

Gov. Cooper increases NC unemployment benefits after Helene. Here's what's available.

October 18, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Avi Bajpai; Staff Writer | Section: News | 631 Words Page: 2A OpenURL Link

RALEIGH Gov. Roy Cooper signed an executive order Wednesday increasing the maximum weekly unemployment payment available to North Carolinians in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene.

The executive order applies statewide and authorizes the current maximum weekly payment of \$350 to be raised to \$600.

The payments paid out by the state will continue to be capped at 12 weeks, but North Carolinians who lived or worked in the western counties that were impacted by the storm, and are out of work because of it, will qualify for up to 26 weeks of federal benefits that will be paid through the end of March.

In a statement, Cooper, a Democrat, said he was authorizing the raise in weekly unemployment benefits after traveling across Western North Carolina and hearing concern from small business owners about employees who were still unemployed because their businesses are still closed.

The executive order, which received unanimous agreement from the rest of the bipartisan Council of State, is tied to the ongoing state of emergency for Helene, and will stay in effect until the end of the emergency, or until the order is rescinded.

On top of raising the cap on weekly benefits to \$600, the executive order also increases benefits by \$250 per week, up to the \$600 maximum, to ensure that any low-income or part-time workers who were receiving less than the current \$350 maximum "receive necessary benefits in the wake of Helene," according to a news release from Cooper's office.

Cooper's office noted that even though federal law requires the increased benefits to apply statewide, 79% of new claims filed - 19,735 - between the storm hitting North Carolina on Sept. 27 and Oct. 13 were filed by workers in impacted counties.

The governor's office also noted that only eight other states have lower weekly maximum unemployment benefits after North Carolina, adding that the \$350 cap, which was set in 2013, had not been changed since, "even as rising wages in the state continue to grow North Carolina's Unemployment Insurance Trust Fund from which benefits are paid."

The trust fund currently has more than \$4.8 billion, and is the second-largest of its kind in the country, the governor's office said.

The governor's office said that the Division of Employment Security estimated that if 50,000 North Carolinians from the impacted counties were to receive the maximum unemployment payment for the entire 12-week duration, it would cost the trust fund a total of \$150 million.

The additional 14 weeks of federal benefits available under the federal Disaster Unemployment Assistance program would cost the federal government an additional \$175 million, the governor's office said.

"Many currently unemployed workers will likely return to work before receiving the full benefit they are entitled to claim, so the actual fiscal impact of the increased benefits is expected to be lower," Cooper's office said in the release.

In a statement, State Treasurer Dale Folwell said he concurred with Cooper's executive order but suggested that officials should work to figure out where the increased benefits are most needed.

"While natural disasters are nothing new in North Carolina, they always present new opportunities to learn important lessons," Folwell said. "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," he said.

Cooper's office said Wednesday that it could take people filing for unemployment between two and three weeks to see the increased payments in their weekly benefit checks.

Avi Bajpai: 919-346-4817, @avibajpai_

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Official: Hypothermia death claims are false

October 18, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Adam Wagner; Staff Writer | Section: News | 458 Words

Page: 1A OpenURL Link

A viral claim that 15 people died of hypothermia in Avery County this week is "categorically false," Alicia Stemper, an acting spokeswoman for the county's emergency operations, told The News & Observer.

"Mark it debunked in all capital letters, please," Stemper said.

Dr. Mollie James posted the claim Tuesday morning on the social media platform X. James joined other medical personnel at a grassroots disaster relief center set up at the Avery County Airport and posted that 15 people, including children, had died overnight from hypothermia.

As of Wednesday afternoon, the post had been seen more than 900,000 times, had been reposted more than 5,400 times and had been liked more than 8,300 times.

James is licensed in Iowa and Missouri as an osteopathic physician and surgeon. She has hosted a pair of podcasts, with episode titles that address free speech in medicine and that discuss legal strategies against vaccine mandates.

Avery County Sheriff's Office deputies have an active investigation into James and into her intent behind spreading the false rumor, Stemper said.

She said they needed to visit the field hospital to investigate the claim of 15 deaths after seeing the social media post.

"You can't hear information like that and dismiss it. You have to go check it out," Stemper said.

And that means the deputies and investigators can't be taking on other tasks that are needed in the storm-impacted county, she said.

As of Wednesday, there were four deaths and three people reported missing in Avery County. Those numbers have held steady for several days, Stemper said.

Stemper also described fears that the false claim and others like it could lead people who are already having a tough time after living through Tropical Storm Helene to enter a state of despair.

"If you're hanging on to the edge and you hear 15 more people from your county died, that might be the last thing it takes for you to give up all hope," Stemper said. "It's just so painful, unnecessary, hurtful and obstructive."

NC Reality Check is investigating rumors having to do with Hurricane/Tropical Storm Helene and its aftermath in Western North Carolina. If you have heard a rumor that you would like us to check out, email realitycheck@newsobserver.com

This story was produced with financial support from the Hartfield Foundation and Green South Foundation, in partnership with Journalism Funding Partners, as part of an independent journalism fellowship program. The N&O maintains full editorial control of the work. If you would like to help support local journalism, please consider signing up for a digital subscription.

Adam Wagner: 919-829-4669, @byadamwagner

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Dog wandered NC after devastation of Helene. Then came the 'kindness of strangers'

October 18, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Simone Jasper, News & Observer | Section: north carolina | 410 Words OpenURL Link

A dog wandered a Western North Carolina neighborhood after Hurricane Helene ravaged his home - then came the "kindness of strangers."

The pup depended on the strangers before he faced a second blow: being "attacked by a pack of wild dogs." That's when a neighbor joined other families in getting him the care he needed, according to the Triangle Beagle Rescue of North Carolina.

"She and her neighbors are all dealing with the aftermath of Helene and it's amazing they were able to do so much for him while facing such a crisis," Tara Lynn told McClatchy News in an Oct. 17 email. "She was able to clean him up after the dog attack and had antibiotics for him which definitely helped keep him from getting a bad infection until he could get to a veterinarian."

Photo Oct 17 2024, 4 47 36 PM.jpgMoose the dog was saved after Hurricane Helene, a North Carolina rescue said.

The dog made it to safety, and Lynn became his foster mom. The pup, named Moose, is now recovering from his injuries.

"His body may have scars, but his spirit remains strong," the Raleigh-area rescue wrote in a Facebook post.

Moose is getting a second chance after Hurricane Helene barreled through Western North Carolina in late September. The deadly storm left the mountainous region with catastrophic flooding and wind damage.

"Moose's world was turned upside down when Hurricane Helene devastated his home in Lake Lure, NC, taking his family and leaving him to fend for himself," the rescue wrote.

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After his post-Helene ordeal, Moose's foster mom said he "had a deep cut behind his ear and on his leg." As his stitches heal, he has become known as a friendly dog.

Lynn said the opportunity to become the pup's foster parent came just as she wondered how she could make a difference in the wake of the "overwhelming" destruction in the North Carolina mountains.

"We had been hoping to foster and considered a few dogs with TBR and another rescue, but nothing seemed quite the right fit," Lynn wrote. "I think it was God's timing that had us wait until Moose needed our help."

As of Oct. 18, Lynn was scheduled to talk to a potential adopter. Future updates about Moose's adoption status may be posted at facebook.com/tribeagles.

Lake Lure is about a 50-mile drive southeast from Asheville.

Family 'watched in horror' as Helene swept their cat away. Then son heard a meow

'Heartbroken' family forced to surrender 'loving' cats after Helene. They need a home

• Citation (aglc Style)

Simone Jasper, News & Observer, 'Dog wandered NC after devastation of Helene. Then came the 'kindness of strangers", *News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles* (online), 18 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C8FF476C794100>



'We will rebuild' I-40 in Pigeon River Gorge, NCDOT tells Buttigieg. But how?

October 18, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Richard Stradling, News & Observer | Section: north carolina | 1014 Words OpenURL Link

Like many Americans, U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg saw pictures of what the remnants of Hurricane Helene did to Interstate 40 in Western North Carolina's Pigeon River Gorge.

On Thursday, he came to the gorge to see first hand. With Gov. Roy Cooper, U.S. Sen. Thom Tillis and state officials, he looked over the concrete highway median into the abyss where the river had washed the eastbound lanes away.

