

## IRS warns taxpayers of charity scams following recent hurricanes

October 17, 2024 | News-Topic, The (Lenoir, NC) Author: STAFF REPORTS | Section: Archives | 444 Words OpenURL Link

In the aftermath of Hurricanes Milton and Helene, the Internal Revenue Service today cautioned taxpayers of scammers who use fake charities to gather sensitive personal and financial data from unsuspecting donors, according to a press release from the IRS.

Scammers commonly set up fake charities to take advantage of peoples' generosity during natural disasters and other tragic events, according to the press release.

"Many people want to help survivors and their families by donating to charities," said IRS Commissioner Danny Werfel. "Too often, criminals take advantage of would-be donors' kindness by stealing money and personal information from well-meaning taxpayers. You should never feel pressured by solicitors to immediately give to a charity. It's important to do the research to verify if they're authentic first."

Tax-Exempt Organization

Search (TEOS) tool

Those interested in making donations should first check the Tax-Exempt Organization Search (TEOS) tool on IRS.gov to help find or verify qualified, legitimate charities, according to the press release.

With this tool, people can:

Verify the legitimacy of a charity,

Check its eligibility to receive tax-deductible charitable contributions, and

Search for information about an organization's tax-exempt status and filings.

Tips to avoid fake charities

Always verify. Scammers frequently use names that sound like well-known charities to confuse people. Fake charity promoters may use emails, fake websites, or alter or "spoof" their caller ID to make it look like a real charity is calling to solicit donations. Potential donors should ask the fundraiser for the charity's name, website and mailing address so they can independently confirm the information. Use the TEOS tool to verify if an organization is a legitimate tax-exempt charity.

Be cautious about how a donation is requested. Never work with charities that ask for donations by giving numbers from a gift card or by wiring money. That's a scam. It's safest to pay by credit card or check — and only after verifying the charity is real.

Don't share too much information. Scammers are on the lookout for both money and personal information. Never disclose Social Security numbers, credit card numbers or personal identification numbers.

Don't give in to pressure. Scammers often pressure people into making an immediate payment. In contrast, legitimate charities are happy to get a donation at any time. Donors should not feel rushed.

The IRS also encourages individuals encountering a fake or suspicious charity to see the FBI's resources on Charity

and Disaster Fraud, according to the press release.

## Claim a deduction

Taxpayers who give money or goods to a charity can claim a deduction if they itemize deductions, but these donations only count if they go to a qualified tax-exempt organization recognized by the IRS, according to the press release.

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## Working on a building

October 17, 2024 | News-Topic, The (Lenoir, NC) Author: ANN EVERHARDT SMITH Columnist | Section: Archives | 706 Words OpenURL Link

It has been a rough few weeks as we continue to clean up from hurricane Helene in Western North Carolina and see and hear news about a second hurricane, Milton, that brought more destruction to our neighbors to the south. We pray that we have finally seen the worst of it. A typical hurricane season generally runs from June1 through November 30, so we aren't out of the woods just yet. In its August forecast, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association predicated this season could rank among the busiest on record, extending into December. Pray with me that North Carolina and our neighbors to the south have seen the last of the destruction and heart break these storms bring.

Our hearts and souls are deeply touched as we continue to see the death toll rise in neighboring communities and see photos shared by friends in communities that in some cases have been destroyed. Millions of dollars from the state and federal government will be required to rebuild roads and communities. In the beginning, I truly wondered if anything would ever be the same again, but almost immediately, I began to see and witness individuals, churches, businesses and non-profit organizations all coming together to meet the needs of families they're never met before. They're not only meeting the basic needs of those who have been affected but are also working to supply warm clothing and heat resources to people in the mountains who will soon face winter and much cooler temperatures.

In addition to the rebuilding of roads and bridges to help people get back to their homes, helping with cutting trees and clearing property, I'm witnessing something even bigger than all those things. I'm witnessing the rebuilding of people, the hands reaching out to lift them up, the hugs and reassurances from strangers who have become new friends, now helping families who may have lost everything that is material know that all is truly not lost. That kind of building is something that money just can't buy. They're giving them hope and sharing the love of Christ, community and friends who care and want to help them.

If you read my column, you know I often reference my grandfather and his love of music. He's been in heaven since 1982, but forty-two years later I can still see and hear him humming or singing part of a tune. He and other members of my family loved bluegrass, and they taught me to love it too. We listened to bluegrass on the radio and went to churches who had what they called "Special Singing" on Sunday nights. One of the songs that comes to mind now fits what my North Carolina brothers and sisters are going through in the mountains and what many people are doing to try to help them. The song is called "I'm Working on a Building". It starts out like this. "I'm working on a building, working on a

building, I'm working on a building for my Lord. It's a Holy Ghost building, it's a Holy Ghost building, a Holy Ghost building for my Lord." I hope you check out the Bill Monroe version on Google. The mandolin player is great, and one of the singers has a high-pitched voice like my grandfather. I wonder if he's singing that in heaven right now.

In first Peter chapter 5 verse 10 we read "In his kindness, God called you to his eternal glory by means of Jesus Christ. After you have suffered a while, he will restore, support, and strengthen you, and he will place you on a firm foundation, all power is his forever and ever." I continue to pray for all those who have been devasted by loss of family and property and I pray and give thanks for all who are finding ways to help them.

I always look forward to your comments by email or in person. Thank you for continuing to share your stories with me and when you ask, I'm glad to share more of my personal stories with you. Email me at ibelieve1068@gmail.com or stop me to talk when we see each other in the community. Ann Everhardt-Smith is a Hudson Town Commissioner and serves on several local boards in the community.

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# NCGA passes \$273M in Helene funding

October 17, 2024 | North State Journal (NC) Author: A.P. Dillon | Section: Article | 1115 Words OpenURL Link

RALEIGH — The General Assembly approved a \$273 million Hurricane Helene relief package that leadership says will be just the first of many, as recovery efforts from the storm will likely span years into the future.

House Bill 149 will serve as the vehicle for the package. The bill's original language will be stripped and replaced with the funding items, and the bill will be retitled to the "Disaster Recovery Act of 2024." Both chambers passed the bill unanimously last Wednesday and was signed by Gov. Roy Cooper the following day.

During a press conference Wednesday morning before the votes on the measure, Senate Leader Phil Berger (R-Eden) and House Speaker Tim Moore (R-Kings Mountain) unveiled the funding package that includes \$250 million to provide state agencies with spending flexibility to address critical needs. That is the exact figure requested by State Budget Director Kristin Walker in an Oct. 7 letter to the legislature.

"Areas of many towns are unrecognizable; some even washed away completely," said Berger. "Roads have been obliterated. Power is still needed in many places. Recovering from Hurricane Helene will be no small task. But I believe we, the state of North Carolina, the people of North Carolina, are up to that task."

"As Sen. Berger mentioned, we know many have lost their lives," Moore said. "We know the numbers unaccounted for. ... The recovery that is going to have to be done is going to be something that is a Herculean task, but it is something that we will get done."

Berger and Moore both underscored multiple times that this round of funds was just a first step. The lawmakers indicated the \$273 million will be pulled from the Savings Reserve, also known as the "Rainy Day Fund."

The state has several reserve funds available to help with the impacts of Helene. According to the Sept. 27 state Cash Watch report, the State Emergency and Disaster Relief Fund has nearly \$733 million that can be tapped, and the state's Savings Reserve has more than \$4.75 billion available.

The funding also contains \$166 million for public school-related needs — \$16 million of those funds is tied to federal matching dollars for lost compensation for school nutrition programs, and \$50 million is for water and sewer issues. Another \$2 million will provide technical assistance for FEMA grants for affected counties, and \$5 million will go to the NC State Board of Elections (NCSBE) for voter outreach and communication in the affected areas.

The NCSBE had asked for \$2 million for voting needs, but Moore said lawmakers were expanding the funding by \$3 million to include all 25 counties plus tribal areas that are under the emergency declaration instead of just the 13 selected by the NCSBE in a resolution passed by the board on Oct. 7.

"We felt that it was necessary to not only provide the state board with adequate resources to do what they're needing to do based on the changes that are taking place," Moore said, "but also some flexibility so that local boards could get some of that money and assist some of the cash flow issues and some of the shortfalls that they might have."

