

NC homeowners' insurance rate hearing opens, likely to continue through election

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Author: Chantal Allam; Staff Writer | Section: Business | 936 Words

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As many in Helene- ravaged Western North Carolina pick through the remnants of their lives, the state's department of insurance (DOI) kicked off a hearing into insurance companies' request to raise homeowners' premiums statewide by an average 42.2%.

On Monday, attorneys on both sides met for the quasi-judicial proceeding in the department's second-floor hearing room in Highwood Towers at 3200 Beechleaf Court in northeast Raleigh.

The hearing is expected to take weeks. One person close to the case, however, was noticeably absent.

Unlike his predecessors, Insurance Commissioner Mike Causey wasn't there to preside over the hearing. State law allows him to designate someone else. So Amy Funderburk, the department's general counsel, is the hearing officer.

"Both of my predecessors were attorneys. I'm not an attorney," Causey told a gaggle of reporters in the building's foyer outside, just before the hearing began. However, he assured those gathered that the final decision rests with him. "I've always made those decisions and will continue to do so."

The hearing is the first under the two-term commissioner's watch. In eight years as the commissioner, Causey has raised property insurance rates 16 times - all without a public hearing.

On Monday, he defended his record. "In past years, we've been successful in negotiating settlements. In this case, we were not able to come anywhere close. So that's why we're here today."

Shortly after making his comments, Causey left the floor. He did not attend the morning session and was not present for opening statements.

What insurers want

After a moratorium on rates lifted in January, the Rate Bureau, which represents some 110 companies operating in the state, submitted a rate filing asking for a statewide 42.2% average increase.

The proposed increases are based on past payouts and future claims projections and vary greatly by county.

In Durham and Wake counties, it's asking for a 39.8% increase. In Chatham and Orange counties, it's requesting 25.1%.

Meanwhile, coastal regions - like Brunswick, Carteret, New Hanover, Onslow and Pender counties - could face the steepest increases. The Rate Bureau wants to nearly double premiums in those counties - a 99.4% jump.

In places hit hardest by Helene like Buncombe County, home to Asheville, it's around 20.5%.

On Feb. 6, Causey rejected the request, calling it "excessive and discriminatory."

It's been almost four years since the last homeowners' rate increase - in November 2020 when the Rate Bureau asked for an overall rise of 24.5% and ultimately received 7.9%.

Inside the hearing room on Monday, the Rate Bureau's attorneys presented 2,000 pages of data in two five-inch white binders to justify its latest proposal.

Rising construction and labor costs, billion-dollar-loss events like Helene and the state of the reinsurance market - the insurance that covers insurance companies - are driving up costs, argued the Rate Bureau attorney Marvin "Mickey" Spivey, an attorney with Raleigh-based Young Moore Attorneys.

"Whether you want to call it climate change or not, there's no denying that we are having bigger, stronger and more costly catastrophic storms than we've seen in any of our lifetimes," he said in his opening statement.

The department's witnesses would seek to either reduce current rates or limit increases by less than 3%, he added. "To put it bluntly, that just does not make sense," he said.

As underwriters tighten guidelines, more residents are being subject to "consent-to-rate" notices, which allow insurance companies to charge rates higher - up to 250% more - than the state-approved rate. They're also turning to the "insurer of last result," the North Carolina Insurance Underwriting Association (NCIUA), or the "beach plan," he said.

These realities signal that the current rates are "not adequate," he said. Without a "fair rate," many companies may "choose not to write at all."

The insurance department's attorney, Terence Friedman, countered by calling the bureau's requested rates inflated. He also argued its filing relied on outdated data and practices. "They're continuing on using the same methods, regardless of the commissioner's admonitions," he said.

He also criticized the Rate Bureau's mention of Helene in its opening statement.

"The tragedy shouldn't be used as grounds to raise homeowners' rates," Friedman said, pointing to the growing reality that much of Helene's damage was caused by flooding. (Standard homeowners' policies do not cover flooding, landslides or anything caused by moving water.)

This case is going to be "long and very dense," he warned. But ultimately, the department's actuaries would prove that alternative rates would allow the bureau's members to earn "what they're constitutionally entitled to," but which are also "fair and reasonable."

Looking ahead

State law gives the commissioner 45 days to issue an order once the hearing concludes.

Causey, a Republican, is up for reelection Nov. 5, casting an even greater spotlight on proceedings.

Earlier in the morning, his challenger, state Sen. Natasha Marcus, a Democrat, held a news conference outside on the steps of DOI's headquarters. She criticized Causey's decision not to officiate, calling it "a ridiculous dereliction of one of the most important duties of his office."

She also took a swipe at the hearing's timing. With only 28 days until the election, a ruling is not expected until after voters hit the ballot box. "Voters won't get a chance to weigh in," she said.

North Carolina is one of very few states where a Rate Bureau still exists. In almost every other state, each carrier files its own homeowners' rates independently. But here, the Rate Bureau, created in 1977 by the General Assembly, has the responsibility to file and negotiate rates on behalf of the entire industry.

The hearing is open to the public. Attendees will be seated on a first-come, first-served basis.

Transcripts of each day's hearing are expected to be posted online the following day.

For additional information, see the homeowners' rate hearing webpage.

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p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C1CC021F6ABD68>



4 music stars to band together for NC hurricane relief show at BofA Stadium this month

October 9, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Théoden Janes; Staff Writer | Section: News | 723 Words Page: 6A OpenURL Link

Three of the biggest music stars North Carolina has ever produced - Luke Combs, Eric Church and James Taylor - will headline a special benefit show for victims of Hurricane Helene on Saturday, Oct. 26 at Bank of America Stadium in Charlotte.

"Concert for Carolina," announced Monday morning, also will feature bluegrass musician Billy Strings, a Michigan native.

In a news release, Live Nation said: "The Tar Heel State is a profoundly special place for all four artists, as it is where Combs, Church and Taylor grew up and first discovered their musical interests, and where Strings has performed many, many times over his career and holds an extra special place in his heart."

Tickets will go on sale at 10 a.m. Thursday; details are at www.concertforcarolina.com. Prices were not immediately available. Ticketmaster lists 5 p.m. as the start time for the Oct. 26 show.

The release said additional featured artists will be announced in the coming days.

Where will Concert for Carolina funds go?

All proceeds from the event will be split evenly between Combs and Church's Chief Cares Foundation, to be distributed to organizations of their choosing in support of relief efforts across "the Carolina region."

The 34-year-old Combs - born in Huntersville and raised in Asheville - announced that his dedicated charities will be Samaritan's Purse, Manna Food Bank, Second Harvest Food Bank of Northwest NC, and one more organization to be revealed soon.

Church's Chief Cares will help "established charities and organizations that are well managed, organized and can expedite aid directly to the families affected by Hurricane Helene."

Of the four men atop the bill, only Combs has headlined BofA stadium before. In July 2023, he sold it out on back-to-back nights.

Church, 47, just last week released a new song, "Darkest Hour," that the Granite Falls native said was dedicated to "the unsung heroes, the people who show up when the world's falling apart." He plans to donate all of his publishing royalties for the track to hurricane relief efforts.

In a separate statement on Monday morning, Church called North Carolina "my home."

"It's in every fiber of who I am," he said. "Our family members, friends, neighbors and communities are in dire need. I'm honored to share the stage with an incredible lineup in order to help meet those needs. Through the dark, light will shine."

Taylor, a 76-year-old Rock and Roll Hall of Famer, has a long association with Chapel Hill and has written many songs influenced by his childhood experiences in North Carolina - most famously, "Carolina in My Mind."

Meanwhile, Strings is the baby of the group at 32, but has built an impressive resume over the past decade. His

album "Home" won the Grammy Award for Best Bluegrass Album in 2021. Although he's not from the area, Monday's news release stated that "Strings' life and career has been deeply impacted by the state of North Carolina both personally and professionally, as it is home to some of his most passionate and supportive fans."

How Concert for Carolina came together

"Concert for Carolina" - presented by Explore Asheville and the Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority - will be hosted by ESPN's Marty Smith and Barstool Sports' Caleb Pressley.

"This concert took so much planning, work, and coordination from so many people," Combs posted on X alongside the announcement. "I'm so thankful to everyone who helped make this a possibility on such short notice."

David Tepper (owner of the Carolina Panthers, Charlotte FC and Bank of America Stadium) and his wife, Nicole Tepper, said in a statement that it was Combs who first approached them about the idea for the event, adding, "We felt compelled to open the doors of Bank of America Stadium for this special moment."

"Every day," they said, "we are more inspired by the strength and resolve of our Carolina community, and we are grateful to join Luke, Eric and our fellow Carolinians as we embark on the road to recovery together."

The David and Nicole Tepper Foundation - along with the Teppers' two local sports organizations - already have distributed \$3.85 million to provide immediate assistance to those impacted by the deadly storm that swept through the Carolinas on Sept. 26 and 27.

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Giant cinnamon roll warms hearts at Chapel Hill Family House

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Author: Tammy Grubb; Staff Writer | Section: Living | 1066 Words

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At 3 feet across and roughly 35 pounds, it's not the world's biggest cinnamon roll ever made, but it might be the biggest in North Carolina, baker Donna Fehrenbach said.

If she's proven wrong, she said at the SECU Family House in Chapel Hill, "I'd cross off 'biggest,' and I'd put 'second biggest.'

"And if another person did that, I'd cross that off and put 'third biggest,' and then I'd put 'a really big bun,' which I think would even be funnier."

That was her goal: to bring a little fun and laughter into the lives of the UNC patients and their families staying at Family House on Old Mason Farm Road. National Cinnamon Roll Day - Oct. 4 - seemed like the best time to try something new.

About half of the pastry was gone when Cheryl Laughter and her husband, Don McNair, stopped by to see it. McNair, who just had a muscle transplant at UNC Hospitals following prostate cancer and a hernia, briefly chatted with the volunteers but declined a treat.

"I'm afraid I'll get diabetes just from looking at it," he joked.

"I would love to eat it, but you'd be picking me off the floor," his wife said.

The couple is staying at Family House a little longer after leaving their Asheville home Sept. 26 to avoid driving in Helene's tropical storm winds. Laughter said she's concerned about taking her husband home before there's clean water and food available.

Water was already pooling Thursday in the basement utility room of their home, which sits on a hill and gets enough runoff when it rains that they installed a drainage system some years ago.

The storm knocked out the power, but a neighbor who checked on their house found the sump pump still working on its 24-hour battery backup, Laughter said. They're not sure what they'll find when they get back, she said.

"It's heartbreaking to think about people that you don't know" who are dead or are suffering after Helene, Laughter said. "You just can't believe it. You couldn't even make it up."

Made with love, and butter and sugar

Fehrenbach, 79, has been a volunteer at Family House for 10 years, showing up every Tuesday with her sidekick Colette File and other volunteers to bake homemade bread and sweet treats.

Friday's creation started with a week of figuring, measuring and sampling to get the recipe just right, Fehrenbach said.

On Tuesday, she perfected the cream-cheese frosting, and on Thursday, they made about 30 pounds of dough in their home mixers, chilling it in the refrigerator overnight to develop the flavor.

Around 7 a.m. Friday, Fehrenbach and four other women gathered in the kitchen at nearby St. Thomas More Catholic Church to roll out the dough, top it with butter, sugar and cinnamon, and form the four quarters of the giant roll on large sheet pans.

Pulling each pan from the church's industrial-size ovens, Fehrenbach expertly checked for doneness with a thermometer. The finished pastry, still warm, was hurried across the street to Family House and assembled on a wooden platter crafted by the maintenance staff.

As the last slathering of gooey, cream-cheese icing melted into the crevices, people gathered, smiling as they got a piece. Some came back for seconds, or to get slices for a friend.

While not the world's largest - that honor goes to a bakery in Medford, Oregon, for a roll weighing 1,149 pounds - the Family House cinnamon roll had more love between the layers.

A 'safe place' for families in medical crisis

Since 2008, the nonprofit SECU Family House has sheltered over 35,000 families and UNC Hospitals patients. The average stay is just over five days, and families have full run of the house, which has 75 guest rooms and is supported primarily by donations.

About 1,300 volunteers provide labor, working the front desk, doing laundry and other chores, and cooking dinner for 60 to 70 people each night. The activities, entertainment, and arts and crafts are a distraction from their worries.

