trump avoided debating Ambassador Nikki Haley during the 2024 primary. It's why he got into a fight with journalists at a news conference this past summer. It's why he's afraid to debate Vice President Kamala Harris again.

When a businessman is accustomed to escaping consequences for his misdeeds by filing for bankruptcy as often as Trump has, I can see why he'd be uncomfortable with being held accountable.

However, a president or candidate doesn't get to avoid accountability any more than the country can escape the consequences of an election. Trump's lies in office did damage. His lies today are hurting people who need help. And no one should be surprised: In every crisis, Trump has shown himself to be a liar, not a leader.

LZ Granderson is an op-ed columnist for the Los Angeles Times.

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