

Winston-Salem Journal (NC): Page 3

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Chamber will be trying to help those who helped us

October 11, 2024 | Bertie Ledger-Advance (NC) Author: Lewis Hoggard Business Columnist| Section: Columnists | 531 Words OpenURL Link

Less than two weeks ago, unbelievable amounts of rainfall brought a lot of hardship and death to the western part of North Carolina as they deal with the impact of Hurricane Helene. Literally billions of dollars of damage in North Carolina from the storm with at this time a couple of hundred of known deaths with more to come.

Our thoughts and prayers are with the people of the mountains of North Carolina who have been very supportive of our area in times of crisis and flooding.

The Chamber has decided to provide help to McDowell Chamber of Commerce which includes Marion which was heavily impacted by flooding. The town of Windsor sent a group of four workers, along with equipment, to help repair severed water lines in Boone. They spent the week there.

The county also provided Bertie County Emergency Services workers to Asheville to help them in their time of crisis.

We have experienced numerous flooding events over the last 25 years as a community and have received lots of help from the people in the western part of the state. We know that they have a long road ahead of them, and we are willing to help them if we can.

The second annual Pecan Pickling Film Festival was held in Windsor on the weekend of Sept. 13 through Sept. 15. With over one hundred submissions this year, the film festival is certainly growing. The weekend included a number of classes and workshops for aspiring filmmakers and those who were just interested in improving their film making skills.

Films were screened over the weekend at the auditorium on the campus of Bertie High School. Awards were presented on Sunday in a variety of categories. Festival creator Patricia Ferguson has made this event quite an experience for our community. Hollywood has come to eastern North Carolina for at least one weekend a year.

There will be a ribbon-cutting on Oct. 30 at 11 a.m. in front of the building, 119 East Granville Street in Windsor. Bream Medical will be celebrating their presence here in Windsor.

They actually opened in late July, and have started to acquire new clients. They also offer a medical subscription service for an individual and a family subscription service, so people may want to check them out.

Upcoming events include the Bertie Spectacular 5k which will occur at 9 a.m. on Saturday, Oct. 26 behind the Windsor Town Hall on York Street.

Individuals may sign up for this event at runtheeast.com with an entry fee of \$25. The purpose of this race is to raise money for the Good Shepherd Food Pantry which provides a lot of help to literally hundreds of Bertie County citizens.

Runners in this race are encouraged to dress in Halloween costumes and there are cash prizes for the best costumes. The Chamber will be hosting as usual the children costume contest at this event. There is no charge to enter but the participants do need to be twelve or under unless an exception is given by the Chamber director. There will be candy awarded to all contestants, but no other prizes.

The year is flying by, everyone stay safe and if you can help those less fortunate than yourself, please do!

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This Week at NCDOT: Continued Response to Hurricane Helene

October 11, 2024 | BladenOnline.com (Elizabethtown, NC) Author: staff report| Section: Local News| 234 Words OpenURL Link

Contributed

RALEIGH – The following are highlights from this week at the N.C. Department of Transportation. The stories below are also featured in NCDOT Now, the department's weekly newscast.

Crews Continue Recovery Efforts After Hurricane Helene

More than 2,000 NCDOT employees and contract crews from across the entire state are working in Western North Carolina to reopen roads, clear debris and make repairs to damaged infrastructure. NCDOT staff have identified more than 5,400 damaged sites with over 450 damaged bridges. Crews have already reopened more than 460 roads and will continue to update DriveNC.gov with the latest closure and detour information.

Division of Aviation Assists with Helene Recovery

NCDOT's Aviation division is using drone technology and the agency's Photogrammetry unit are using aircraft to assist with the inspection of damaged roads, bridges and culverts.

Drone pilots have completed about 200 UAS missions to inspect infrastructure and provide high-quality imagery for analysis by engineers.

The drone imagery is being used to help engineers make informed decisions on repairs needed to damaged infrastructure across the region.

Donations and Volunteering to Support WNC

If you are interested in donating your time, money or resources to help with relief efforts in Western North Carolina, please visit ncdps.gov/Helene.

For more information about NCDOT Now, contact the NCDOT Communications Office at (919) 707-2660. Additional news stories from throughout the week can be found on NCDOT.gov.

The post This Week at NCDOT: Continued Response to Hurricane Helene appeared first on .

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Lumber River United Way 2024 Campaign Kicks Off with Exciting Prizes and Community Initiatives

October 11, 2024 | BladenOnline.com (Elizabethtown, NC) Author: staff report| Section: Local News| 449 Words OpenURL Link

A staff report

Contributed photos

Lumber River United Way (LRUW) launched its 2024 campaign on August 1st, and the excitement continues to build with opportunities for donors to win fantastic prizes, participate in community events, and support critical causes.

Fair Share Drawings and Prizes

The first Fair Share drawing is set for Tuesday, October 15th, and it offers incredible prizes for those who pledge. Peterson Toyota is sponsoring the grand prize—a \$5,000 cash giveaway—while CITGO Fueling Good provides \$50 gas gift cards to weekly finalists. Additionally, in partnership with 95.7 WKML, LRUW is raffling two VIP tickets to the Stars & Guitars concert on November 11th in Fayetteville. Becoming a Fair Share donor means pledging just one hour's pay per month for a year to support LRUW, and it puts your name in the running for these exciting prizes.

Hurricane Helene Relief Fund

In the wake of Hurricane Helene, LRUW has established the Hurricane Helene Relief Fund to provide urgent support to affected communities. Donations to the fund allow United Way teams in impacted areas to respond to immediate needs and continue assisting as challenges evolve in the coming weeks. Donations can be mailed to PO Box 2652, Lumberton, NC 28359, or made online through the Donate button.

Dillon Jack-O-Lantern Jubilee

Join the LRUW staff at the Dillon Jack-O-Lantern Jubilee on Friday, October 25th from 6:00 PM to 9:00 PM. Stop by the United Way booth to register your child(ren) for Dolly Parton's Imagination Library and pick up a treat—no tricks! It's a fun and festive event for the whole family.