They are grateful for the encouragement, the smiles, the hugs, and the laughter, Laughter said. Family House has been their "home away from home" more than once.

"Particularly when you feel like you're walking that terrible path of health care by yourself, and we know we're not alone. We see people here every day that my heart goes out to them," she said.

Like many other guests, Laughter said she enjoys joining the volunteers in the kitchen. Fehrenbach, whose cookbook, "Rolling in the Dough," helps buy chocolate chips, pecans and other special ingredients, said the pecan sticky buns are very popular, but she prefers a fresh loaf of sourdough bread.

"There's something about a kitchen, baking, smells," she said. "They come down here. They roll out dough, and then they talk about what they're going through."

Family House was her "safe place" when her husband died in 2022, Fehrenbach said. She used to teach baking at Chapel Hill's specialty food store, A Southern Season, and still holds classes in people's homes.

"It's my test kitchen," she said. "We probably do something new just about every week - just a different filling, the holidays are coming, we make bread that looks like a pumpkin, a Christmas tree. I love to bake, and I live alone. Who am I going to bake for?"

"It gives me a sense of purpose and community, and I love that."

How to get involved

- * Donate: One-time or monthly donations support SECU Family House in Chapel Hill, Winston-Salem and Wilmington. Donations can be made online at secufamilyhouse.org/donate.
- * Fill the wish list: Family House relies on pantry donations from corporate and community partners, and individuals. Find a wish list at Amazon.com and secufamilyhouse.org/support/wish-list

- * Volunteer: Visit secufamilyhouse.org/get-involved for a list of individual and group opportunities.
- * Meals from the Heart: Help make weeknight dinners for Family House guests. Learn more: secufamilyhouse.org/get-involved/prepare-a-meal.

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NC Gov. Cooper signs \$273 million Helene relief bill into law. How the money will be spent.

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Author: Dawn Baumgartner Vaughan, Kyle Ingram and Luciana Perez Uribe Guinassi, News & Observer Section: politics government | 1741 Words
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North Carolina's lawmakers moved quickly to rush the first round of Hurricane Helene relief to the western part of the state devastated by flooding caused by the storm.

The General Assembly convened Wednesday to take up a \$273 million bill that leaders describe as a "first step."

Back in Raleigh for a one-day session, Republicans, who control the legislature, released the bill Wednesday. It received unanimous approval within hours, with a 47-0 vote in the state Senate and a 113-0 vote in the House, sending it to the desk of Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper.

Cooper quickly signed the bill into law on Thursday morning.

"This storm caused catastrophic damage but also showed the resiliency of NC's people and communities. We must continue the bipartisan work to help them build back strong," Cooper said in a statement.

The bill, called the Disaster Recovery Act, replaces the previous version of House Bill 149, and only required a yes or no vote, without any amendments.

Senate leader Phil Berger said in a news conference that the bulk of the money will go to state agencies for spending flexibility, rather than specific earmarks to districts. Berger and House Speaker Tim Moore announced there will be another legislative session on Oct. 24 to pass another round of funding.

"This is not all of it, not by a long shot," Berger said about the state money. He said the federal government will be providing most of the relief.

RAL_100124-HURRICANE-HELENE-TEL-33.JPGAn aerial view of downtown Marshall on Tuesday, Oct. 1, 2024 after the French Broad River caused catastrophic flooding. The remnants of Hurricane Helene caused widespread flooding, downed trees, and power outages in western North Carolina.

Lawmakers will work to figure out what FEMA is paying for, and what it's not, when they come back for the additional session later in the month, said Sen. Kevin Corbin, a Republican whose district spans seven Western North Carolina counties.

Corbin was among several Republican lawmakers who spoke at the news conference about the damage and response in their districts. Later that day during the Senate floor debate, Corbin talked about the historic magnitude of the storm and that the measure is still "a beginning."

"I thank God we have the rainy day fund. I thank God it's there ... We have over \$4 billion in the rainy day fund, because in Western North Carolina, we had a rainy day. That's what it's for," Corbin said.

"We're in a long-term recovery," said Sen. Ralph Hise, a Spruce Pine Republican, who represents a devastated area. Hise said "there's a lot of distrust in the areas I have."

Hise also spoke about the recovery during the Senate floor debate. Democratic Sen. Julie Mayfield of Buncombe County echoed his comments about response time, saying that "nothing happens as fast as you want it to. And the first couple of days were terrifying because things weren't coming."

"But then they did start to come, and the National Guard is there, pulling people out of houses. And that's still happening, still happening. FEMA showed up. And despite what you read on the internet, and don't believe any of it, FEMA is everywhere," Mayfield said.

Sen. Tim Moffitt, who represents Henderson, Polk and Rutherford counties, said the bill is "a first chapter of a very long book to rebuilding the mountains."

Asked about Democrats' involvement in the bill, Berger and Moore said they had met with the Cooper administration, Senate Democratic Leader Dan Blue and House Democratic Leader Robert Reives.

Full press conference: NC lawmakers to pass \$273 million Helene relief billNorth Carolina's lawmakers are ready to rush the first round of Hurricane Helene relief to the western part of the state devastated by flooding caused by the storm. The General Assembly is expected to pass a \$273 million bill that leaders describe as a "first step."

New Helene Fund

The bill creates a new Hurricane Helene Fund with \$273 million from the state's Savings Reserve fund.

« \$250 million will go to the Department of Public Safety, Division of Emergency Management, to provide the state's match to federal disaster relief funds.

The bill says "a portion" of the money will be used to establish a revolving loan program to help local government and state agencies with cash flow while they are waiting for reimbursement from the federal government.

Moore said they expect the federal government to pay 90% to the state's 10% in storm relief, and "don't want to supplant those federal dollars with state dollars if we're not required to. And then there's language in the bill, too, that points out that we want to be careful on how the money is spent, that we don't forfeit the ability to get those federal dollars."

Help on schools, infrastructure, IDs

Here's what else the bill does:

- « \$16 million to the Department of Public Instruction for "lost compensation of school nutrition employees due to school closures resulting from Hurricane Helene."
- « Grants school calendar flexibility to public schools by allowing them to make up or mark as completed any number of the days or hours missed. It also allows the schools to use up to 30 remote instruction days towards required instructional days.

However, the bill did not grant other funding requests from the education agency.

- « Provides flexibility for infrastructure projects. Berger said the flexibility should not "impair the health, the safety, the required building requirements" but "a lot of it has to do with procurement and the way that you decide how to deploy the dollars to someone so something could get built."
- « Allows the governor to waive fees assessed by the Division of Motor Vehicles for things such as obtaining a duplicate driver's license, obtaining an identification card and more.
- « Provides \$2 million for grants to the North Carolina League of Municipalities, the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners and the North Carolina Association of Regional Councils of Governments "to provide technical assistance with local recovery funds. In providing this assistance, these entities shall prioritize grants to counties with a population of less than 250,000." The Office of State Budget and Management will run the program.

- « Temporarily lifts the six-month separation requirement for some retired state employees who want to help with recovery efforts.
- « Temporarily waives the accrual of interest on certain state taxes such as for an underpayment of tax imposed on a franchise, corporate income, or individual income tax return.
- « Temporarily extends some provisional licenses for adult care homes and family care homes in impacted areas.

What the bill does about Election Day

The bill also includes \$5 million for the State Board of Elections, plus a variety of temporary election law changes to make it easier for residents of Western North Carolina to vote.

"The hurricane has dealt a serious blow to what may very well be the ability to conduct elections in the disasterrelated counties," Berger said.

The bill would allow the western counties hit by Helene to change polling sites that were rendered unusable by the storm, give counties more flexibility in how they hire election workers and give affected voters more options to get absentee ballots in.

Most of the bill's election measures codify changes already approved by the State Board of Elections on Monday. However, while the board's resolution only applied to the 13 counties hit hardest by the storm, the bill includes all 25 western counties in the federally declared disaster area.

Any changes to early voting or Election Day polling sites would require a bipartisan majority vote of the county board of elections.

The state's election appropriation is nearly \$3 million more than what the state board requested.

Moore said that, in addition to helping the state carry out the election, the money will also go to county governments attempting to hire election workers and secure new polling sites.

"You have poll sites that literally no longer exist," Moore said. "... A fire department or church or community building - that building is no longer there."

The money would also be used to conduct outreach efforts to voters in western counties and establish a voter hotline.

The bill does not change the deadline for counties to receive absentee ballots, which is 7:30 p.m. on Election Day. However, it will allow voters from the affected counties to turn in their absentee ballot in any county in the state.

On the House floor, Democratic Rep. Caleb Rudow of Buncombe County attempted to bring forward a bill that would extend the voter registration deadline by one week and give voters in affected counties a three-day grace period to get their absentee ballots in.

The voter registration deadline is Friday, although those voting early in-person will be able to register and vote on the same day.

Rudow's motion failed, with Republican Rep. Destin Hall, chair of the Rules Committee, saying he had not been contacted about this request before the session began.

"We don't have time for partisan games," he said.

RAL_100524-HELENE-TEL-005.JPGDebris removed from flood damaged businesses line a street in downtown Waynesville on Sunday, Oct. 6, 2024 after Tropical Storm Helene flooded Richland Creek. North Carolina officials have confirmed 76 deaths from Tropical Storm Helene.

What Gov. Cooper requested for Helene relief

The Office of State Budget and Management, which is part of Cooper's administration, sent its proposal on Monday to Berger, Moore and others.

Cooper requested the \$250 million that the bill provides for the Helene Fund.

The proposal, sent in a letter from Budget Director Kristin Walker, also says that the state has "already obligated tens of millions of dollars in the first week of response," and while "much of that will be reimbursed by FEMA," the state needs to be able to move money quickly and "without red tape or unnecessary delay."

The budget proposal to legislative leaders also included:

- « Up to \$100 million to the Department of Transportation from the State Emergency Response and Disaster Relief Fund to deal with more than 600 roads closed and "catastrophic" damage to transportation networks.
- « A request to amend the Emergency Management Act to "facilitate necessary executive response to emergencies so that a state of emergency can extend as long as necessary to respond to the emergency without enactment of a general law by the General Assembly."

In response to Cooper's emergency management request, the bill extends the statewide declaration that Cooper already issued until March 1. That order had concurrence from the rest of the Council of State, which is made up of 10 statewide elected officials. State law changed to limit the duration of states of emergency after Cooper issued a continuing series of orders during the coronavirus pandemic.

Politics reporter Avi Bajpai contributed.

Under The Dome embed (2022)

New Under the Dome newsletter subscriber embed (graybox)

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Photos: Army uses tactical vehicles to bring supplies to hard-hit NC mountains after Helene

October 9, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Travis Long, News & Observer | Section: weather news | 818 Words OpenURL Link

Troops from the 101st Airborne Division Air Assault Division used lightweight all-terrain vehicles Tuesday, Oct. 9, to deliver supplies out of Maggie Valley, N.C. into areas in and around Soco Gap, N.C. isolated by flooding from Helene.

The soldiers, from the division's 2nd Brigade Combat Team, traveled up narrow dirt roads in Infantry Squad Vehicles while delivering water, food, toiletries and other aid to residents.

The unit is deployed as part of the Army's 18th Airborne Corps response to Helene, which caused massive damage and dozens of deaths in landslides and flooding.

RAL_100824-HELENE-TEL-007.JPGSoldiers with the 101st Airborne Division Air Assault, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, from Fort Campbell, Kentucky, help volunteers distribute water, food, toiletries, and other aid to residents in Maggie Valley on Tuesday, October. 8, 2024. The team has been using the Maggie Valley Pavilion and Town Hall as a distribution base for relief efforts in the town following Tropical Storm Helene.

RAL_100824-HELENE-TEL-004.JPGSoldiers with the 101st Airborne Division Air Assault, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, from Fort Campbell, Kentucky, help volunteers distribute water, food, toiletries, and other aid to residents in Maggie Valley on Tuesday, October. 8, 2024. The team has been using the Maggie Valley Pavilion and Town Hall as a distribution base for relief efforts in the town following Tropical Storm Helene.

RAL_100824-HELENE-TEL-005.JPGSoldiers with the 101st Airborne Division Air Assault, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, from Fort Campbell, Kentucky, use Infantry Squad Vehicles to deliver water, food, toiletries, and other aid to residents in the Soco Gap community in Maggie Valley on Tuesday, October. 8, 2024. The team has been using the Maggie Valley Pavilion and Town Hall as a distribution base for relief efforts in the town following Tropical Storm Helene.

