

## Pilots fly NC nursing home residents with dementia to safety as medicine runs low

October 6, 2024 | Herald-Sun, The (Durham, NC) Author: Julia Coin; Staff Writer | Section: News | 458 Words

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More than 100 nursing home residents - most with dementia - were hoisted onto helicopters and flown across 80 miles of North Carolina's damaged interior on Tuesday.

They'd been stuck in Burnsville since Friday, when Helene hit the southeastern United States with a wrath that hasn't been seen in some areas for more than a century.

Volunteer pilots made about 20 trips in their own helicopters - from two-seaters to Black Hawks - flying northwest from Hickory to rescue 76 residents in Yancey House, Mitchell House and a few others nearby.

The U.S. Army - via a Chinook marked by an image of singer Lionel Richie's face, with a troop from Davenport, Iowa, inside - made one trip. It was the last trip.

They had 34 seatbelts on board. Luckily, said Capt. Cody Nolan, there were only 34 residents left.

"That's because I prayed," said Lindsey Duch, the vice president of health policy and innovation at ALG Senior, a company with about 30 nursing homes from Charlotte to Asheville. "We had our own pilots going out and getting people."

She worked with Operation Airdrop, a nonprofit that sends volunteer pilots with personal aircraft into disaster zones. The pilots were set to rescue 100 from an orphanage Tuesday, said Matt McSwain, the organization's Hickory coordinator, but when they heard the kids got replenished food and water, they pivoted.

The seniors would soon run out of resources - namely medicine.

Shana Pitts, another ALG Senior executive, said they'd been waiting for government help since Thursday.

"It was a little frustrating," she said.

But the furrowed, concerned look disappeared from her face when residents wheeled up to the sliding airport doors in Hickory. One held a Bible in her lap, atop of a flowery, ankle-length skirt.

The nurses welcomed patients with chipper smiles.

"Hey, sweet lady! How're you?" one asked as a woman in a pink hummingbird shirt with long gray hair rolled up.

"Alright, now go steal some snacks," another said after checking one diabetic man's sugar.

Inside the terminal, on a table with a leafy fake plant, sat an opened pack of Lance peanut butter crackers, the kind grandma might have at the bottom of her big purse.

Then McSwain got another call. This one was from the N.C. State Highway Patrol.

"They just gave me a mission," he said. "Why is the highway patrol calling me? I should be calling them."

North Carolina Sens. Thom Tillis and Ted Budd stopped in at the Hickory airport early Tuesday. They offered verbal

support, McSwain said, which was more than some parts of the government.

Julia Coin: 7042189350, @juliamcoin

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## Anti-Trump ad hits home for Franklin Graham

October 6, 2024 | Herald-Sun, The (Durham, NC) Author: Issac Bailey| Section: Editorial/Opinion| 582 Words Page: 20A OpenURL Link

Franklin Graham doesn't like the way a political group advocating for Vice President Kamala Harris is using his iconic father's image and words. The Rev. Billy Graham I grew up with wouldn't like the way his son has politicized the faith to which the senior Graham dedicated his life.

No matter what happens at the ballot box this November, the damage men like Franklin Graham have done to the image of Christianity will be long lasting and not easily repaired. The irony is that the political ads that have so upset the junior Graham makes clear why.

One of the ads begins with an old clip of Billy Graham trying to spread the Gospel while standing before the large crowds he was known to routinely attract.

"But you must realize that in the last days, the times will be full of danger," he preached. "Men will become utterly self-centered and greedy for money."

The power of the ad, though, is what comes next. It cuts to a clip of Trump.

"My whole life I've been greedy, greedy, greedy," Trump says. "I grabbed all the money I could get. I'm so greedy."

The ad shows several clips of Graham while juxtaposing them with Trump.

"They will be proud and abusive...," Graham preached in the ad.

"They will be treacherous, reckless, and arrogant... loving what gives them pleasure instead of loving God... maintain a facade of religion, but their lives deny the truth."

Each time, it cuts to Trump declaring he is "the chosen one" or replaying the infamous "Access Hollywood" tape in which he brags about casually sexually assaulting women.

In another ad, Graham preaches about the importance of forgiveness while Trump says he's never asked for God's forgiveness.

"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see if they are from God," another begins before showing Trump bragging that he could shoot someone on Fifth Avenue and not lose support.

It's a damning indictment not only of Trump, but of Franklin Graham, a man who has fallen in line behind the type of charlatan his father warned us about.

Instead of being convicted and learning from his mistakes, Franklin Graham has condemned the producers of the ads. In August, he took to "X," formerly known as Twitter, to berate Evangelicals for Harris, a group that said this week Graham has tried to get the ads pulled.

"Maybe they don't know that my father appreciated the conservative values and policies of President Donald Trump in 2016, and if he were alive today, my father's views and opinions would not have changed," Franklin Graham wrote.

If true, Billy Graham wasn't the man I thought he was, not the man my mama made me and my siblings sit down to watch on TV like millions of others throughout the South.

If true, Billy Graham isn't worthy of the reverence many of us have long had for a man we've believed tried to lead people to God even when we disagreed with some of his teachings.

If true, Billy Graham wasn't as authentic as he presented himself for most of his life.

That's what Franklin Graham doesn't seem to understand, or doesn't care to. His embrace of Trump is denigrating his father's name, and this country's largest religion.

While there are plenty of people involved with his non-profit Samaritan's Purse performing great deeds, including in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene, that can't make up for how Franklin Graham has defiled the faith he says he loves by worshiping Trump.

Issac Bailey is a McClatchy opinion writer in North Carolina and South Carolina.

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# They were in the basement frantically preparing for a flood - Then the landslide hit

October 6, 2024 | Herald-Sun, The (Durham, NC)

Author: Martha Quillin; Staff Writer | Section: News | 736 Words

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BARNARDSVILLE Kelli Ball felt the landslide in the bones of her chest before she could see it.

She and her husband, Dakota, were in the basement of their house on Stony Fork Road trying to move stuff out of the way of the rising water. The water was coming from the creek behind the house, normally a little trickle way down the hill, that had climbed the bank Friday morning with all the rain from the remnants of Hurricane Helene.

Their boys, Canaan, 8, and Macon, 4, were upstairs on the couch.

It was around 10 a.m. The family had been awake since 5 a.m., and all morning, the mountains around them had been groaning in the deluge.

"If you've not experienced a flood in the mountains, you just hear these boulders rolling and trees breaking and it just rumbles in the mountains," Kelli said. "It echoes everywhere. We had been hearing that all morning."

The flooding was happening all around Barnardsville, a farming community in Buncombe County north of Asheville along the normally friendly Big Ivy River and laced with creeks that come down from the hills. The Big Ivy itself was coming out of its banks and spreading all over the lowland, snatching double-wide mobile homes and stick-built houses off their foundations and sending them downstream in shards. It emptied out a catfish pond. It blew out a wall of the local diner.

In the Balls' basement, the water was just coming up too fast, and Kelli told Dakota, "We've got to go. We've got to go!" And ran upstairs.

That's when she felt the vibration in her breastbone.

She reached the living room, with its big windows that look across Stony Fork Road at a hay field, then up at a mountain that's part of Pisgah National Forest, just as the mountain turned loose a river of boulders and trees and mud

It was heading hundreds of yards downhill, coming for the Balls' house, with the potential to also take out Dakota's parents' house, on one side of them, or his grandmother's, on the other.

They had picked this site when they built the home in 2019 because it was on high ground.

"We thought it was the safest place," Dakota said.

When Kelli saw - and felt - the liquified mountain coming at her family, she screamed at Dakota, who was still in the basement: "Landslide!"

She grabbed the boys and went out the front door just as a whole tree slammed into the house, jamming under the porch.

"It was like a runaway freight train coming down that mountain," Kelli said.

The boys jumped from the porch and first the family started to run to the right, "but the slide kept coming," so they

decided to go the other way. By then, Dakota's parents had run outside. Separated by the flow of mud and debris several feet deep running between their two houses, "We formed a human chain and just passed our babies across that river," as rocks and branches ran across their bare feet in the flowing mud.

Dakota Ball said the slide opened up two new springs in the front yard, and he and others had used a track hoe to reroute them into one stream running beside the driveway and toward the creek behind the house. The couple had stripped the drywall in the basement, and with the help of people of Barnardsville, had cut enough of the scattered trees to move around in the yard.