Moore said finding both people to work the polls and viable polling sites were part of the consideration for more funds.

"They're trying to find people to work. ... When you have poll sites that literally no longer exist, I mean, they're not there, right?" Moore said. "Like a fire department or a church or that community building. That building is no longer

there. And I know that you all have shown the photos of what's happened and how just dramatic it is in these areas, but even just seeing the photos does not fully capture the extent of it."

Moore and Berger said the General Assembly will reconvene Oct. 24 to address more Helene recovery needs.

Several legislators in districts that were hardest hit spoke of the devastation but also zthe resilience of the people in those communities and how thankful they are for the support and supplies that have come from all corners of the state and across the country.

Sen. Ralph Hise (R-Mitchell) was among the handful of legislators who gave brief remarks. He represents portions of nine of the 25 counties hit by the story and flooding; Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Caldwell, Haywood, Madison, Mitchell, Watauga, Yancey.

"This is by far the most devastating thing I've ever experienced as a community," said Sen. Ralph Hise, who represents nine of the 25 counties hit by the story and flooding: Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Caldwell, Haywood, Madison, Mitchell, Watauga and Yancey.

He went on to describe the majority of areas having no water, power, sewer, or cell service coupled with some areas being inaccessible.

"In Mitchell County, the water treatment system for the entire county, both towns, is gone," said an emotional Hise." It does not exist and it's unsalvageable. That's a four-year process to put a water treatment plant back in. We don't have a temporary solution for these things right now."

"I promised I wouldn't cry, but people are still needing help, even though we didn't ask for it," said Rep. Jennifer Balkcom (R-Henderson). "This is just a start. This is a start to give people what they need."

Like Hise, Rep. Dudley Greene (R-Burke) appeared to choke up talking about the devastation.

"There was not a corner of my district that was unimpacted, if not decimated by this, by this storm," he said.

Greene said with colder temperatures coming, it's becoming critical to make sure those in shelters have what they need.

"This morning, the lows were in the 40s. Next week, they'll be in the 30s," Greene said, adding "things like kerosene heaters, blankets, warm coats" will be needed.

"I can't say enough thanks to the folks of North Carolina for what you've done, but specifically the folks that are in the mountains right now," said Rep. Mark Pless (R-Haywood). "There were some challenges initially that could not be met for reasons that we will determine. But the folks stepped up."

Pless, co-chairman of the Disaster Recovery and Homeland Security Committee, said he has concerns "just like everyone else" that some things were not done correctly.

"I'm not going to dismiss everything I've heard as being misinformation, but I am going to say there's a time and there is a place for us to figure out what went wrong," said Pless. "I've sat in on hearings for Matthew, Florence and Tropical Storm Fred. There's no one in this room that's perfect and there's no agency in this state that's perfect. But we need to figure out what didn't work."

For information on NC's Hurricane Helene Recovery and Resources, visit tinyurl.com/nc-helene.

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## Hurricane Helene relief: North Carolina boosts unemployment benefits

October 17, 2024 | North State Journal (NC) Author: A.P. Dillon | Section: Article | 649 Words OpenURL Link

RALEIGH — In the wake of Hurricane Helene's devastating impact on western North Carolina, Gov. Roy Cooper has issued an executive order increasing unemployment benefits for citizens struggling in the aftermath of the storm.

"As I've traveled for days around western North Carolina I've heard concern from many small business owners about their employees who are unemployed because their businesses are temporarily closed," Cooper said in a press release. "This Executive Order will increase unemployment benefits and help ease the financial burden for impacted North Carolinians as they work to recover from the storm."

Per Cooper's press release and order, unemployment data as of Oct. 13 shows that workers from affected counties accounted for 79% of new claims – 19,735 in total – since the disaster struck.

On Oct. 16, Cooper issued Executive Order No. 322, which authorizes the North Carolina Department of Commerce's Division of Employment Security (DES) to increase the maximum weekly unemployment benefit from \$350 to \$600.

In addition to the state benefits, which remain capped at 12 weeks, workers who lived or worked in the impacted North Carolina counties may qualify for up to 26 weeks of federal Disaster Unemployment Assistance (DUA) benefits. These federal benefits will be available through March 29, 2025, providing an extended safety net for those facing long-term unemployment due to the hurricane.

The enhanced benefits will be funded through the state's Unemployment Insurance Trust Fund (UITF), which currently has a balance of more than \$4.8 billion – the second-largest such fund in the United States.

The order also grants authority to the secretary of Commerce to waive any constraints that might increase employers' unemployment insurance tax rates due to disaster-related claims or increased benefit amounts.

While federal law requires the elevated state payment to apply statewide, the increased benefits are expected to primarily assist workers from counties impacted by Helene.

DES estimates that for every 10,000 North Carolinians who receive the elevated state benefits, the additional cost to the Unemployment Insurance Trust Fund would be \$2.5 million per week.

For example, if 50,000 North Carolinians from impacted counties received the full additional state benefit for all 12 weeks, the total cost to the UITF would be an estimated \$150 million. The same 50,000 workers would then be eligible for an additional 14 weeks of federal benefits, totaling another \$175 million paid by the federal government.

The actual fiscal impact may be smaller as many currently unemployed workers may return to work before receiving the full benefits.

DES estimates that it may take between two and three weeks for impacted individuals to see the change reflected in their weekly benefit checks. However, the benefits for eligible claimants will be retroactive to Sept. 29, 2024, with adjustment payments issued for benefit weeks dating back to that date.

Cooper's order will remain in effect until rescinded or superseded by another applicable executive order, or until the State of Emergency declaration is lifted.

The North Carolina Council of State unanimously concurred with this executive order, demonstrating broad support

for the measure across the state's leadership.

North Carolina State Treasurer Dale Folwell issued a statement following Cooper's order.

"I concur with the Governor's emergency executive order extending additional benefits to areas hit the hardest by Hurricane Helene," Folwell said. "While natural disasters are nothing new in North Carolina, they always present new opportunities to learn important lessons.

"I recommend that the Governor, working with local, state and federal officials and agencies, resolve to more clearly define and identify areas that are most impacted by this and future disasters. That would assure that increased benefits and employer tax relief are provided to those in the greatest need. Hopefully, the U.S. Congress and the North Carolina General Assembly will take this opportunity to draft laws that will allow precision focus and immediate action to struggling disaster relief areas instead of extending response on a statewide basis."

The post Hurricane Helene relief: North Carolina boosts unemployment benefits first appeared on The North State Journal.

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## FEMA will use Greensboro facility for Helene recovery

October 17, 2024 | North State Journal (NC) Author: A.P. Dillon | Section: Article | 715 Words OpenURL Link

RALEIGH — North Carolina Congressional Republicans' request to the Biden administration to allow a migrant facility in Greensboro to be used to help aid Hurricane Helene efforts was granted.

The Greensboro Influx Care Facility (ICF) was deemed operational March 15, but no children have been placed at the facility. HHS entered a nearly \$50 million, five-year contract on June 9, 2022, that expires in 2027 with an option to renew.

North Carolina's Rep. Richard Hudson (NC-09) and Sen. Thom Tillis led a letter making the request, which was sent to Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra on Oct. 5.

"Based on our understanding of this facility, we think that it could be incredibly useful in supporting the people of western North Carolina as the region recovers from Hurricane Helene," the lawmakers letter continued. "To the best of our knowledge, GCC has hundreds of beds, as well as extensive facilities for medical care, meals, and education. We believe that this ICF could be repurposed to support the state's rescue and recovery efforts."

The letter suggests the site could be used as a staging area for relief and aid workers or even house citizens displaced by the storm.

Sen. Ted Budd and Reps. Chuck Edwards (NC-11), David Rouzer (NC-07), Dan Bishop (NC-08), Virginia Foxx (NC-05), Greg Murphy (NC-03) and Patrick McHenry (NC-10) all signed the letter.

In response to the letter, FEMA issued a press release through a spokeswoman indicating the site would be used for Helene efforts.

"FEMA continues to lead a comprehensive, whole-of-government approach to assist communities impacted by Hurricane Helene," the statement reads. "As part of our effort to ensure that every available resource is mobilized, FEMA will soon sign an agreement with the Department of Health and Human Services to transfer the Greensboro Facility in North Carolina, previously operated by HHS, to FEMA. The Greensboro facility will be another resource to ensure that FEMA has access to a wide array of assets and resources should they be needed for the recovery."