RAL_100824-HELENE-TEL-006.JPGA Maggie Valley resident thanks soldiers of the 101st Airborne Division Air Assault, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, from Fort Campbell, Kentucky, who were delivering water, food, toiletries, and other aid to residents in the Soco Gap community in Maggie Valley on Tuesday, October. 8, 2024. The team has been using the Maggie Valley Pavilion and Town Hall as a distribution base for relief efforts in the town following Tropical Storm Helene.

RAL_100824-HELENE-TEL-003.JPGA soldier with the 101st Airborne Division Air Assault, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, from Fort Campbell, Kentucky, rides in an Infantry Squad Vehicles while delivering water, food, toiletries, and other aid to residents in the Soco Gap community in Maggie Valley on Tuesday, October. 8, 2024. The team has been using the Maggie Valley Pavilion and Town Hall as a distribution base for relief efforts in the town following Tropical Storm Helene.

RAL_100824-HELENE-TEL-010.JPGSoldiers with the 101st Airborne Division Air Assault, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, from Fort Campbell, Kentucky, use Infantry Squad Vehicles to deliver water, food, toiletries, and other aid to residents in the Soco Gap community in Maggie Valley on Tuesday, October. 8, 2024. The team has been using the Maggie Valley Pavilion and Town Hall as a distribution base for relief efforts in the town following Tropical Storm Helene.

RAL_100824-HELENE-TEL-001.JPGSoldiers with the 101st Airborne Division Air Assault, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, from Fort Campbell, Kentucky, use Infantry Squad Vehicles to deliver water, food, toiletries, and other aid to residents in the Soco Gap community in Maggie Valley on Tuesday, October. 8, 2024. The team has been using the

Maggie Valley Pavilion and Town Hall as a distribution base for relief efforts in the town following Tropical Storm Helene.

RAL_100824-HELENE-TEL-002.JPGSoldiers with the 101st Airborne Division Air Assault, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, from Fort Campbell, Kentucky, use Infantry Squad Vehicles to deliver water, food, toiletries, and other aid to residents in the Soco Gap community in Maggie Valley on Tuesday, October. 8, 2024. The team has been using the Maggie Valley Pavilion and Town Hall as a distribution base for relief efforts in the town following Tropical Storm Helene.

RAL_100824-HELENE-TEL-008.JPGSoldiers with the 101st Airborne Division Air Assault, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, from Fort Campbell, Kentucky, use Infantry Squad Vehicles to deliver water, food, toiletries, and other aid to residents in the Soco Gap community in Maggie Valley on Tuesday, October. 8, 2024. The team has been using the Maggie Valley Pavilion and Town Hall as a distribution base for relief efforts in the town following Tropical Storm Helene.

RAL_100824-HELENE-TEL-009.JPGA soldier with the 101st Airborne Division Air Assault, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, from Fort Campbell, Kentucky, rides in an Infantry Squad Vehicles while delivering water, food, toiletries, and other aid to residents in the Soco Gap community in Maggie Valley on Tuesday, October. 8, 2024. The team has been using the Maggie Valley Pavilion and Town Hall as a distribution base for relief efforts in the town following Tropical Storm Helene.

Surviving after Helene: 'Just living is a challenge'The News & Observer's Travis Long was one of the first journalists on the ground when Helene's floodwaters roared through Western North Carolina. A veteran of more than 20 major storms, he shares his experiences and images after a week of covering the devastation the storm left behind.

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Travis Long, News & Observer, 'Photos: Army uses tactical vehicles to bring supplies to hard-hit NC mountains after Helene', *News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles* (online), 9 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C6027D1445AAB0>



Storm damage at Tweetsie Railroad, Biltmore and other Western NC landmarks after Helene

October 9, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Chyna Blackmon, News & Observer | Section: north carolina | 995 Words OpenURL Link

Nearly two weeks after Hurricane Helene swept through the southeast as a tropical storm, much of the damage across North Carolina is still being assessed, even at some of the state's most loved tourist attractions.

Along with several roads shut down after being washed out, several big businesses and landmarks in Western North Carolina are closed after flood damage from the storm.

From popular roadways to state parks, here's the latest on some of the damage left behind from Helene's destructive wrath on some of the top spots in North Carolina's biggest mountain towns:

Biltmore Estate

Latest update: Temporarily closed

biltmore estate lodge gate damageStorm damage at Biltmore Estate's lodge gate after Hurricane Helene.

While Helene storm damage varies across the 8,000-acre property of America's largest home, the Biltmore House, conservatory, winery, gardens, and hotels had little to no damage from Helene, but the entrance to Biltmore and other low-lying areas of the property did have some flooding.

According to the estate's website, guests with daytime tickets for Sept. 27-Nov. 1 can reschedule a visit once the estate is reopened or request a refund online. Overnight guests with stays scheduled for Sept. 27-Nov. 1 will be emailed with more details about alternative options.

While the estate is being restored, the team launched a \$2 million "Biltmore Relief Fund for WNC" to support estate employees, emergency response teams and nonprofit partners in Asheville.

An estimated reopening date has yet to be announced.

Drone video shows the damage to Biltmore Village in AshevilleBiltmore Village received extensive damage from flooding of the Swannanoa River after the remnants of Hurricane Helene caused torrential rainfall in western North Carolina over the weekend.

Blue Ridge Parkway

Latest update: Temporarily closed

blue ridge parkway closed.jpegHelene ripped parts of the Blue Ridge Parkway away, including this section near Gooch Gap in McDowell County. The road is closed for the foreseeable future in all of North Carolina and Virginia, park rangers said on Saturday, Oct. 5, 2024.

While damage from Helene is still being assessed, the entire length of the Blue Ridge Parkway remains closed, the National Park Service announced. One week following the storm, tens of thousands of trees across the roadway and nearly three dozen rock and mudslides have been discovered, which is why officials warn that "until the parkway has been reopened, entering closed sections is not only dangerous to visitors and recovery crews, but also illegal."

"The damage left behind by the storm has created dangerous conditions, some of which are not immediately visible

from the road itself," Tracy Swartout, superintendent of the Blue Ridge Parkway, said in a release. "We thank the public for their cooperation in respecting closures for their safety and to allow crews to complete their work."

An estimated reopening date has yet to be announced.

Feds to send \$100 million to repair Helene-damaged roads and bridges in Western NC

Grandfather Mountain and other state parks

Latest update: Temporarily closed

Both the private park and state park at Grandfather Mountain are closed at this time. According to the Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation website, Helene brought landslides, flooding and an "extreme number of downed trees and powerlines" to the area. Along with the state park portion of Grandfather Mountain, all state parks and recreation areas west of I-77 in Western North Carolina have temporarily closed.

The Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation is accepting donations to provide relief to those in need around the area. You can contribute online at grandfather.com/helene.

All state parks west of I-77 and most park programs are closed through at least Oct. 31.

Helene devastated two iconic hiking trails in Western NC. When will they reopen?

The North Carolina Arboretum

Latest update: Temporarily closed

Storm damage is still being assessed at the North Carolina Arboretum in south Asheville following Helene so it is closed until further notice. At this time, the team is warning the public to avoid trying to walk or bike onto the 434-acre public garden.

An estimated reopening date has yet to be announced.

The Omni Grove Park Inn

Latest update: Temporarily closed

The team at The Omni Grove Park Inn says they are in the early stages of assessing the impact on the property's infrastructure so the hotel is temporarily closed and does not have water or power. While the team is working on restoring full operations, the Omni's website says the team is also clearing debris from its golf course and addressing minor flooding.

Guests with bookings through Oct. 26 have been canceled and those who pre-paid will be issued refunds. Those with future reservations will be contacted about alternative arrangements.

During its temporary closure, the hotel announced that it is collecting donations to assist its associates affected by the storm. Contributions can be made online at linktr.ee/omniresources.

An estimated reopening date has yet to be announced.

Doubleheader EventAug. 30, historic engines No. 12 and N. 190 will work in tandem at Tweetsie Railroad, together pulling one train.

Tweetsie Railroad

Latest update: Temporarily closed

While storm cleanup continues from Helene, North Carolina's first theme park remains temporarily closed through the fall season.

A spokesperson for the park told The Observer that the park incurred some damage during the storm and flooding.

"This storm has touched the lives of so many in ways we never anticipated," Chris Robbins, President of Tweetsie Railroad, said in a statement. "Many of our team members and local families are facing tremendous challenges, and we want to ensure they have the time and resources they need to get back on their feet. Their safety and well-being are our top priority."

According to the park website, all ticket sales have been paused but those who already purchased some can request a refund or exchange by emailing tickets@tweetsie.com.

To support relief efforts in the area, the team launched the #TweetsieMatchingChallenge. The park made an initial \$10,000 donation to Samaritan's Purse, with a pledge to match and even triple additional contributions.

The park plans to reopen for the holiday season on Nov. 29.

Tweetsie Railroad theme park to remain closed through fall season after Helene

Social media videos capture devastating damage in NC after Hurricane Helene

When does hurricane season end? What to know, how to stay prepared in NC after Helene Copyright 2024 The News and Observer

• Citation (aglc Style)

Chyna Blackmon, News & Observer, 'Storm damage at Tweetsie Railroad, Biltmore and other Western NC landmarks after Helene', *News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles* (online), 9 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C8A4FE7B064290



Cooper describes 'all-hands-on-deck' Helene response in NC, blasts disinformation

October 9, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Adam Wagner, News & Observer | Section: north carolina | 854 Words OpenURL Link

Gov. Roy Cooper vowed Wednesday that the state government will continue to provide the resources Western North Carolina communities need to recover from Tropical Storm Helene.

"This is a true all-hands-on deck moment," Cooper said.

In a wide-ranging briefing, officials touched on a number of topics related to the Helene response.

Notably, Cooper called out the effects of wide-reaching disinformation that has been spreading in Helene's wake; FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell vowed to keep significant assets in North Carolina even as the agency responds to Hurricane Milton's impending landfall in Florida; and Cooper called for direct assistance for small businesses impacted by the storm.

"This is a historic disaster, the magnitude of which we have never experienced before in our state. The road to recovery will be long, but North Carolinians are strong and resilient and together we will recover," said NC Emergency Management Director Will Ray.

Ray described the response to Helene - including other states, the federal government, the private sector, nonprofits and volunteers - as "the largest whole-of-community response in North Carolina history."

Cooper said there are fewer than 81,000 power outages remaining, down from hundreds of thousands after the storm passed through. He said 80% of AT&T and Verizon outages have been repaired; and FEMA has approved about 126,000 Individual Assistance applications with more than \$60 million in aid paid.

The state has confirmed 88 storm-related deaths.

Additionally, there are about 2,600 people staying in hotels through FEMA's Transitional Sheltering Assistance program.

"It's clear that we're still at the beginning of this recovery and much more work remains ahead for Western North Carolina to recover stronger than ever, and it will," Cooper said.

FEMA head: No resources leaving NC

FEMA has more than 900 staff members on the ground in Western North Carolina assisting with the response to Helene.

That staff will stay in North Carolina even after Hurricane Milton makes landfall, Criswell said Wednesday.

"I want to assure the people of North Carolina that while we watch Hurricane Milton approach the coast of Florida, you can be assured that no resources are going to be taken from North Carolina," Criswell said.

Biden Cooper.JPGPresident Joe Biden speaks with Mayor Esther Manheimer of Asheville, N.C., FEMA Director Deanne Criswell and Gov. Roy Cooper (D-N.C.) during an aerial tour aboard Marine One to assess areas impacted by Hurricane Helene, Wednesday, October 2, 2024, in western North Carolina.

While Criswell is headed to Florida to coordinate the Milton response, she vowed she would return to North Carolina

and said FEMA's regional administrator would remain in North Carolina.

There are already 1,000 FEMA employees in Florida working on Helene and other disasters, Criswell said, with additional search-and-rescue teams headed south. Some people are leaving the Helene response in Georgia, South Carolina and Tennessee to head toward the Milton response, Criswell added.

"We are not moving resources that are actively engaged in the priorities that the governor has set here in North Carolina," Criswell said.

'Onslaught of lies and misinformation'

Cooper made a point to call out the rampant rumors about the Helene response that are spreading on social media.