A few miles down the road, in Barnardsville proper, volunteers were sorting donations of canned corn and taco shells and bottled water at the old four-bay building that used to house the volunteer fire department. The community, routed by water, already was rebuilding its washed-out roads using equipment on loan from Brock Mountain, a local construction company.

Owners of ATVs were shuttling residents where they needed to go because cars and pavement had been washed away.

"We're lucky," Kelli Ball said. "We're alive."

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p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C0CDDB6B5AD0E0>



# Appalachian State falls to Marshall in first football game in 16 days

October 6, 2024 | Hickory Daily Record (NC) Author: TOM FOREMAN JR. Staff Reporter | Section: News | 533 Words OpenURL Link

It may have been a lot to ask of Appalachian State to play a football game, but the Mountaineers have been through a lot already in a short period of time.

Hurricane Helene carved a devastating path through western North Carolina, and Boone was not spared. City streets were flooded, cell phone service was lost and so was power. The Mountaineers were scheduled to play Liberty about 24 hours after Helene had caused so much destruction, but the game was canceled. Classes at App State were suspended as students tried to put their lives back together in the storm's aftermath.

The football team regrouped in the midst of the chaos and traveled to play Marshall on Saturday. The Mountaineers outgained the Thundering Herd and picked up more first downs. But App State was assessed 15 penalties for 158 yards, and an old bugaboo — the explosive play — reared its head once again in a 52-37 loss in Huntington, West Virginia, on Saturday.

Marshall had eight plays that gained 10 yards or more, and of those, two covered 15 yards or more. One was a 75-yard pass play from Braylon Braxton to Jordan Houston at the start of the second quarter. There was also a 26-yard Braxton pass to Charles Montgomery for another score late in the third quarter. The first touchdown pass erased a 10-7 Appalachian State lead, and the other extended Marshall's lead to 45-24.

"Very disappointed," Appalachian State coach Shawn Clark said. "This is not what we came down here for, to play like we did. Too many mistakes on both sides of the ball. Too many penalties. You have almost 500 yards of offense but you have two turnovers. We have to limit the big plays. We can't give up those plays and be successful."

App State erased an early 7-0 deficit and climbed into a 10-7 lead after a Jackson Moore 42-yard field goal midway through the first quarter and a Kanye Roberts 10-yard touchdown run at the start of the second quarter. But Marshall scored on their next two possessions and threw in a pick-six to leave the Mountaineers in a hole they couldn't emerge from.

Joey Aguilar threw for 293 yards and two touchdowns, but he had the two interceptions that Clark alluded to. Aguilar added 55 yards rushing to lead the ground game.

Clark said the ride back to Boone on Saturday night would include a film session to figure out what needs to be fixed. But he acknowledged that it's been a tough go of it for more than a week, and one way to help in the healing and recovery in western North Carolina would be to get a win. App State gets that chance next weekend at Louisiana. After an open week, officials have to decide whether they will play the scheduled home game against Georgia State in Winston-Salem or in Charlotte, primarily to divert traffic away from Boone as it continues its cleanup.

"It has been tough. You can't deny that a lot of people lost everything in Boone and Watauga County," Clark said.
"Those fans, those residents of Watauga County have a lot of pride in Appalachian State football. We have to
eventually come through for them."

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#### MARION FOOD LION REOPENS

October 6, 2024 | McDowell News, The (Marion, NC) Author: MIKE CONLEY nconley@mcdowellnews.com| Section: News| 235 Words OpenURL Link

A week after it was under water due to Hurricane Helene, the Food Lion grocery store in Marion will reopen for business Friday afternoon.

Lisa Crawford, a spokesperson for the Food Lion chain, said the Marion store will reopen Friday, Oct. 4.

"In the aftermath of Hurricane Helene, Food Lion expresses our deepest sympathies and support to our neighbors affected in the towns and cities we serve," Crawford said. "We know our neighbors depend on us to provide fresh, affordable groceries.

"We thank our customers for their support while we work to ensure our neighbors have what they need to nourish their families. While the availability of some items in the store may be impacted, we remain committed to restocking our store shelves as guickly as we can."

Food Lion said the store, located at 1210 N.C. 70 West in Marion, can accept credit card or cash transactions. The store staff has tested the system and it's working, Crawford said.

She added that Friday's hours, 4-9 p.m., were considered a soft opening, and the store will resume regular hours as it moves forward. The store's regular hours are 7 a.m. to 11 p.m.

Crawford said the company is bringing in merchandise to make sure that the store is stocked as before.

"We thank our customers for their support while we work to ensure our neighbors have what they need to nourish their families."

Lisa Crawford, a spokesperson for the Food Lion chain

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# Welch, Rawlings performing in Schaefer Center on Oct. 17

October 6, 2024 | Mountain Times, The (Boone, NC) Author: JERRY SNOW| Section: Mountaintimes | 218 Words OpenURL Link

BOONE — The Schaefer Center for the Performing Arts (733 Rivers St.), on the campus of Appalachian State University, will host Gillian Welch & David Rawlings on Oct. 17 starting at 7:30 p.m.

Tickets are \$25 for students and range from \$40 to \$60 for adults.

Gillian Welch's career spans over 25 years, and she and her musical partner David Rawlings are a pillar of the modern acoustic music world, according to schaefercenter.appstate.edu.

Rolling Stone called them the "protectors of the American folk song."

Welch gained recognition when Emmylou Harris recorded a cover of "Orphan Girl."

Welch released a Grammy-nominated album in 1998, a duet with Rawlings.

For her work as executive producer as well as a performer and songwriter on the eight times platinum O Brother, Where Art Thou? soundtrack, Welch was awarded the Album of the Year Grammy, and was simultaneously nominated for her own Time (The Revelator), which Rolling Stone called one of the best albums of the 2000s. Time is considered by some critics to be one of the best albums of all time. This release was their first on their own record label, Acony Records.

Due to flooding from Hurricane Helene, the Schaefer Center had to cancel its Oct. 3 show "Ailey II: The Next Generation of Dance."

To learn about upcoming events at the Schaefer Center, go to schaefercenter.appstate.edu (c) 2024 The Mountain Times. All rights reserved.

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## Status report: daily updates and useful things to know post Helene

October 6, 2024 | Mountaineer, The (Waynesville, NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: News | 1176 Words OpenURL Link

The following is a running list of important status reports on the state of things in Haywood County. This list is updated daily.

For a list of assistance and resources, as well as volunteer and donation opportunities, visit the link below.

#### Curfew

The curfew in Haywood County — which has been from 9 p.m. until 7 a.m. — will be modified starting Friday. The modification comes just in time for Friday night lights, with Tuscola and Pisgah both holding home football games — though Pisgah will play on the Bethel Middle Field due to flood damage to Pisgah stadium.

Starting Friday, the curfew will be from 1 a.m. until 6 a.m.

National Guard rolls into Haywood

If you see a convoy of army buggies on the road or parked outside the Smoky Mountain Event Center, it's the N.C. National Guard and the 101st Airborne Division from Fort Liberty — formerly Fort Bragg. The troops are providing assistance across the county, from helping with clean up to delivering supplies to cut-off areas.

"Last week, we had a couple teams that physically put stuff on their back and carried resources into people," said Bill Miller, assistant emergency management in Haywood County.

Ingles supply chain

Ingles Markets central distribution center in Swannanoa was severely impacted by the flood, which in turn has affected stocking of Ingles grocery stores across the region. Ingles issued public statement saying that the flooding has "impacted our footprint of operations."

The Ingles supply chain issue caused other stores to have lower inventory than normal, as well.

#### School status

Haywood County Schools will return to the classroom on Tuesday, Oct. 15. The first day back will have a two-hour delay to ensure safe travels for staff and students. A regular schedule will commence on Wednesday, Oct. 16.

"We are extremely grateful for the efforts of our emergency services, fire departments, EMS, county government, municipalities, power crews and everyone that has contributed to allowing us to get back to school," Haywood County Schools Superintendent Dr. Trevor Putnam said. "We will be extremely excited to see students back in the buildings and return to some level of normalcy."

#### Mission Hospital update

Mission Hospital in Asheville has been impacted by the loss of water and power in Buncombe County, leading to an influx of patients at Haywood Regional Medical Center.

However, Mission has remained open and caring for patients since the storm. "We have the staff and resources to

treat all patients, including trauma patients, that come to our hospital via ambulance or through our emergency room," according to a statement from Mission.