Community Engagement and Events

Lumber River United Way is committed to fostering community engagement. Here are some upcoming events where you can participate or volunteer:

Dillon Jack-O-Lantern Jubilee - Friday, October 25, 2024

Bladenboro Beast Fest - Saturday, October 26, 2024

Adopt-A-Highway - Friday, November 1, 2024

Lumberton Christmas Parade - Saturday, November 23, 2024

For those interested in volunteering at any of these events, please contact Director of Community Impact Tomeika Munn at 910-739-4249 ext. 102.

Community Resources and Programs

LRUW's On The Spot program is tackling period poverty by providing feminine hygiene products to local schools and nonprofits. In 2024 alone, they have distributed 5,136 kits, totaling 102,720 pads, making a huge impact in the community.

Additionally, LRUW is proud of the success of the McKinney-Vento Initiative, which supports homeless students in Bladen County Schools, Hoke County Schools, and Public Schools of Robeson County. This vital initiative ensures that every child has the resources they need to thrive.

Your financial support is essential in sustaining these programs.

For more information or to donate, visit www.lumberriveruw.org or call 910-739-4249.

The post Lumber River United Way 2024 Campaign Kicks Off with Exciting Prizes and Community Initiatives appeared first on .

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Blowing Rock hotels provide housing for locals, emergency personnel

October 11, 2024 | Blowing Rocket, The (Blowing Rock, NC) Author: Nick Fogleman| Section: Blowingrocket | 423 Words OpenURL Link

BLOWING ROCK — The town of Blowing Rock avoided the worst of Hurricane Helene, and hotels have since become a hub for housing those impacted by the storm and the emergency personnel who have poured into the area.

Many hotels hope this will reduce Hurricane Helene's impact on travel during what is typically the busiest time of the year in Blowing Rock.

"This is going to make a difference for us for the remainder of the year," General Manager of Meadowbrook Inn, Ali Borchardt said. "Our hotel is mostly occupied by energy workers right now."

As cancellations struck hotels over the weekend of Helene, bookings began to come in from those impacted by the storm as they sought housing and resources.

"We've seen a real fluctuation of customers here," Chris Valet, whose family owns the Homestead Inn, said. "We were slammed this weekend with people just trying to get hot water and electricity."

Many of the hotels have reduced their rates to allow locals who were impacted by the storm to stay there.

"This is usually the busiest and most expensive time," owner of the Hemlock Inn Bryan Summers said. "You can't get them in on your tourist rates because some people lost everything."

After power and water returned to the area and people began to make their way home, hotels found themselves filled with a different group of people. The town became a vital source of housing for the medical professionals, disaster staff, and linemen who had poured into the region.

"If it wasn't for hospital staff and emergency crew, we would have lost a lot of customers right now." Valet said.

"This time of the year, our rates are the highest, and right now, we've dropped the rates to the same as off-season."

Hotels have reported that most of the cancellations so far have been in the first half of October, but with many of the major fall events being canceled, they hope the storm won't impact their business for much longer.

"Getting into the middle of the month, we're still pretty good," Summers said. "But there's not going to be a Valle Crucis Fair, there's not going to be an Art in the Park. It's gonna be tough. This is how we make it through the winter."

Other hotels face similar challenges as October events and attractions are big business in Blowing Rock.

"I'm hoping the second half of October is good. I'm hoping some of the events will get going.'" Valet said. "Something like this has never really happened, and it's great to see a small town really come together."

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Nick Fogleman, 'Blowing Rock hotels provide housing for locals, emergency personnel', *Blowing Rocket, The* (online), 11 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C44A25B93ED0D0



Best Friends mobile clinic to offer free services to pets and owners impacted by Helene in western North Carolina

October 11, 2024 | Carteret County News-Times, The (Morehead City, NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: News Times | 370 Words
OpenURL Link

WESTERN NC — As Florida assesses the damage caused by Hurricane Milton, many communities in western North Carolina, Georgia, and Tennessee are still reeling from the devastation of Hurricane Helene.

To continue supporting the people and pets impacted by Helene, Best Friends Animal Society, a leading national animal welfare organization working to end the killing of dogs and cats in America's shelters, will launch The Hurricane Helene Relief Clinic, a free mobile vet, in Western North Carolina on Oct. 13.

Best Friends will offer free vaccinations, basic wellness care, routine injury care, and medications for dogs and cats in parts of the state where veterinary centers and shelters are still closed or working at limited capacity.

The Best Friends mobile vet clinic will operate Oct. 13 – Nov. 15. During that time, the clinic will take turns popping up at least two days a week at Heart of the Foothills Animal Rescue in Rutherford County and two days a week at Yancey County Humane Society in Yancey County.

Below are the pop-up locations, along with the first week's schedule:

Heart of the Foothills Animal Rescue in Rutherford County

Address: 380 US-221, Rutherfordton, NC 28139

Starting Dates: October 13, 14, 18 (subject to change)

Time: 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. (subject to change)

Yancey County Humane Society in Yancey County

Address: 211 Kind Hearts Wy, Burnsville, NC 28714

Starting Dates: October 15, 16, 19 (subject to change)

Time: 10:30 a.m. - 4 p.m. (subject to change)

The schedule will be subject to change based on community needs, so all are encouraged to visit the shelters' Facebook pages listed above to verify prior to arrival. Pets will be treated on a first come, first served basis; no appointments are required.

Donated by Providence Animal Center and Fido Fixers, the Best Friends mobile Hurricane Helene Relief Clinic is currently making its way from Pennsylvania to North Carolina, helmed by a group of volunteer veterinarians from the Massachusetts SPCA. Once in North Carolina, MSPCA vets, in collaboration with local veterinary staff coordinated by Brother Wolf, will get the clinic up and running for its first day of service.

The Best Friends mobile vet clinic is being funded by Best Friends' dedicated fundraiser, which has raised \$400,000 to date, along with donations from the Massachusetts SPCA Disaster Relief Fund.