Those rumors have resulted in FEMA and N.C. Emergency Management each creating rumor response web pages, while U.S. Rep. Chuck Edwards, a Republican who represents Western North Carolina, has also sent a press release debunking myths about the Helene response. The News & Observer and Charlotte Observer have also been gathering and fact-checking rumors and disinformation.

"It's important to point out the onslaught of lies and misinformation that are impacting people there on the ground. This misinformation is confusing to people trying to get help. It's demoralizing and dangerous for people working so hard to deliver that help," Cooper said.

Cooper urged people to verify information they have been sent with "respected news sources" or to reach out directly to FEMA or state responders.

Stay off WNC roads

More than 460 roads have reopened, NC Department of Transportation Secretary Joey Hopkins said Wednesday, but more than 600 remain closed due to storm damage.

"This number's still changing daily as communications improve and we reach more sites," Hopkins said.

RAL_SALUDAHELENE-NE-100724-RTW_28.JPGGreen River Cove Road, along the Green River was destroyed by historic flooding in the wake of Hurricane Helene on Monday, October 7, 2024 near Saluda, N.C.

There are 5,800 sites that have sustained damage, Hopkins said, including 500 bridges and 600 culverts. Of those, DOT anticipates that at least 100 bridges will need to be replaced.

DOT's response include 2,100 employees, 1,700 of them working in Western North Carolina. There are also hundreds of contract employees, N.C. National Guard and U.S. Army forces helping DOT.

"Non-essential traffic is hindering our efforts to get roads opened back up. Crews are having to stop work to allow traffic to pass through damaged areas. To hep us get roads open, cleared and open as fast as possible, we again ask that traffic use alternative routes," Hopkins said.

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p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C8A4FD8E7B2F10>



Helene devastated two iconic hiking trails in Western NC. When will they reopen?

October 9, 2024 \mid News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Richard Stradling, News & Observer \mid Section: north carolina \mid 982 Words OpenURL Link

Among the places that will have to be rebuilt after Hurricane Helene are two long-distance hiking trails that traverse and symbolize the rugged mountains of Western North Carolina.

The Appalachian Trail and the Mountains-to-Sea Trail were both heavily damaged by Helene. Downed trees, landslides and washed out paths and bridges have made the trails impassable in many places, and they will likely remain that way for a while.

"We know it's bad," said Les Love of Weaverville, who heads the Carolina Mountain Club, which supports hiking in Western North Carolina. "When you've got both wind and water, it's just catastrophic to the trails."

No natural disaster has affected as much of the Appalachian Trail in its 100-year history as Helene, according to the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, the nonprofit that manages and protects the 2,200-mile trail from Georgia to Maine.

The trail is officially closed on U.S. Forest Service land in North Carolina, Tennessee and Southwest Virginia. Many of the roads normally used to access the A.T. are closed as well, and the towns that normally welcome hikers with a meal and a place to rest are struggling to recover from the storm and not equipped to handle visitors.

Sandi Marra, the conservancy's president and CEO, said roads, electricity and other infrastructure must be restored before the trail's condition can be assessed.

"While we are eager and anxious to tackle the work necessary to restore sections of the A.T. impacted by Helene, we ask for patience," Marra said in a message to supporters. "Once we can safely access the A.T., we will identify the sections and features that need immediate attention and put a call out for volunteers to help restore the trail."

Fixing the trails is a low priority compared to the humanitarian crisis still unfolding in Western North Carolina, says Brent Laurenz, executive director of the Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail. The mountain portion of the trail parallels the Blue Ridge Parkway, which was severely damaged and remains closed.

"So we do not have much direct knowledge of the trail's condition," Laurenz wrote in an email. "The very little we have heard would indicate that the trail has suffered significant damage from downed trees and running water, but we are holding off on any active work on the trail while rescue and recovery efforts and critical infrastructure work are underway."

The Mountains-to-Sea Trail covers nearly 1,200 miles across the state from Great Smoky Mountains National Park to Jockey's Ridge State Park in Nags Head. The trail should be considered "closed and highly dangerous" from Kuwohi (the peak once known as Clingmans Dome) through Stone Mountain State Park in Wilkes County.

When the time is right, Laurenz said, crews will get out on the trail and get a clearer picture of the needed cleanup and repair work. But the group's website warns hikers "it is likely that sections of the trail will remain closed for a significant length of time."

'Everybody's itching to get out'

Much of the maintenance work on both long-distance trails is done by volunteers. Love said about a third of the more than 1,200 members of the Carolina Mountain Club regularly work on the trails to keep them in shape and well marked.

Love said volunteers have been told to stay away from trails for the time being.

"Everybody's itching to get out and do what they can for the trails," he said. "But right now the word is, 'Concentrate on your neighborhood and help each other.' That's the best thing we can do right now."

Volunteers often adopt sections of the trail and go out every week or two to maintain it, says Franklin Tate, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy's associate regional director based in Asheville.

"It makes them a little anxious to not be about to get out and assess their section," Tate said. "They love the A.T. They love the work that they do. So to be in a temporary stand-down mode is challenging for a lot of them."

Thru-hikers get a Helene dispensation

The Georgia section of the Appalachian Trail has reopened. People are also free to use the trail north of Bland, Virginia, except where it crosses the Blue Ridge Parkway, which remains closed.

Tate said the trail is also in better shape in the Nantahala National Forest in far southwestern North Carolina and in Great Smoky Mountains National Park, though the National Park Service warns of limited emergency services and closures elsewhere in the park.

The worst damage is north and west of Asheville, in Pisgah National Forest in North Carolina and Cherokee National Forest in Tennessee, Tate said.

Hurricane Helene has thwarted the ambitions of an unknown number of people who attempt to walk the entire length of the Appalachian Trail in a single year. Known as thru-hikers, most begin in Georgia and try to reach Mt. Katahdin in Maine before the snow flies.

But some begin in Maine and head south. The A.T. Conservancy says those who must skip around the closed sections are still eligible for "2,000-miler status" if they later pick up where they left off and finish the trail within 12 months of when they restart.

As for people planning to hike the entire trail in 2025, the group says it's too soon to say if and when the trail will be ready. Tate said it depends on the extent of the damage and other factors, such as the severity of winter weather and the supply of experienced sawyers to cut the tangle of trees blocking the trail.

"If I had to guess, I think that large sections of the trail will be open and there will be multiple detours around some of the most problematic areas and some of the bridges that have washed out," he said. "I hope we have a thruhiker season in 2025. But I think it's going to be a season where the hikers have to exercise more patience than usual."

GY5C4TTXoAEmH0u.jpgCrews working to clear a section of the Blue Ridge Parkway on Sept. 30, 2024.

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Under the Dome: Lawmakers return for Helene relief, House speaker visits and Stein sues TikTok

October 9, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC)
Author: Danielle Battaglia, Dawn Baumgartner Vaughan and Avi Bajpai, News & Observer Section: politics government | 1138 Words
OpenURL Link

Good morning and welcome to the Under the Dome newsletter. Today the North Carolina General Assembly is back in session for just one day.

It was scheduled as a placeholder session with no votes expected until a weeklong session in November. But then Hurricane Helene happened, and state lawmakers are using the day to pass the first round of Helene relief for Western North Carolina.

The day begins at 10 a.m. with a press conference from Republicans who control the legislature, including Senate leader <person value="APIN:2877243085">Phil Berger and House Speaker <person value="APIN:3920368537">Tim Moore. Democratic state Rep. Caleb Rudow, who represents hard-hit Buncombe County, is holding a news conference later.

The bill will replace House Bill 149, so you'll soon be able to find it here. It is expected to pass both chambers today and then be sent to Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper's desk. Legislators are scheduled to gavel in at noon in both chambers.

The Office of State Budget and Management in Cooper's administration sent its budget proposal on Monday to Berger and Moore. It calls for, among other things, using \$250 million from the State Emergency Response and Disaster Relief Fund for Helene relief.

Read more coverage later today from our team.

- Dawn Baumgartner Vaughan

U.S. HOUSE SPEAKER TO VISIT NC

House Speaker Mike Johnson plans to travel to Western North Carolina on Wednesday evening to survey the damage from Hurricane Helene, Rep. Chuck Edwards announced in a news release Tuesday.

Edwards said Johnson plans to visit towns and small businesses hit by the storm.

Hurricane Helene made landfall in Florida as a Category 4 storm and traveled up the East Coast, bringing destruction to Florida, Georgia, the Carolinas, Virginia, Tennessee, Alabama, Kentucky and West Virginia. At least 230 people have been found dead, with half from North Carolina.

President Joe Biden and Sens. Thom Tillis and Ted Budd have all called on Congress to come back early to help with relief efforts, but so far Johnson has pushed back against that effort, saying lawmakers will return shortly after the election.

During election years, Congress typically recesses in October to give members time to campaign back home.

- Danielle Battaglia

HARRIS LAUNCHES NEW AD IN NC

As disinformation about Helene clouds recovery efforts, Vice President Kamala Harris' campaign launched an ad Monday night telling viewers that former President Donald Trump threatened to withhold disaster relief from areas where he wasn't supported politically.

To back up these claims, the Harris campaign had two former Trump administration officials speak in the ad: Olivia Troye and Kevin Carroll.

"He would suggest not giving disaster relief to states that hadn't voted for him," Carroll says in the ad.

Helene has led to a disinformation campaign so severe that both Republicans and Democrats from North Carolina to the White House have had to rebuke it.

White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre called on elected officials from every level to call for "an end to these conspiracy theories."

"False information following a disaster can discourage people from seeking critical assistance when they need it more," Jean-Pierre said. "Everyone, especially those in positions of power, must do everything they can do to encourage survivors to register for assistance, not discourage them by allowing these falsehoods to fester."

CNN tallied at least six days of disinformation that came from Trump himself.

And among the allegations Trump made, without factual basis, was that Gov. Roy Cooper was going out of his way to avoid helping his Republican constituents.

But that's exactly what some on Trump's former team, and the ad, accuse him of doing.

Troye and another official first told Politico's E&E about Trump's tendencies to want to punish communities for their lack of support, and provide extra to the ones who did support him.

They said Trump's initially refused to help California during the 2018 wildfires. The fires killed 108 people and caused more than \$25 billion in property damage.

But Troye says in the ad that Trump didn't initially want to help Califorinia recover because "it was a Democratic state."

"We went as far as looking up how many votes he got in those impacted areas, to show these are people who voted for you," Troye said. "This isn't normal. The job of the president is to protect Americans. Regardless of politics."

The ad is airing digitally in battleground states including North Carolina as part of a \$370 million fall paid media campaign.

- Danielle Battaglia

NC ATTORNEY GENERAL SUES TIKTOK

Attorney General Josh Stein filed a lawsuit with a bipartisan group of 12 other attorneys general against TikTok on Tuesday.

The lawsuit, which was filed in Wake County Superior Court, alleges that TikTok and its parent company ByteDance designed an addictive app that poses serious "mental, emotional, and physical risks" to young users, and ignored warnings about those harms "because their business model and desire for advertising revenue require keeping consumers on the app as much as possible."

In a 56-page complaint, the plaintiffs allege that TikTok designed "coercive platform features to manipulate the

vulnerabilities" of children and teenagers using the app and "promote excessive and compulsive use."

The lawsuit claims that ByteDance placed more robust protections on Douyin, the version of TikTok only available in China, and by contrast, "saw American children and teens as an irresistible 'golden audience.'"

In a statement, Stein, the Democratic candidate for governor in next month's election, said that TikTok "knowingly created a product that harmed children, and then it deceived everyone about how dangerous and addictive the product was."

"They did this to make more money. It doesn't matter what you're selling - you have to be honest about the risks, and you have to follow the law," Stein said. "TikTok failed in both regards, and our children suffer. So, I'm taking them to court to make them do better by our kids."

- Avi Bajpai

CAMPAIGN WATCH

GOP attorney general candidate and Rep. Dan Bishop and congressional candidate Brad Knott are slated to speak at NC House candidate Mike Schietzelt's campaign fundraiser tonight in Wake Forest.

VOTER GUIDE

In the latest candidate questionnaires from our 2024 NC Voter Guide, see what candidates for state superintendent have to say about the issues, and learn more about their biographies.

Democrat Mo Green answered our questions.

His opponent, Republican Michele Morrow, did not. Here's Morrow's questionnaire from the March primary.