Water trucks are supplying more than 200,000 gallons of water per day to Mission, but water availability remains a chief concern. Alternative solutions, including drilling wells, are being explored to provide water to cool HVAC units.

Tens of thousands of gallons of fuel are coming in to power generators and 400 nurses and 40 physicians from other areas have come in.

Water

Maggie Valley Sanitary District has a boil water advisory until further notice. Waynesville instituted a boil water advisory on Oct. 8 due to high turbidity, but lifted it again on Oct. 9.

Canton is under voluntary water conservation measures, but the advisory's no longer affects Clyde, as Clyde is now getting its water from Waynesville's reservoir instead of from Canton.

Earlier in the week, Canton was back under a boil water advisory due to a 6" inch water line break, but it was lifted again after repairs.

Power

As of Tuesday afternoon, only 550 customers in Haywood County were still without power, the majority with Haywood Electric Membership Corporation, which covers the most remote, rugged and isolated areas of the county.

As of Monday Sept. 30, 13,000 homes in Haywood were still without power. By Thursday morning, that number was 6,438, and by Friday evening 2,356 homes.

Internet service

Internet service with Spectrum was restored for most of Haywood County the second half of last week, but a large portion of Maggie Valley is among areas still without internet service. Those with Skyrunner and Zito were among the first in the county to get service back early last week, while those with AT&T fiber didn't come back up until Friday.

Cell services is now restored for all carriers.

Interstate travel

A landslide in the Pigeon River Gorge on Interstate 40 has prompted an I-40 closure west of Fines Creek exit 15. While there is varying degrees of damage along a more than two-mile stretch of I-40, the east bound lanes are completely gone in one spot. The road bed sheered off on the downhill side, collapsing out from under the asphalt and taking the interstate with it.

The damage is so extensive it is unknown when it could get repaired.

Meanwhile, I-26 heading north is closed at the Tennessee line due to a washed out a bridge near Unicoi, Tenn.

Mail

If USPS is unable to reach you due to washed out roads or debris, your mail will be held for pickup at your local post office. Amazon deliveries are suspended through this week.

Court Schedule

All Haywood County courts were canceled this week. On Monday, Oct. 7, Haywood County courts will be open to handle emergency hearings and statutorily required hearings.

#### **Fatalities**

As of Friday afternoon, Haywood County officials have reported five known fatalities in the county during the flood. An effort has been underway across the county since the day of the storm to visit homes in the path of the flood or landslides, or rendered inaccessible by washed out roads and bridges.

The wellness checks have been a joint effort of law enforcement, firefighters, public works crews, first responders and outside agencies that have come in to aid with response and recovery.

#### Tourism discouraged

Haywood County officials issued a notice discouraging tourism on Oct. 2, stating"It is too dangerous to travel to Haywood County right now. Flooding, landslides, downed trees, power outages, and poor cell service are making travel unsafe at this time. Additionally, there is no food, water, or fuel in the area, and many places are only accepting cash."

The loss of a fall tourist season could be a death blow to many small businesses, who fear the loss of income will force out of business. The county will issue a revised travel notice Thursday.

#### Debris

Storm debris and demolition materials must be taken to the landfill or placed beside public roads for pick up. Whenever possible, separate tree debris from construction materials. Debris should be photographed for documentation purposes.

"Please ensure that debris is placed beside, not on, the road," Haywood County Information Office Dillon Huffman said.

Debris continues to pile up on the roadsides pending a large-scale debris removal contract.

#### Gas and cash

Remember when you had to wait in line for gas and cash? That's now over, with plenty of gas and credit card transactions working again for most stores. Only a few remain on a cash only basis.

#### Landslides and washed out roads

There are around four dozen landslides in the county, and dozens of washed out roads and bridges in various stages of repair. A parade of dump trucks transporting gravel come and go from the Allens Creek rock quarry to repair sites all day long from dawn to dusk.

If you have something to share in this community bulletin board, email bjohnson@themountaineer.com.

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## NC lawmakers to pass first Helene relief this week

October 6, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC)

Author: Dawn Baumgartner Vaughan and Kyle Ingram; Staff Writer | Section: News | 1223 Words

Page: 15A OpenURL Link

RALEIGH North Carolina's state lawmakers return to Raleigh for a one-day session on Oct. 9, and leaders say they will vote on an initial relief package for communities affected by Tropical Storm Helene.

Top Republicans, who control the legislature, put out a joint statement on Friday. Senate leader Phil Berger and House Speaker Tim Moore said they are "preparing to come back next week to vote on an initial disaster relief package."

"Over the past week, we've heard directly from residents in Western North Carolina and have seen the devastation firsthand. Our hearts are broken for the communities that have been ravaged by Hurricane Helene. Despite the destruction, it has been incredible to see how North Carolinians have stepped up to help. We cannot let up on those efforts or forget about the small communities that have been effectively closed off because of this storm," Berger and Moore wrote.

"The General Assembly is preparing to come back next week to vote on an initial disaster relief package to facilitate the state's response to Hurricane Helene. We are still working to determine what needs to be included in that legislation. Our thoughts and prayers remain with the victims of this storm and those who have lost loved ones, as well as the aid workers, volunteers, and rescue teams supporting the region," they said.

The General Assembly also has a weeklong session in November, and could also hold a special session. Lawmakers may wait until more information is known about what the exact needs are for communities in crisis for the next round of relief.

Money from the federal government is already on the way, with the White House reporting more than \$17 million in housing and other assistance for more than 10,000 households in North Carolina. Individuals and families can apply for FEMA assistance, and access other resources, at fema.gov or call the FEMA helpline at 800-621-3362.

In the meantime, at the state level, the Department of Public Instruction has announced what it definitely needs, and the Board of Elections has concerns, too. Here's where things stand with what lawmakers and agencies are considering.

General Assembly 'stands ready'

Berger said earlier this week, "It will take time to know the full catastrophic nature of this storm, but the General Assembly stands ready to take the necessary steps to help our neighbors in Western North Carolina."

Legislative leadership, particularly in the Senate, prioritizes its "rainy day" fund in annual budget discussions. No amount of spending has been announced.

Senate Democratic Leader Dan Blue, of Wake County, said Senate Democrats "look forward to working with Senate Leader Phil Berger and our Republican colleagues to ensure these reserve funds are allocated in a way that will restore stability in our communities as soon as possible."

Possible special session to deal with Helene relief

House Democratic Leader Robert Reives, of Chatham County, has floated the idea of having a special legislative

session to deal with Helene.

"House Democrats are thinking of and praying for the residents affected by Hurricane Helene, especially in Western North Carolina but also in Eastern North Carolina where a tornado tore through Rocky Mount. We are committed to doing whatever it takes to help rebuild the region over the long term," he said in a statement. Reives said it will take time to plan for "long-term recovery."

"House Democrats have begun working on a package of relief measures and look forward to working with our Republican colleagues and the Governor's team to help get it done. We stand ready to do this work in one of our regularly scheduled sessions or during a special session - whatever is necessary," Reives said.

Department of Public Instruction request

N.C. Superintendent of Public Instruction Catherine Truitt said what people "are seeing and hearing in WNC is heart breaking," and that after talking to school and school district leaders in Western North Carolina, her agency already has a list of requests for lawmakers.

That request, which Truitt shared on social media and at a meeting this week, includes about \$166 million.

The funding request includes \$150 million for building repairs and renovations, school nutrition, equipment, supplies and technology losses. The DPI request notes the amount is "a preliminary figure based on amounts appropriated during Hurricane Florence and estimates based on current needs."

DPI is also requesting up to \$16 million for school nutrition staff who were employed for scheduled instructional days that were missed due to Helene. And the agency is requesting school calendar flexibility for impacted school districts.

#### Elections request

The State Board of Elections is considering a variety of legislative requests to address Helene's potential impact on voting. Extra funding for counties hit hard by the storm could be a key part of the request, as well as changes to deadlines for receiving absentee ballots.

"We're still early in our conversations with the legislature," Karen Brinson Bell, executive director of the board told reporters on Tuesday. "...We want to be able to give them a very educated request and not just (be) haphazard in what we're asking for."

Though the board is still working with county election officials to determine the extent of the damage, Brinson Bell said funding may be needed to help counties pay to reissue ballots lost in the storm or hire on-site assistance for other election tasks. Getting absentee ballots in by the deadline, 7:30 p.m. on Election Day, could be another concern, given that postal service is still disrupted in many western counties and many ballots were likely delivered right before the storm hit.