"It's one thing to see a photo," Buttigieg said. "It's another to stand here and look at just the shocking, destructive power of this storm. It's almost impossible to believe that water and wind alone could have torn apart rock and asphalt and the literal ground near where we're standing."

Of all the rebuilding challenges ahead, the reconstruction of the eastbound lanes of I-40 through the gorge will be among the most complex and expensive. The N.C. Department of Transportation's preliminary estimate puts the cost at \$1 billion.

On his first tour of Western North Carolina since the storm, Buttigieg pledged federal support to "make sure that funding is not a barrier."

State officials don't yet know how long it will take to rebuild I-40 through the gorge and restore the main highway connection between North Carolina and Tennessee. But standing next to Buttigieg on Thursday, N.C. Transportation Secretary Joey Hopkins pledged that it would happen.

"Not rebuilding is not an option," Hopkins said. "We will rebuild. The question is how."

IMG_2980.jpgThis is one of about 10 places where the swollen Pigeon River washed away pavement along the eastbound lanes of Interstate 40 after Hurricane Helene. About 7,000 linear feet of pavement will need to be replaced along a four-mile stretch of I-40 near the Tennessee line.

The eastbound lanes of I-40 began to disappear just before noon on Sept. 27, as the remnants of Helene moved out of Western North Carolina. The swollen Pigeon River carved into the earth along the highway, swallowing trees, then the guardrail and the paved shoulder. In several places, one or both of the travel lanes are also gone.

The westbound lanes are intact, though cracks have developed in the pavement in spots. The NCDOT and its contractors are keeping an eye on those, looking for any signs of movement, says Wanda Payne, NCDOT's top engineer in the region.

"We're actively monitoring the cracks to make sure we don't lose anything else," Payne told Buttigieg.

Stabilizing the westbound lanes is the first step in restoring the highway. Contractors are using a technique called "soil nailing," essentially driving reinforced steel bars up to 20 feet long into the side of the gorge under the road to keep it from eroding further.

IMG_2992.jpgContractors drill long steel rods into the ground under the westbound lanes of Interstate 40 in Pigeon River Gorge on Wednesday, Oct. 16, 2024. The rods will help stabilize what's left of the road, so contractors can begin rebuilding the eastbound lanes washed out by the remnants of Hurricane Helene.

The \$8 million contract with Wright Brothers Construction of Charleston, Tennessee, and Colorado-based

GeoStabilization International requires that work to be done by Jan. 4, with incentives if they can finish sooner, said Daniel Ross, NCDOT's engineer overseeing the project. Once they're done, work on the eastbound side can begin in earnest.

It's not clear yet how the road will be rebuilt. Hopkins said NCDOT has identified teams of designers and construction contractors and asked them to come up with proposals, along with estimated costs and timelines.

"I'm sure we'll see some different ideas," he said.

The basic challenge, Payne said, is to reconnect the highway from the Tennessee line to the tunnels near mile marker 4. There may be different solutions at different points along the way, including walls, viaducts and shifting lanes back from the river's edge.

"I think we have a lot of options," she said.

Hopkins said he hopes NCDOT will choose a design and construction team in the next few weeks.

IMG_3098.jpgN.C. Transportation Secretary Joey Hopkins presents a list of the biggest road reconstruction projects after Hurricane Helene to U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, left. Looking on during a visit to Interstate 40 in the Pigeon River Gorge are Gov. Roy Cooper and Wanda Payne, NCDOT's top engineer in the region.

Could the westbound lanes reopen to traffic?

The Pigeon River also tore away parts of eastbound I-40 in Tennessee, though the damage was not as extensive. The state transportation department has converted the two westbound lanes to two-way traffic between the North Carolina line and Exit 447, a distance of about 4 miles.

But it's too soon to tell whether NCDOT can put traffic on the westbound lanes on the North Carolina side once they're stabilized.

In several places, all that separates those lanes from the river is the median barrier, like the spot Buttigieg visited Thursday. Ross, the project engineer, said it's likely contractors will need at least one of the westbound lanes for trucks and construction equipment to rebuild the highway.

IMG_3094.jpgU.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg visits Interstate 40 in Pigeon River Gorge on Thursday, Oct. 17, 2024. Buttigieg is standing at the median, where the eastbound lanes collapsed into the river after the remnants of Hurricane Helene dropped historic amounts of rain, severing the busiest connection between North Carolina and Tennessee.

Meanwhile, an alternate route between the two states, Interstate 26, remains closed after floodwaters knocked down twin spans that carried the highway over the Nolichucky River in Erwin, Tennessee, about 40 miles from the state line.

There's no timeline set for rebuilding the bridges and fully reopening the highway, said Mark Nagi, spokesman for the Tennessee Department of Transportation.

But TDOT hopes to get one lane open in each direction to through traffic by the end of November, Nagi said. The bridge spans that fell are close to the river bank, and TDOT plans to create a temporary roadway by filling the area on the westbound side with stone and paving over it.

When the eastbound span is rebuilt, traffic will shift and the temporary road will be replaced with a new westbound bridge.

NCDOT_WesternNCClosed_Map.jpgA map showing detours around two long-term closures of Interstates 40 and 26

after the remnants of Hurricane Helene slammed Western North Carolina.

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We're taking a deep dive into election misinformation. Here's how you can help.

October 18, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Caitlyn Yaede and Emily Vespa, correspondents, News & Observer Section: election | 432 Words OpenURL Link

Keeping voters informed with reliable information about North Carolina's elections is a top priority for The News & Observer.

Now, with less than a month until Election Day, The N&O is asking readers to share examples of misinformation they see, hear and read, so we can investigate and set the record straight.

The N&O is one of eight publications across six states receiving funding from the Center for Media Engagement at the University of Texas at Austin to identify, record and correct dishonest election information. The partnership, which began last month, aims to provide voters with accurate information about the 2024 elections. (The N&O retains full editorial control over its reporting when it receives funding from philanthropy and grants.)

To extend our eyes and ears, N&O has also asked a bipartisan group, the Commission on the Future of NC Elections, to flag potential misinformation for our reporters.

Now, we are inviting readers to report local election information that you think might be inaccurate, or that raises questions you want answered, to https://truthsleuthlocal.netlify.app.

For example, you might see questionable information about where to vote or how to vote. From this dashboard, reporters can review submissions, notice trends and potentially report on widespread misinformation.

Already, this project has led to coverage of myths that arose after Hurricane Helene's devastation in Western North Carolina, such as misconceptions about FEMA disaster funding. and Al-generated photos of flooding.

You may also follow our Reality Checks - like one by Kyle Ingram debunking accusations of election theft after the North Carolina State Board of Elections removed 750,000 registrations from the voter rolls.

To anonymously submit misinformation you see, create a Truth Sleuth Local account. Then, select "New Report" and fill in the form, using as much detail as possible. All identifying information in recorded responses will be removed before publication, if your report is used.

Those unable to access the database for any reason can submit a report to this form. If you have already submitted a report to the database, you do not need to resubmit it.

If you have any questions about this project, how you can help or how your information will be used, email dome@newsobserver.com.

Still curious? Check out what we've been working on so far:

Helene fact check: Here are the rumors and the reality in Western North Carolina

Fake, misleading images of Helene spread on social media. Here's how to spot them.

'Over the top' ad features a fake Mark Robinson. What to know about AI in political ads.

No, disaster funding isn't being sent to the border. Here's how FEMA spends its money

Starlink reconnects Western NC reeling from Helene. Who gets credit becomes political.

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Caitlyn Yaede and Emily Vespa, correspondents, News & Observer, 'We're taking a deep dive into election misinformation. Here's how you can help.', *News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles* (online), 18 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C906624EABFB40



RDU On the Rise: Early voting is underway, downtown Raleigh news you can use & Fortnite

October 18, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Avi Bajpai, News & Observer | Section: rdu on the rise nl | 1024 Words OpenURL Link

Hello and welcome to this week's edition of RDU on the Rise. I'm Avi Bajpai, a state politics reporter here at The News & Observer.

It's officially crunch time in #ncpol.

As this newsletter hits your inbox Friday morning, in-person early voting in North Carolina is underway, and candidates both at the top of your ballot and all the way down are finalizing their campaign plans for the final two-week stretch through Election Day. If you need a reminder, that's Tuesday, Nov. 5.

092124-TRUMP-WILMINGTON-KLM-17.JPGFormer President and current Republican candidate for president Donald Trump dances at the conclusion of his remarks during a rally in Wilmington, N.C. on Saturday, Sept. 21, 2024.