Today's newsletter was by Emily Vespa with contributions from Dawn Baumgartner Vaughan, Danielle Battaglia and Avi Bajpai. 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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Photos: Vampire Weekend plays a soldout show in Raleigh, NC with proceeds going to Helene relief

October 9, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Scott Sharpe, News & Observer | Section: entertainment | 276 Words OpenURL Link

Front man Ezra Koenig and Vampire Weekend rolled into Raleigh Wednesday night for a high-energy concert at Raleigh's Red Hat Amphitheater.

The "Only God Was Above Us" tour is named for the album of the same that dropped earlier this year. The album was the first new music the band had released in five years.

Vampire Weekend was scheduled to perform in Asheville on Oct. 13, but the show has been canceled due to Hurricane Helene. The band said proceeds from Tuesday's concert in Wilmington and Wednesday's show in Raleigh will go to BeLovedAsheville.com for relief efforts.

"Our hearts are with the good people of Asheville, their loved ones and all affected by this terrible storm," according to a message on the band's social media. "We hope for a speedy recovery for a city we love and hope to see you all soon."

Here are photos from the Raleigh concert with opening act, Cults.

111.jpgVampire Weekend's Chris Bail in concert at Raleigh, N.C.'s Red Hat Amphitheater, Wednesday night, Oct. 9, 2024.

_08A1697.jpgVampire Weekend front man Ezra Koenig in concert at Raleigh, N.C.'s Red Hat Amphitheater, Wednesday night, Oct. 9, 2024.

2.jpgVampire Weekend in concert at Raleigh, N.C.'s Red Hat Amphitheater, Wednesday night, Oct. 9, 2024.

4.jpgVampire Weekend in concert at Raleigh, N.C.'s Red Hat Amphitheater, Wednesday night, Oct. 9, 2024.

_08A1618.jpgVampire Weekend in concert at Raleigh, N.C.'s Red Hat Amphitheater, Wednesday night, Oct. 9, 2024.

_F2A1815.jpgVampire Weekend in concert at Raleigh, N.C.'s Red Hat Amphitheater, Wednesday night, Oct. 9, 2024.

_08A1719.jpgVampire Weekend bassist Chris Baio in concert at Raleigh, N.C.'s Red Hat Amphitheater, Wednesday night, Oct. 9, 2024.

cults.jpgCults opens for Vampire Weekend in concert at Raleigh, N.C.'s Red Hat Amphitheater, Wednesday night, Oct. 9, 2024.

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Scott Sharpe, News & Observer, 'Photos: Vampire Weekend plays a soldout show in Raleigh, NC with proceeds going to Helene relief', *News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles* (online), 9 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C8A4FDA49C19D0>



Want to support Western NC? Check out these fundraisers, drives & other ways to help

October 9, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Renee Umsted, News & Observer | Section: north carolina | 1069 Words OpenURL Link

In the wake of Helene, North Carolinians have mobilized to support communities in the western region of the state as they begin to recover and rebuild.

Well-known musicians such as Luke Combs, Eric Church, James Taylor, Billy Strings and Ben Folds have announced benefit concerts. Local businesses in the Triangle and Charlotte have collected clothing and other supplies to share as temperatures drop. The Carolina Hurricanes donated ticket sales and donations to hurricane relief funds. Michael Jordan and his 23XI Racing team contributed \$1 million to Second Harvest of Metrolina and the North Carolina Disaster Relief Fund. Restaurants in the Triangle set aside some proceeds from sales for relief efforts.

And still more is being done.

Here's a list of fundraising events and donation drives.

Two Roosters unveils new flavor for Western NC

Raleigh-based ice cream shop Two Roosters unveiled the flavor "Appalachian Apple Stack Cake" earlier this month, which can be found in all six scoop shops throughout the Triangle until Thursday, Oct. 31 and benefits Samaritans Purse headquartered in Boone.

The ice cream flavor is made with an apple butter base, chunks of molasses cake and buttermilk frosting. As of Thursday, Oct. 17, Two Roosters raised over \$17,000 from the special edition flavor.

Two Roosters has three scoop shops in Raleigh, one in Durham, one in Wake Forest and a new one in Cary.

1017-TwoRoostersEMBED

NC-based jewelry store accepting donations

Bailey's Fine Jewelry, which has stores at Crabtree Valley Mall, Village District (formerly Cameron Village) and Cary's Fenton, is collecting monetary donations and supplies that will be delivered to Western North Carolina. Find a list of accepted items at instagram.com/baileysfinejewelry.

Fenton restaurant donates proceeds to Helene relief

Colletta, an Italian restaurant at Fenton in Cary, is donating a portion of proceeds from each polpette order throughout October to hurricane relief efforts.

Colletta polpette

Triangle real estate office accepting supplies

Compass Triangle, located at 201 Fenton Gateway Drive in Cary, is collecting supplies, such as baby formula and wipes, bug spray, sunscreen, cleaning supplies, pet food, trash bags, work gloves and toiletries.

They can be dropped off on the second floor above the Hines office, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Friday. (Questions may be sent to kevin.woody@compass.com.)

Crabtree mall fundraising events

Crabtree Valley Mall in Raleigh is hosting a series of events to support relief efforts in Western North Carolina through the end of 2024.

A portion of proceeds from a concert, silent auction, photos with Santa and other programs will be donated.

Triangle Pilates studio to hold donation-based class

Club Pilates Cary, located near Fenton in Cary, is holding a donation-based mat class Thursday, Oct. 24. Proceeds from the class, scheduled for 6-7 p.m., will be donated to Triangle Mutual Aid.

Register for the class, which will be held at Fenton Square (21 Fenton Main St.) in front of Paragon Theaters.

Music for the Mountains benefit concert in Raleigh

Band Together and Lincoln Theatre are partnering to put on Music for the Mountains, a benefit concert to raise funds for hurricane relief and disaster recovery. The concert will be on Sunday, Oct. 27 at Red Hat Amphitheater and feature performances by Old Crow Medicine Show, Chatham County Line, BJ Barham and more.

All proceeds from ticket sales will go directly to The Community Foundation of Western North Carolina. For tickets and details, visit etix.com and bandtogethernc.org.

Donate while buying NC State Fair tickets

You can support disaster relief efforts while purchasing tickets to the NC State Fair. All money collected will go to the MANNA FoodBank of Asheville, which lost its distribution warehouse in the hurricane.

When purchasing fair tickets online, a "State Fair Cares" boxed link will pop up on the shopping cart page before you check out. Visit ncagr.gov/divisions/ncstatefair/2024/buytixnow to buy tickets and donate.

Buy T-shirts to benefit western North Carolina

Many local and regional shops are selling apparel, like tee shirts and sweatshirts, to donate funds to organizations working in storm-hit areas, and all you have to do is click "buy."

For details, designs and prices, visit charlotteobserver.com.

Country artist Sturgill Simpson fundraising concert in Cary

Country musician Sturgill Simpson will perform a benefit concert at Cary's Koka Booth Amphitheatre on Monday, Oct. 21. All proceeds from the event will be donated to the North Carolina Disaster Relief Fund.

Visit sturgillsimpsonlive.com for information and tickets.

Simpson was originally scheduled to perform at Asheville's ExploreAsheville.com Arena on Monday, Oct. 21, but the show has been canceled with plans to be rescheduled.

Appalachian Aid Music Festival to benefit Helene victims

The Appalachian Aid Music Festival will take place at Carolina West Wireless Community Commons in downtown Wilkesboro on Saturday, Oct. 19, 12-9 p.m. Tickets will be \$20 for general admissions and are available on Eventbrite.

The event will feature Alex Key, John PayCheck, Wayne Henderson, The Contenders, Taylon Hope, Matt Bizzell, Holy Water, BRB and others. Proceeds will be distributed through Musicians Mission of Mercy, a nonprofit based in Ashe County.

Western NC shops and restaurants could use our help from afarThe hurricane devastated so many of our mountain towns who rely on tourism, especially right near the peak of leaf-changing season, and supporting these businesses feels more critical than ever. Officials have asked us not to travel to Western North Carolina for fun right now, and many of these shops were absolutely devastated, so there would be no place for us to visit even if we could get there.But there are a few ways you can help support the area from afar: Local shops and restaurants are beginning to offer ways to support them online, including making purchases and supporting fundraising efforts. One business suggested including a note stating "Ship when the time is right" with your purchases, and that's probably a great idea for all of these places. Another idea is to book a rental or a session with a place that you don't plan on using, so the business is able to pocket the money. This may help hospitality folks who can't work during this time.Find a list of businesses and ways you can help at charlotteobserver.com. Charlotte chefs, breweries, venues hosting dinners and concertsMany Charlotte restaurants and concert venues are hosting dinners, music events and fundraisers for disaster relief. Here are some Charlotte-area groups hosting events and/or fundraisers in October: Oaklore DistillingBurial Beer Co. Birdsong Brewing Co.CustomshopStage Door TheaterThe Amp Ballantyne Resident CultureNeighborhood TheatreFind a full list of events at charlotteobserver.com.

Is there a fundraising event we missed? Let us know.

Ask NC service journalism team EMBED

Musician Ben Folds to hold concert benefiting Western NC. Here's when & where

Want to donate clothing to Western NC? Here's where & when to drop it off

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Renee Umsted, News & Observer, 'Want to support Western NC? Check out these fundraisers, drives & other ways to help', *News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles* (online), 9 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?
p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C8AE75E2FBB428>



With GOP votes at risk, NC Republicans suddenly are OK with easing voting rules - Opinion

October 9, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: The Editorial Board, News & Observer | Section: opinion | 643 Words OpenURL Link

As Hurricane Helene's devastation complicates voting in Republican-heavy western North Carolina, the GOP is showing an uncharacteristic approach to elections. Suddenly, the party that made voting harder in the name of "election integrity" is in favor of making voting easier in western counties where accessibility to polling places and mail service remain disrupted. Two Republican members of the State Board of Elections joined the board's three Democratic members in voting to make the changes. No Republicans appear to be complaining about these changes, unlike their complaints then and now about mid-election changes made in 2020 because of COVID. Indeed, on Wednesday Republican legislative leaders rolled out legislation that will expand the changes in election procedures from the 13 counties named by the State Board of Elections to 25 counties included in the original disaster designation. The GOP's softening on voting rules may be out of respect for the right to vote. Certainly it is correct to adjust election rules after the loss of polling places, the displacement of many people and a shortage of poll workers.But Republicans may also be open to the changes because western North Carolina is their party's base. Two of the affected counties, Mitchell and Avery, have the first and second highest concentration of Republican voters in the state.Former President Donald Trump, who carried North Carolina by only 1.3 percent of the vote in 2020, will need to win big in the western counties to carry the state in November. The GOP's statewide candidates for governor, attorney general and other offices and judicial seats also can't afford a falloff of votes from rural western counties. Under changes approved Monday by the State Board of Elections, local election boards in the 13 counties can by a bipartisan majority vote change voting sites and when sites will be open during early voting days. Absentee ballots will be accepted at any county board of elections office - not just the one in the voter's home county. The deadline for requesting absentee ballots is extended to the day before Election Day, rather than a week before. The legislation, according to a Republican Senate news release, also "Establishes procedures for spoiling and reissuing absentee ballots and for curing deficiencies to accommodate voters who have been displaced by the hurricane."These and other changes will help voters affected by Helene's flooding. But some Republican lawmakers may wish they hadn't done so much to restrict voting in the first place. They may regret the new requirement for voters to present an authorized photo ID because some Republican voters may have lost their driver's license along with other possessions in the flood. Given Helene's effect on mail delivery, Republican lawmakers may wish that they hadn't eliminated the three-day grace period for the receipt of absentee ballots postmarked on or before Election Day. Sen. Warren Daniel, a Burke County Republican who co-sponsored the legislation that ended the grace period, said at the time of the bill's passage in 2023 that "Every day that passes after Election Day with votes still coming in creates the possibility of distrust in the process." What will create distrust in the process is a stream of mail-in ballots going uncounted because closed roads and other obstacles delayed their delivery. Republican lawmakers may also be sorry they empowered partisan observers at polling places. That could lead to an increase in challenged votes in western counties as voters show up at new locations and some vote from outside their home county. Finally, Republican lawmakers may wish they had given the State Board of Elections all the funding the board said it needed to run an ordinary election, let alone one complicated by a natural disaster. There is no problem with voter fraud in North Carolina. There is a problem with voter suppression. Now, only temporarily and only in certain counties, Republicans are willing to make the voting process what it should always be for everyone: Easy to do.