With about a month left until the election, Brinson Bell said the board may need to consider asking the legislature to extend the deadline for receiving absentee ballots - an issue that has been a point of contention in the past. In previous elections, the state accepted absentee ballots within three days of the election, so long as they were postmarked by Election Day. However, last year, Republican lawmakers passed a bill eliminating this deadline over the objections of their Democratic colleagues and voting rights activists.

Short of asking for a deadline extension, Brinson Bell said there were other steps the legislature could take to help voters affected by Helene get their absentee ballots in on time. One of those changes could be allowing voters to drop off their absentee ballots in-person on Election Day - not just during early voting.

"That's the kind of thing we're weighing right now," she said.

UNC System request 'at some point'

The UNC System is still assessing what it might need.

"The UNC System will certainly request relief funds at some point, but it's too soon to evaluate costs when the region is focused on life, safety and health. We also support the state and congressional delegation who are advocating for federal support in North Carolina," UNC System spokesperson Andy Wallace told The N&O.

Higher education reporter Korie Dean contributed.

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Dawn Baumgartner Vaughan and Kyle Ingram, Staff Writer, 'NC lawmakers to pass first Helene relief this week', *News & Observer, The* (online), 6 Oct 2024 15A <a href="https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?">https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?</a> p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C0CE723698CE80>



# WAVE OF DESTRUCTION - Once-in-a-lifetime weather event - The science behind why Helene was a catastrophic storm - and why it hit Western North Carolina with such force

October 6, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Adam Wagner; Staff Writer | Section: News | 1157 Words Page: 4A OpenURL Link

How did this happen?

That's one of the key questions on many people's minds as the recovery from Tropical Storm Helene continues in Western North Carolina, with more than 55 people confirmed dead and damage estimated to be in the tens of billions of dollars over a mountainous 25-county region.

The News & Observer asked four experts why this storm's rainfall was so catastrophic. They pointed to a number of contributing factors, including abnormally high water temperatures as the storm chugged through the Gulf of Mexico to a stalled weather system that caused heavy rain in the 36 hours leading up to Helene's arrival in Western North Carolina and likely played a role in the storm remaining so strong as it moved inland.

Here's a look at the role each of those factors played.

Warm ocean and gulf waters

Experts have been eyeing warm waters in the North Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico warily for months.

Warm water means more water vapor, Gary Lackmann, the head of N.C. State University's Marine, Earth and Atmospheric Sciences department, told The News & Observer.

And water vapor is one of the key ingredients in severe weather.

"Water vapor is weather fuel. It's like you have this huge reservoir of anomalously large weather fuel and then you basically just need some mechanism to ignite that fuel," Lackmann said.

As Helene made its way through the Gulf of Mexico Sept. 25 and 26, it passed over abnormally warm water.

Climate change, it's worth noting, has a major impact on ocean temperatures around the world. About 90% of global warming takes place in oceans, according to NASA.

On Sept. 25, the Gulf of Mexico's sea surface temperature averaged 84.2 degrees between 1991 and 2020. This year, Helene encountered waters averaging nearly 86.7 degrees.

"Not only is the sea surface temperature along its path a toasty 30-31 C, the warm water runs deep, producing extremely high ocean heat content ... an endless source of fuel," Ben McNoldy, a University of Miami hurricane expert, wrote in a blog post as Helene started to take shape.

Helene rapidly intensified in the hours before making landfall, starting as a Category 1 storm on Sept. 26 before strengthening into a Category 4 storm with 140 mph winds and making landfall late in the day.

Rain before the storm

As Helene was working its way northward, Western North Carolina was already experiencing heavy rainfall.

A low-pressure system before the storm stalled over the Tennessee Valley, effectively creating an atmospheric wall with severe weather on its eastern side.

Low pressure systems create strong southerly winds on their eastern edges, said Justin Lane, a meteorologist at the National Weather Service's office in Greer, S.C., which covers Western North Carolina. Low pressure systems also lift air into the atmosphere, where water vapor is more likely to condense and become rainfall.

Those strong winds picked up vapor-laden air that was already in the Gulf of Mexico and carried it into Western North Carolina, where strong rains started falling about 36 hours before Helene made landfall near Perry, Florida, around 11:30 p.m. Sept. 26.

"Even without Helene, there would have been a significant rainfall and flooding event just due to the other weather system and setup and this really vapor-rich air," Lackmann said.

At Asheville Regional Airport, for instance, 9.85 inches of rain fell on Sept. 25 and 26.

"We were just streaming that moisture over the area, basically over the same area, continuously for a day and a half or so. You can envision it being a firehose of moisture that doesn't really move," Lane said.

That's the second time in September that meteorologists called a severe rain event a "firehose." The same label was applied to the Sept. 15-16 rainfall that caused significant flooding in Carolina Beach and across Brunswick County.

#### Geography

The Blue Ridge Mountains played a key role.

As winds out of the east or southeast run into the mountains, air is pushed upward. And as air goes upward, more of the water vapor within it comes out in the form of rainfall or, in winter, snow.

In the case of Helene, that played a significant factor, said Chip Konrad, the director of NOAA's Southeast Regional Climate Center.

"There was more water vapor available to come in and then basically just being wrung out of the atmosphere at a very rapid rate as it's being forced up against the Blue Ridge escarpment," Konrad said in an interview.

Lane, the NWS researcher, agreed, saying the low pressure system and geography worked together to bring more rainfall.

"Because of the extra lift provided by those southeast winds flowing up the mountain, we basically were maximizing the efficiency of the rainfall rates given the available moisture," Lane said. "We got the most out of the moisture that was available."

#### Speed of the storm

The jet stream also played a role when Helene came into the picture, Lane said, helping the storm move swiftly northward through Florida, Georgia and South Carolina into Western North Carolina.

At one point after making landfall, Lane said, Helene was moving 40 to 45 mph through the Southeast. Normally, storms have time to lose energy over land. This one didn't.

"It was moving so fast, it just didn't have enough time to weaken significantly before moving into our area," Lane said.

And then Helene came

The region's strongest rainfall came as Helene was passing west of the region, Lane said.

The worst place to be when a hurricane is making landfall is the east side.

"By far the worst impacts are going to be in that area from just east of the center out to about 100 to 200 miles," Lane said.

That's exactly where Western North Carolina was.

At the Mountain Research Station in Waynesville, Helene brought 5 inches of rain the morning of Sept. 27.

The rain, which had been falling steadily from the predecessor event, picked up pace at about 2 a.m. Friday, with 0.4 inches of rain over the next hour. Then larger amounts started to fall.

By 6 a.m., there was 0.74 inches of rain falling in an hour. In the 9 a.m. hour, 0.87 inches of rain fell.

Friday brought nearly as much rain as the weather station saw fall in July and August combined. The 1.5 inches of rain that fell between 8 a.m. and 10 a.m. was more than the 1.21 inches the station recorded in August.

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

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# Marshall residents dig out of the mud - They know Helene has forever changed their NC town

October 6, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Ryan Oehrli; Staff Writer | Section: News | 484 Words Page: 6A OpenURL Link

Fran Randall peered into a comic book and board game store in downtown Marshall.

"This is the kind of business we never thought we'd have," he said, studying the damage inside.

Randall, 61, is a sixth-generation native of Marshall, a Madison County town with fewer than 1,000 people. He grew up on a hill just over downtown, which had bloomed since 2008 or so into an "artsy" sort of place, he said. There was a bike shop, a bar with live music, art galleries and even a tattoo parlor.

But the old Western North Carolina character was still there, like a place to buy bib overalls.

"It's kind of weird being in that generation that saw old and new," he said Tuesday. "Now, I'm about to see what's next."

Downtown Marshall lies between cliffs and the French Broad River. Like other areas on that river, it was devastated by Helene last week. Police and barricades blocked every way into downtown Tuesday morning. But shop owners, their friends and family met up.

The job was big but straightforward: dig out mud that caked the streets and buildings.

Help for Western North Carolina has come from local law enforcement, the federal government and volunteers. Recovery for some towns will take a long time, though.

Randall donned a fishing hat and a shovel. As he walked along the muddy road, he checked in on friends and neighbors.

Others downtown shared their stories with him and a reporter.

Jaime Perkins talked about putting up barricades around a church before the storm.