• Citation (aglc Style)

Staff Writer, 'Best Friends mobile clinic to offer free services to pets and owners impacted by Helene in western North Carolina', Carteret County News-Times, The(online), 11 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C29F7A684B7DA0>



Governor Cooper announces federal employment and training grant for North Carolina Commerce Department to support Helene economic recovery

October 11, 2024 | Carteret County News-Times, The (Morehead City, NC) Author: NEWS-TIMES | Section: News Times | 520 Words
OpenURL Link

RALEIGH — Governor Roy Cooper announced Friday that North Carolina has received approval from the United States Department of Labor for an initial grant of \$10 million to provide jobs and training services in areas that were severely impacted by Hurricane Helene.

"The impacts from Hurricane Helene have been catastrophic for Western North Carolina, causing immense damage to many communities and hurting our state's economy as well," said Governor Cooper. "As we continue our unprecedented response effort to surge resources into affected areas, this grant from our federal partners will help provide critical jobs and training services to folks who need them. We're grateful for the Biden-Harris Administration's commitment to helping our state rebuild and recover from this storm."

The North Carolina Department of Commerce's Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS) requested the funds. Approximately \$2 million will be made available immediately, and the remainder will be distributed as needed to support workforce development efforts in the months to come. DWS is eligible to apply for funding beyond the initial \$10 million as needed for additional support.

"We look forward to using these resources to support disaster relief and recovery by connecting people who need work with organizations that need workers," said N.C. Commerce Secretary Machelle Baker Sanders. "The challenges facing the communities of western North Carolina are immense, but our people are resilient, and together, we will rebuild."

The 25 counties included in this Disaster Recovery Dislocated Worker Grant are: Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Clay, Cleveland, Gaston, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Lincoln, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Transylvania, Watauga, Wilkes and Yancey counties. These counties were declared eligible for certain types of assistance through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Pending federal approval, the area of the grant will expand to include Mecklenburg and Swain counties, which were recently added to the major disaster declaration by federal authorities.

Through the two-year grant, eligible residents of those counties will be employed in jobs that support either cleanup and recovery from the storm's devastation or humanitarian assistance to residents of the affected areas. Supported by the Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act, Dislocated Worker Grants like this one fund temporary jobs in response to large, unexpected events that cause significant job losses. Participants in the grant would be employed for up to 12 months. They may potentially work for nonprofit organizations, state or local government agencies, or private businesses engaged in relevant disaster-recovery work.

In addition to temporary employment, this grant can support employment and training services that help people find new jobs and pay for workforce training – at community colleges, for example.

Workers may be eligible for the grant by being temporarily or permanently laid off as a consequence of the hurricane, or by meeting certain other criteria.

In partnership with various local workforce development boards, DWS has administered several different grants of this type in recent years. The most recent national dislocated worker grant for a storm in North Carolina was approved in the aftermath of Hurricane Florence in 2018.

To apply for the Hurricane Helene dislocated worker grant program, residents should contact their local NCWorks

Career Center. Contact information is available at www.ncworks.gov.

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North Carolina Community College System, John M. Belk Endowment partner to provide \$2 million in Hurricane Helene relief for Western NC colleges

October 11, 2024 | Carteret County News-Times, The (Morehead City, NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: News Times | 412 Words
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RALEIGH — Following Hurricane Helene's devastating impact on Western North Carolina, the John M. Belk Endowment (JMBE) has committed \$2 million in funding to support students, faculty, staff and communities in their recovery efforts in partnership with the N.C. Community College System (NCCCS). This funding will address immediate needs and lay the groundwork for long-term resilience across the region.

The \$2 million allocation will provide vital assistance to the 14 community colleges located within the emergency declaration zone as follows.

Nearly \$300,000 in Direct Support: The John M. Belk Endowment will disburse \$280,000 in discretionary funding, offering \$20,000 to each of the 14 impacted colleges to help meet urgent local needs. These funds will be made available to the colleges within the next two weeks.

More than \$1.7 million in Flexible Support: Additional funds will support a variety of needs as identified by the system and colleges. This includes wrap-around services such as transportation, childcare, food assistance, and mental health support, as well as strategic consulting for emergency response. Over 2025 and 2026, flexible funding will be available for continued recovery and rebuilding efforts.

NCCCS President Dr. Jeff Cox expressed his gratitude for the Endowment's quick and generous response.

"The John M. Belk Endowment's commitment serves as a vital lifeline for our colleges and sets a standard for public-private partnerships in these challenging times," said Dr. Jeff Cox, System President. "With many hands working tirelessly to address the immediate needs of organizations across western North Carolina, we are fortunate to have this partnership and funding in place. It ensures our students and staff receive swift, flexible support to maintain the delivery of quality education throughout the recovery period."

MC Belk Pilon, President and Board Chair of the John M. Belk Endowment, said she hopes the investment helps western North Carolina communities return "stronger than ever."

"The Belk Endowment is honored to announce this wide ranging, multi-year investment in North Carolina community colleges," Belk Pilon said. "It is our hope these funds provide system and campus leaders with a surge of resources as the recovery effort unfolds over the coming days, months, and years. Our community colleges have already demonstrated their incredible resilience, and our team is proud to stand beside them now, and always."

Donations can also be made to the North Carolina Community College System's statewide Hurricane Helene Relief Fund. To learn more about the system's response and resources for Helene victims, visit the system's website.

For more information, contact Nathan Hardin, NCCCS Executive Director of Communications, at hardinn@nccommunitycolleges.edu.

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Helene presents leaders with a choice on Western NC schools

October 11, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The (NC) Author: Bryan Proffitt | Section: Editorial/Opinion | 668 Words Page: 9A OpenURL Link

As the tragedy facing Western North Carolina continues to unfold, our state faces a critical choice about its future. As public school educators, we know that challenging life events like divorce or the loss of a loved one can stunt a student's learning, growth and happiness. Young people living in the wake of Hurricane Helene's havoc will face immeasurable stress, as will the public school staff who love and serve them. In the coming months, our state's elected leaders have the ability to relieve a great deal of that stress.