The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) fact sheet on the ICF has had the same update since the March 15 announcement, which in part says, "No children have been in care at the Center since it became operational in March. It will continue to have no children in care but must be ready to resume operations and accept children eight weeks after being notified by ORR."

Following the March 15 announcement, Hudson and Tillis also sent a letter to Becerra criticizing HHS for failing to respond to multiple past congressional inquiries for information about the ICF.

"Our offices were notified late afternoon on Friday, March 1, 2024, despite repeated, outstanding requests for answers about plans for operationalizing the facility," the lawmakers wrote in a March 7 letter to Becerra. "We are frustrated by this sudden announcement and the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) lack of transparency to Congress and the State of North Carolina related to this issue."

The ICF is the former American Hebrew Academy (AHA) campus, a sprawling 100-acre property with \$26 million in original loans attached to it. North State Journal found the loans have changed hands several times between multiple entities and individuals with ties to China. Two of the companies involved are registered in the British

Virgin Islands.

The campus operated from 2001 through 2019 before it closed due to financial issues. There was a brief window in 2020 when AHA rebranded as an "International School" following the \$26 million loan from Puxin Ltd., a Chinese company. The rebranded school was supposed to reopen in 2021 but never did.

In December 2023, North State Journal attempted to find out why the facility was still empty but was turned away at the gate by contracted security forces that said no one there would speak with a reporter.

Following North State Journal's visit to the ICF, nearby residents said there had been activity at the site in summer 2023. One resident provided images of multiple charter buses with blacked-out windows coming and going from the ICF's side gate.

CAPTION: North Carolina Sen. Thom Tillis, pictured last month, was among the Republican lawmakers who requested FEMA use the unoccupied Greensboro Influx Care Facility for Hurricane Helene relief. (J. Scott Applewhite / AP Photo)

The post FEMA will use Greensboro facility for Helene recovery first appeared on The North State Journal.

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## MATTHEWS: Hurricane politics in the 2024 presidential election

October 17, 2024 | North State Journal (NC) Author: Stacey Matthews | Section: Article | 620 Words OpenURL Link

Like just about everything else, the recent hurricanes that have hit the southeastern United States have been fertile ground for presidential politicking.

Florida has experienced three hurricanes since August: Hurricane Debby in August, Hurricane Helene in September and Hurricane Milton in October.

One of them, Helene, left a wide path of destruction, with western North Carolina being particularly hard hit by what was left of the storm after it traveled up from Florida.

During all of them, the Sunshine State's governor, Ron DeSantis, has been at the helm, making sure his state was well prepared and also making sure to keep its residents informed and up to date before and after they hit.

DeSantis, along with Florida Division of Emergency Management director Kevin Guthrie, "are a well-oiled machine" when it comes to these things, as acknowledged by Weather Channel storm-reporting legend Jim Cantore during a broadcast amid Hurricane Milton's arrival on the Florida coast.

So with all of that in mind, it was rather perplexing and yet predictable to see the mainstream media launch a hurricane-related hit piece in DeSantis' direction just a few days before Milton made landfall.

In the anonymously sourced story, NBC News claimed without evidence that DeSantis "refused" to take Democratic presidential nominee Kamala Harris' call after Helene hit the state in late September.

They reported that an aide supposedly told them, "Kamala was trying to reach out, and we didn't answer."

My first thought when I read this story was, "Why would Kamala Harris be trying to connect with DeSantis over these storms?" Vice presidents have little to nothing to do with hurricane preparations/relief efforts, as it is the president who is typically involved in getting the ball rolling as far as federal help goes.

This was confirmed by DeSantis himself, who, when first asked about it, said he wasn't aware she had even tried to call him. Further, in another interview, he noted how Harris had never reached out to him before or after prior storms that his state faced, and was doing so now only because she was running for president.

In response to the report, Harris predictably took the bait, proclaiming that "playing political games with this moment in these crisis situations, these are the height of emergency situations, it's just utterly irresponsible and it is selfish."

Except it's Harris who has been "playing political games" and acting "selfish," not DeSantis.

You don't even have to be a DeSantis fan to know that when storms are headed to Florida, he's the guy you want in your corner.

He's inarguably one of the most visible governors in the aftermath of these weather events and is unquestionably one of the most active state leaders in getting what is needed from the feds while cutting through the red tape at the state level to get things running again and to get people the things they need to move forward.

That he would be called "selfish" by someone like Harris, who desperately wants voters to view her as presidential

material, is pretty rich.

Fortunately, the attacks have backfired, as Joe Biden himself has repeatedly praised DeSantis' leadership and has said how "gracious" DeSantis has been when they've talked.

When Americans take to the polls next month, one of many things they should take into consideration is that Harris chose to politicize Hurricane Milton by attacking DeSantis some 48 hours before the storm, which had been predicted to be devastating, began lashing Florida.

DeSantis was prioritizing his state and its residents. Harris was prioritizing herself and her presidential campaign. Think about it.

North Carolina native Stacey Matthews has also written under the pseudonym Sister Toldjah and is a media analyst and regular contributor to RedState and Legal Insurrection.

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## Rob Schofield: Prepare for storms now to improve response later

October 17, 2024 | Rocky Mount Telegram: Web Edition Articles (NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: News | 819 Words OpenURL Link

Government officials and average citizens of all guises and stripes have done a mostly remarkable job of carrying out relief efforts in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene.

Notwithstanding the understandable frustrations of those in devastated areas still waiting for aid and the calculated lies of some cynical politicians and social media creeps, the truth is that government agencies and elected leaders of both major parties have been working tirelessly, and even heroically, in the storm's aftermath.

As Bill Wilke, the Republican sheriff of hard-hit Haywood County, said Oct. 4 in response to the wild and false rumors and crazy conspiracy theories that continue to spread on social media: "turn that garbage off ... get off Facebook and get out there and put on a pair of boots and pair of gloves and get to work."

Meanwhile, average citizens and private organizations across the state are heeding Wilke's call by contributing millions of dollars, tons of supplies and, where and when possible, large amounts of physical labor to the effort.

In some places, officials have been inundated by so many donations that figuring out a way to distribute them efficiently is one of the big current challenges. And this latter fact helps illustrate an important good-news-bad-news truth about the current situation.

The good news, of course, is that notwithstanding the yawning political divides that plague us these days, the vast majority of North Carolinians still care about their neighbors and are anxious to do what they can to help people in need — whatever their politics or beliefs. We may be a tense and quarrelsome body politic these days, but thankfully for most people, basic human decency still prevails.

The bad — or at least maddening — news in all this, however, is how sadly familiar it all feels. As with the societal outpourings of shock, grief and goodwill toward the victims that invariably follow in the aftermath of the mass shootings that so plague us, the hurricane response is wonderful and inspiring. But it's also, as the old saying goes, a day late and a dollar short.

In other words, the overwhelming societal response to Helene and other similar disasters demonstrates the happy fact that Americans remain willing to sacrifice for the common good. But as with the shootings, what's needed is not just post-disaster relief and sacrifice, but pre-disaster prevention.

Think about it: As climate change and population growth conspire to place millions and millions more people in harm's way, disasters like Helene are certain to become increasingly common unless society comes together quickly to do two things that only government can spearhead.

First is dramatically enhancing physical infrastructure and disaster planning, as well as the rules governing where and how buildings are constructed.

Simply put, we can and should have water and sewer systems and power and communication grids that are vastly more resilient, but it will take money — lots of it — to construct and maintain them.

The same is true for the kind of pre-positioned disaster relief and recovery equipment and personnel that could spring into action in huge numbers on a moment's notice to the remotest mountain holler, and for stricter zoning and building codes that could make homes and businesses much tougher and storm resistant. We can have these things, but only if we're willing to pay for them.

What's lacking, sadly, are political leaders who have the courage to speak these hard truths, to say "no" to greedy industry lobbyists who try to block every proposed regulation and to ask voters to come together and sacrifice a little ahead of time so that a crazy patchwork of public and private relief efforts will be less necessary in the future.

And, of course, the same is true for climate change itself. As Helene made clear yet again, global warming and sealevel rise may appear to be steady, incremental processes when viewed from a distance, but up close they are violent and episodic.