Jackson Massey was shoveling mud out of his grandparents' shop on his 15th birthday; he'd get his learner's permit to drive soon, his grandfather said.

Connie Molland shared some good news: Most of the art in Flow Gallery survived.

Randall's town will change more after Helene, he knows. There's some melancholy in knowing that. But then again, that's just the way it is. New people will come in. The collective memory won't hold onto the damage Marshall saw in September 2024.

"The buildings will be gone, a lot of them," he said. "But new things will come in. It'll be a further turn of the page, of the old generation of people that's been here to a new generation."

Ryan Oehrli: @oehrli

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Ryan Oehrli, Staff Writer, 'Marshall residents dig out of the mud They know Helene has forever changed their NC town', *News & Observer, The* (online), 6 Oct 2024 6A <a href="https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?">https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?</a>
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## commentary - Many Helene stories to come in NC; we commit to tell them

October 6, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Thad Ogburn; Staff Writer | Section: News | 645 Words

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It's been a grueling, emotional week for North Carolina as we learn the incredible toll that Hurricane Helene took on our state and its cherished mountains. Even now, a week after the storm's arrival, the scope of the lives lost, the property destroyed and the landscape forever changed is hard to comprehend.

There are so many stories and images that will be seared forever in our minds.

On Tuesday afternoon, I got a text message from reporter Josh Shaffer and photojournalist Kaitlin McKeown, who had followed a convoy of relief vehicles traveling into hard-hit Avery County in the North Carolina High Country: "We're the first reporters in Banner Elk."

And they immediately got to work, documenting in words and pictures a place where "the police lieutenant saw his house float away" and "for days, food, water and diapers have arrived by helicopter."

Kaitlin and Josh were but two of the many journalists from The News & Observer and The Charlotte Observer who have worked to tell this immense story throughout the week:

Photojournalist Travis Long of The N&O, who has family in Cherokee, was there even before Helene's arrival. The photographs sent from across the region by Travis, Kaitlin and Robert Willett of The N&O and Khadejeh Nikouyeh of The Observer have been devastating.

Khadejeh and N&O reporter Martha Quillin captured stories of a family bracing for flooding who suddenly faced a landslide; a beloved Asheville area for artists washed away, and a wedding that went on in the storm's aftermath, with the National Guard arriving to wish the couple well.

The Charlotte Observer's Ryan Oehrli joined Travis for a report from the small town of Marshall, where resilient residents are thinking of the future as they dig out from mounds of mud.

The N&O's Brian Gordon and Robert, in the tiny area called Pensacola, talked to a resident who recalled a flood from 1977. But this time was different, she said, as "she felt the entire mountain move."

Virginia Bridges of The N&O told the heartbreaking story of families and friends searching for missing loved ones.

N&O transportation reporter Richard Stradling has constantly updated a list of the many road closures in the area, as well as explaining why rebuilding Interstate 40 through the mountains will be such a challenge.

The Charlotte Observer's Evan Moore and The N&O's Drew Jackson have updated a county-by-county list of damages.

As the situation turned political, with candidates and current office holders sparring over the federal and state response, Dawn Baumgartner Vaughan and Danielle Battaglia did a Reality Check to find the truth.

And correspondents Emily Vespa and Caitlyn Yaede also did some fact-checking about the many fake images being shared on social media and how to spot them. (Please, folks, don't share that photo of the crying little girl with big eyes holding the crying little dog with big eyes. It's Al generated, and there are many real photos that show what real people are dealing with. It doesn't need fake embellishment.)

These are just some of the many stories that The N&O and The Charlotte Observer have done. Our newsrooms have worked together closely, coordinating our response and trying to cover as many angles from as many places as possible.

All of our Helene aftermath coverage is outside of our existing paywall, and we are sharing freely with other newsrooms across North Carolina. You can find all our storiesat newsobserver.com/topics/helene-nc. You'll also find links there to ways you can help.

On their trip into Banner Elk, Josh and Kaitlin talked to Fire Chief Tyler Burr. He offered a memorable quote. "Let's be honest, we're the stepchild of the nation. If Taylor Swift gets engaged tomorrow, we're an afterthought."

We're committed to making sure that doesn't happen.

There will be a lot of rebuilding to be documented. There are many questions to be answered. And there are many stories to tell.

Thad Ogburn is interim executive editor of The News & Observer.

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#### Biltmore Estate closed until further notice after Helene

October 6, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Chyna Blackmon; Staff Writer | Section: Living | 455 Words

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Following the catastrophic flooding of Hurricane Helene, several Western North Carolina homes and businesses were damaged or destroyed, including one of the state's biggest tourism sites: Biltmore Estate.

Like many other sites around the mountains, much of its destruction is still being assessed so the property will remain closed until further notice. According to the Biltmore website, it could be closed to guests until at least Oct. 15.

"Like all of this region, the damage varies by location across our 8,000-acre property. In forested areas, which is a large portion of the estate, wind damage is extensive to grounds and some structures. Crews have been working tirelessly to clear roads so we can begin repairs," the Biltmore's latest update on Oct. 3 said.

How bad was Helene storm damage at Biltmore?

Biltmore House, Conservatory, winery, gardens, and the property's hotels had very little to no impact, the team said, with most damage to other elements of the estate.

"The entrance to Biltmore, located in Biltmore Village, and other low-lying areas of the property, such as our farm, experienced significant flooding and damage to buildings. We are assessing structures and roadways in these areas," the team said.

"We sadly lost a few of our animals during the storm, but the vast majority are safe and accounted for thanks to our dedicated agriculture and equestrian teams. As with all of our neighbors who experienced the effects of Helene, we are working on our plans for a swift recovery and look forward to welcoming our guests to this region as soon as it is safe to do so."

Located in the state's largest mountain town, the 8,000-acre Asheville estate with 250 rooms is the largest privately owned home in the country and one of North Carolina's most popular tourist destinations.

What if you have tickets to visit Biltmore?

As the Biltmore remains closed to guests, including Biltmore Annual Passholders, Vanderbilt Wine Club members, and Sporting Clay Club members, the team is working to accommodate those with previous plans to visit during this time.

According to the Biltmore website, those with daytime tickets are welcome to reschedule a visit for another day once the estate has safely reopened or request refund online. For those who booked overnight stays at the estate between Sept. 27-Oct. 15, reservations have been automatically canceled and a 12-month credit will be distributed.

"We are heartbroken for our friends, family, and neighbors across this region who have been devastated by this storm," Biltmore's website says. "To our first responders, utility workers, and community volunteers, we are eternally grateful for your endless care and courage. We will all work together to recover from this unprecedented disaster."

You can find more information and updates on the status of Biltmore's closure, cancellations and refunds online at

biltmore.com/weather-update.

# Chyna Blackmon: @chynablackmon

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Chyna Blackmon, Staff Writer, 'Biltmore Estate closed until further notice after Helene', *News & Observer, The*(online), 6 Oct 2024 1C <a href="https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C0CE7243970588">https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C0CE7243970588>



## Only road into Pensacola, NC, adds twists to Helene response

October 6, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Brian Gordon; Staff Writer | Section: News | 542 Words

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Stanchions of trees, embedded vehicles and mangled trailers line the only road through Pensacola, North Carolina, a week after Tropical Storm Helene crashed into the small Yancey County town. But the worst physical damage, locals say, isn't as evident.

"There are a lot of homes where you wouldn't know they were ever there if you hadn't lived here your whole life," said Noah Davis, a local handyman. "There's going to be a before-the-storm and after-the-storm Pensacola."

Consecutive days of heavy rains late last week overwhelmed the remote community of around 500 people in Pisgah National Forest - 22 miles and a world away from Asheville. Pensacola lays south of Burnsville in a holler between two hillsides. The Cattail Creek runs down one mountainside and the Cane River flows below.

Early Friday, the creek flooded and sent a torrent toward the town while at the same time, the river swelled and encroached. "We were surrounded by water," said resident Joyce Maness. "Our floors were giving in."

After three days, Christa Robinson felt the creek had receded enough to leave her house in the Cattail Creek community, which sits above Pensacola. With her 7-year-old daughter Lilly, she walked - and at times slid - into Pensacola, where they spent the next night at the local fire station.

Robinson remembers the immense local flood of 1977. Unlike then, she felt the entire mountain move last week.

"The highway is gone," said Mark Harrison, medical officer for the Pensacola Fire Department. "Most of the homes are gone."