For years, members of the North Carolina Association of Educators have advocated for resources to remediate crumbling infrastructure in our schools across the state. From sweaty trailers, freezing classrooms, and libraries with mold, we have asked for those resources because our students deserve better. Our public schools are the centers of our communities.

Beyond the bonds we build at Friday night games and Saturday performances, our public schools serve as sites of refuge when things go wrong. Throughout our mountain region, we have seen neighbors gathering at public schools for showers, water and cell service. Educators have called through class rosters, offering support and love to students and their families. Public schools in counties around the state have already started to welcome displaced families into their communities. Schools keep more of us connected on a regular basis than any other institution in our community. A storm won't change that.

This storm will, however, create a moment of choice for our elected leaders. We can keep neglecting our constitutionally-guaranteed public schools, or we can prioritize safe and stable public schools as we rebuild for the future.

We can start by protecting our public school employees. They need their pay, leave and benefits until it is safe to go back to work. They should be able to focus on rebuilding and supporting their families through this trauma, not stress over finances.

School districts should have what they need too. As we did during COVID, we can keep funding schools as their student populations fluctuate. Thousands of students will be displaced, and some will bounce from county to county as their families seek stability. Public schools, as the most stable institutions in our communities, need resources for the long haul. They need to be ready to welcome our kids home.

We also need the resources to help them thrive. Too many students and staff have been dealing with substandard schools. To serve as stable centers of our communities, we need modern, safe and sturdy schools that can withstand the kinds of disasters that Eastern North Carolina families have been accustomed to. Rebuilding schools with updated infrastructure, in and out of the current disaster area, keeps our kids and communities safer and invests in the future of our state. Legislative action can also provide free student meals.

Before Helene, the General Assembly was considering giving away more than \$400 million of public tax dollars this year, and more than \$4 billion over the decade, to private school vouchers. Those vouchers cannot be the priority right now. Instead, let's allocate those same resources to relief, rebuilding and resourcing safe and stable public schools as the center of Western North Carolina communities.

Every day, our students and staff accomplish incredible things in public schools across the state. In the coming months, many public school communities will accomplish more than they ever imagined. Not only will they serve every student, regardless of background, ability, or income, public schools will also keep our communities safe, our

families fed, and all of our lives a little more stable. Our kids deserve a strong and resilient state-let's rebuild Western North Carolina with a recognition that our public schools are at the heart of what makes that possible.

Bryan Proffitt is a high school history teacher in Durham and the North Carolina Association of Educators vice president.

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NC Gov. Cooper signs \$273M Helene relief bill into law. Here's how the money will be spent

October 11, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The (NC)

Author: Dawn Baumgartner Vaughan and Kyle Ingram; Staff Writer | Section: News | 1642 Words

Page: 10A OpenURL Link

RALEIGH 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.

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.

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.

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.

Reporters Luciana Perez Uribe Guinassi and Avi Bajpai contributed.

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

October 11, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The (NC)

Author: Chyna Blackmon; Staff Writer | Section: News | 832 Words

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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

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.

Blue Ridge Parkway

Latest update: Temporarily closed

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.

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.

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.

Tweetsie Railroad

Latest update: Temporarily closed

While storm cleanup continues from Helene, North Carolina's first theme park remains temporarily closed. A spokesperson for the park told The Observer that the park incurred some damage during the storm and flooding.

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.

"This community has always supported Tweetsie Railroad, and we want to do our part to give back in its time of need," Chris Robbins, president at Tweetsie Railroad, said in a statement.

"Many of our loyal customers have heard that Tweetsie Railroad incurred some damage during the hurricane and

flooding, and offered contributions to help the park get back in operation. We would much rather that they provide direct assistance to those who have a greater need than us."

An estimated reopening date has yet to be announced.

Chyna Blackmon: @chynablackmon

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Thousands in Western NC still without water after Helene

October 11, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The (NC)

Author: Mary Ramsey; Staff Writer | Section: News | 730 Words

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Extensive work remains to restore clean water access for North Carolina communities hit hard by Helene two weeks ago.

Repairs are underway across Western North Carolina, including the main city of Asheville's facilities, which serve more than 156,000 people in Buncombe and Henderson counties, according to the system's 2023 water quality report. Crews are trying to finish work that would normally take months or years on a much shorter timeline, Asheville Assistant City Manager Ben Woody said Wednesday.

At other public water systems throughout Western North Carolina, a variety of issues are stopping water restoration, according to state officials.

Even people with private wells need to take precautions to avoid health risks after Helene's flooding, officials say.

How many people in Western NC are without water?

About 3.7% of the region's public water systems, serving 24,330 people, were closed and not producing water as of Wednesday morning, according to the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality's tracker. An additional seven systems serving 238,967 people, including the City of Asheville's system, were down or limited due to water pressure problems.

Another eight systems had no power, and 48 systems serving tens of thousands were either running on back-up power or operated on stored water only.

Hundreds of thousands are under boil water advisories.

When will water be restored in Asheville, Western North Carolina?

Asheville's Mills River Water Plant is "fully operational," the city said Monday. That plant serves about 20% of the city's water system, according to the Asheville Citizen-Times.

But the North Fork Reservoir and its plant, which serves the other 80%, need more extensive and time-consuming repairs. City officials did not give an updated timeline Wednesday on when water would be restored but said previously it could be weeks.

Woody on Wednesday said crews are laying a new bypass line connecting North Fork's treatment plant to the water distribution system and hope to finish that by Friday. Boulders clogging pipes slowed down that project, he added.

"That's just the contingencies we have to be prepared for," he said.

Asheville also is working to repair distribution lines throughout the city, Woody said. The city is partnering with the Environmental Protection Agency and engineers to purify the water in the reservoir, which was contaminated by sediment during the flooding from Helene.

"When the storm came, it essentially flipped the reservoir," he said. "... All this sediment, pieces of clay particles, are now suspended in the water column."

Workers need to get much of the sediment out of the water before it goes through the treatment plant, Woody said. Not doing so could cause more damage that could take months to fix.

The city will also have to repressurize its system, which will likely lead to the discovery of more damage, Woody said.