North Carolina is one of seven major battleground states Kamala Harris and Donald Trump are vying for, and both presidential candidates are showing how important the Tar Heel State is to them.

This week, the focus for both campaigns has been on Eastern North Carolina. Harris held a rally in Greenville on Sunday, and Trump is headed to the same venue on the campus of East Carolina University on Monday.

HARRISGVILLE-NE-101324-RTW_7.jpgVice President Kamala Harris, the Democratic Presidential nominee, delivers remarks during a rally at Minges Coliseum on Sunday, October 13, 2024 in Greenville, N.C.

The Harris campaign is also deploying running mate Tim Walz and Bill Clinton to the state this week, while the Trump campaign is tapping running mate JD Vance and surrogates including Tulsi Gabbard, Kristi Noem, and Donald Trump Jr. Both Clinton and the Trump campaign have been embarking on bus tours this week, hitting multiple cities in a day across the state.

Everything you need to know about early voting

North Carolina has more than 7.7 million registered voters as of this year, according to the State Board of Elections. Millions of those voters will go to the polls during the in-person early voting period, which began Thursday and runs through Saturday, Nov. 2.

In 2016, 62% of voters cast their ballots during early voting, and in 2020, that share was even higher, at 65%.

Plenty of voters showed up to vote on the first day of early voting yesterday. Lines were short at some polling places, but at other busy sites across Wake County, the Triangle, and the rest of the state, the elections officials reported wait times between one and two hours.

101724-EARLY-VOTING-KLM-01.jpgPeople line up to vote outside the Durham County Main Library in Durham, N.C., Thursday morning, Oct. 17, 2024, on first day of early voting in North Carolina. There are more than 400 early voting sites across the state. During the early voting period, voters can visit any early voting site in their county. While on Election Day, voters must visit their assigned polling place.

If you plan to vote early, be sure to check out our guide to casting your ballot before Election Day.

One reason to vote early that might make things easier is that you can go to any of the early voting sites in the

county where you live and are registered to vote.

Voting on Election Day is a tradition that many prefer to stick to, but if you do that, you'll have to go to the polling place assigned to you.

And before you vote, make sure to take a look at our 2024 Voter Guide. You can easily select the race you're interested in learning more about, and find the questionnaires we asked the candidates to fill out.

Those questionnaires, which have been published in front of our paywall and can be read by anyone visiting our website, regardless of whether they have a subscription, cover the statewide, judicial, congressional, legislative, and local races that are on ballots in and around the Triangle.

In other news

- « The Charlotte Observer's Catherine Muccigrosso and Melissa Melvin-Rodriguez documented relief efforts after spending 12 hours embedded with the Army earlier this month, as troops deployed from Fort Liberty to assist with the response to Hurricane Helene in Western North Carolina.
- « The Raleigh City Council voted this week to try out a two-hour, free parking program for certain decks in downtown Raleigh, to help businesses and attract more foot traffic, Kristen Johnson reports, with details on where and when the free parking will be available.
- « Will it (finally) snow again in Raleigh this year? Martha Quillin breaks down what forecasters at NOAA and the farmers' almanacs are saying.

IMG_new_color_jump.jpg_2_1_041LB7OV_L38592967.JPGDean Webster makes his way up Fayetteville Street to his office after a visit to the Subway for some dinner on February 12, 2014 in Raleigh, N.C. "It was like an oasis," Webster said, referring to the restaurant that was open despite the winter storm. Webster said he was prepared to spend the night in his downtown office instead of trying to make it to his home off Glenwood Avenue.

- « Kristen also reports on the latest regarding a nightclub in Raleigh's Glenwood South district that has been closed for two years. The owner is now suing the city for harassment.
- « Brian Gordon has a comprehensive, four-part series examining how a North Carolina studio made Fortnite, the gaming sensation that wasn't just the world's highest-grossing game for a while, but quickly became a cultural behemoth that "reached millionaires and middle school students, pioneered intellectual property collaborations and sparked thorny legal fights," and even today, has "well over a million at any given minute" playing on their laptops, desktops, tablets, phones, and consoles worldwide.
- « Drew Jackson fills us in on the Triangle's "tremendous taco trend" continuing with a new national brand that is slated to open its first location in the state, in downtown Raleigh, early next year.

Thanks for reading. Keep an eye out for next week's RDU On the Rise from my colleague Drew Hill on our audience and growth team.

Before you go:

Sharing this newsletter with someone new? They can sign up here. We love making new friends. Want to unfriend us? We won't take it personally. Click the unsubscribe link near the bottom of this email. Looking for more news in your inbox? Check out our full range of newsletters here, including a brand new one for those of you who live in western Wake County.

Avi - Newsletter author card.pngAvi Bajpai is a state politics reporter for The News & Observer and The Herald-Sun.

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Under the Dome: Judge rules against GOP effort to purge 225,000 from voter rolls

October 18, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Kyle Ingram, News & Observer | Section: election | 767 Words OpenURL Link

Good morning and welcome to your Under the Dome newsletter. I'm Caitlyn Yaede. We start today with reporter Kyle Ingram's dispatch from a Wilmington courthouse.

A federal judge partially dismissed a controversial Republican lawsuit seeking to purge 225,000 North Carolina voters from the rolls on Thursday.

The lawsuit alleges that the State Board of Elections improperly allowed these voters to register without providing certain identification information.

Chief U.S. District Judge Richard E. Myers II, an appointee of former President Donald Trump, ruled that the NC GOP and Republican National Committee did not have the right to sue over the federal voter registration law in question.

However, Myers agreed to send a separate portion of the GOP's lawsuit, which made arguments based on the North Carolina Constitution, back to a state court for consideration.

The impetus for the lawsuit is a voter registration form that the Republican plaintiffs say did not clearly tell registrants that a driver's license number or last four digits of a Social Security number were required to register.

"The court is not insensitive to plaintiffs' concerns about election integrity and voter disenfranchisement," Myers wrote in his order. "Nor is its decision in any way a stamp of approval on Defendants' conduct."

That form has been updated and Republicans have not provided specific examples of registrants who successfully used the form to register despite being ineligible. Regardless, all voters are required to show voter ID in this year's election.

The state board and the Democratic National Committee, which intervened as a defendant in the case, have until Oct. 22 to appeal Myers' decision to send part of the case back to state court.

Both of North Carolina's statewide appellate courts have Republican majorities.

In court on Thursday, attorneys for the State Board of Elections and the DNC argued that the case deals primarily with federal law and should therefore stay in federal court.

The National Voter Registration Act prohibits states from systematically removing registrants starting 90 days before an election. That deadline had already passed when Republicans filed the lawsuit in August.

The NC GOP's attorney, however, argued that state law also sets out voter registration requirements – even if those only replicate federal law.

This lawsuit is one of several the RNC and NC GOP have brought against the elections board in recent months. Other cases challenge the board on digital voter IDs, absentee return envelopes and more.

- Kyle Ingram

Today, on the second day of early voting, Republican candidates Mark Robinson and Hal Weatherman plan to campaign together today at a joint town hall in Marion. Before joining the candidate for governor in Western North Carolina, lieutenant governor candidate Weatherman will be at John M. Brown Community Center - an early voting location in Wake County - to meet voters this morning.

POLL WATCH

The latest polling from Quinnipiac University indicates a tight race in the presidential election in the battleground state of North Carolina. Vice President Kamala Harris has 49% support among likely voters, compared to 47% for Donald Trump. The race remains "too close to call."

WHAT ELSE WE'RE WORKING ON

VP candidate Tim Walz made several stops across the state Thursday, Dawn Baumgartner Vaughan reports, including in Durham, where he took the stage at a campaign rally with former President Bill Clinton. Waltz was then set to fly to Winston-Salem for another campaign event with the musician Common.Trump is expected to visit Greenville on Monday, rallying at Williams Arena on East Carolina University's campus. This is the same venue where Harris hosted a campaign event on Sunday. Avi Bajpai has more.

WHAT ELSE WE'RE READING

The impacts of Hurricane Helene are still being felt in Mitchell County, where access to clean drinking water is limited, WUNC's Will Atwater reports. The county's water treatment system was made inoperable by the hurricane.