Rescue and recovery began over the weekend as volunteers drove four-wheelers along rutted, muddy passageways. Pensacola Road is the town's only direct connection to the rest of Western North Carolina, and by Thursday, enough of the eroded blacktop had been cleared to allow trucks to narrowly inch through.

U.S. Army personnel arrived on the ground Thursday to hand out supplies as helicopters delivered medicine, appliances and food to hard-to-reach areas. Search-and-rescue teams from Charlotte, Pittsburgh, Kansas and elsewhere visited each standing home to document the destruction. Civilians pitched in further, offering neighbors their services as mechanics, movers and transporters.

"The lack of roads has been the biggest thing logistically," said Davis, who estimated he has evacuated at least 30 people on his four-wheeler.

Another major hurdle is accounting for everyone affected. The Cattail Creek community in particular has a sizable number of vacation homes. Were their owners out of town during the storm? Or are they now missing?

These are the questions people want answered.

"After COVID hit, a lot of people came in here, and we have no idea how many are residents," Harrison said. "We've evacuated all of the critical people that we could. Now, it's more or less preventative."

As for fatalities, Harrison declined to share a specific number but said "it's obvious" people have been killed. Donations in recent days have poured into the fire station, the community's makeshift recovery hub. Asked what

Pensacola residents still need, Harrison listed medications, including antibiotics and methadone.

Brian Gordon: 919-861-1238, @skyoutbriout

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Brian Gordon, Staff Writer, 'Only road into Pensacola, NC, adds twists to Helene response', *News & Observer, The* (online), 6 Oct 2024 15A <a href="https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C0CE7239E457D0">https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C0CE7239E457D0</a>



#### NC mountain businesses, tourist sites look ahead

October 6, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC)

Author: Desiree Mathurin; Staff Writer Section: Living 1071 Words

Page: 1C OpenURL Link

Jessie Dean, her sister Melissa and the Asheville Tea Company team spent all of last Thursday, Sept. 26, preparing their production center for Hurricane Helene.

The facility beside the Swannanoa River and down the road from Biltmore Village in Asheville is where the group blended and packaged their tea bags for the past eight years. For hours, Dean said the team raised as many items as they could off the ground, anticipating that some water from the river would seep into the building.

Some water guickly turned into unprecedented flooding.

Most everything near the Swannanoa River was swept away, including Asheville Tea's facility. The river rose more than 26 feet on Sept. 27, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Hurricane Helene raged through western North Carolina, destroying homes, local businesses and thriving tourist areas from Asheville to the town of Chimney Rock.

While local, state and federal agencies are focused on search and rescue operations, and delivering necessary supplies to the area, local communities are starting the long road to rebuilding and facing whatever the economic fallout may be.

"I was able to get to higher ground on Friday to try and see the state of the building and it was gone. It was just all water and it was completely gone," Dean said. "Everything was in that building. Everything is gone...

"Then we started seeing pictures of where the building was, and then a video of our building floating down the Swannanoa and it getting cut in half by a pole."

Economic impact of the storm

The fall season is a busy time for areas in western North Carolina, "both visually across the Blue Ridge Mountains and for our economic vitality," said Luisa Yen, director of public relations with ExploreAsheville, the city's tourism guide. Many people come to gaze at the colors of the fall foliage, for instance.

Tourism is one of the area's biggest economic drivers, particularly for Asheville and Buncombe County. And last year was record-breaking. About 14 million people visited the region, spending about \$3 billion, according to a local Tourism Economic Impact Report produced by the county tourism agency.

But as of now, Asheville and Buncombe County are isolated, with numerous roadways destroyed. And many attractions remain closed, including the historic Biltmore Estate. Or some have been completely swept away, like Main Street in the town of Chimney Rock.

According to AccuWeather, total damage and economic loss from the storm is totaling between \$145 billion and \$160 billion for the states. And that figure could increase as more damage across the Carolinas, Florida, Georgia, Virginia, West Virginia, Kentucky and Ohio are assessed.

"This is definitely going to hurt. Our hearts and minds are focused on supporting our community right now and starting to lay the foundation for recovery in the days and months ahead," Yen said in an email interview with The

Charlotte Observer.

The Biltmore Estate after Helene

About 70% to 80% of the arts buildings in the popular River Arts District were "compromised," according to Heather Divoky, marketing co-chair for the historic creative hub.

The district sits near the French Broad River, which crested close to 25 feet on Sept. 27. It's a popular area to visit and explore the work of local artists.

While some of the buildings experienced minimal flooding, the art was still compromised, Divoky wrote in an email, noting that humidity will eventually cause mold, and some artwork is on paper.

"We have 355 artists and organizations in the (district), and in one way or another all of our creative lives have changed," Divoky wrote.

Biltmore Village is another popular destination filled with local boutiques and history. It also has suffered heavy damage from the storm. Like Asheville Tea Company, it sits along the Swannanoa River and remains very inaccessible.

Biltmore Estate, which is south of the village, will remain closed through Oct. 3. It's unclear whether one of the state's most popular attractions, a Gilded Age, 175,000-square-foot home built by George Washington Vanderbilt II, sustained any damage.

But it sits closer to the French Broad River. A Biltmore Estate official could not be reached for comment Wednesday.

Other lodging sites, including the upscale, historic Omni Grove Park Inn and Wrong Way River Lodge & Cabins, which is known for its A-frame cabins, are also closed. On social media, Wrong Way said it sustained significant damage and the Omni said it is without water or power.

East of Asheville, the town of Chimney Rock, another popular tourist destination, was mostly wiped away by rising water from the Broad River.

Next steps after Helene

For all of these communities, next steps include a search for funding to help them rebuild.

Yen said ExploreAsheville has a list of organizations on its website that people can support, including MANNA FoodBank. Divoky said the River District is taking donations that will directly go to artists affected by the damage. Arts North Carolina, a nonprofit that supports the art industry in the state is also accepting donations for creatives.

"Our next step is to create a path forward," wrote Jeffrey Burroughs, president of the district. "We are only just beginning to communicate via text as of (Monday). We are looking to raise money for our artists, clean up, and building support...It will take a great effort to rebuild, but we are artists, we live to create and are up for the task at hand."

For Asheville Tea, Dean said the team is "committed to the long ride" of rebuilding and helping out the community. Asheville Tea is also asking for donations, as well as looking into federal aid.

It's unclear what the economic landscape will look like for western North Carolina. Dean said the road to normalcy will be long but the community already knows how to stick together.

"Neighbors are out and helping each other. Cooking for each other and going into their friends' properties and trying to help restore anything that can be restored," Dean said. "There's just a huge immediate outpouring of love

and effort within Asheville and that's really special.

"The magic of Asheville will rebound, it's just going to take a long time."

Desiree Mathurin: @Dez\_AM

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Desiree Mathurin, Staff Writer, 'NC mountain businesses, tourist sites look ahead', *News & Observer, The* (online), 6 Oct 2024 1C <a href="https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C0CE7233B39C68">https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C0CE7233B39C68</a>



## Helene's NC death toll exceeds 100, expected to increase as recovery enters second week

October 6, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC)

Author: Virginia Bridges; Staff Writer | Section: News | 907 Words

Page: 12A OpenURL Link

A week after Helene slammed into western North Carolina, the state death toll reached 115, a tally expected to increase as search and recovery continues.

Some counties damaged by the storm, including Alleghany and Caldwell, finished their searches and safety checks this week, after crossing off dozens of names of people reported missing, according to sheriffs' officials there.

The hunt for living and the dead continues in Buncombe County. Rescuers there have found 72 bodies, by far the most in the state. And dozens of survivors were still known to be trapped on Friday, according to the Buncombe County Sheriff's Office.

"Our search and recovery has not ceased. We've been trying to do that 24/7," said Bumcombe County Sheriff Quentin Miller. "We cannot stop. We must continue to move forward."

Yancey County, so far, had the second highest number of confirmed deaths Friday: nine, according to state data. The latest death toll also included six people in Henderson County, according to numbers from the state.

Numbers reported by the state and counties continued to differ one week into disaster response, because the state doesn't count a death until a state medical examiner determines if it is related to Helene, according to Kelley Richardson, a spokesperson for North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services.

The state process takes time and results in a discrepancy between county numbers and state numbers that work out in time.