"Even when the water is able to leave the North Fork treatment plant, the process of refilling thousands of miles of pipe is going to take time," he said.

Asheville's water system also serves parts of Black Mountain, Hendersonville, Woodfin and Weaverville.

Issues in other water systems include a lack of consistent power, storm debris that needs clearing and damaged distribution infrastructure such as pipes and pumps, said Josh Kastrinsky, spokesman for the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality.

"The spectrum of needed improvements is broad," he said.

What about well water?

Officials are also urging caution for those in Western North Carolina using well water after Helene.

Floodwater can contaminate wells with livestock waste, sewage, chemicals and other contaminants that can lead to illness, the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services advises.

Dug wells, bored wells and wells less than 50 feet deep are especially vulnerable to contamination, according to NCDHHS.

Property owners should reach out to their local health department, the NC State Laboratory of Public Health or their local county extension about getting their well water tested after flooding, the agency says. Additional testing may be needed if the well is near animal feeding operations, fields that use pesticides or industrial chemical factories.

Test kits will also be available for pick-up starting Thursday at 30 Valley St. in Asheville, county officials said at their Wednesday briefing.

NCDHHS also recommends property owners reach out to their local health department or a licensed well driller to "shock chlorinate" their well - a process that disinfects wells using liquid bleach or chlorine - after flooding.

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NCHSAA extends football season after Hurricane Helene

October 11, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The (NC) Author: Langston Wertz Jr.; Staff Writer | Section: Sports | 540 Words Page: 2B

The N.C. high school football season will extend a week after Hurricane Helene caused severe damages to many schools in the western part of the state.

The N.C. High School Athletic Association announced the change Wednesday, which was approved by its board of directors. The playoffs will begin on Nov. 15 and end with state championships on Dec. 20-21.

Originally, the playoffs were set to start on Nov. 8 and conclude on Dec. 13-14.

In addition, the NCHSAA board approved pushing most playoffs for fall sports back and approved one additional contest for all sports with a season limit. But that additional game - which could be added to avoid an open week at the end of the regular-season - must be approved by the NCHSAA.

That additional game cannot exceed daily or weekly game limit rules. It must also exceed the season limit for both participating schools. Lastly, that additional game cannot be entered into MaxPreps and will not count towards postseason qualifying.

The NCHSAA also said that, effective immediately, a minimum of 72 hours must occur between football games, a move that could allow schools to make up some missed contests.

"Changes to the fall calendar are difficult as well as complex but necessary," said NCHSAA President Dr. Stephen Gainey and NCHSAA Commissioner Que Tucker in a joint statement. "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."

Other changes announced:

- * The reporting deadline for boys' soccer was pushed back a week to 11:59 p.m. on Nov. 6. The first round will be Nov. 7, followed by rounds on Nov. 9, Nov. 12, Nov. 14 and Nov. 16. The regionals will now be played Nov. 19 with state finals on Nov. 22-23.
- * For girls' golf, the minimum number of 9-hole scores require to qualify for regionals was revised from five to three.
- * The girls' tennis regionals reporting deadline was extended to 11:59 p.m. on Oct. 14. Originally, that deadline was 3 p.m. Regional play is scheduled for Oct. 18-19. State finals are scheduled for Oct. 25-26.
- * The dual team tennis reporting deadline was moved from Oct. 10 to Oct. 17. The first round will begin Oct. 18 with state finals now on Nov. 9.
- * The volleyball reporting deadline was moved back to 11:59 p.m. on Oct. 19, instead of Oct. 16. The first round will now begin Oct. 22, instead of the original Oct. 19 date.

The remaining rounds will play on a more condensed schedule: Oct. 24, second round; Oct. 26, third round; Oct. 29, fourth round; Oct. 31, regional round.

The state finals will be held Nov. 2 as originally scheduled.

* Cross-country reporting deadline for regional qualifying was moved back to 11:59 p.m. on Oct. 22. It was originally scheduled for Oct. 19. The regionals will be held Oct. 26 with state finals Nov. 2.

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Luke Combs, Eric Church to play Helene benefit concert

October 11, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The (NC) Author: Théoden Janes; Staff Writer | Section: Living | 733 Words Page: 1C

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In the grand scheme of things, fellow North Carolina natives and country-music stars Luke Combs and Eric Church are happy to be co-headlining a concert at Bank of America Stadium later this month.

And, at the same time, they're unhappy about it - about why it's necessary to begin with, that is.

"I wish it had never happened," said Church, the 47-year-old Granite Falls native and 10-time-Grammy-nominated singer, speaking to The Charlotte Observer by Zoom Tuesday.

"I'm glad we can help, but ... I wish we were never here," Church said. "So now it's a matter of trying to figure out the best way that we can rebuild where we're both from ... the place that made us who we are as artists."

Monday, Church and Combs were announced as two of the headliners of a special benefit show on Oct. 26 that will help victims of Hurricane Helene in the Carolina region.

"I would love to be there right now chainsawing trees down, or whatever that may be. Just trying to figure out, in what way can we have the most impact, right?," added Combs, 34, who was born in Huntersville and raised in Asheville.

"Like Eric said, obviously, we wish that we didn't have to be even having this conversation. But we are. So I think that's where this concert comes in. This is something that we can do to make to make an impact."

Tickets for the "Concert for Carolina" will go on sale at 10 a.m. Thursday, with pricing to be announced. Church and Combs will be joined for the event by folk legend James Taylor, who has ties to Chapel Hill; bluegrass star Billy Strings, who has performed regularly in North Carolina; along with Keith Urban, Sheryl Crow, and Bailey Zimmerman.

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 event is the brainchild of Combs, himself a Grammy nominee responsible for hits like "Forever After All" and "Fast Car."

"I was just sitting at home and watching everything, and waiting to hear back from my friends and family, and I called this guy," he said, gesturing to Church. "He was my first call. I was like, I know he's gonna want to do something and step up. And I had the crazy idea of seeing if the Panthers would be willing to give us the stadium."