VOTER GUIDE

In the latest candidate questionnaires from our 2024 NC Voter Guide, see what candidates for U.S. House District 12 have to say about the issues, and learn more about their biographies.

Two candidates answered our questions:

Republican Addul Ali

Democrat Alma Adams

Today's newsletter was by Caitlyn Yaede. Check your inbox tomorrow for more #ncpol.

You can sign up to receive the Under the Dome newsletter at newsobserver.com/newsletters. Want your friends to get our email, too? Forward them this newsletter so they can sign up. We want to know what you would like to see in the Under the Dome newsletter. Do you like highlights from the legislature? Political analysis? Do you have a question you'd like The News & Observer team to answer? Tell us here. You can also email us at dome@newsobserver.comDon't forget to follow our tweets and listen to our Under the Dome podcast for more developments.

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NCHSAA announces sites for fall championships

October 18, 2024 | News Herald, The (Morganton, NC) Author: JUSTIN EPLEY Sports editor | Section: High School | 470 Words OpenURL Link

CHAPEL HILL — The NCHSAA on Thursday announced championship sites for the state's high school sports fall season, which has had some rearranging done due to damage inflicted by Hurricane Helene in the western half of the state.

Football state championship games will be played from Dec. 20-21, with the 2A and 4A contests held at the University of North Carolina's Kenan Stadium and the 1A and 3A state championship games contested at North Carolina State University's Carter-Finley Stadium. Both venues are playing host for the fourth consecutive year, the NCHSAA said. The association also noted that decisions regarding game times will be made once the participating teams are determined.

In boys soccer, state championship games will be played from Nov. 22-23, with all classifications playing at the Mecklenburg County Sportsplex in Matthews. According to the NCHSAA, this marks the first time the venue will host the boys soccer championships after making its debut as a championship site for girls soccer this past spring. The boys title games had been held at MacPherson Stadium at the Bryan Park Soccer Complex in Greensboro following a three-year stay at Cary's Koka Booth Stadium.

For volleyball, all classifications will play on Nov. 2 at North Carolina State University's Reynolds Coliseum. The NCHSAA says the venue is serving in this role for the fourth straight year.

Girls tennis individual tournaments will be held from Oct. 25-26 with 1A at Cary Tennis Center, 2A at Ting Park in Holly Springs, 3A at the Burlington Tennis Center and 4A at the Millbrook Exchange in Raleigh. Dual-team state championships will be played on Nov. 9, with all classifications at Burlington Tennis Center.

For girls golf, state championships will be held from Oct. 28-29 with the 1A/2A match at Sapona Golf Club in Lexington, 3A at Longleaf Golf and Family Club in Southern Pines and 4A at Pinehurst Resort No. 6 in Pinehurst. According to the NCHSAA, Sapona is a new venue for state championships. The 3A match returns to Longleaf after being played at Foxfire Golf Club a season ago. And the 4A match will be played at its most-frequented venue this millennium, with Pinehurst No. 6 hosting for the ninth time since the event left Finley Golf Course in Chapel Hill in 2000.

All cross country classifications will compete for state championships on Nov. 2 at the Ivey Redmon Complex in Kernersville. The NCHSAA says this is the 12th time in a row the complex has played host and the 15th consecutive time the events have been held in Kernersville.

The NCHSAA's cheerleading invitational will be held on Dec. 7 at the Raleigh Convention Center. The association notes the event has been held there for most of its history, with this season marking the fourth consecutive time after it was held at Southern Alamance High School in Graham for the 2020-21 campaign.

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Draughn awarded Western Highlands Conference volleyball title after season interrupted

October 18, 2024 | News Herald, The (Morganton, NC) Author: JUSTIN EPLEY Sports editor | Section: Girls | 1110 Words OpenURL Link

VALDESE — For the Draughn volleyball team, an 8-0 start to Western Highlands 1A/2A Conference play was enough to secure the league's crown.

What would have been a 14-game conference slate was trimmed to nine after Hurricane Helene ravaged many of the WHC's mountain communities in late September. In fact, the Lady Wildcats played just one more league contest after the storm, and that didn't come until late Thursday at Rosman, 22 days after DHS won in four sets at Owen.

But by the time DHS (14-7, 8-1 WHC) played the Lady Tigers, they already had been awarded the conference championship in former player Triniti Lambert's first season as head coach.

"I told the girls from the start that I'm really big about having a positive attitude," Lambert said. "A positive attitude toward yourself, a positive attitude toward your teammates and a positive outlook on how the game's going to go. So, I told them that no matter who we face, we have to go in there and know that as long as we give it our all, it's going to be what we want it to be.

"So, we played some pretty tough teams this season in conference and nonconference. We took some losses, but the important thing that we talked about after every loss was learning from a loss. If you lose and don't learn from it, then it's an even bigger loss. So, we definitely got some good information from all of our losses."

Another key ingredient in Lambert's recipe for success has simply been to have a good time playing on the court.

"We also talked about having fun," Lambert said. "I think sometimes, you have some really good teams that don't go as far as they should because they stop playing the sport for the love of the game. They play for the sport for glory or for something else. When our girls go out there and have fun together, they're unstoppable."

Draughn's run through the WHC included five wins via sweep, and they all came consecutively at Avery County on Sept. 3, at Mitchell on Sept. 5, versus Madison on Sept. 10, versus Rosman on Sept. 12 and at NCSSM-Morganton on Sept. 17. That streak was bookended by four-set victories versus Owen on Aug. 29 and at Mountain Heritage on Sept. 19, and later followed by another four-set win over the Warlassies in Black Mountain on Sept. 25.

"It was really good," Lambert said. "When we finished that first round (through the WHC) undefeated, we had a little celebration. Then, Owen was our biggest competition and we did get to play them before the hurricane hit. When we played them the second time, we lost the first set and we talked about playing our game, having fun, playing as a team and came out there and they were a completely different team the last three sets.

"Owen was our biggest competition, so to be able to take that and win it in four after a tough first-set loss, I was really impressed with the girls."

Even though Lambert is in her first season coaching the Lady Wildcats, she inherited a team that has been a mainstay in the NCHSAA 1A state playoffs the past few seasons and has some veterans to lean on, namely scoring leaders Lyrical Edwards, a senior, and Bailey Mozeley, a junior. But sophomores Kylie Corpening and Bella Whitson are next up in that category, giving Draughn some youth to tap into, as well.

Senior Allyson Auton; juniors Ava Aldridge, Ella Anthony, Kristyn Cozort, Peyton Brewer and Rebecca Feimster; sophomores Macy Auton, Shelby Proffitt, Braylen Clontz and Lillian Collins; and freshman Ashlyn Heavner all have been regular contributors throughout the fall, also.

"I'm extremely lucky," Lambert said. "I wasn't just blessed with girls who have talent, because we do have an extreme amount of talent on our varsity and our JV teams, but what I have, more importantly, is girls who want it. Whenever I tell them we're going to have a longer practice or whenever I ask them to work harder, they do. They step up every time I ask them for something.

"You can have skill all day long, but if you're not blessed with a team that wants it, there's not much you can do as a coach."

Waiting next for the Lady Wildcats is a trip to the NCHSAA 1A state playoffs. Seeding will take place on Sunday, followed by the first round on Tuesday, the second round on Thursday, the third round on Oct. 26, the 1A West Regional semifinals on Oct. 29, the 1A West Regional finals on Oct. 31 and the 1A state championship on Nov. 2.

It's just a matter of how far Draughn can go.

"We've kind of looked at the playoffs from the beginning of the year," Lambert said. "Every game is important, but every game, you learn a lesson from. When you get to the playoffs, there is no next time. So, we've been prepping for this for quite a while.

"One of our biggest messages that we just started looking at the end of the season is focusing on our side of the net. Sometimes, our girls get really excited when they're playing a bigger team, especially if they know somebody, and they focus too much on the other side of the net, and it can mess with their heads. So, the biggest thing that we're focusing on for the playoffs, when we're probably going to face some really big teams, is focusing on our side of the net and everyone doing their job on our side of the net and playing as a team on our side of the net and taking care of business."

Lambert, who played volleyball and basketball during her time as a Lady Wildcat, learned plenty from her time as a student-athlete on Lovelady Road to apply to her coaching strategy at her alma mater.

"Something I have learned from the coaching side of things that I didn't realize I was learning as a player is how to lose, how to lose together and how to be in a tough spot and tough it out," Lambert said. "Sports teaches you so many life lessons that you don't realize that you're learning until you're on the other side of things watching somebody learn those lessons.