Happily, we have the knowledge and capacity to reduce greenhouse gas emissions rapidly so that climate change doesn't spiral utterly out of control in the coming decades, but again, probably only if we're willing to make some modest sacrifices. And that means — at least initially — things like slightly higher taxes and energy bills, and lifestyle changes like winding down the overwhelming societal reliance on internal combustion vehicles.

Will a majority of American politicians ever get to the point — as is already the case in some more enlightened countries — at which they're willing to level with voters about these facts?

The current electoral cycle in which one side constantly repeats the virulent lie that climate change is a hoax, while the other mostly avoids the issue or implies that it can be addressed in a pain-free manner, inspires little confidence.

One prays that it won't take several more Helene-like disasters to convince a majority of Americans and their leaders to grasp the wisdom of sacrificing a little now to save a lot later.

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## John Hood: Helene shows value of NC's fiscal restraint

October 17, 2024 | Rocky Mount Telegram: Web Edition Articles (NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: News | 650 Words OpenURL Link

The devastation wreaked on North Carolina by Hurricane Helene will take weeks to assess, months to clear out and years to repair or rebuild. Second only to the value of the lives lost will be the exorbitant fiscal and economic costs of our recovery.

Our state government is reasonably well prepared to shoulder its share. Our federal government is not.

Last week, the General Assembly authorized an initial \$273 million withdrawal from North Carolina's rainy-day fund to cover initial recovery expenses and changes in elections administration. Gov. Roy Cooper signed the bill.

That's only the first tranche of state expenditure. Lawmakers will return to the capital more than once before year's end, then commence regular session in early 2025. They'll appropriate much more money for various reconstruction efforts, from academic campuses and government offices to highways, bridges, water systems and other infrastructure.

North Carolina has lots of money set aside. The rainy-day fund itself still contains about \$4.5 billion. Other accounts and our unreserved credit balance contain billions more. I don't mean to minimize the storm's staggering costs. I'm just pointing out that the General Assembly won't have to cut other programs, raise taxes or borrow money to fulfill its responsibilities.

Congress is another story. Over the past couple of decades, presidents and lawmakers of both parties have run massive federal deficits and made exorbitant spending promises that far exceed any reasonable expectation of revenues at economically sustainable tax rates.

In a recent Reason magazine piece, Veronique de Rugy of the Mercatus Center pointed out that the federal debt now exceeds \$28 trillion — \$2 trillion more than last year and \$6 trillion more than when the Biden-Harris team entered the White House.

"This debt stands at 100% of America's gross domestic product, which, other than a one-year exception at the end of World War II, is the highest ratio we've ever had," she wrote. "Unlike in 1946, today's debt is only going to grow. Indeed, debt-to-GDP took a nearly 30-year dive to reach 23% in 1974. Today, federal debt is projected — under the rosiest scenarios — to rise to 166% in 30 years."

In other words, every dollar Congress authorizes and the executive branch distributes for hurricane relief in North Carolina is, in effect, a borrowed dollar. It represents a debt to be paid in the future, not a gift.

Of course, North Carolinians aren't the only ones who must pay each dollar back (with interest). Decades ago, our politicians essentially nationalized the provision of relief and reconstruction after natural disasters. I don't think that was wise. States and localities ought to make their own preparations and save their own money to handle future emergencies.

But at this point, I'm not sure how to extricate ourselves from this process. If Congress passed a law next year to slash federal disaster relief and then Kansas gets clobbered by tornados, their taxpayers could reasonably complain that they helped clean up after North Carolina's disaster and then didn't get their "turn" at withdrawing funds for their own.

The next best thing, then, is for future Congresses and presidents to take their budgeting responsibilities more

seriously. As I've pointed out many times, the opportunity to bring federal revenues and expenditures closer to alignment without painful adjustment has long since passed. The gap is too large.

It can't be substantially closed by eliminating "waste, fraud and abuse." Nor can it be substantially closed by "tax hikes on the wealthy." Contrary to popular misconception, the United States already has one of the most steeply progressive tax codes in the developed world. According to the left-wing Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, the bottom quintile of American taxpayers pay an average of 17% of their income in federal, state and local taxes. The middle quintile pays 26%. The wealthiest 1% pay 35%.

Washington's fiscal recklessness should be one of the top voting issues this year. Alas, it isn't. But ignoring the problem won't make it go away.

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#### • Citation (aglc Style)

Staff Writer, 'John Hood: Helene shows value of NC's fiscal restraint', *Rocky Mount Telegram: Web Edition Articles*(online), 17 Oct 2024 <a href="https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C457422E308DF0">https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C457422E308DF0</a>



# Pet food drive, agriculture and football on the schedule at Southern Nash High

October 17, 2024 | Rocky Mount Telegram: Web Edition Articles (NC)

Author: David Cruz | Section: School News | 309 Words

OpenURL Link

The suffering in the western part of the state due to the devastating destruction from Hurricane Helene has affected many. And that has included pets, too.

At Southern Nash High in Bailey, school officials will be taking donations of dog and cat food for the pets in need in western North Carolina as part of a full evening of charitable giving, agriculture appreciation and football.

In conjunction with Friday's football game against Rocky Mount High School, the Firebirds will hold its first-ever Agriculture Appreciation Night from 5 to 7 p.m.

"The event will celebrate North Carolina's agricultural heritage while offering the community a chance to connect, learn and give back," stated Heather Finch, Nash County Public Schools spokeswoman.

Finch said the evening will begin with an Agriculture Expo at 5 p.m., where students, parents and community members can engage with local businesses, organizations and colleges linked to the agriculture industry.

"Attendees will have the opportunity to explore careers, learn about innovations in agriculture and enjoy free giveaways," said Finch.

This year's event will also feature a pet food donation drive to support communities in western North Carolina still reeling in the aftermath of the storm.

The agricultural theme will also be a part of the football game, which commences at 7 p.m.

"Throughout the football game, several families involved in agriculture will be recognized, and there will be interactive games to keep the crowd entertained," Finch said.

Sponsors supporting the event include the N.C. Watermelon Association, AgCarolina Farm Credit, N.C. Sweetpotatoes, N.C. Soybean Producers Association, Dean's Farm Market, Farm Bureau Nash and Girls 'Round Here.

The forecast for Friday evening calls for clear skies and temperatures in the mid-60s. The high school is located at 6446 Southern Nash High Road in Bailey.

The public is invited to come celebrate agriculture, participate in the expo and support pets in need — all while cheering on the Firebirds and the Gryphons.

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# NCAE praises state lawmakers' efforts to help those recovering from Helene: Applaud action on calendar flexibility, school pay

October 17, 2024 | Salisbury Post (NC) Author: Staff Report| Section: Education | 166 Words OpenURL Link

NCAE praises state lawmakers' efforts to help those recovering from Helene: Applaud action on calendar flexibility, school pay

Published 12:00 am Thursday, October 17, 2024

By Staff Report

RALEIGH — The North Carolina Association of Educators released the following statement last week in regards to state lawmakers taking action to help educators and schools impacted by Hurricane Helene:

"The General Assembly today took the first step towards helping our mountain region, and its local public schools, recover from Hurricane Helene," President Tamika Walker Kelly said. "NCAE is glad that lawmakers heard the call for calendar flexibility and protecting school employee pay, which will ease the burden on educators who have had their lives turned upside down.

"From here, western North Carolina students and educators will need our continued support over the coming months. NCAE members will advocate for additional funds to protect school district budgets, provide free school meals, and build safe and sturdy schools across North Carolina. These are far more vital priorities right now, than private school vouchers."

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## Dallas Woodhouse: Protecting the vote for Helene victims

October 17, 2024 | Salisbury Post (NC) Author: Post Opinion | Section: Opinion | 639 Words OpenURL Link

Dallas Woodhouse: Protecting the vote for Helene victims

Published 12:00 am Thursday, October 17, 2024

By Post Opinion

By Dallas Woodhouse

North Carolina voters in 25 western North Carolina counties, all of which were declared federal disaster areas because of Hurricane Helene, will have a plethora of new tools to ensure their ability to vote.

But with communications hampered and citizens from the far west spread far and wide it is going to take a significant effort from elected officials, public policy non-profits, churches and community leaders to make sure citizens know their voting options. We need to make sure that those who have lost everything due to an unprecedented inland hurricane disaster do not also lose their voice in the 2024 elections, now just a month from concluding.