The David and Nicole Tepper Foundation - which owns the team and already had pledged more than \$3 million to those impacted by the deadly storm that swept through the Carolinas on Sept. 26 and 27 - was all-in.

"Then," Church added, "we both got on our phones and started texting people, calling people, trying to put what this thing was together. ... Normally, things like this - when you're talking about that kind of concert - take months to plan. We're literally trying to do it in days."

Combs said finding a "day that we're both available, and that the stadium's also open, and all those other artists are available, that's kind of a miracle in and of itself."

Meanwhile, Church last week released a new song, "Darkest Hour," that he said in a statement Friday was dedicated to "the unsung heroes, the people who show up when the world's falling apart." He pledged to donate all of his publishing royalties for the new song to hurricane relief efforts.

On Tuesday, he called the reaction to it "great."

"The biggest thing for me," Church said, "is keeping focus and giving awareness to what's happening in the area. 'Cause a lot of times when these disasters happen - and this is just historically - everybody pays attention for a month or however long. And then there's another thing."

But he said, "the rebuild in western North Carolina is not in months. It's in years. And we need to make sure we're keeping attention on that so that we can help and plan for that long-term, so that we can get that community back to where it was."

For more information on the show: concertforcarolina.com.

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Local T-shirt shop sales - go toward Hurricane Helene relief

October 11, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The (NC) Author: Heidi Finley; Staff Writer | Section: Living | 440 Words

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With widespread devastation in Western North Carolina from Hurricane Helene spurring relief efforts that will likely stretch for years, many in the Charlotte area are looking for ways to help and show their support.

One easy way to do that is to buy a shirt or sweatshirt. Many local and regional shops are selling apparel to donate funds to organizations working in storm-hit areas, and all you have to do is click "buy."

Here are a few options for hurricane relief items that you can check out:

The Bitter Southerner General Store

Location: Online

Funds from sales of The Bitter Southerners' The South - Disaster Relief Shirt will rotate over time, but right now the white T-shirts are benefiting World Central Kitchen.

Cost: \$38

[FEEDING THE COMMUNITY: Chef José Andrés and World Central Kitchen distribute thousands of meals in Western NC.]

Ellis + Olivia Ruth Boutique

Location: Online

Ellis + Olivia Ruth Boutique's Mountain Strong shirts showcase a blue mountain range image on a black T-shirt. Twenty percent of proceeds will go to those who have been affected by the hurricane.

Cost: \$25 (Note: They are currently sold out, but new orders are on the way.)

Glory Days Apparel

Location: 2202 Hawkins St, Charlotte, NC 28203

Glory Days' custom online exclusive Carolina Strong T-shirts and sweatshirts are available in multiple colors. Youth sizes are available, too. All proceeds from the items will benefit the NC Disaster Relief Fund.

Cost: \$34-\$70

Homewurk

Location: Online

Homewurk has offered a choice of three Carolina sweatshirts - with green, blue or brown writing - with 100% of proceeds going to Samaritan's Purse and Brother Wolf Animal Rescue. Online, you can select which organization you'd like your donations to go to.

Cost: \$38

McCall & Co.

Location: Online

McCall & Co. is offering black and gray Together We Rebuild shirts with your choice of locations, including Asheville, Swannanoa, Chimney Rock and other spots, plus a few Appalachia Strong selections. All proceeds go to Little River Baptist Church in Penrose, which is serving as a disaster relief feeding and distribution center. Shipping is available, but shirts will also be available for pickup at McCall Farm in Penrose.

Cost: \$20

Paw Mountain Designs

Location: Online

Paw Mountain Design's Western NC Relief collection offers gray and black T-shirts with your choice of multiple designs. Shipping is available, or you can pick up your purchase at Southern Grace Studios, 1207 Southern Grace Lane in Raleigh. All proceeds will be donated to community support and disaster relief.

Cost: \$20

Sycamore Cycles

Location: 112 Hendersonville Hwy, Pisgah Forest, NC 28768

Sycamore Cycles has created an oatmeal-colored Ride for WNC Helene Relief T-Shirt and a hat option, with 100 percent of the proceeds going to local charities dedicated to rebuilding Western North Carolina. Youth sizes are available, too.

Cost: \$24.99-\$29.99

Heidi Finley: @HWhiteFinley
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'It reinstills your faith in people.' What Western NC lawmakers say about Helene aftermath

October 11, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The (NC)

Author: Dawn Baumgartner Vaughan and Avi Bajpai; Staff Writer Section: News 1525 Words

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RALEIGH As North Carolina's 170 state lawmakers returned to Raleigh on Wednesday to pass a Hurricane Helene relief package, they brought stories of what they've seen, and what they want, in their devastated districts.

Here's what many in the self-described "mountain delegation" have said about Helene, and the response so far:

'A very isolating event'

* Republican Rep. Tim Moffitt, who represents Henderson, Polk and Rutherford counties:

"We've often complained here in Raleigh as the mountain delegation, that the mountains are often forgotten, that we're often overlooked, and that the rest of the state tends to be the beneficiary of all the efforts that begin here in Raleigh," Moffitt told reporters on Wednesday.

"We're different: We're mountain folks, we're tough, we're resilient, and we're uncomfortable in the spotlight, but it is needed. When you wake up, there's a total collapse of telecommunications, your power, your water, your sewer, your roads and your bridges. It is a very isolating event. This is something that is beyond description," he said.

On the Senate floor, Moffitt spoke extensively to thank everyone from both the public and private sectors for their help.

"It reinstills your faith in people," he said.

Moffitt talked about what happened right after the storm, for those left on their own and determining who they'll rely on for help.

"So who are you going to rely on? Go up in the mountains. Go listen to rednecks just like me. They're the first wave of first responders, with the chainsaws and with the 4-wheelers, and they're out in the hills and the hollers and they're checking on their neighbors. They're the ones that have the skid steers and the miniature trackhoes. They deploy themselves, and they get out there and they start working with their neighbors. And this is all while our first responders, our volunteer fire departments, our sheriff's departments are really trying to assess the scope of the need and how they're going deploy their assets in order to best serve our citizens," Moffitt said.