"I just want to say that overall, I'm extremely proud of these girls. I've had some girls who have really stepped up this season. Girls who have worked very hard to get more playing time, earn a starting spot or just worked hard to be a good teammate, overall. I have an extremely hard-working team, and I have a lot of girls who have stepped up to the plate."

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Leadership Caldwell Class of 2025 postponed

October 18, 2024 | News-Topic, The (Lenoir, NC) Author: STAFF REPORTS | Section: Archives | 241 Words OpenURL Link

The Caldwell Chamber Leadership Committee has announced that Leadership Caldwell 2025 will be postponed until fall 2025, according to a press release from the committee.

The class was originally scheduled to begin in January 2025. Applicants for the class will be notified directly of the change in date, according to the press release.

Due to the impact of Hurricane Helene on individuals and businesses in the Caldwell County community, the committee felt it would benefit class participants to delay the start of Leadership Caldwell 2025. The committee hopes to use the additional time to plan and return with a new, exciting look to the program. Those interested in participating in Leadership Caldwell next fall should stay tuned to The Caldwell Chamber Newsletter for updates on the return of the class, according to the press release.

"The committee met to discuss the future of Leadership Caldwell. We wanted to give our community time to recover from the devastating impacts of Hurricane Helene both in our county and in the region. This break will allow us to return to the class schedule used before the COVID-19 Pandemic. It will be spread across a longer period to allow for more schedule flexibility and more in-depth exploration of the class themes. Keep a lookout in the next months for news and updates about Leadership Caldwell," said April Austin, Leadership Caldwell Committee cochair.

If you are interested in learning more about Leadership Caldwell, or other networking opportunities, visit caldwellchambernc.com.

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STAFF REPORTS, 'Leadership Caldwell Class of 2025 postponed', *News-Topic, The* (online), 18 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C4B0AE9C70A3C0



Record numbers arrive at polls for early voting

October 18, 2024 | News-Topic, The (Lenoir, NC) Author: SHELBY POWELL spowell@newstopicnews.com| Section: Archives | 619 Words OpenURL Link

Early voting in Caldwell County began at 8 a.m. on Thursday, Oct. 17, drawing in record numbers of day one voters to the two Caldwell early voting sites in Lenoir and Granite Falls, according to county Board of Elections director Chad Barnes.

Barnes said that, by the time the sites closed at 7:30 p.m., 1,675 voters had cast ballots at the Lenoir early voting site and 1,460 had cast ballots at the Granite Falls site for a total of 3,135 voters. Barnes said these voters broke Caldwell County's record for the first day of early voting.

This trend was reflected across the rest of the state, according to a press release form the state Board of Elections, with a first-day record of 353,166 ballots being set statewide. This record beat the previous, 2020 record of 348,559 by 1.3%, according to the release.

This falls in line with expectations set by State Board of Elections executive director Karen Bell, who said, "in-person early voting has been the most popular method of voting in recent general elections, and we expect that will continue in 2024," in a previous release.

The state board announced through its website that, as of Oct. 17, 428,299 total ballots had been cast, including the early voting number as well as 75,133 absentee ballots. 373,316 absentee ballots have been requested as of the same date. As of Oct. 12, the board announced 7,736,114 registered North Carolina voters.

"Yesterday's turnout is a clear sign that voters are energized about this election, that they trust the elections process, and that a hurricane will not stop North Carolinians from exercising their right to vote," said Bell on Friday. "Let's keep it rolling, North Carolina."

Voters at the Lenoir early site formed a slow but steady line through the election board office, out the doors and around the side of the building. They came in from Lenoir, Gamewell, Cajah's Mountain, Patterson, and further out in the county.

Of those interviewed by the Topic, voters were primarily motivated by the presidential election, neatly divided by support for or opposition to the reelection bid of former President Donald Trump.

Along issues, some voters expressed concerns with the health of the economy, high inflation, immigration and general discontent with the state of the federal government. Other voters cited as motivation a desire to secure abortion and reproductive access, defend rights and legal protections for minorities, and an opposition to the political objectives outlined by the Heritage Foundation's Project 2025. Only a few voters had no strong opinions on candidates or issues.

Most interviewed voters said convenience or habit motivated them to vote early, saying they always vote early or want to avoid the possibility of getting sick on Election Day. Some were taking the chance to vote while they had time off from work, or in preparation for being out of town in November.

Others expressed concerns that efforts may be made to restrict access to early voting, and wanted to get theirs in early before that could happen. Some cast doubt on the legitimacy of the 2020 election and believed voting early might make their vote more likely to count in 2024.

One voter said there was a concern that another storm like Helene could limit access to polling places and wanted

to ensure his vote was cast to avoid that possibility.

Early voting will continue in Caldwell County until Nov. 2. The Lenoir early voting site is at 120 Hospital Avenue, at the Caldwell County Board of Elections office on the lower level of the Caldwell County Public Library. The Granite Falls early voting site is at 56 Pinewood Road. Polls will be open Monday thru Friday from 8 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. and on Saturdays from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.

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Lenoir honors public resource officer Chris Smith at council meeting

October 18, 2024 | News-Topic, The (Lenoir, NC) Author: SHELBY POWELL spowell@newstopicnews.com| Section: Archives | 447 Words OpenURL Link

During its normal meeting on Tuesday, Oct. 15, the Lenoir City Council held public hearings, approved NC Department of Transportation debris removal for the city and recognized the winner of the 2023 Golden Ticket Award.

The meeting began with the recognition of master patrol officer Chris Smith, whose live changing advice to a family and relationship to students while serving as a School Resource Officer earned him the 2023 Annual Golden Ticket Award from the Lenoir's Customer Service Team.

The award's winner is selected by city staff members and awarded to a fellow a coworker to "recognize their coworkers for going above and beyond their normal responsibilities to provide 'Service Beyond Measure' to fellow staff and public," according to the city agenda. Smith has won the award previously in 2020 for rescuing a dog trapped in a pool.

The city held a public hearing for the rezoning of a lot on Ideal Drive from single to multi-family. The amendment is in line with the comprehensive plan and will promote growth without adversely affecting the neighborhood, according to the planning board.

A second public hearing was held regarding another rezoning request for a corner at the intersection of 321 and Victoria Court to allow for the building of a multi-family development by Southwood Realty Company. The rezoning is in line with the Comprehensive plan and staff recommendations, according to the meeting agenda.

The meeting's third public hearing was held for a proposed ordinance ordinance amendment that would allow for electronic message boards and signage, specifically for religious institutions in residential districts. The amendment also establishes standards to help ensure these boards will automatically dim at night for safety.

The forth public hearing was for a second ordinance amendment that would allow for light pole banners to be placed on certain private poles under certain conditions. The amendment was presented at a September council meeting, where it was sent back to staff to be narrowed. At Tuesday's meeting, the new draft was sent to the planning board for consideration.

The city approved of a debris removal agreement with the North Carolina Department of Transportation's disaster relief debris removal agreement. The agreement is required for Lenoir's participation in Caldwell County's agreement with NCDOT's debris removal to clear roads or remove damaged construction materials from properties following the impact of Tropical Storm Helene.

The council adopted the Design-Build Method of project delivery for modifications and improvements at the Lenoir Aquatics and Fitness Center. This method would result in a contract for both the design and construction of these improvements simultaneously. The recipient of the contract has yet to be selected.

The council approved fireworks authorization permits for Hibriten High School, which has partnered with Team Pyrostar for the displays.

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Lucy B. Garner

October 18, 2024 | Pilot, The (Southern Pines, NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: Obituaries | 285 Words OpenURL Link

Lucy Burton Garner, "Ma," was born on May 11, 1938, and passed away peacefully on Thursday, Oct. 17, 2024. She was a beloved mother, grandmother and great-grandmother, known for her warmth, wisdom and love of family.

Lucy was preceded in death by her cherished husband, Jesse Leonard Garner; and her son, Darrell Van Garner.

She is survived by her three sons, Randall, Jeffrey and Matthew; along with their devoted wives, Lori, Kelli and Skylar. Lucy's legacy also lives on through her adoring grandchildren, Tyler, Hunter, Kayla (fiancé Josiah), Zachary, Brayden, Isaac and Landry; as well as her great-grandchild, Jayce.