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Work begins to restore I-40 through the NC mountains, but timetable still uncertain

October 9, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Richard Stradling, News & Observer | Section: north carolina | 639 Words OpenURL Link

The N.C. Department of Transportation has hired contractors to stabilize the surviving two lanes of Interstate 40 through the Pigeon River Gorge but says no decision has been made about what to do with them.

It also says there's still no timetable for reopening the highway that connects North Carolina with Tennessee.

The eastbound lanes of I-40 washed out in several places on both sides of the state line. During a visit to the gorge on Monday, Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee told reporters that work had begun to convert the westbound lanes to two-way traffic while long-term repairs are made.

"We'll have the road moving in another week or so," Lee said.

But NCDOT says the North Carolina side isn't ready. Contractors arrived Tuesday to begin a process 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.

That work will take a few months, said NCDOT spokesman David Uchiyama. In the meantime, NCDOT and the Federal Highway Administration will determine the best use of the westbound lanes as plans for major repairs come together, Uchiyama said.

"This temporary shoring operation will save the remainder of westbound lanes in sections where eastbound lanes slid into the river gorge," he said. "Around the time this operation concludes, plans for a larger complex and complete repair will be in progress."

The \$10 million shoring contract has incentives if the contractors - Wright Brothers Construction of Charleston, Tennessee, and Colorado-based GeoStabilization International - can finish the work by Jan. 4.

Engineers are still trying to figure out how to restore the land that once supported the eastbound lanes of I-40.

i 40.jpgEastbound lanes Interstate 40 in the Pigeon River Gorge washed out and collapsed during catastrophic flooding from Helene.

Historic rain from the remnants of Hurricane Helene turned the Pigeon River into a torrent that wore away the earth below the highway. The guardrail and shoulder along the eastbound lanes fell into the river in several places. In some spots, the travel lanes themselves also disappeared.

The westbound lanes remain intact. But in at least one place, all that separates them from the river is the median barrier.

Options for travel between the two states

In North Carolina, I-40 is open as far as Exit 20, the Maggie Valley interchange with U.S. 276. On the Tennessee side, westbound I-40 opens at Exit 447, while eastbound traffic must get off at Exit 440, U.S. 321.

Tennessee DOT has begun converting the westbound lanes of I-40 to two-way traffic around its damaged section of the highway, between the North Carolina line and Exit 447, a distance of about 4 miles, according to spokesman Mark Nagi.

TDOT hopes to finish the conversion by the end of next week, though drivers won't be able to go beyond the North Carolina state line.

Speaking with reporters, Gov. Lee called the Pigeon River Gorge section of I-40 "incredibly important." More than 26,000 drivers a day normally use what is the busiest route between the two states.

Meanwhile, an alternate route, Interstate 26, remains closed after floodwaters knocked down twin spans that carried the highway over the Nolichucky River in Erwin, about 40 miles from the North Carolina line. Nagi says there's no timeline set for rebuilding the bridges and reopening the highway.

For now, NCDOT advises drivers wishing to go west toward Tennessee to take either I-77 north to I-81 near Wytheville, Virginia, toward Knoxville or take U.S. 74 west toward Chattanooga.

NCDOT_WesternNCClosed_Map.jpgA map showing areas where travel is limited to people who live in the area or are helping with storm recovery. It also shows detours around two long-term closures of Interstates 40 and 26

NC Reality Check is a continuing series holding those in power accountable and shining a light on public issues that affect North Carolina. Have a suggestion for a future story? Email realitycheck@newsobserver.com

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Vice President Kamala Harris returning to NC with campaign trip to Greenville

October 9, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Danielle Battaglia, News & Observer | Section: election | 252 Words OpenURL Link

Vice President Kamala Harris plans to return to North Carolina to campaign in Greenville on Sunday, the Harris-Walz campaign told McClatchy exclusively Wednesday.

The news comes as Hurricane Milton was expected to make landfall as a Category 5 storm in Florida, and the campaign added that the vice president was continuing to monitor the storm and taking her travel day-by-day.

This marks the Democrat's 19th visit to North Carolina this election cycle. The campaign didn't provide details of what Harris would do in Greenville or whether the public could attend her event.

She last visited the state on Saturday as part of an official trip to tour areas impacted by Hurricane Helene, a storm that made landfall in Florida on Sept. 26 as a Category 4 storm before traveling up the East Coast, killing at least 230 people and causing devastation in its wake.

Harris has spent a lot of time campaigning in North Carolina but has cut back on campaign appearances in the state since Helene, having last visited Greensboro and Charlotte on Sept. 12.

North Carolina is considered a battleground, and both Trump and Harris' campaigns believe the path to the White House runs through the state.

Trump has inched up in the polls in recent weeks, with FiveThirtyEight showing him ahead of Harris by 1 point, well within most polls' margin of error.

Early voting by mail has started in North Carolina. The election is less than a month away, on Nov. 5.

Under The Dome embed (2022)

New Under the Dome newsletter subscriber embed (graybox)

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NC treasurer candidates debate how to keep health plan afloat, pension plan growing

October 9, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Luciana Perez Uribe Guinassi, News & Observer | Section: election | 1400 Words OpenURL Link

The two candidates vying to become North Carolina's next state treasurer debated Tuesday night at Greensboro College, laying out their vision on how the state's health plan, pension plan and billions in state taxpayer funds should be managed and invested.

Republican Brad Briner laid out a vision that was more narrowly focused on cutting liabilities and growing investments. Meanwhile, Democrat Wesley Harris also called for focusing on economic policy, in addition to the treasurer taking on a more active role advocating for state employees and laying out an economic vision for the state.

This race should matter to "every taxpayer," because "the treasurer's office consumes a large and growing share of our state budget every year, a number that continues to accelerate as we deal with the unfunded liabilities of our state pension plan and our state Health Plan," Briner said.

"If we elect an experienced investment professional, we will consume a smaller share of the state budget, which will allow us to invest in roads, salaries, tax reduction, all the above," he said.

Briner is a retired financial investor who previously managed the philanthropic assets of former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg. He also serves on the UNC-Chapel Hill Board of Trustees. He has a master's in business administration from Harvard University

Harris is a former economic consultant and has been a state representative from Mecklenburg County since 2019. He has a PhD in economics from Clemson University

Harris spoke on his background growing up in rural North Carolina, saying "we didn't have a lot, but I was so blessed that we had a state that invested in me, and I had great teachers, and I had a great public school system, and I had great treasurers that took care of them for my parents, so that I was able to have those opportunities."

This position "is about the future of North Carolina, making sure we're investing in our people and this knowledge," he said.

North Carolina's state treasurer manages the state's pension plan and the State Health Plan, which provides medical and pharmaceutical benefits to more than 750,000 current and retired public employees.

The debate, hosted by the NC Institute of Political Leadership in partnership with Spectrum News, lasted for an hour and spanned various topics. It was moderated by Spectrum News 1 political reporter and anchor Loretta Boniti.

Here are four highlights from the debate.

Local recovery efforts following Hurricane Helene

The Department of State Treasurer approves debt issuance for local governments and assists them with fiscal management via its Local Government Commission. The treasure heads that commission.

Asked how the treasurer's office would help local recovery efforts in Western North Carolina, Harris said local finances need to be solid.

Citing a bill in the General Assembly that would be released Wednesday morning providing \$273 million in state funding for recovery efforts, Harris said "that's just scratching the surface."

He said "we have to be serious about making sure that we're making the investments on the state level, because these counties in the western part of the state are going to take years to recover."

He said he thinks it's a responsibility of the treasurer's office to make sure people around the state understand local finances and that if a local government cannot make investments - such as for recovery efforts - "it's because the state is simply not doing their job."

Briner said Harris's answer "has nothing to do with what the state treasurer does" as the state treasurer is not "involved in economic development."

"We need to grow the assets of our state, deliver checks to our beneficiaries, make sure their health care is in place, and really stay in our lane to make sure that all the services the State Treasurer's Office are provided to all of the people in the western part of the state," he said.

Investment approach for the pension plan

North Carolina's state treasurer manages the state's pension plan.

The North Carolina Retirement Systems - which administer the pension plan, as well as the other supplemental retirement plans - returned a net 5.3% for the fiscal year that ended June 30, 2023. This was below the plan's benchmark's for a 6.5% return. The Retirement Systems returned a net 8.2% for the fiscal year that ended in June, according to a quarterly investment report.

The state's pension fund, which is among the largest public pensions in the country, was valued as of June 30 at \$123 billion. It has a 88.3% funded ratio, which means it can cover a large part of accrued benefits owed with assets.

Yet the current state treasurer, Republican Dale Folwell, who is not running for reelection, has been scrutinized for his investment approach, with some saying he is too averse to risk and keeps too many assets in cash. Both candidates honed in on this, but their suggested investment approach differed.

Folwell took office in January 2017 and was reelected in 2020. This year, he ran unsuccessfully for governor in the Republican primary, meaning he could not run again for treasurer, leaving the seat open.

Harris said "we have one of the best-funded pension plans in the country, but we also have the worst performing pension plan in the country," due to the plan being cash-heavy. He said the treasurer's office needed to take advantage of the "good times in the stock market" for investments and lower the cash balance to get higher returns. This would allow the state to give state employees a cost of living adjustment (COLA), he said.

Briner said the state needs to have a more "assertive" investment strategy to give COLAs to state employees without needing to increase taxes and crowding out other state funding priorities. To do this, the pension plan needed to hit a 6.5% return and investments would need to go not toward stocks but toward assets like mortgages, Briner said.

Sole fiduciary responsibility model

North Carolina is one of few states where the state treasurer has sole fiduciary responsibility for making investment decisions for the pension fund. Most other states delegate that authority to boards or investment experts.

Asked whether this should change, Briner said it should, and that "if we keep the current sole fiduciary governance model, it matters entirely who the treasurer is. Everyone else is just an adviser."

Harris said he "fundamentally" disagreed with Briner and that the treasurer should remain the sole person accountable to North Carolinians.

"If you take that power away from the treasurer, you are giving it to the legislature," he said.

This power will go to the legislature by allowing it to appoint experts, who in fact will be political appointees who will be "doing the will of the political leadership," he said.

State Health Plan solvency issues

The State Health Plan is facing financial strains, according to Folwell, who has cited rising health care costs, inadequate state funding and more as reasons for this.

The plan is projected to have a cash balance at the end of the calendar year of \$591 million. But during the State Health Plan's most recent board of trustees meeting in July, the plan's staff forecasted the plan to be \$816 million in the red by calendar year 2027, with the plan "likely to be unable to pay bills in fall 2026."

Also facing strain are retiree health benefits, which are facing a \$26.65 billion liability, according to a June 2023 report from The Segal Group.

Both Harris and Briner said they would be able to fix the liability.

Harris said because the State Health Plan is "broke" the state is "having to cut benefits," such as cutting access to popular weight loss drugs like Wegovy and Saxenda.

"That's making us make short-term, financially necessary decisions" to stay solvent but will lead to higher expenses in the future, Harris said. Because of this "we have to pressure the General Assembly to fund this" and hold elected officials accountable, he said.

This would allow the state to improve compensation and benefits for state employees, which would help recruit more state employees, including younger employees who would improve the risk pool for the health plan, he said.

Briner said "we have to get creative" to make "our dollars go further – whether it's (investing) in preventative care," or another solution.

"We have to have a better method going forward than just going back to the legislature every year asking for more and more money," he said.

Throughout the debate, Harris also cited the importance of prioritizing preventative care measures.

Both Harris and Briner said they wanted to get GLP-1s, the popular weight loss drugs, covered again.

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Burke County had 37 structures collapses due to Helene; 55 Morganton businesses deemed unsafe

October 9, 2024 | News Herald, The (Morganton, NC) Author: Sharon McBrayer| Section: Government Politics| 743 Words OpenURL Link

Burke County officials are working on the final damage estimates that home and business owners in the area experienced due to Hurricane Helene.

Burke County 911 Assistant Director Chris White said county emergency workers responded to 37 structure collapses during the storm.