Others in the first wave included the faith community, he said, and local churches rose to the occasion.

"So all of this is going on while the bigger picture is starting to come together. So heartfelt gratitude for all of our our unofficial first responders, and thank you for being there. Our sheriffs and our deputies, they did a great job. Our volunteer fire departments, they did a great job, and they're still doing a great job, and we're doing our best to relieve them with volunteers from other parts of the state and other parts of the nation," he said.

Water treatment 'unsalvageable'

* Republican Sen. Ralph Hise of Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Caldwell, Haywood, Madison, Mitchell, Watauga and Yancey counties:

"This is by far the most devastating thing I've ever experienced. Many of the areas I represent - all the counties I

represent - have been devastated by the storm," Hise said.

"We've had entire counties without water, power, sewer, cell service. We've been trying to rescue areas - there's still areas you can't access unless you're on a motorcycle, unless you're on side-by-sides, communities that are tied off. We've had an incredible outpouring from so many communities across the state and others, but we're in a long term recovery ... Mitchell County, the water treatment system for the entire county, both towns - it's gone. It does not exist. It's unsalvageable. It's a four-year process to put a water treatment plant back in. We don't have a temporary solution to these things right now."

"People at the fire departments every day are having the first hot meal they've had in more than two weeks. We have a lot of things to ask for. I'm excited to be here today to see that we're asking as a community for the support of the state, and that the state of North Carolina is stepping up to do that initially. And so there's a lot of distrust in the areas I have, but I hope we can begin to show that North Carolina is stepping up with responsibility, and we are here," Hise said.

'FEMA showed up'

* Democratic Sen. Julie Mayfield of Buncombe County:

Mayfield said during the Senate floor debate 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.

People living 'up to the best versions of themselves'

* Democratic Rep. Caleb Rudow of Buncombe County:

"There have been a few moments in my life when I've been able to see people live up to the best versions of themselves, to step up to a tremendous challenge, to, regardless of the odds, run into danger to save the neighbor, and that is what I saw so many times over the past 12 days," Rudow said on the House floor.

"I saw neighbors helping neighbors. I saw first responders perform acts of heroism that were just incredible. I saw communities come together. I saw people drive from all over this country, and all over the world, to come and help us."

Rudow said the photos of the destruction "don't do it justice," and "don't show the terrifying power of this storm." He said that in some areas, flood waters rose 25 feet above normal levels.

As a point of illustrating that to his colleagues, Rudow told lawmakers to look up at the the blinds above the gallery in the House chamber.

"If you look, right up there to the top of those blinds, that is 25 feet high," Rudow said. "And you imagine that power in a river moving downstream, and that is a pressure washer that washes away houses, blows houses into bridges, that takes out the bridges, that destroys people's lives."

Heating, housing solutions needed

* Republican Rep. Dudley Greene of Avery, McDowell, Mitchell and Yancey counties:

"There was not a corner of my district that wasn't impacted, if not decimated, by this storm," Greene said.

"The injury has occurred, hopefully we are starting to get the bleeding stopped up that way. And this will be the first step for healing to begin. We still have people in shelters, so we're starting to look for what's a housing solution for folks up there, what's a heating solution for folks up there," he said.

'Thank God we have the rainy day fund'

* Republican Sen. Kevin Corbin of Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Jackson, Macon, Swain and Transylvania counties:

"I thank God we have the rainy day fund. I thank God it's there," Corbin said during the Senate floor debate on the bill. "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.

The \$273 million Hurricane Helene relief bill uses money from the Savings Reserve fund, which is also known as the rainy day fund.

'Start their lives over again'

* Republican Rep. Jennifer Balkcom, Henderson County:

"Back home, people are trying to start their lives over again," Balkcom said Wednesday.

"The lives in the mountains are different. We're strong, we're resilient. We will rebuild, absolutely, and a lot of times we hate asking for help. I know that myself, and I promise I wasn't going to cry, but people are still needing help, even though they don't ask for it. And this is just a start. This is a start to help give people what they need. Our community has come together. It's been such a blessing to see the strength that is out in Western North Carolina," she said.

She thanked everyone across the state who has helped, including those who sent supplies.

'Need to show folks that the government has their back'

* Democratic Rep. Lindsey Prather of Buncombe County:

Prather praised the response and coordination by officials at all levels of government.

She said lawmakers were in touch with and receiving updates from Gov. Roy Cooper, FEMA, the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services, and the military, but she highlighted officials at the local level too, including the Buncombe County emergency management director, local fire chiefs, and volunteers.

"This is personal, and y'all know that," Prather said. "Western North Carolina is a special place, unlike any other. The people are creative, and caring, and resourceful, and resilient. The mountains are homey, and lush, and lifegiving. Each little community has its own character and style, but we are all mountain folk."

Prather said everyone had stepped up to help however they could, including local radio stations that provided news, but also some "musical levity" to their communities, restaurants that immediately began to give away what they could, and neighbors who checked in on each other before emergency officials could even reach them.

"We need to show folks that the government has their back, right now, at the time they need it most," she said.
"Not just in my district, but in all of Western North Carolina, the vacation land that people watched get ravaged on TV."

"It's a permanent home to many, many people. Please don't forget us."

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What people in Western North Carolina had to say as supplies arrived by helicopter

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Thursday, Oct. 3, was the first time Loretta Zahn, 60, was able to speak with her husband since the storm knocked out cell phone service and electricity in Mitchell County. It was difficult, she said.

She and her neighbors watched as helicopters landed near their homes in the Poplar area to deliver food, water and a temporary satellite that would give the couple the connection they needed to confirm they were each safe.

Like many other areas in Western North Carolina, Poplar is depending on these airdrops from the National Guard, or Amazon in the case of the satellite, as many roads were destroyed by Hurricane Helene and have cut them off.

Zahn stayed in Spruce Pine for several days after the storm hit because the roads weren't clear.

"It was treacherous," she said. "It was like a war zone."