A woman of faith, Lucy found joy in the simple pleasures of life, particularly those spent on her porch, where she would take in the beauty of God's creation and share her timeless wisdom with those she loved. Her home was a gathering place for family, filled with laughter, love and unforgettable memories. Lucy will be deeply missed by all who knew her, but her spirit will forever remain in our hearts.

While the immediate family will not be receiving guests at the family home, friends and family are invited to pay their respects and honor the remarkable woman she was during visitation at Kennedy Funeral Home, in Robbins, from 5 to 7 p.m., on Sunday, Oct. 20.

Funeral services will be held at Elise Presbyterian Church, in Robbins, on Monday, Oct. 21, at 2 p.m., with graveside services immediately following at Brown's Chapel Church in Robbins/Spies.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to support Hurricane Helene victims in western North Carolina (www.samaritanspurse.org/disaster/hurricane-helene) reflecting Lucy's generous spirit and her love for others, especially children who were not her own.

Kennedy Funeral Home is serving the Garner family.

Condolences online at pinesfunerals.com.

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Hurricane Helene creates 'severe environmental disaster'

October 18, 2024 | Rocky Mount Telegram: Web Edition Articles (NC) Author: Nick Fogleman Watauga Democrat | Section: State | 888 Words OpenURL Link

BOONE — Rivers swelled, trees fell and landslides engulfed mountainsides as the landscape of Watauga County radically changed when Hurricane Helene brought historic rain and wind to the area.

As support and recovery efforts continue across the region, assessments of the environmental damage have yet to account for the devastating effects Helene has had on the ecosystem.

"It is my personal perspective that this is going to be the most severe environmental disaster in the recorded history of this area. We've experienced nothing like this before," said New River Conservancy Executive Director Andrew Downs.

The rivers and streams that run through the mountains are vital to the economy, recreation and identity of Watauga County. Throughout the storm, unprecedented water and debris swept through these areas, leaving a trail of environmental destruction.

Environmental organizations are just beginning to inspect the damage to the ecosystem.

"We're just getting our minds around the human toll of this hurricane and the flooding, but the environmental toll is also staggering. We've seen drowned wildlife and habitat destruction along the rivers and watersheds, and widespread erosion and sedimentation," Blue Ridge Conservancy's Director of Communications Leila Jackson said.

Days before Helene, Boone and surrounding communities were struck with storms that filled up the natural sponges that typically absorb water before the full brunt of the storm made its way to the Appalachian Mountains.

"That set the stage for when the real part of the storm arrived," said Dr. Bill Anderson, an Appalachian State University hydrogeology professor. "There's no storage or anywhere for that water to go but rush down our mountain valleys and get into the major streams and try to get out of here as quickly as possible."

With nowhere to go, rainwater made its way into Watauga County's rivers and streams, along with the houses, trees, asphalt, cars, and sediments that were destroyed and swept into the river.

"There's all the materials, from tires to construction debris, that are in the river that are going to have a long-term impact," Downs said.

On Sept. 27, the USGS sensor on the Watauga River measured a discharge rate about 1,000 times more than what was recorded just days before, and a height of 25 feet. Both readings were still climbing upward when the sensor broke during the storm.

As flood waters and materials made their way through river beds, they caused significant damage to the river banks, or riparian zones.

"Those natural filters that protected the river were wiped out, eradicated in many places, and those are going to need to be rebuilt," Downs said.

These natural protection systems have been crippled by physical damage, and this has left the environment more susceptible to chemical and biological damage.

Along with the wreckage of buildings and roads, water likely picked up the toxic materials, pesticides and sewage it came in contact with.

"Who knows what kind of contaminants that we all have in our households for cleaning and so forth. Those are all in the streams now," Anderson said. "When you're out in the non-municipal areas, people have septic tanks, and I would guess that a number of those have been compromised or maybe completely inundated."

Large amounts of pollution, toxicants and waste can cause a variety of problems for mountain ecosystems.

They can influence water and habitat quality, food availability, wildlife behavior, and aquatic oxygen levels and disrupt natural cycles within an ecosystem. This can reduce wildlife's overall rates of survival and affect systems that rely on healthy waterways.

"All other systems rely on water, you don't have to overthink it," Downs said. "Water isn't a building block, it's the building block."

Contaminants can also cause dangerous algae blooms making it even more difficult for ecosystems to recover.

Over time, the rivers and streams will move some of these contaminants downstream and out of the region, but Helene's timing means the scars left behind will take more time to heal and make natural and human communities more vulnerable as the ecosystem repairs.

With winter around the corner, areas where trees fell and landslides ripped apart soil and vegetation have little time for secondary succession, when new plants and grass recolonize disrupted ecosystems.

"We're going to have a lot of barren areas throughout the winter," Anderson said. "So when we do get rain, and we get quite a bit of rain throughout the winter, I think we're going to be more prone to landslides and see more sediment in our streams."

As the wreckage and debris from our communities begins to be cleared, unnatural levels of sediment in the water ways remain an issue.

Studies show that while sediment is a vital component of ecological functions when it exceeds natural limits, it can have a range of negative effects on aquatic ecosystems and act as a sink for contaminants.

"That's going to compromise the environment and anything trying to live in those streams," Anderson said. "Our mountain streams are cool and clear environments. That is what the animals that live in those environments have adapted to."

In some areas, the rushing water created new pathways for runoff and altered the natural floodplain. Depending on the severity, this could cause increased erosion and flooding in areas where it was not typical.

"This is what streams do; that's how they wear down our mountains, and they've been doing this for a very long time," Anderson said.

The assessment of the environmental destruction caused by Hurricane Helene will only add to the total account of devastation.

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Editorial: Robinson fails to show up for the job

October 18, 2024 | Rocky Mount Telegram: Web Edition Articles (NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: Editorials | 615 Words OpenURL Link

While western North Carolinians continue working to shovel themselves out of the destruction and devastation wrought by Hurricane Helene, Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson continues to dig himself into deeper and deeper holes of hypocrisy and neglect of his constitutional duties.

For just the second time this year he actually appeared to do the job the N.C. Constitution assigns him — preside as President of the N.C. Senate. He attended a mere five Senate sessions in 2022 and only six sessions in 2023. He's missed 96 percent of the Senate meetings during the current session. Showing up to do the job taxpayers provide a \$157,400 annual salary (plus expenses) for shouldn't be a major news event.

During his unique appearance in the Senate chamber, he chastised politicians who sought to create division and cast aspersions amid the efforts to rescue and provide relief to those suffering from Helene's wrath.

His words came as the Republican-controlled legislature — in unanimous bipartisan votes — approved a relief package crafted largely by Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper, the N.C. State Board of Elections and the Republican-led N.C. Department of Public Instruction.

"I stood there as an elected official and thought about the foolishness of politics, arguments that people have, the accusations that people make against elected officials, the things that we see on TV, the commercials we make, the campaigns we run and I, quite frankly, was embarrassed," he told the Senate. "Each and every one of us should commit ourselves — and I'm sure you have — to double down on our efforts to not be politicians, to not make empty promises, but to be the servant leaders we're supposed to be."

Words are cheap. It takes integrity to stand up and honor the platitudes of a speech with actions that provide the true testimony.

On that count — as he has regularly done in his time in office and before — what Robinson demands of others isn't what he displays in his own behavior.

When it was time to make sure those in harm's way would have quick access to the resources necessary to help, Robinson was nowhere to be found. Twice he failed to vote, as a member of the Council of State, on a request for a declaration of emergency. He was the ONLY one of the 10-member council (six Republicans and four Democrats) who failed to vote. Both requests (minus Robinson's failure to participate) were unanimously approved.

Less than a week after the storm hit the western part of the state — at an event in Louisburg (260 miles east of the center of the devastation) — it was Robinson who went after Democrats Gov. Roy Cooper and President Joe Biden.

He described Cooper's efforts as "abysmal" and, without a shred of evidence, said: "Joe Biden told the people of North Carolina they had no more supplies for us," adding, "Ask the people of western North Carolina if Joe Biden's response has made worth a hill of beans to them."

In an op-ed, Robinson also went after Cooper and the efforts of those in state government as "sluggish at best."

A PolitiFact check found the claims by former President Donald Trump and echoed by Robinson were false.

The truth is, as Robinson was speaking, thousands of federal and state relief and rescue personnel were on the scene or headed that way to provide assistance.