The Disaster Recovery Act of 2024 makes many emergency voting provisions for the 25 counties.

The measures include a long list of provisions that allow for ease of in-person voting in the area, including replacement of storm-damaged voting locations, expanded early voting opportunities and setting up of remote voting centers in adjacent counties.

The more difficult subset of people needing voting access are the many citizens who have lost homes, jobs, power or access to water and have left the area for some considerable amount of time.

Thankfully the General Assembly has also made provision to ease absentee voting by these citizens.

Easier to request absentee ballots

If you are displaced because of the flood, you can request an absentee ballot to be delivered to your new location. Visit securevotenc.com for more information, or visit the North Carolina Absentee Ballot Portal.

If you have already requested an absentee ballot and need it to be sent to a new location, contact your county board of elections to spoil your current ballot and reissue a ballot to your new location.

In a key change, voters (or their near relative) can now request and receive an absentee ballot in person at their local board of elections. Voters can request up until 5 p.m. the Monday before the election, Nov. 4. Voters can receive, mark, and return their ballot all at once at their local board of elections.

Easier to return absentee ballots

This year absentee ballots must be turned in/received by 7:30 p.m. on Election Day. This is why it is recommended that voters put their marked ballot back in the mail no less than a week before the election.

However, people in disaster area have multiple new ways to return absentee ballots.

Every county in the flood zone now has an open and operable elections office.

Absentee ballot return options include allowing voters registered in the affected counties to return ballots to any county board of elections, early voting site, or the State Board of Elections office up until 7:30 p.m. on Election Day.

The convenience of early and mail voting is now going to be a necessity for hundreds of thousands of voters in the 25 western counties considered major disaster areas.

The 25 counties designated as disaster areas due to Hurricane Helene account for over 16 percent of the state's registered voters. Nearly 1.3 million registered voters are in the impacted areas.

The counties are Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Clay, Cleveland, Gaston, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Lincoln, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Transylvania, Watauga, Wilkes and Yancey.

If you want to help your fellow citizens in the flood area vote, please post on social media: Absentee and early voting information is available for all NC voters at www.securevotenc.com

Editor's note: An earlier version of this article misstated absentee ballot return options for voters on Election Day Nov. 5. On Election Day voters in the 25 disaster counties can return their absentee ballot to their local or any elections office in North Carolina until 7:30 pm.

Dallas Woodhouse is the N.C. executive director for American Majority and author of The Woodshed for Carolina Journal where this first appeared.

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## Swain students, athletes help in Hurricane Helene relief effort

October 17, 2024 | Smoky Mountain Times (Bryson City, NC) Author: Jessica Webb editor@thesmokymountaintimes.com| Section: News| 292 Words Page: 3 OpenURL Link

Swain High football team players were joined by student members of the National Honor Society at the school to pitch in a helping hand for downtown Bryson City businesses Oct. 1 that had damage from flooding during Hurricane Helene.

The students cleared the shops of damaged inventory, ruined furniture and even pulled up carpets. "In four hours, we were able to help everyone in town," said Coach Sherman Holt. "It made the cleanup a whole lot quicker with more than 40 people."

The Swain High athletic department, including coaches, administration and athletes also traveled two days to help in the recovery effort in Haywood County over the past couple of weeks, where communities suffered more extensive and widespread damage. They volunteered in Maggie Valley and at the distribution center Canton. "We also helped gut a church in Beaver Dam," said Coach Holt, who lived in Haywood County for about six years and has family there.

Holt said he wanted to give students the opportunity to be of service. "I think it's very important to instill values in young people that when people have been faced with tragedy or devastation, and you're able to help that you do; that's a big part of what community in America is about," Holt said. "The great thing is it doesn't matter where you're form, what race, creed or color you are, if you see somebody in need, you should help."

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Jessica Webb editor@thesmokymountaintimes.com, 'Swain students, athletes help in Hurricane Helene relief effort', *Smoky Mountain Times* (online), 17 Oct 2024 3 <a href="https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?">https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?</a> p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C430848669E050>



## Disaster Relief programs

October 17, 2024 | Smoky Mountain Times (Bryson City, NC)

Section: News 777 Words

Page: 3 OpenURL Link

Swain approved for Disaster Unemployment Assistance Swain County has been approved for Disaster Unemployment Assistance (DUA), according to the Division of Employment Security (DES) because of the devastating impacts from Hurricane Helene, joining 25 counties and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians of North Carolina that were previously approved. People from Swain County who are unable to continue working as a direct result of Hurricane Helene must file an application for benefits by Dec. 9, 2024.

If you became unemployed as a direct result of the effects of Hurricane Helene impacting North Carolina, you may be eligible for unemployment insurance benefits under the DUA program. Business owners and self-employed individuals affected by the storm may also qualify for benefits.

People and business owners must meet the following criteria to be eligible for benefits: No longer have the job that provided their primary source of income.

- · Are unable to reach their place of unemployment.
- · Cannot work because of an injury caused by the storm.
- · Were unable to begin employment or self-employment due to the storm.
- · Have become the major supplier of household income due to a storm-related death of the previous major supplier of household income.

DUA is entirely funded by the federal government. You first need to file for state unemployment benefits. If you are determined to be ineligible for state unemployment or have exhausted your state benefits, then you may be eligible for a DUA claim.

You will need the following to file for unemployment: · Name and address of all employers you worked with within the last 24 months.

- · County of residence.
- · County of employment. · Mailing address and zip code. · Valid telephone number. · Your Social Security number or your Alien Registration number.

Have proof of employment and income if you're self-employed, a farmer, or a commercial fisher.

To get DUA benefits, all required documentation must be submitted within 21 days from the day the DUA application is filed. DES will work with people who cannot provide all documentation to ensure that their unemployment benefits are not delayed. Claims are filed through the DES website at des.nc.gov. If you are not able to file through the website, you can call the DUA Hotline at 919-629-3857 to apply for benefits.

Nearly \$2 million distributed to nonprofits for regional Helene relief The Community Foundation of Western North Carolina (CFWNC) continues to work to mobilize resources and get funds to frontline organizations providing relief and recovery services in Western North Carolina. Since Monday, 83 grants totaling \$1, 961, 246 has been distributed to nonprofits from the Emergency and Disaster Response Fund.

The grants support frontline nonprofits meeting immediate needs or those whose ability to provide services was directly affected by the floods. Nonprofits use a simple, expedited process to access funds with grants awarded on a rolling basis.

"In times like these, nonprofits join other first responders in helping their communities recover, and we want to make sure that those on the frontlines have the resources they need," said President Elizabeth Brazas. "We are heartened by the level of support for this effort and are deeply grateful for every contribution and expression of concern. CFWNC and its partnering funders are committed to geographic equity and recognize that there are still isolated communities with fragile connectivity. We are here for the long haul as Western North Carolina continues to recover."

If you wish to support aid to those affected by the storm, you can donate to the Emergency and Disaster Response Fund at www.cfwnc.org. Administrative fees are waived so that every dollar goes directly to assistance.

CFWNC makes grants in 18 Western North Carolina counties including the Qualla Boundary. Bringing people together to address regional issues or crises is a key role of community foundations. Mountain BizWorks offers rapid recovery loan program Mountain BizWorks has established a rapid recovery loan program to assist Western North Carolina small businesses in recovering from the devastating impacts of Tropical Storm Helene.

The WNC Strong: Helene Business Recovery Fund is being established with an initial \$7.5 million in support from the Golden LEAF Foundation. Mountain BizWorks and program partners hope to secure additional funding capacity in the coming days and weeks.

Through the Fund, impacted small businesses will be able to apply for loans up to \$100, 000 to help meet immediate needs and bridge to longer term relief resources from SBA disaster loans, FEMA assistance, insurance, and other sources. The loans will have a 1 percent interest rate and interest-only payments for 12 months. If not repaid in the first year, the loans will automatically convert to a term loan.

For terms and application information, visit mountainbizworks.org/helene/fund. For additional business relief resources, visit mountainbizworks.org/helene. Contact wncstrong@mountainbizworks.org or call 828-701-1525 with any questions.