The Charlotte Observer spoke with people in two communities hit by Helene's flooding while traveling with the National Guard as soldiers delivered supplies, flying from Salisbury.

Clearing the roads has "all been done by the locals right here," said Jody Murphy, 52, who watched the helicopters arrive with his son Jett, 24, and Zahn. People used their machinery, he said.

Murphy said his home wasn't destroyed but his property was.

On the day of the storm, it took three hours for his other son to get home, Murphy said.

"I had to go out and help him home," he said. "Every way we went was washed out, but we finally got him home safe. And then the eye of the storm come over less than an hour later."

He said he was thankful for the National Guard bringing supplies, but felt frustrated by the response, or lack thereof, by the state and his county officials.

When National Guardsmen or other disaster response teams land in towns, they make lists of supplies the town needs.

Murphy and Zahn said they hoped the National Guard would bring heaters to keep them warm as temperatures begin to drop, as well as generators and a way to cook food.

"We need diesel fuel for our workers. Our guys are using their own equipment," Murphy said. "We need regular fuel for generators."

They've been told it would take about eight months before things were back to "normal," but they didn't seem confident about that outlook.

'God is good, mountain people are strong'

Earlier on Thursday, residents in Buladean, another small community in Mitchell County, watched as the National Guard landed on a baseball field to deliver food and water.

Ray Honeycutt, 70, said the days since the storm had been tough, but watching the helicopters land and take off with his 3-year-old grandson Mason brought excitement.

He said his home was undamaged by the storm and he didn't lose any loved ones.

The lifelong Buladean resident said the experience brought him back to his childhood.

"I was raised up without any water in the house," he said. "I didn't have no inside plumbing or nothing."

David Caughroun, 76, who has lived in the area most of his life, watched the helicopter land. He, like many others, began volunteering to clean the area as soon as the storm passed.

Caughroun said he didn't know many of the people volunteering alongside him but still felt close with them.

"It's been rough, but could have been a lot worse," said Caughroun, whose home was undamaged and loved ones were safe. "God took care of us."

One man bagged debris kicked up by the helicopter's propellers. He said local people are using chainsaws to cut fallen trees and clear roads.

Like Poplar, people in Buladean requested specific items: baby formula, insulin, and chainsaws.

The time it will take for the area to recover seems unclear, residents said. They've heard one to three months.

But Becky Garland and Kathy Jenkins, friends who were helping clean up the debris in Buladean, said they're confident their community will pull through.

Garland's homes and loved ones were not harmed by the storm. Jenkins' home and loved ones were safe, but the storm destroyed her son's home, she said.

Despite that, they both remain optimistic.

"God is good, mountain people are strong," Garland said. "We need help, but we'll be all right."

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Did NC's Ted Budd and Dan Bishop vote against disaster relief? We explain.

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Author: Danielle Battaglia; Staff Writer | Section: News | 601 Words

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Sen. Ted Budd and Rep. Dan Bishop have been criticized for voting against funding the Federal Emergency Management Agency ahead of Hurricane Helene.

The storm made landfall on Sept. 26 as a Category 4 hurricane and tore up the East Coast, leaving a path of devastation behind.

Helene killed more than 230 people, decimated communities across Western North Carolina as well as other states, and will cost well into the \$100 billion range in relief aid.

And just days before the storm hit, Congress went home while ignoring requests for billions of dollars of additional disaster relief funding.

But that's not what Budd and Bishop are being criticized for. The two Republicans are under fire for voting against a continuing resolution to keep the government funded at its current levels through Dec. 20. The CR refilled FEMA's \$20 billion budget.

Eighteen senators and 82 House members voted against the package.

Vice President Kamala Harris' campaign and others have used the vote to criticize Budd, Bishop and the other 98 lawmakers for voting against disaster relief funding.

But is that a fair assessment?

Voting against appropriations

"Appropriations bills are large, unwieldy pieces of legislation by design," said Chris Cooper, a political science professor from Western Carolina University. "While it is true that the bill they voted against would have included FEMA funding, it also would have included a host of other provisions that have absolutely nothing to do with emergency management or disaster relief."

After the bill passed the House, 341-82, Bishop quickly took to social media to explain his vote. Bishop said he won't vote to spend billions on things the country doesn't need when he has concerns about the election and "our debt is sky-rocketing."

"Today's vote sets up another monstrous December omnibus and worsens the swamp spending addiction," Bishop wrote.

Bishop is running for attorney general against fellow Rep. Jeff Jackson.

Budget negotiations

This session of Congress will go down in history as one of the least productive on record. The first year was mired by Republican infighting, and that largely stemmed from negotiations over 12 appropriation bills.

The infighting got so severe that it cost House Speaker Kevin McCarthy his leadership role, caused him to resign

from Congress, led to Rep. Patrick McHenry, a Republican from North Carolina, becoming an interim speaker for the first time in the nation's history, and then set up three weeks of Republicans trying to elect a new speaker.

Most of those events happened in October 2023, but it wasn't until March that Congress passed those 12 appropriation bills that make up the government's budget.

And now they have to do it again.

Budd's vote

As for Budd, he didn't put out a public statement following the vote, but his staff provided an explanation in an email to McClatchy Tuesday.

"Senator Budd wanted to see reform to the broken budget process instead of setting in motion a process that will lead to a massive take-it-or-leave-it spending bill before Christmas," said Curtis Kalin, Budd's spokesman. "... when the government overspends on things it shouldn't, it crowds out the real responsibilities it has, like disaster relief."

Disaster relief

Since Helene hit Western North Carolina, Budd has been one of the lawmakers who immediately called for relief to those affected.

He and Sen. Thom Tillis wrote a joint letter asking for congressional leadership to consider bringing members of Congress back during their October recess to pass disaster relief aid.

FEMA officials stated that the agency has the money for an immediate response and recovery to Helene.

But long-term, both Republicans and Democrats, including President Joe Biden, have called on Congress to do more.

And overnight, Hurricane Milton made landfall in Florida, causing widespread damage and flooding in its path.

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NC Republicans suddenly are OK with easing voting rules

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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 midelection 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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