In Morganton, City Manager Sally Sandy said Monday night that 14 homes in the city had significant damage from the storm but were still livable. Another 14 homes were marked unsafe for occupation and would need contractors to repair the damage.

Sandy said any permits related to storm damage are free.

Fifty-five businesses in Morganton were marked unsafe for the public, but Sandy said all the structures in the city can be cleaned up and reopened once repairs are made. Nothing has been condemned.

White said Burke County 911 received 4,225 calls between Thursday and Sunday during the storm. In addition, 315 Burke County calls were answered by Catawba County because Burke's system rolled over there for a short time, he said.

Burke County emergency crews also conducted 31 water rescues and 322 welfare checks.

"None of those turned up to be missing people or anything like that," White said. "So to our knowledge, we don't have anybody missing."

Burke water, food donation center closing

The county is going to stop accepting donation by 8 p.m. Tuesday due to the abundance of supplies that have been donated, a news release from the county said. Donation center shopping will end at 5 p.m. on Thursday, the county said.

"Thanks to your incredible outpouring of support, the community is saturated with clean water, food, hygiene supplies, blankets, and other items," the release said. "Both functions can be reorganized should the need arise."

White said the distribution centers have served around 1,200 people a day, but that has diminished this week. The county's distribution centers served 600 people in four hours on Sunday, White said.

The items being given out at the distribution centers include water, nonperishable food, toiletries, diapers, baby wipes and batteries.

The county said relief efforts are transitioning to a more long-term relief strategy that supports housing, food and economic insecurities.

Those who still want to contribute can donate to the Burke Community Foundations Emergency Relief Fund. The fund has already reached more than \$100,000. The money will be used to source grants to community nonprofits with a specific focus on housing, food and economic insecurities created because of Hurricane Helene.

To donate, visit www.cfburkecounty.org/grants.html.

Storm debris

Valdese Mayor Charlie Watts, who retired as the town's fire chief, said if tree debris is in the street or street right-ofway, the cleanup would fall to the North Carolina Department of Transportation or the municipality.

Watts said FEMA also has a debris program in place to help if a property owner can get the debris to the street, then NCDOT will pick it up. He said if the tree is on private property, municipalities can't clean it up.

Property owners should not take debris to the landfill. The county has contracted with a hauler to manage debris collection directly from residential areas.

Watts said after a storm, if the town has a lot of trees fall into roads, it's standard operation for the town to get at least one lane open and then move on to the next street with trees down. The town will then come back and clear the street later, he said.

Residents are requested to move storm debris to the street curb and separate it into three distinct piles:

Vegetation (tree limbs, branches, etc.) White goods (appliances like refrigerators, washing machines) Building materials (construction debris, wood, drywall)

Burning debris

For those who are thinking about burning debris such as trees, limbs or brush, the North Carolina Forest Service is advising caution.

"Recent tropical weather, most notably Hurricane Helene, has left piles of debris in its wake. Once safe to do so, many people will have significant yard cleanup and may choose to dispose of leaves and other yard debris by burning it," Agriculture Commissioner Steve Troxler said in a release. "Outdoor fires left unattended can get out of hand quickly, becoming wildfires that threaten lives and property."

Typically, wildfires occur more frequently in October through early December. In 2023, the N.C. Forest Service responded to nearly 2,000 wildfires during those months, with response to more than 1,200 of those fires taking place in November.

Troxler said before residents choose to burn debris, they need to obtain a valid burn permit and keep an eye on the weather.

You can obtain a burn permit at any N.C. Forest Service office or Burke County Fire Marshal, or online at www.ncforestservice.gov/burnpermit.

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p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C1B92DF2B0F1A8>



STORM DEATH REPORTED IN BURKE

October 9, 2024 | News Herald, The (Morganton, NC)
Author: SARAH JOHNSON AND BILLY CHAPMAN sjohnson@hickoryrecord.com wchapman@hickoryrecord.com | Section: News | 890 Words
OpenURL Link

HURRICANE HELENE UPDATE

One death attributed to Hurricane Helene was reported in Catawba County and one was reported in Burke County.

Alexander, Caldwell and Iredell counties have reported no deaths attributed to the storm.

Ten days after the storm, thousands remain without power. Hundreds of thousands of customers were without power in the immediate aftermath of the remnants of Hurricane Helene.

Burke County

One fatality in Burke County was reported after a driver hit a tree on Summers Road, according to Burke County Emergency Communications Assistant Director Chris White.

Burke County emergency crews also conducted 31 water rescues, responded to 37 structure collapses and conducted 322 welfare checks.

"None of those turned up to be missing people or anything like that," White said. "So to our knowledge, we don't have anybody missing."

White said areas along the Catawba River, Johns River, Linville River, Lake James and Lake Rhodhiss were most heavily impacted by Helene.

White said the Catawba River spread 100 to 150 yards in some places from its banks.

The county received 4,722 emergency calls for service Thursday and Friday. An additional 315 calls were routed to Catawba County while emergency service lines were down in Burke County.

Thirty swift water rescues have been conducted in Burke County. Last week, Burke County water systems reported power outages and boil water advisories. This week, White said no public water systems are under a boil water advisory. White said test kits for private wells have been ordered but not received yet.

Over 1,800 customers were without power Monday afternoon in Burke County, the majority of which receive service from Rutherford EMC.

Seven roads were closed on Monday in Burke County due to Helene damage, according to DriveNC.gov.

Catawba County

Approximately 100 homes in the Look-out Shoals Lake area were fl ooded during Hurricane Helene.

The Lookout Shoals Lake area was the most heavily impacted area in Catawba County, Catawba County Communications and Marketing Director Amy McCauley said.

Approximately 50 other homes across Catawba County have major structural damage due to the storm.

McCauley said the county received 2,152 emergency calls Sept. 26 and 27 as Helene came through the area.

One death in Catawba County was attributed to the storm. A 4-year-old was killed in a car crash on Sept. 26 during heavy rains prior to Hurricane Helene officially reaching Catawba County, McCauley said.

One road in Catawba County remains closed.

According to DriveNC. gov, a bridge along Finger Bridge Road sustained significant damage during the storm and will have to either be replaced or repaired before the road is reopened.

The rest area on Interstate 40 in Claremont was closed Monday due to lack of power and water, according to DriveNC.gov.

More than 27,000 were left without power in Catawba County during the storm, McCauley said. As of Monday, there were 15 customers without power in Catawba County, according to PowerOutage.us.

Alexander County

Alexander County reported 13 homes with structural damage following Hurricane Helene, Alexander County Public Information Officer Gary Herman said on Monday.

One of the homes was a total loss. The most heavily impacted areas of Alexander County were in the western and northern sections, Herman said.

As of Monday, two roads remain closed in Alexander County. Black Oak Ridge Road is closed due to a damaged culvert. Friendly Church Road is closed due to downed trees and powerlines, Herman said.

Roughly 60% of Alexander County residents were without power at one point. Herman said 11,300 people was the peak number of residents without power due to the storm. As of 11:30 a.m. on Monday, only one person remained without power in the county, according to PowerOutage.us.

No deaths or injuries were reported relating to the storm. Alexander County 911 Communications dispatched 580 calls for assistance. The county received 190 emergency calls and 1,559 other calls throughout Sept. 26-27, Herman said.

Caldwell County

Caldwell County still is assessing damage to homes, according to Caldwell County Public Information Officer Paige Counts.

As of Monday morning, county inspectors had not visited some of the hardest-hit areas in Wilson Creek, Mortimer, Edgemont, Globe and Collettsville.

Counts said the county received 3,539 calls for service from the time a state of emergency was declared on Wednesday at noon through Friday. More than 1,800 of those were 911 calls.

Counts said the county communications center typically answers 90 to 100 calls per day.

The donations center at 2145 Norwood St. in Lenoir is no longer accepting donations as of Monday afternoon, Counts said, because the center is full.

No fatalities have been reported in Caldwell County.

Over 600 customers were still without power in the county Monday afternoon, according to PowerOutage.us.

Six roads in Caldwell County remain closed due to Hurricane Helene, according to DriveNC.gov.

Brown Mountain Beach Road and Waterfalls Road are not expected to reopen until January 2025, according to DriveNC.gov.

Iredell County

Two families were displaced in Iredell County due to Hurricane Helene, Iredell County Manager Beth Milton said.

A total of seven homes were damaged due to the storm. None of the homes were a total loss, Milton said.

Milton said the Central Fire region was the most impacted in the county due to fl ooded roads and bridges. The Central Fire region is southeast of Love Valley.

No deaths or injuries were reported. The Iredell County Emergency Communications Center received a total of 2,511 calls. That number includes non-emergency calls and routine transfers, Milton said.

Approximately 3,500 homes in Iredell County were left without power, Milton said. As of Monday, there were only six Iredell County customers without power, according to PowerOutage.us.

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Freedom, East Burke return to action following hurricane, Draughn uncertain

October 9, 2024 | News Herald, The (Morganton, NC) Author: JUSTIN EPLEY Sports editor | Section: Football | 516 Words OpenURL Link

It'll be in a different venue and with a scrambled schedule, but high school football will return to Burke County when Freedom hosts Northwestern 3A/4A Conference opponent Alexander Central this Friday at Patton High School in Morganton.

The Patriots were supposed to start NWC play at Hibriten on Oct. 4 and host the Cougars for Senior Night at FHS on Nov. 1, but the impact of Hurricane Helene has changed all of that. Instead, with Freedom's stadium on the mend after significant flooding and all conference games for Week 7 postponed, the Patriots will entertain Alexander Central on the other side of town on Friday.

The Patriots lead Alexander Central 29-8 all-time, but fell 35-7 to end the season in Taylorsville last fall.

The last time Freedom (3-2) was on the field, it played arguably its best game of the season with a 63-13 nonconference thrashing of visiting Chase on Sept. 20. Junior quarterback Kaden Davis accounted for six touchdowns against the Trojans, finishing 7 of 9 for 234 yards and three TDs to Kobe Johnson (53 yards), Tiras Walker (66) and Justice Dominguez (61) while also cashing in on three short rushing touchdowns of 1, 6 and 1 yards as part of a 72-yard night on the ground. Cam Brown (15 and 5 yards) and Ian Clark (26) also had rushing TDs for FHS.

Alexander Central finished the nonconference portion of its schedule with a 2-3 record, winning versus Wilkes Central 54-14 and at North Iredell 28-19 while losing versus Statesville 36-21, at Burns 28-7 and versus Sun Valley 42-10.

ACHS is led by junior rushers Jeremiah Whitaker (51-479-4) and Sawyer Chapman-Mays (59-232-5). Senior quarterback Wade Queen has completed 20 of 42 passes for 230 yards, one touchdown and three interceptions while running 28 times for 154 yards and two scores. His favorite target is senior Garison Millsaps (6-115-1).

Prediction: Freedom.

East Burke (1-3, 0-1) at Bunker Hill (4-1, 2-0)

The Cavaliers will travel to Claremont for a Catawba Valley 2A Conference game following the two-week, hurricaneimposed break while the Bears were able to play last week, winning 35-21 at league foe West Lincoln.

Bunker Hill leads the series 9-2, including a 28-6 victory in Icard one season ago.

EBHS was last on the field for its CVAC-opener at Maiden on Sept. 20, a 43-6 loss. The Cavs are led by running backs Zayne Newman (63-161-1) and Darren Hammons (20-137-1), quarterback Carter Bennett (29 of 65, 243 yards, TD) and receiver Cannon Morrison (6-60-1).

The Bears' offense is more robust, led by senior running back Jason Willis Jr. (92-934-13). Junior quarterback Eli Davis-Helms has completed 29 of 50 passes for 438 yards and three touchdowns to a receiving corps led by senior Jaylan Willis (17-267-2), who also has rushed for 142 yards and two touchdowns on 13 carries.

Prediction: Bunker Hill.

Draughn's plan uncertain

As of press time, the Wildcats (3-2, 1-0 Western Highlands 1A/2A Conf.) were uncertain to resume play in a conference whose communities were hit very hard by the storm. Coach Chris Powell said his team might play Madison on Friday, but nothing was confirmed.

DHS' original schedule called for a trip to Marshall this week.

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'You are not alone' — Columbus County continues support for western N.C.