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## The best way to improve disaster relief

October 17, 2024 | Smoky Mountain Times (Bryson City, NC) Author: Rob Schofield; NC Newsline Editor | Section: Opinions | 722 Words Page: 5 OpenURL Link

Government officials and average citizens of all guises and stripes have done a mostly remarkable job of carrying out relief efforts in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene.

Notwithstanding the understandable frustrations of those in devastated areas still waiting for aid and the calculated lies of some cynical politicians and shameless social media creeps, the truth is that government agencies and elected leaders of both major parties have been working tirelessly, and even heroically, in the storm's aftermath.

Average citizens and private organizations across the state are contributing millions of dollars, tons of supplies, and where and when possible, large amounts of physical labor to the effort.

In some places, officials have been inundated by so many donations that figuring out a way to distribute them efficiently is one of the big current challenges.

And this latter fact helps illustrate an important good-news-bad-news truth about the current situation.

The good news, of course, is that notwithstanding the yawning political divides that plague us these days, the vast majority of North Carolinians still care about their neighbors and are anxious to do what they can to help people in need - whatever their politics or beliefs. We may be a tense and quarrelsome body politic these days, but thankfully for most people, basic human decency still prevails.

The bad - or at least maddening - news in all this, however, is how sadly familiar it all feels.

In other words, the overwhelming societal response to Helene and other similar disasters demonstrates the happy fact that Americans remain willing to sacrifice for the common good. But as with the shootings, what's needed is not just postdisaster relief and sacrifice, but pre-disaster prevention.

Think about it: As climate change and population growth conspire to place millions and millions more people in harm's way, disasters like Helene are certain to become increasingly common unless society comes together quickly to do two things that only government can spearhead.

First, is dramatically enhancing physical infrastructure and disaster planning, as well as the rules governing where and how buildings are constructed.

Simply put, we can and should have water and sewer systems and power and communication grids that are vastly more resilient, but it will take money - lots of it - to construct and maintain them.

The same is true for the kind of pre-positioned disaster relief and recovery equipment and personnel that could spring into action in huge numbers on a moment's notice to the remotest mountain holler, and for stricter zoning and building codes that could make homes and businesses much tougher and storm resistant. We can have these things, but only if we're willing to pay for them.

What's lacking, sadly, are political leaders who have the courage to speak these hard truths, to say 'no' to greedy industry lobbyists who try to block every proposed regulation, and to ask voters to come together and sacrifice a little ahead of time so that a crazy patchwork of public and private relief efforts will be less necessary in the future.

And, of course, the same is true for climate change itself. As Helene made clear yet again, global warming and sealevel rise may appear to be steady, incremental processes when viewed from a distance, but up close, they are violent and episodic.

Happily, we have the knowledge and capacity to reduce greenhouse gas emissions rapidly so that climate change doesn't spiral utterly out of control in the coming decades, but again, probably only if we're willing to make some modest sacrifices. And that means - at least initially - things like slightly higher taxes and energy bills, and lifestyle changes like winding down the overwhelming societal reliance on internal combustion vehicles.

Will a majority of American politicians ever get to the point - as is already the case in some more enlightened countries - at which they're willing to level with voters about these facts?

The current electoral cycle in which one side constantly repeats the virulent lie that climate change is a hoax, while the other mostly avoids the issue or implies that it can be addressed in a pain free manner inspires little confidence.

One prays that it won't take several more Helene-like disasters to convince a majority of Americans and their leaders to grasp the wisdom of sacrificing a little now to save a lot later. NC Newsline is part of States Newsroom, the nation's largest state-focused nonprofit news organization.

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## Floods and Swain County history - Mountain Musings and Memories with

October 17, 2024 | Smoky Mountain Times (Bryson City, NC) Author: Jim Casada | Section: Opinions | 877 Words Page: 5 OpenURL Link

Flooding and catastrophic damage caused by rainfall associated with Hurricane Helene have dominated regional and national news in recent weeks, and extensive portions of upstate South Carolina, east Tennessee, and western North Carolina bore the brunt of the wind and rainfall associated with the event. Although this publication rightly featured news of Helene's impact on Bryson City and Swain County, by comparison we escaped quite lightly indeed.

In a recent issue a local store owner wrote about collective efforts by merchants to deal with flooding affecting businesses lining downtown Everett Street. Elsewhere in the county the Old River Road paralleling the north side of the Tuckasegee from the bridge below Darnell Farms to Deep Creek was under water, portions of Darnell Farms closest to the river looked like a lake, and campground/trailer parks such as the Ela one just downstream from the confluence of the Oconaluftee and Tuckasegee rivers along with Bear Hunter's and others, were hit hard. Yet in the grander scheme of things, both for this event and historically speaking, the town and county escaped relatively unscathed.

Winds here never reached anything approaching the velocity they did elsewhere, and rainfall locally was much lighter that it was in the mountain counties to the northeast. As a result, falling trees and other interruptions to power were comparatively small, and over a period of several days anyone looking at WNC county by county on the United States Power Outage map website readily realized this locality did not suffer badly. Loss of power for most folks in Swain County amounted to hours, not days, weeks, or even months. Similarly, what flooding did occur left little of the devastation found in and around Buncombe County. That area received much more rainfall during the heart of the storm and had experienced appreciably more precipitation in days leading up to Helene's arrival. Whole communities were swept away, bridges large and small were destroyed, creeks and rivers actually changed courses in many locations, and the recovery process in some areas will involve time periods of months or even years. It is possible some crossroads communities and even towns have ceased to exist-forever.

In a word, Swain County was lucky, and this 2024 event pales in comparison to two other major storms and their local impact. These are the historic floods of 1916 and 1940. The latter, in particular, is well documented not only in written historical records but in photographs. Both famed local photographer Dr. Kelly Bennett (see digitized images in Western Carolina University's collection) and one or more photographers working for the Tennessee Valley Authority took scores of images of that flood.

The underlying factors in 1940 were quite similar to what happened in the North Carolina mountain counties to the north and east of Swain a few weeks ago. There was a lead up of multiple heavy rains, sufficient to saturate the soil, followed by downpours in the upper Tuckasegee River drainage in Jackson County that may well have ranged from 24 to 30 inches. That amount of rainfall proved more than one dam in the area could withstand. It broke, and the devastation downstream was massive. Most bridges spanning the Tuckasegee in Jackson County were swept away. While the two Swain County bridges then spanning the stream (Patterson Bridge at Ela and Everett Street Bridge in Bryson City) survived, high waters wrought extensive damage.

Extant photographs show much of downtown Bryson City underwater, and to depths measured not in inches but in feet. On a personal level, both my father and my grandparents often pointed out to me the exact height of the river at peak flood in relationship to Grandma Minnie and Grandpa Joe's home along Carringer Street just east of town. It was (and is) the highest home place along that little street and sets perhaps 50 yards back from the river. Yet the Tuckasegee, at its 1940 peak flooding, lapped just inches below the home's front porch (which was elevated 6 or 7 feet above ground level).

That flood wrought great damage, cost lives, and was by comparison with the recent high waters multiple magnitudes of measurement worse. In short, troubling and damaging as the recent event might seem, by comparison to the 1940 flood on the local level or the recent cataclysm in nearby North Carolina counties, it is almost consequential. Keep that in mind as we count our collective blessings. Additionally, I would urge readers to do whatever they can, through trusted organizations, to help fellow mountain folks in truly dire straits. My personal choices, although there are literally dozens of effective non-profits who use donations wisely, are Samaritan's Purse and the Salvation Army.

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## Touring Bryson City's water plant - Turn on the tap

October 17, 2024 | Smoky Mountain Times (Bryson City, NC) Author: Jessica Webb editor@thesmokymountaintimes.com| Section: News| 849 Words Page: 1 OpenURL Link

If you want to have a conversation about water, Russell Ball, who has been operating the Town of Bryson City's water plant for 25 years, can talk your ear off. When I toured the plant, I spent an hour and 45 minutes there, and there wasn't a dull moment. Getting the behind-the-scenes on how water goes from Deep Creek to drinkable water from the tap is surprisingly fascinating.

"In all my life, I never thought I'd enjoy a job as much as this," Ball said at the conclusion of the tour. "It's a challenge every day, it's changing so fast it's a good job, it's a very important job. I know the majority of folks never have a clue what it takes." Dear reader, I'm here to clue in. Bryson City's unassuming little twostory water plant on Deep Creek became operational in 1995. Prior to that, the town's water was fed by a small system on a reservoir in Lands Creek.