"We do not dispute the numbers released by our counties, but we work to release one verified number as the state on a twice daily basis," Richardson said.

Few names but some causes reported

According to both state and county data, Helene's death toll stood at 113 on Friday morning. At least 16 people drowned and 10 victims died due to landslides, according to the state Department of Health and Human Services, which releases death statistics twice a day.

Children were among those who perished. Among the youngest is a 4-year-old girl in Catawba County who died in a two-vehicle crash on a flooded road, and a 7-year-old Buncombe County boy who drowned.

One victim whose body was found at the end of this week was Julie le Roux, a 33-year-old artist from Georgia, who was separated from her fiancé in McDowell County, when water, mud and much more crashed into a home where they took shelter

The state hasn't reported any deaths in Mitchell and Alexander counties, and officials in those areas could not be reached by The News & Observer on Friday.

Some good news too

Among so much awfulness, there are slivers of welcome news. Lincoln, Jackson and Allegheny counties reported

zero fatalities when contacted by The News & Observer Friday.

Chief Deputy Shane Glenn said Allegheny communities kept the number of deaths down by looking after each other before and after the storm, said Allegheny Sheriff's Office Chief Deputy Shane Glenn. By Friday that county had whittled down its missing person list to zero, Glenn said.

McDowell County as of Friday had recovered the body of one person who died due to Helene and still had 20 people reported missing, Sheriff Office spokesperson Holly Ramsey said.

Numbers released by the state and counties conflict with widely shared social media claims overstating the death toll that describe gory scenes of mountains littered with dead people and animals, according to interviews with state and local officials.

North Carolina Emergency Management officials cautioned on Friday about false reports being spread online. The public should rely on trusted sources, like state, national and local government and weather sources.

"Dangerous conditions continue in some areas and false information could put people at risk," the press release states.

Man shoots at Buncombe deputies

That said, the situation is tragic, especially in Buncombe County. Landslides and floods there have left local and visiting law enforcement using borrowed boats, ATVs, drones and cadavers dogs to continue their search for the dead and living.

"We got areas that we haven't even been able to get to," said Sheriff Miller, who said his first goal is to save people who are stranded and cut off from resources. Second, is to knock on doors to find the missing, and the third is to find the bodies. Bodies that have been buried in landslides and tangled in mud and debris along the Swannanoa River, according to the daily state reports.

Bridges are down and roads are impassable, leaving more than 100 people stranded without running water and power, said Braxton Langston-Chapman, who works for Forsyth County Sheriff's Office but is temporarily serving as a spokesperson in Buncombe.

An out-of-town fire department is building temporary bridges so officers can get to communities, Langston-Chapman said. Other organizations are dropping resources down to them via helicopters and drones.

In the search effort, deputies are knocking on doors at night, trying to account for the missing as quickly as possible. But a recent incident highlights the dangers of exploring savaged areas at night. On Wednesday, a 64-year-old man fired four bullets at deputies walking up to his home. After a negotiation, the man was arrested on attempted first-degree murder and other assault charges.

"I would just ask people to help us, you know, be patient with us," Miller said, and keep in mind that it could be law enforcement just trying to check on them.

Virginia Bridges covers criminal justice in the Triangle and across North Carolina for The News & Observer. Her work is produced with financial support from the nonprofit The Just Trust. The N&O maintains full editorial control of its journalism.

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## No power but only minor damage: Spruce Pine quartz mine owner updates Helene recovery

October 6, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Brian Gordon; Staff Writer | Section: News | 488 Words

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The world's main producer of high-purity quartz, a mineral crucial to the global supply of semiconductor chips, announced its shuttered Spruce Pine, North Carolina, mines have endured "minor damage," according to an initial assessment conducted after Tropical Storm Helene upended the town.

"Our dedicated teams are on-site, conducting cleanup and repair activities to restart operations as soon as we can," the mine owner, Sibelco, wrote in an update Friday. The private Belgian company added the power remains out at its Western North Carolina mines but that repairs have "progressed significantly."

With around 500 employees, Sibelco is the largest employer in Mitchell County, a rural mountainous area northeast of Asheville. The company said all its employees and contractors had been accounted for following last week's storm, which dumped more than two feet of rain on Spruce Pine and flooded the local North Toe River. Its facilities have been closed since Sept. 26.

Sibelco's mines sit north of downtown in an area called the Spruce Pine Mining District. Like much of the region, Mitchell County has sustained extensive road and rail line damage, which could hinder employees' ability to get to the mines and Sibelco's ability to move its valuable quartz.

Free of impurities, Spruce Pine quartz has been crucial to the supply of semiconductor wafers, solar panels and other fast-growing technologies.

"It is rare, unheard-of almost, for a single site to control the global supply of a crucial material," wrote Ed Conway in his 2023 book "Material World." "Yet if you want to get high-purity quartz - the kind you need to make those crucibles without which you can't make silicon wafers - it has to come from Spruce Pine."

Sibelco has grown to keep up with the demand. Between 2019 and 2023, the company increased its production of high-quality quartz by almost 60%. And in April 2023, Sibelco committed to invest \$200 million in its Spruce Pine facilities to double production by next year.

On Friday, the company said its final product stock "has not been impacted" by the storm. "We are working closely with our customers to assess their needs and plan the restart of product shipments as soon as we can," Sibelco said.

Sibelco sells its white quartz sand under the brand name IOTA, which the company states online is "indispensable in the manufacture of a wide range of high-tech products."

Disruptions at the Spruce Pine mines have previously impacted the supply chain of quartz; In 2008, a fire at a local quartz refinery "temporarily brought production to a halt and impacted the market," the consulting firm Global Risk Intel reported.

Sibelco isn't the only quartz mining company in Spruce Pine. In recent years, a second company named The Quartz Corp opened area mines. On Tuesday, The Quartz Corp confirmed it had also stopped operations following Helene, noting "we have no visibility on when they will restart."

Compared to Sibelco's sites, The Quartz Corp mine is positioned closer to the North Toe River.

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# UNC basketball scrimmage, originally planned for Cherokee, will now fund Helene relief

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Author: Shelby Swanson; Correspondent | Section: Sports | 449 Words

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Chapel Hill The North Carolina men's basketball team's Blue-White scrimmage, originally scheduled on Oct. 13 at Harrah's Cherokee Hotel & Casino Resort in Cherokee, North Carolina, has been relocated due to logistical concerns following Hurricane Helene.

The event will take place on Oct. 12 at the Smith Center, following UNC's football game against Georgia Tech. The scrimmage will begin 45 minutes after the conclusion of the football game, which is scheduled for noon.

The event was originally going to be held off-campus to provide players more opportunities to promote and profit from their name, image and likeness. Now, following the damage caused by Helene, the scrimmage will function as a fundraiser to help those impacted by the storm.

"Our number one concern is the safety and well-being of the thousands of people who are affected by the storm and we didn't want to add to their challenges by trying to play a basketball game in Cherokee at this time," UNC coach Hubert Davis said in a statement. "We had some discussions about keeping the date to help restore some normalcy but there is nothing normal about the tragic circumstances people in the area are facing every day. We plan to bring our team to Harrah's and Cherokee another time when the conditions are right."

Tickets for the scrimmage are \$10, with proceeds going to hurricane relief. Those who previously purchased tickets for the Cherokee event can attend for free. UNC students can attend with a One Card at no extra cost.

Davis likened the event in Cherokee to barnstorming games he participated in as a former player at UNC.

"We would go play games all around the state and the reason why we would do it is not everyone had an opportunity to come to the Smith Center," he said. "So why not do it in the preseason? It gives us an opportunity to travel around the state and for North Carolina fans to be able to see us who can't make it all the way down here."

Davis said the Tar Heels will look for similar preseason opportunities in the future.

Following the Oct. 12 scrimmage, the Tar Heels play a preseason game against the Memphis Tigers on Oct. 15 at FedEx Forum, benefiting St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. The game will be broadcast on ESPNU, with all proceeds directed to St. Jude.

The Tar Heels will also host Johnson C. Smith at the Smith Center in an exhibition on Oct. 27, and their regular season begins on Nov. 4 at home against Elon.

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## Avery County residents salvage what remains - 'It's gone'

October 6, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Josh Shaffer; Staff Writer | Section: News | 733 Words Page: 7A

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MINNEAPOLIS Bob Tatum stared over the Toe River bridge and pointed out the pieces of his house, smashed to splinters and wedged in the rocks below.