October 9, 2024 | News Reporter, The (Whiteville, NC) Author: Diana Matthews dianamatthews@nrcolumbus.com| Section: Clothing | 1638 Words OpenURL Link

Within less than two weeks, Columbus County citizens, government officials, businesses and nonprofits have battled on multiple fronts to provide relief to Southern Appalachian residents in danger and distress from Hurricane Helene's destruction.

"Whether you donated supplies, gave a helping hand or simply spread the word, you are part of something bigger," Columbus County Sheriff Bill Rogers told county residents in a social media post last week. "Together, we are showing the world that Columbus County stands by its neighbors, no matter the distance."

And the need won't go away soon, Rogers said. For victims of the historic storm, "The road ahead is long."

Columbus County's tangible investment in western North Carolinians' survival and recovery has been measured in truckloads of donated supplies and hundreds of work hours by skilled public safety and emergency responders. Others at home have gathered for prayer or sent personal messages of support, like the high school student who wrote, "Please remember, you are not alone in this."

Sheriff's office plans fourth deployment

Rogers said a team of 12 deployed Sept. 30 "with a 53-foot trailer and an 18-foot trailer packed to the brim," headed to Mitchell County, "one of the areas hardest hit by Hurricane Helene." Rogers said Bladen County Sheriff's Office and Sheriff Jim McVicker had joined in the effort.

CCSO spokesperson Jenna Jalving confirmed on Tuesday that a second team delivered supplies Oct. 2 and a third team left Sunday, Oct. 6. Jalving quoted a participating captain as saying that, "This team was sent out only to aid in security. We are in the works of planning another trip in the future to bring more supplies."

Teams find tragedy

CCSO staff assisted in clearing roads and bridges to restore safe transportation. "When we arrived in a small town within Mitchell County," Rogers wrote, "we were heartbroken to learn that they had not yet received any supplies—we were the first boots on the ground."

The sheriff said donations from Columbus County had provided "a life-changing difference for these families. This small community, which had been waiting for help, now has food, water and basic necessities, thanks to your generosity."

The News Reporter spoke Friday, Oct. 4, with some of the four Whiteville Fire Department members who'd just returned from a six-day deployment to McDowell County. The men carried out search, rescue and evacuation operations and answered fire calls with members of the Sugar Hill Fire Department, near Marion.

"It's awful," said Lt. Marquise Blanks. People were stranded with "no water, no food. It's like a desert. Houses are gone. Parts of houses and pieces of clothing are hanging in the treetops." The team from Whiteville helped local firefighters put out a fire at a site six-tenths of a mile from the road and across a bridge that was "not stable."

Blanks said the WFD team had also located a couple with a baby and a young child. "The mom and dad hadn't had any food in three or four days," he said.

Firefighter Rocky McPherson said mountain landscapes looked "like a bomb exploded" and people were "taking baths in the river." Many places they saw"the foundation of a house here, and the rest of the house was two miles down the road or down the river," he said. Other times, "You'd find a pile of sticks, and you'd get that smell. You don't ever forget that smell."

McPherson added that, in another stroke of Helene's cruelty, survivors who had lost family members had at the same time lost all photos of their loved ones.

Asheville area

Columbus County Manager Eddie Madden reported Friday, Oct. 4, that, "Our Columbus County teams continue to provide support to the Emergency Operations Centers in Buncombe County and in Black Mountain. We are also providing tactical support in Polk County."

Madden said Emergency Management Director David Ransom and Fire Marshal Shannon Blackmon had arrived bringing donations and a mobile shower unit.

Madden said he'd been working "alongside some of the best and most highly trained people in the country." He networked with contacts in other counties to locate 500 feet of ductile iron pipe to repair the Town of Black Mountain's water system. "Multiple counties and towns contributed pipe and the necessary couplings," he said, and Black Mountain "got their water system back into service later that day."

Working with Buncombe County Manager Avril Pinder, Madden said, "we have been able to get resources such as port-a-johns, shower trailers, additional law enforcement, equipment, supplies and SpaceX Starlink technology" to communities in need "very quickly."

The county manager said his staff had "arrived here on the heels of the hurricane when we were needed the most. Our teams have helped in numerous ways and have been on the ground bringing some semblance of normalcy to communities in great despair."

Prison accepts evacuees

The North Carolina Department of Adult Correction announced Oct. 1 that it had evacuated 841 men incarcerated at Avery-Mitchell Correctional Institution in Spruce Pine. "The evacuation became necessary due to long timeframes for water and power restoration at the prison," a news release said. Tabor Correctional Institution was among seven facilities housing some of the offenders.

"The duration of all relocations will depend on the time required to restore water and power," NCDAC said.

Many gifts

Columbus Baptist Association is among many local groups sending aid. Dave Heller, CBA missions strategist, said a trailer load went to Transylvania County Friday and another will go to Canton.

"Roads were pretty good all the way into Transylvania County, Heller said, but, "just 10 miles away, there are no more roads. They're completely gone, washed away." Churches in the disaster area are helping distribute supplies to remote areas. Heller said people can now obtain "water, showers and laundry" at church-operated sites.

Southeastern Community College President Chris English, a Hendersonville native, asked the community to donate supplies and also monetary gifts to help community college students in need in western North Carolina.

Ready to go

Whiteville City Manager Darren Currie told The News Reporter Tuesday that members of the city public works

department and police department were standing by to help but "haven't got the call" yet from state emergency management officials.

"It's going to be a long recovery process," said Currie, "and they don't want to burn everybody out" by summoning too many workers at one time. "They're going to rotate people out and in," he said. "It's not going to be a sprint; it's going to be a marathon."

Neighbors helping neighbors

Whiteville residents Cindy and Randy Kirby both assisted with relief and recovery in Pond Mountain Township, near the meeting of the Tennessee and Virginia state lines. High-priority jobs included clearing roads, repairing washouts and rough-grading the gravel roads to make them passable, Cindy Kirby told The News Reporter via text messages.

Many of the volunteers had lost bridges and farm equipment themselves, she said. They had "water in their homes, no power or running water, and had animals to round up, assess and care for, mostly cattle."

Still, "They were out doing wellness checks on all the neighbors and trying to convince these fiercely independent people to accept the aid offered. So many were determined that they shouldn't take anything because there was always someone worse off than they were, no matter what all they had lost."

Kirby reflected that, "No matter how bad it was, and it was horrific at times and in places, these people were all focused on caring for others and for their community. It was their driving purpose. And I have never been so honored to be part of a community like this in my life."

She wrote that, "Despite the destruction and loss of life that touched so many families, the coming together, caring and sense that no one was alone was one of the most beautiful and uplifting things I have ever seen."

Words of compassion

Columbus Career and College Academy students wrote "letters of encouragement for our friends and neighbors in western North Carolina," a county schools Facebook post said.

Excerpts from the letters follow:

"Dear Hurricane Helene Survivor, I am writing this letter of condolences and encouragement to hopefully strengthen your belief that there are better times ahead...Help is on the way...Please keep your head up. There isn't a second you aren't thought about."

"Stay strong and keep hope alive. We believe in your courage and your ability to get through this. We are all cheering for you and standing with you."

"Remember, it's okay to ask for help. Everyone needs a little help sometimes, and that's okay."

"I am writing this from the heart...Being from N.C. and experiencing many hurricanes, I never would've thought any could do such damage, none of us did. With that being said, I want you to know you aren't alone...Prayers are being sent in every waking moment from across the world. Many of us are putting in efforts to collect goods and supplies to help you all start to rebuild...We are all praying for a bright future for everyone affected."

How you can help now

As needs change, so will donation requests. These lists come from recent online posts.

Columbus County Sheriff's Office

Gas grills with camping-sized propane tanksCharcoal grills with charcoal and smallChainsaw oilNon-perishable food (such as canned goods)Bottled waterFemale hygiene productsBaby supplies (diapers, wipes, formula).

Columbus Baptist Association plans trip tomorrow

Cold weather is expected to arrive in the mountains soon. New and gently used coats, sweaters, hats, gloves, and scarves, sweatshirts and hoodies are the only clothing items being accepted at this time. ("Gently used" means zippers work, no rips or tears, no stains.)

Donors may drop off items at the CBA office until 4:30 p.m. today. CBA will deliver them tomorrow, Friday, Oct. 11. The office is at 208 S. Thompson St., Whiteville.

Southeastern Community College Foundation

To help western N.C. community college students financially, visit

sccnc.edu/give. Select "donate today," then "other" and specify Hurricane Helene support as the destination for your gift.

Editor's note:

Based on information received as text messages, an earlier version of this article attributed to Randall Kirby comments that were actually made by Cindy Kirby.

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NCHSAA announces changes to fall sports schedules

October 9, 2024 | News Reporter, The (Whiteville, NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: Sports | 576 Words OpenURL Link

The NCHSAA, as expected, announced revisions to the fall sports seasons and playoff schedules Wednesday morning. Modifications were made to the fall sports schedule due the devastation that has occurred in numerous schools in western NC from Hurricane Helene.

The NCHSAA President and Commissioner issued a joint statement. "Changes to the fall calendar are difficult as well as complex but necessary," said NCHSAA President Dr. Stephen Gainey and NCHSAA Commissioner Que Tucker. "Keeping our student-athletes safe as we try to minimize risk of injury was central to any decisions made. We commend the work of the NCHSAA staff in its research, the Board of Directors in making time to consider these changes, and the willingness of our host partners to accommodate any changes and make their venues available."

Fall sports schedules that Columbus County high school students participate in that have changed are women's tennis, volleyball, football and men's soccer. A summary of these changes follows.

Women's Tennis

Individual

Reporting deadline: October 14, 11:59 p.m. (revised from 3 p.m. to allow for an extra day of competition)

Regionals: October 18-19 (no change)

State Championships: October 25-26 (no change)

Dual Team

Reporting deadline: October 17, 11:59 p.m. (revised from October 10)

Seeding: October 18 (was Oct. 11)

First Round: October 21(was (Oct. 14)

Second Round: October 23 (was Oct. 16)

Third Round: October 28 (was Oct. 21)

Fourth Round: October 30 (was Oct. 23)

Regionals: November 5 (was Oct. 29)

State Championships: November 9 (was Nov. 2)

Volleyball

Effective immediately, the weekly limitation is modified to allow affected schools to make up multiple postponed matches, not to exceed eight in a week. No change was made to the daily limitation.

Reporting deadline: October 19, 11:59 p.m. (revised from October 16)

Seeding: October 20 (Sunday, after 1 p.m.) (was Oct. 17)

First Round: October 22 (was Oct. 19)

Second Round: October 24 (was Oct. 22)

Third Round: October 26 (was Oct. 24)

Fourth Round: October 29 (was Oct. 26)

Regionals: October 31(was Oct. 29)

State Championships: November 2 (No change)

Men's Soccer

Effective immediately, the weekly limitation is modified to allow affected schools to make up multiple postponed matches, not to exceed four in a week. No change was made to the daily limitation.

Reporting deadline: November 6, 11:59 p.m. (revised from October 31)

Seeding: November 7 (was Nov. 1)

First round: November 9 (was Nov. 4)

Second Round: November 12 (was Nov. 7)

Third Round: November 14 (was Nov. 11)

Fourth Round: November 16 (was Nov. 14)

Regionals: November 19 (No change)

State Championships: November 22-23 (No change)

Football

Effective immediately, a minimum of three calendar days (72 hours) must occur between contests.

Reporting deadline: November 9, 11:59 p.m. (revised from November 1)

Seeding: November 10 (Sunday, after 1 p.m.) (was Nov. 2)

First round: November 15 (was Nov. 8)

Second round: November 22 (was Nov. 15)

Third round: November 29 (was Nov. 22)

Fourth round: December 6 (was Nov. 29)

Regionals: December 13 (was Dec. 6)

State Championships: December 20-21 (was Dec. 13-14)

Special Provision

The Board approved one (1) additional contest for all sports with a season limit. To exceed the season limit of contests, the following conditions must be met:

Prior approval from NCHSAA

The contest cannot exceed the daily or weekly limitations

The contest must exceed the season limit for both schools

The contest MUST NOT be entered into MaxPreps

At this writing, no local school has announced the intention of playing any extra contest(s). The condition of the result NOT BEING ENTERED into MaxPreps means a team's RPI will not change due to any "extra" contest played.

Clinched

Whiteville women's tennis, Whiteville volleyball (with its win over Pender and Trask's loss to South Columbus on Tuesday) and East Columbus volleyball have already earned automatic playoff bids.

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