A week later, it was that same Robinson who told the Senate, "We're not here to play games," adding he'd resign if he ever engaged in such behavior.

North Carolina voters don't have to wait on an unlikely resignation from Robinson — but by their votes in about three weeks can end his tenure in a job he doesn't show up to do anyway.

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Editorial: Mark Robinson preaches but he doesn't practice

October 18, 2024 | Rocky Mount Telegram: Web Edition Articles (NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: Editorials | 621 Words OpenURL Link

While western North Carolinians worked to shovel themselves out of the destruction and devastation wrought by Hurricane Helene, Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson continued to dig himself into deeper holes of hypocrisy and neglect of his constitutional duties.

On Oct. 9, for just the second time this year, he actually appeared to do the job the North Carolina Constitution assigns him — preside as President of the North Carolina Senate. He attended a mere five Senate sessions in 2022 and only six sessions in 2023. He's missed 96% of the Senate meetings during the current session. Showing up to do the job taxpayers provide a \$157,400 annual salary (plus expenses) for shouldn't be a major news event.

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Helene damage in TN affecting supply chain

October 18, 2024 | Star, The (Shelby, NC) Author: Myron Thompson; Knoxville News Sentinel Section: News | 501 Words Page: A12 OpenURL Link

As the focus shifts from emergency response to the long-term work of rebuilding from Hurricane Helene, reestablishing supply chains is a top priority. Rebuilding a regular flow of goods to flood-ravaged communities will allow residents to get back to daily life, help workers get back to their jobs and once again make homes habitable.

Supply chains are the work and planning it takes to create goods and get them to customers. Manufacturers, vendors, warehouses, transportation and retail shops are all involved, and a disruption in one place has cascading effects.

Closed roads and bridges are an obvious hurdle. So are other problems, including employees who are blocked from getting to work or sharp spikes in demand for water or building supplies. They all can disrupt the normal flow after a disaster.

Here's what needs to happen to get the private sector supply chain back into action.

First, "when there has been catastrophic damage to critical infrastructure, such as the electrical grid and telecommunications systems, there will be an urgent need to resume – and possibly redirect – pre-existing flows of life-preserving resources," according to the FEMA Supply Chain Resilience Guide.

Companies and agencies must find ways to talk and transport items on their own when the power is out, communications lines are severed and roads have washed away. And they do.

Helene's after-effects are especially challenging because "it is these very localized and isolated areas that are hard to get to anyway," said Lance Saunders, a professor in the University of Tennessee at Knoxville's supply chain management program. "You talk about some of these local mountain communities, how in the world could they get these big pieces of lumber up here? Well, you're doing this on a massive scale."

Syfan Logistics, a Georgia logistics company, has delivered tractor-trailers full of donation supplies across the Southeast.

"We have not had any trouble getting supplies to locations. We've delivered about 38 loads, and we knew where we were going, and the address, and contact, and everything," Syfan Logistics CFO Denise Nix said.

Drivers coordinated routes primarily by working with local churches to learn which streets could handle trucks after the storm.

After the basics are covered and people are safe, companies can take a midterm step of learning how to operate under a new normal.

Once communication is stabilized, a flow of inventory can move into these areas, but that takes square footage. Damaged warehouses are a big problem in storm zones. Construction supplies are needed to rebuild, of course, and they're large and have to be kept out of the elements.

"They're going to need the ability to store all this inventory that's going to be needed to rebuild," Saunders said.

The final step is for companies and governments to really study how to best rebuild roads, bridges, housing and

businesses, and it all goes hand in hand.

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Myron Thompson, Knoxville News Sentinel, 'Helene damage in TN affecting supply chain', *Star, The* (online), 18 Oct 2024 A12 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C48B75C2C336E0



Impacted by Helene? - Here's how to apply for food benefits

October 18, 2024 | Star, The (Shelby, NC) Author: Shelby Star | Section: News | 470 Words Page: A1

OpenURL Link

Beginning today, Cleveland County residents impacted by Hurricane Helene can apply for a one-time benefit to help them buy food through the Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (D-SNAP).

The benefits are available to people living in 25 Western North Carolina counties and members of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians who were impacted by the storm.

To be eligible, applicants must:

Have suffered losses/damages related to Hurricane Helene, such as damage to property or loss of income

Have proof of identity and proof of residency (if available)

Not currently receiving benefits through Food and Nutrition Services (FNS)

Certain income and resource limits may apply

How to apply:

People can apply online, by phone or in person.

To apply online, visit the ePASS Pre-Registration Tool, which will close next Thursday. Once the pre-registration is completed, applicants will be issued a confirmation number and will need to call 844-453-1117 by Thursday to complete the interview part of the application.

To apply by phone, call the D-SNAP Virtual Call Center at 844-453-117 from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. TheD-SNAP call center will be open at the following hours: Weekdays from now until Thursday from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Saturday and Sunday from 9 a.m. to noon.

Residents are encouraged to apply for D-SNAP by phone on their assigned day by last name but will not be turned away if they apply at any time during the application period: 10/18: A-G 10/19: H-M 10/20: N-S 10/21: T-Z 10/22: Open to all 10/23: Open to all 10/24: Open to all

Residents may apply in person at the Cleveland County Schools Bus Garage, located at 300 Kemper Road in Shelby from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. on weekdays and weekends from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Bring a valid form of I.D.

While people are encouraged to apply in their county of residence, they can also apply in person at anyof the counties approved to implement D-SNAP. NCDHHS will post information on the locations andhours of the sites in each county at ncdhhs.gov/dsnap.

Eligible households will receive a one-time benefit on a special debit card (called an Electronic BenefitsTransfer, or EBT card) to help buy food, good for up to nine months. While there are income eligibility standards, a number of considerations are taken into account. Individuals above these limits may still be eligible depending on disaster expenses, so everyone who needs support is encouraged to begin the application by calling the DSNAP Virtual Call Center at 844-453-1117.

There may be long wait times. County officials will do everything they can to process applications as quickly as possible. People who may have a disability or are physically unable to go in person to apply for help can complete this form in English or Spanish and send an authorized representative in their place.

For information regarding Hurricane Helene and additional resources and flexibilities in place, go to ncdps.gov/Helene and ncdhhs.gov/helene.

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Shelby Star, 'Impacted by Helene? - Here's how to apply for food benefits', *Star, The* (online), 18 Oct 2024 A1 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C48B75BB2E73A0



Bacterial infections surge in Florida - Hurricanes bring warm floodwaters, raising risk

October 18, 2024 | Star, The (Shelby, NC) Author: C. A. Bridges; USA TODAY NETWORK – Florida | Section: News | 895 Words Page: A18 OpenURL Link

Bacterial infection cases have surged in Florida over the last few weeks since Hurricanes Helene and Milton swept through, according to data from the state Department of Health.

Vibrio vulnificus, a naturally occurring but potentially fatal bacterial infection, thrives in warm floodwaters when hurricanes and tropical storms push brackish water along the coast and into rivers and canals, filling them and low-lying areas with rainwater, pollutants, sewage and debris.

There have been 37 cases and four deaths reported just since mid-September, according to Florida Department of Health data, with 13 cases and one death in Pinellas County.

That more than doubles the number of cases before the storms and brings the year's total to 70 confirmed cases and 11 deaths, the FDOH said. Last year, there were 46 cases and 11 deaths.

"Vibrio bacteria, commonly found in warm coastal waters, can cause illness when ingested or when open wounds are exposed to contaminated water," the FDOH warned in a release on Oct.8, before Milton made landfall as a Category 3 hurricane, pushing a wall of water ashore and dumping rain across the state. "After heavy rainfall and flooding, the concentration of these bacteria may rise, particularly in brackish and saltwater environments."

If Vibrio vulnificus bacteria infects a person, such as by floodwaters coming in contact with a cut or other open wound, it can cause the skin and soft tissue around the wound to quickly break down. Treatment may require limb amputation to stop the rapid flesh deterioration, and the infection can be fatal.

Nationwide, vibriosis from Vibrio vulnificus and other Vibrio bacteria causes an estimated 80,000 illnesses and 100 deaths every year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. About 52,000 of these illnesses are believed to come from eating contaminated food, but the bacteria are also often found in floodwaters, something Florida has seen a lot of lately.

Between 2008 and 2023, 155 people in Florida have died from Vibrio vulnificus, according to FDOH records.