The water plant was recently upgraded with a new security system, an extremely helpful tool if ever there was a break in at the plant.

The first room in the plant looks a lot like a chemistry lab and the entire building has a fresh, clean faintly chlorinated smell.

Jonathan Twomey, senior operator and Jesse Fortner and William Shuler also work at the plant.

"Everything we do is recorded in multiple ways," Ball said.

At the certified lab, they test for bacteria, turbidity and test the quality of the water "at every stage." There is the steady flow of water from taps from both filtration tanks one and two, as well as a tap for the finished water.

Ball says finished product is "near to the quality of distilled water."

They conduct manual testing in the lab every 2 hours (it is required every 4) and make sure it matches the SCADA, which stands for Supervisory Control and Data Acquisitions.

"It makes the job a whole lot easier. One person can monitor operation," Ball said.

The creek water starts at an intake just outside the border of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. It then is fed to a clarifier and pumped uphill and settles out as it is gravity-fed through a media bed of anthracite, silka and garnet then goes into the plant, where it goes through a chemical treatment and filtration system.

Under the building is the clear well, a 100, 000-gallon tank where it is disinfected with chlorine before it is pumped into the system and out to the customers.

When I toured the plant, I got to see something not a lot of people do-a backwash, reversing the flow of water from the clear well back through the filtration system. This is conducted periodically and required more often during weather events like storms that bring more sediment into the system from the creek.

At the filtration tank, the surface is being broken up on the surface then goes through large filters that sift out sediment. As the backwash continues, the clarity of the water in the open air tank visibly improves.

Inside the equipment room, there are big pumps that feed the water through the process and various meters testing the water at each stage.

The chemical treatment happens in another room. The water is treated with hypochlorite for disinfecting, aluminum sulfate as a coagulate, soda ash for Ph adjustment and what Ball calls "one of the most important chemicals," orthophosphate. This reacts in the pipes of the delivery system to prevent metals from leaking into the water as it travels through the pipes.

As we tour the filtration room, Ball says corrosion is a constant battle since everything they use in the water is salt based.

Years ago, the plant stored chemical gas. Now they have big containers of hypochlorite, which is much more stable than storing chlorine gas and far safer for the workers.

In addition to monitoring regularly at the plant itself, Ball and his staff pull samples from throughout the system.

So, what causes a boil notice, like the 24-hour one that was issued after Hurricane Helene?

Things like the water pressure getting too low or air gets into lines can be reason to call for a boil notice. "A good portion of the system was under water, which reduced the pressure," Ball explained of the recent event. Helping with hurricane relief They have offered to conduct water testing to help other water systems that were heavily impacted by Hurricane Helene like City of Asheville. The county and town have also helped distribute MREs and the town public works crew will likely send a couple of workers to help in restoration work as well as lending town equipment. "We're ready to help rebuild, fix leaks whatever they need," said Bryson City Town Manager Sam Pattillo.

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## • Citation (aglc Style)

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## Cross country ladies out run the competition

October 17, 2024 | Smoky Mountain Times (Bryson City, NC) Author: Gary Ayers ayers5315@bellsouth.net | Section: Sports | 448 Words Page: 7 OpenURL Link

The Swain High ladies Cross Country team ran away from the field and dominated the Smoky Mountain Conference Cross Country championships while the men came in second during the events held at Kituwah.

Swain women scored 21 points to win a fifth straight SMC title. Cherokee finished a distant second with 74, Murphy was third with 85, Hayesville fourth with 93, Tri-County Early College had 124 points for fifth and Summitt Charter finished in sixth placed with 126 points.

Swain's dominant team saw four of the top five finishers led by Arizona Blankenship with a time of 17:39.9, Annie Lewis was second with a time of 18:21.9, Dvdaya Swimmer of Cherokee placed third with a time of 19:11.5, Angelina Lomeli from Swain finished fourth at 19:18.5 and the Maroon Devils' Emily Gray Stargell finished fifth with a time of 19:49.1.

Blankenship was named SMC Champion and Runner of the Year. Lewis, Lomeli and Stargell were named All-Conference with Audrey Monteith in 9th place with a time of 21:31.4 and Julianna Meraz-Quijada 10th at 21:46.7 both named Honorable Mention All-Conference.

The Swain boys finished a close second to Hiwassee Dam by only three points as the Eagles scored 43 points, Swain had 46, Hayesville was third with 65 points, Cherokee fourth with 106, Murphy fifth with 110 and Tri-County Early College was sixth with 127 points. Swain's Carl Baird led the way with a time of 15:57 and was named SMC Champion and Runner of the Year. Ross Clapsaddle was 10th with a time of 17:50.2, Derek Gunter came in 11th at 17:54.6, Gus Burgess was 11th at 18:05.8 and Elijah Dingle was 26th with a finish of 19:50.4. Clapsaddle, Gunter and Burgess were all named Honorable Mention All-Conference.

"I couldn't be more proud of the effort our kids gave at the conference championships," said Coach Ian Roper.
"Between the two teams we had seven personal best times and three more season best times.

The kids are working hard and we have three more weeks to continue to improve before the state championships. I just continue to be impressed with our athletes' resilience and determination." Roper also commended the EBCI and John Griffen for the work that went into getting the course ready. "A large part of the course was five feet under water a couple of weeks ago during Helene. It took countless hours of work to make today possible."

Swain will host the Western Regional Championships at Kituwah Saturday, Oct. 26 before heading to the NCHSAA 1-A State Championship meet Nov. 2 at Beeson Park in Kernersville.

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## Swain awarded \$53 million for new middle school

October 17, 2024 | Smoky Mountain Times (Bryson City, NC) Author: Jessica Webb editor@thesmokymountaintimes.com| Section: News| 678 Words Page: 1 OpenURL Link

They say it takes a village to raise a child. It could also be said it takes the state to build a school. Recently, Swain County School System received word that its grant application for \$52 million to build a new Swain Middle School has been awarded.

The grant is awarded under North Carolina's Department of Instruction Needs-Based Public School Capital Fund. Swain was awarded its full request that will go toward a new school and athletic fields to be located on Black Hill Road in Bryson City.

The new school will be a 100, 000-square-foot building accommodating up to 500 students. Plans also include athletic fields that will be for both the middle and high school. One of the biggest benefits of the new school will be safety- as the buildings will all be internally connected. The design is in the schematic phase, with the district having contracted with LS3P Associates for early schematics prior to applying for the grant.

Both NC Sen. Kevin Corbin (R-50) and Rep. Mike Clampitt (R-119), toured Swain Middle School earlier this year and advocated for the funding.

Statewide, more than \$360 million was awarded to seven school districts for new schools, renovations and capital improvements. The fund is the largest annual allocation for school capital projects and was created by the General Assembly in 2017 from state lottery revenues. The grants are in addition to the state's lottery-supported Public School Building Capital Fund and the Public School Building Repair and Renovation Fund, from which all 115 districts receive an allocation each year.

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Catherine Truitt said in a press release the needs-based grants continue to help districts across North Carolina ensure that students have access to high quality learning environments that are clean, modern and inviting to better serve student learning. "Hurricane Helene has reiterated the necessity of our students having access to safe, modern and structurally sound learning environments," said Truitt. "Each year, this funding does so much to support districts in modernizing infrastructure to improve safety and to enhance access for students to specialized learning facilities where they gain hands-on experience in new facilities like STEM labs, media centers and in career and technical education fields. I'm so thrilled to see these grants get into the hands of some incredibly deserving districts as we seek to help every student in the state reach their full potential."

Neighboring county school districts Graham and Jackson were also awarded significant grants. Graham was awarded \$42 million to construct a new elementary school and Jackson was awarded \$52 million for a new middle school that will consolidate five middle school programs.

Mark Michalko, executive director of the N.C. Education Lottery, said a substantial portion of the money raised by the lottery will support schools and communities as they renovate, repair and construct buildings. "More than half of the \$1 billion raised by the lottery last year went to build new schools and renovate and repair older ones," said Mark Michalko, Chief Executive Officer of the N.C. Education Lottery. "You can see ground-breaking and ribboncutting events for new schools occurring all across our state. It's a wonderful use of lottery funds and these new schools and classrooms will help move our students forward."

In total, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) received 122 applications totaling \$1.78 billion in requested funding. The NBPSCF grant program is funded annually through budget appropriations of NC Education Lottery revenue. The next grant cycle for FY 25-26 is anticipated to be open in the fall of 2025, following completion

of the next biennial budget.

For Swain, one of the next pieces will be trying to secure funding to improve sewer lines and a pump station at Powell Lumber so a new school could be built in the proposed location. Rep. Clampitt has filed a bill in the state requesting \$10 million out of the Water Infrastructure Fund toward that effort.

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p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C430847A445DD8>



## Maroon Devils fall to Hayesville on home turf

October 17, 2024 | Smoky Mountain Times (Bryson City, NC) Author: Gary Ayers ayers5315@bellsouth.net| Section: Sports | 852 Words Page: 7 OpenURL Link

Defense continued to rule play for the Maroon Devils but there was improvement offensively as Hayesville got its' first conference win 12-7 at Swain Memorial Stadium last Friday night. Swain ground out 65 plays for 208 total yards offensively while holding the Yellow Jackets to 162 yards on 40 plays. Hayesville won the passing battle 118 to 48 in passing yardage while Swain ruled the ground attack 160 to 44 yards. But costly fumbles hurt multiple drives as Swain fumbled 5 times, losing two and also tossed one interception while Hayesville only suffered only one turnover on the night. A vast improvement was seen in penalties for the Devils with only one penalty for 10 yards compared to 11 penalties for over 80 yards vs. Andrews the week before.

Hayesville opened the game with a surprise on-side kick-off but Swains' Obadiah Darnell recovered for the Devils and Swain took over at mid-field. Swain quarterback Jon Stephenson hit James Arch for a 12-yard gain to start the offense and Zeke Glaspie had a 10-yard run while Rocky Barker also had 6 yards on the ground as the Devils moved to the Hayesville 13-yard line on the opening drive. But a fumble that the Devils recovered and an incomplete pass forced a Brendan Lanning 27 yard field goal attempt that was wide left.

Hayesville took over and Michael Mauney passed complete to Ben Bethel for a big 24-yard gain. But a big tackle by Aiden Smiley and a pass break up by Corey Stillwell forced a Hayesville punt. Three plays later a Stephenson pass was intercepted by the Yellow Jackets' Bethel at the Hayesville 41-yard line. But great tackles by Smiley, Grady Lewis, Drew Scaggs and Arch forced another Hayesville punt that Swains' Stillwell returned to the Swain 48-yard line. Swain picked up a first down on three straight by freshman Colton Shuler but turned the ball over on downs at the Hayesville 37-yard line.

Arch forced a Hayesville fumble on first down but the Jackets recovered but couldn't pick up a first down thanks to a pass break up by Keyanthae Graham at the Swain 7-yard line, keeping Hayesville off the scoreboard. Three straight running plays by Zeke Glaspie netted 18 yards but a Swain fumble was recovered by Dawson Devane at the Swain 25-yard line and the Jackets were deep into Swain territory again.

This drive proved fruitful as quarterback Lance Coker hit Mauney with a 15-yard pass to the Swain 9-yard line and Tre Graves carried the ball into the end zone on the next play for a 6-0 Hayesville lead.

The 2-point coversion failed for the Jackets.

Swain had one of its' best drives of the night on the next series as Glaspie rushed 3 straight times for 25 yards and a 28 yard pass from Stephenson to Stillwell moved the ball to the Hayesville 6-yard line.

Glaspie carried twice but the half ended with the Devils on the 3-yard line and the Jackets took a 6-0 lead into the locker room.

The third quarter saw defense dominate play as the two teams exchange punts on five straight series, two of which saw the Devils recover their own fumble which slowed drives. Hayesville lost their only turnover of the game as Coker was hit by Houston Hornbuckle and Andreas Cisneros recovered for the Devils at the Hayesville 22-yard line which proved to be a huge play.

After Glaspie and Shuler carried to the 10-yard line, Barker scored on a 10-yard run to tie the game at 6-6. Lanning gave the Devils their only lead of the game with the PAT for a 7-6 edge early in the fourth quarter.

Swain enjoyed the lead only briefly as Hayesvilles' Coker hit Mauney with a 66-yard touchdown pass for a 12-7 lead after the PAT failed. After exchanging punts, Stillwell returned a Jacket punt to the Swain 39-yard line to give the Devils one more chance to win the game. But the only penalty of the night for 10 yards for the Devils and three incomplete passes gave the ball back to Hayesville, who ran out the clock for the 12-7 victory.

Glaspie finished the game with 102 yards on 24 carries and really took a physical beating from the Jacket defense. Another solid defensive effort by Swain was led by Grady Lewis with 9 tackles, Nse Uffort had 8 tackles and one sack to go with 3.5 tackles for loss, Noah Brown had 5 tackles and Scaggs had 4 tackles and one TFL.

The Maroon Devils will travel to Murphy this Friday to take on the rival Bulldogs, who lead SMC play with a 6-1, 2-0 record as the Devils fall to 0-6, 0-2. Extra Notes: John Taylor and Jacob Jackson were honorary captains for the Maroon Devils this week from the Swain County Special Olympics Team.

The NCHSAA has announced the 2024 football regular season will be extended one week after Tropical Storm Helene ravaged many Western North Carolina counties two weeks ago. The decision will see the first round of the playoffs starting Nov. 15 instead of Nov. 8. This decision gives WNC football teams a chance to make up missed games.

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## Early voting starts in 10 more states this week

October 17, 2024 | Star, The (Shelby, NC) Author: Maya Homan; USA TODAY | Section: News | 524 Words Page: A11 OpenURL Link

In North Carolina, there are additional resources available for voters affected by Hurricane Helene.

Voters in 10 more states can start casting ballots this week as early voting rolls out for the Nov.5 general election.

Here's when early voting begins in these states and what voters should know.

Tuesday: Georgia

Early voting locations, sample ballots and other information are available on the Georgia secretary of state's My Voter Page.

Voters should bring a valid photo ID, such as a Georgia driver's license, Georgia Voter ID Card, U.S. passport or tribal ID to their polling place. Students from Georgia's public colleges, universities or technical colleges can also use their school ID cards.

Wednesday: Iowa, Kansas,

Rhode Island, Tennessee

For voters in lowa, in-person early voting is available at the local county auditor's offices or, in certain cases, at a satellite early voting station. Voters can contact their county auditor by visiting the secretary of state's website. If proof of residence is not listed on a voter's ID, voters should bring an additional document showing proof of residence.

Kansas voters can also vote early at county election offices or satellite voting locations throughout the state. Voters should bring a photo ID to the polls. Kansas residents can look up early voting locations using VoterView and find more information about their county elections office on the secretary of state's website.

Rhode Island voters should be sure to bring a photo ID with them to cast their ballot. The Board of Elections website has a full list of locations.

In Tennessee, voters need an excuse for an absentee ballot, but not to vote early. Early voting is available at county election offices or satellite locations. Check with their local elections commission for hours and locations.

Thursday: North Carolina

North Carolina requires a photo ID, such as a driver's license or a passport. However, voters who don't already have an accepted form of ID can apply online to receive a free voter ID card. Early voting sites are available online at the North Carolina State Board of Elections website. There are additional resources available for voters affected by Hurricane Helene.

Friday: Louisiana, Washington

Early voters in Louisiana will be asked to present a valid photo ID or sign a voter affidavit. More information about early voting in each parish can be accessed through Louisiana's voter portal, and a full list of early voting locations

is available at the secretary of state's website.

Washington is a vote-by-mail state, meaning all registered voters are automatically mailed an absentee ballot. Ballots can be mailed in or dropped off at a voting center. The secretary of state's website has a full list of voting centers and ballot drop boxes.

Saturday: Massachusetts, Nevada

Some first-time Massachusetts voters may have to show a photo ID, but voter ID is not required for the majority of voters. Early voting locations are available on the secretary of the commonwealth's website.

Nevada's registered voters automatically receive an absentee ballot, but voters can also vote in person at an early voting site. A list of locations is on the secretary of state's website.

Contributing: Sarah Gleason, USA TODAY

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