This year, the state is on track to break its record of cases (74) and deaths (17) set in 2022, when Hurricane Ian flooded large parts of southwest Florida.

What is Vibrio vulnificus?

The Vibrio vulnificus bacteria can be found in saltwater, brackish water (which is created when fresh water from a river or lake meets the salty water of the sea), and raw or undercooked seafood.

Flooding spreads brackish water into places it doesn't usually get to, and people working in floodwaters during and after storms are susceptible.

Some Vibrio vulnificus infections lead to necrotizing fasciitis, a severe infection in which the flesh around an open wound dies. Without treatment, death can occur in just a few days.

People with compromised immune systems, liver disease or open wounds are at higher risk for Vibrio vulnificus, the FDOH said.

What are the symptoms?

Common symptoms of Vibrio infection may include:

Watery diarrhea, often accompanied by stomach cramping, nausea, vomiting and fever

Bloodstream infection: fever, chills, dangerously low blood pressure and blistering skin lesions

Wound infection, which may spread to the rest of the body: fever, redness, pain, swelling, warmth, discoloration and discharge (leaking fluids)

Anyone who experiences these symptoms after being exposed to floodwaters should seek medical attention immediately. Health care professionals can treat the infection with antibiotics, but in extreme cases, arms and legs may need to be amputated to remove dead or infected tissue.

"Many people with Vibrio vulnificus infection require intensive care or limb amputations," the CDC says on its website, "and about 1 in 5 people with this infection die, sometimes within a day or two of becoming ill."

Does it actually eat flesh,

and is it contagious?

The infection does not actually eat flesh, but it does kill it. Vibrio vulnificus can cause necrotizing fasciitis that kills human tissue, including the skin and outer layer surrounding muscles, nerves, fat, blood vessels and organs.

Calling it "flesh-eating bacteria" is inaccurate because it kills tissue, but does not eat it; and it cannot penetrate intact skin, but must enter through an existing break in the skin.

The Florida Department of Health also points out it is not considered contagious. "There is no evidence of person-to-person transmission of Vibrio vulnificus," the FDOH said.

How to avoid Vibrio vulnificus

According to the FDOH and CDC:

Avoid exposure of open wounds or broken skin to warm salt or brackish water, especially floodwater, or to raw shellfish harvested from such waters. Stay out of the water or cover any wounds with a waterproof bandage.

Immediately wash wounds and cuts thoroughly with soap and water after they have contact with saltwater, brackish water, raw seafood or its juices.

Seek immediate medical care if a wound develops redness, swelling, oozing or other signs of infection such as fever, increasing pain, shortness of breath, fast or high heart rate, confusion or disorientation.

Do not eat raw oysters or other raw shellfish.

Cook seafood thoroughly: Boil shellfish in the shell until the shells open and then for five more minutes, or steam them until the shells open and then for nine more minutes. Boil shucked oysters for at least three minutes or fry them in oil for at least 10 minutes at 375 degrees.

Do not eat shellfish that does not open during cooking.

Avoid cross-contamination of cooked seafood and other foods with raw seafood and juices. Wear protective clothing

when handling raw shellfish.

Eat shellfish promptly after cooking and refrigerate leftovers.

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Hurricane season isn't over yet. Here's why North Carolina residents need to stay vigilant.

October 18, 2024 | StarNews (Wilmington, NC) Author: Gareth McGrath NETWORK | Section: News | 937 Words OpenURL Link

First Tropical Storm Debby, a slow-moving storm that trudged up the East Coast in early August before making a second landfall along the central South Carolina coast, drenched the Cape Fear region with more than 15 inches of rain in places.

A little more than a month later, an unnamed storm that wasn't deemed a big enough threat to close many schools swamped parts of southern New Hanover County and much of Brunswick County with another massive deluge. The nearly 20 inches of rain in some areas caused extensive flash flooding, collapsed roads, and destroyed several bridges.

Then Tropical Storm Helene blew into the state three weeks ago, pummeling Asheville and the North Carolina mountains. The record-setting rainfall, more than 18 inches in some places, washed out roads and bridges, knocked out power to nearly 2 million people in the Carolinas - with 14,000 N.C. customers still without power as of Wednesday, and killed at least 95 people in the state with dozens still unaccounted for.

North Carolina has been hammered on both ends of the state by tropical weather systems this year, making 2024 one of the worst hurricane seasons the state has seen in a long time. And while it might be mid-October and temperatures are already beginning to fall, experts warn that the Tar Heel State needs to stay on alert for another possible visit from Mother Nature.

Several factors are contributing to officials' concerns, but chief among them is the impact climate change is having on temperatures and weather patterns.

"So, no, we are definitely not out of the woods for this season," said Dr. Michael Mann, a meteorologist and scientist at the University of Pennsylvania, in an email.

Does North Carolina get late-season hurricanes?

On Oct. 15, 1954, Hurricane Hazel made landfall near the North Carolina/South Carolina state line. The storm remains the only Category 4 hurricane to ever hit the Carolinas.

After wiping clean some of the Brunswick County barrier islands with storm surge that exceeded 18 feet in places, the monster storm barreled inland at speeds of more than 50 mph. That allowed Hazel to bring hurricane-force winds well inland, to places like Fayetteville, Raleigh and Goldsboro.

While Hazel might be a bit of an outlier, it isn't the only storm that has impacted North Carolina late in hurricane season. Others include 2012's Hurricane Sandy, which brought substantial overwash to the Outer Banks and nearly a foot of snow to the N.C. mountains in late October, and 2018's Tropical Storm Michael that left more than 400,000 without power and flooded many coastal communities. Hurricane Matthew also hit the state in October 2016, flooding nearly 100,000 structures across much of Eastern North Carolina and causing billions in damages.

Remnants of tropical systems that form and then fall apart farther south also can wander north and impact parts of the state, especially coastal areas as they ride the Gulf Stream north.

STORMY WEATHER AHEAD: A warming planet is pushing hurricanes north and deeper inland. What that means for NC

How is the rest of the 2024 hurricane season shaping up?

As of Wednesday the National Hurricane Center was tracking two tropical disturbances in the Atlantic basin, with the one in the mid-South Atlantic on track to hit the northern Caribbean and then potentially Florida. If it strengthens enough, it would become Tropical Storm Nadine.

They are unlikely to be the last systems of the season to attract the attention of meteorologists.

Before hurricane season officially began June 1, officials were expressing concern over how bad it might be. With climate change warming the oceans and air temperatures seemingly hitting new highs every month, they said it really was only a question of just how brutal the season would be.

But for most of the summer, aside from Beryl, which was a rare major June hurricane, the reality on the ground seemed to confound the predictions, with Saharan dust blowing off Africa helping limit storm formation for much of June, July and into August.

Then Debby, Ernesto, Francine and Helene came barreling ashore - not to mention the no-name storm that pummeled Southeastern North Carolina.

Mann said conditions remain ripe for more storm activity. He said sea surface temperatures remain very warm, largely a result of heat-trapping gasses pumped into the atmosphere tied to human activity. Warmer ocean water helps fuel storms, allowing them to intensify more quickly and grow bigger and stronger. They also can hold their strength longer and travel farther inland, and hotter ocean temperatures allow them to travel farther north, striking areas that aren't used to seeing raging hurricanes on the horizon.

Mann said we're also still transitioning toward a La Niña climate pattern. That will mean decreased wind shear in the tropical Atlantic and a more favorable environment for tropical cyclones.

"That combination of factors tends to lead to very late seasons," Mann said. "2005 is the definitive example, where we saw named storms into the new year."

The record-setting 2005 hurricane season included 28 named storms and 15 hurricanes. Four of those reached Category 5 strength, and seven of the storms formed in October, another three in November.

Although hurricane season is supposed to end Nov. 30, the 2005 season continued until Jan. 6 and was so busy the National Hurricane Center had to use the Greek alphabet to name some of the storms.

Infamous storms from that season included Hurricanes' Katrina, Rita and Wilma. Another storm, Hurricane Ophelia, raked much of the N.C. coast, causing significant coastal flooding and erosion.

Reporter Gareth McGrath can be reached at GMcGrath@Gannett.com or @GarethMcGrathSN on X/Twitter. This story was produced with financial support from the Green South Foundation and the Prentice Foundation. The USA TODAY Network maintains full editorial control of the work.

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