There's his wife's jewelry box, red and round.

There's the solid walnut mantle piece, cut by his father-in-law.

There's a cushion from his paddle boat, hanging from a tree.

"I might start crying," said Tatum, 74. "I'm raw. I don't know what day it is. You wake up in the middle of the night and you think, 'I don't have a house.' Your heart's pounding and you start to jump out of your skin."

Before Hurricane Helene washed his entire house downriver and drowned both of his horses, Tatum woke his wife to say, "Edwina, we need to get out of here."

"We grabbed our dogs and a little cash," he said Wednesday. "Not thinking we weren't going to come back in a day or two. We've been through hurricanes before. I was in Vietnam. This is worse."

The not-quite-a-town of Minneapolis took some of Helene's worst, to the point everyone around can rattle off the names of half a dozen friends now homeless, and more than a few know a police officer who's pulled a body from the mud and debris.

Dogtown residents alone without power after Helene

Though named Minneapolis, the tiny hamlet in Avery County with a population of 185 near the Tennessee border more often goes by its nickname: Dogtown.

"At one time, there were more dogs than people," said Randy Pitman, a longtime local. "They called it Dogtown."

When the storm hit, neighbors fretted about Beulah Young, better-known as "Bootsy," who is 96.

She lives a quarter-mile upriver, with her son Champ Robert, wheelchair-bound since a motorcycle wreck his senior year of high school in 1977.

Now the mudslides blocked the steep mountain road to her house, leaving the two of them alone without power or water for three days.

"We had to hike in there with the mud up to our knees," said Larry Jones, her son-in-law. "I carried 30 pounds of water in a backpack. My wife had her legs all torn-up from rocks in her boots. They're infected. We just got some antibiotic."

The rescuers found the Young's barn swept away, and the yard replaced by river rocks.

"Do you think she said 'Glad to see you?'" asked Della Wright, laughing at the memory. "She said, "Don't come in here with that mud on your shoes!"

On Wednesday, "Bootsy" left her house for the first time since Friday, riding in Jones' pickup to collect her mail.

Neighbors busy shoveling mud out of their basements, crowded around her. Just last summer, the 96-year-old Dogtown native was grand marshal of the Independence Day parade.

"We just prayed that God would let our house be there," said "Bootsy." "The Good Lord just left my house."

'I hurt for Spruce Pine. I hurt for Asheville.'

Back on the bridge, Tatum continued his survey. Since the storm, he has been unable to return to the spot he shared a house with Edwina, their maltipoo named Puppy and their border collie, Hitch.

"That's where I go to church right there," he said pointing to Minneapolis Baptist, where walls leaned at 45-degree angles and thick mud coated the ground. "My wife taught school right there."

He leaned back over the bridge, noticing some of the former walls in the water, and teared up while struggling to remember the words to a Psalm.

He isn't able to get blood pressure medicine.

He hasn't been able to find orthopedic shoes.

Everything he had sat in the river below.

"I know all these people," said Tatum, a retired Avery County school administrator. "I hurt for Spruce Pine. I hurt for Asheville. It's not just us.

"You realize you went from having a beautiful home, a beautiful place. Retired. Feeding the fish. Feeding the horses. Petting the horses. Now you know it's gone."

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## In the resort town of Hot Springs, service workers take on leadership - roles after Helene

October 6, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC) Author: Brian Gordon; Staff Writer | Section: News | 601 Words

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What is a resort town without a resort?

What is a stop on the Appalachian Trail without anywhere to stay?

These questions face the residents of Hot Springs, North Carolina, in the months ahead. Significant sections of the spa that gives the community its name were carried into the French Broad River last Friday during Tropical Storm Helene. A row of outdoor hot tubs, No. 1 to No. 8, are gone. Severed pipes and several roofs stick into the sandy grounds.

Along with Marshall and Mars Hill, Hot Springs is one of three towns in Madison County, a remote area of tree-covered mountains and slaloming roads directly north of Asheville and less than 5 miles from Tennessee. Where Marshall is the county seat and Mars Hill a college town, Hot Springs revolves around tourism.

With the French Broad running north, the greater community of around 1,100 residents is a popular spot for white water rafting. It also boasts the only downtown in the state that the Appalachian Trail cuts directly through. And like much of Western North Carolina, the local leaves turn majestic colors in the autumn.

"We call these people leaf lookers," said Karen McCall, who runs a Hot Springs rafting and tubing company with her husband. "All this town is is tourism. There's nothing else here."

As in other areas devastated by Helene, Hot Springs experienced not one local waterway flooding but two. In addition to the French Broad, an overwhelmed Spring Creek swept through the town center and its small concentration of shops, breweries and restaurants along Bridge Street. Keith Calloway watched from his second-floor apartment as the waterline consumed his specialty grocery store below. The creek receded Friday evening but his store was a soaking jumble. To get inside, he and a group tore down the entire front.

"The first two days we were cut off," Calloway said. "But then (the North Carolina Department of Transportation) got this road put back together."

A few doors down Friday morning, Rochelle Moon and two other women were shoveling mud out of the darkened local library. The shelves were bare, with a stack of salvaged books on a center table. Moon, a member of the nonprofit Friends of Libraries, said she hasn't spoken to county officials about the library's future. She simply arrived to Hot Springs on Wednesday, found the building in disarray, and began the process of clearing.

Volunteerism was evident throughout the community, as residents took on new responsibilities.

Last week, Sonya Phillips was a bar manager at a brewery off Bridge Street. On Friday, she was leading a massive recovery effort out of the Hot Springs public schools campus. Mounds of donated food, diapers, water, gallon buckets, trash bags and wipes filled the gymnasium throughout the day. Outside, someone asked Phillips about the logistics of a helicopter landing to drop off more supplies.

"There's a whole airspace thing," she advised before referring the person to an aviation contact she knew.

"Right now, it's about trying to coordinate outreach with other communities, like Marshall, Barnardsville and Burnsville," she said.

As volunteers kickstarted Hot Springs' long recovery, law enforcement continued to search for Helene victims. Behind the Hot Springs spa, where Spring Creek meets the French Broad, agents for the North Carolina Bureau of Investigations removed a mass of tangled tree trunks. Additional personnel from the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms and Explosives were parked on the resort's front lawn.

There have been four confirmed deaths in Madison County attributed to Helene. As of Friday morning, around 13% of the county's 16,000 homes and businesses remained without power as authorities continue to look for those still missing.

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## Trump, in Fayetteville, calls federal response to Helene 'terrible'

October 6, 2024 | News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC)

Author: Avi Bajpai and Mary Helen Moore; Staff Writer Section: News | 1273 Words

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FAYETTEVILLE Former President Donald Trump, in his first trip to North Carolina since it was hit by Hurricane Helene, said the federal government's response to the devastating storm had been "terrible."

During a town hall with supporters in Fayetteville on Friday night, Trump also praised billionaire Elon Musk, a major supporter of his campaign, for providing Starlink satellite systems to Western North Carolina.

He reiterated his campaign promise to launch the "largest domestic deportation operation in American history," and he vowed to change the name of Fort Liberty back to Fort Bragg, if elected again.

The town hall came as rescue and recovery efforts continue around the clock in Western North Carolina. A total of 115 deaths had been reported by state and local officials as of Friday.

President Joe Biden surveyed the damage by air Wednesday and promised additional federal resources, including 1,000 active-duty U.S. Army soldiers from Fort Liberty, and 22 aircraft. Vice President Kamala Harris will visit affected areas Saturday, but her office hasn't yet said where she'll be traveling in particular.

On Thursday, Trump said in a social-media post that he plans to visit Western North Carolina next week, but said he hasn't set the date because he doesn't "want to do anything that's going to interrupt their rescue efforts."

Federal response to Helene 'terrible,' Trump says

Trump said the federal government had done a "rotten" and "terrible job" of responding to the hurricane.

U.S. Rep. Anna Paulina Luna, who moderated the event, also repeated a claim Trump made earlier this week without providing any evidence, that Republican-leaning areas of the state impacted by Helene had been deliberately neglected.

"I do believe that they have intentionally, and this is my opinion, not helped out those residents, because it's red communities that are impacted," Luna said, adding over the roaring crowd: "Let's call a spade a spade. Do your job and do better."

Trump made a similar claim on Monday about North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper and President Joe Biden. Later that day, Biden told reporters that Trump was lying, and said that it was "simply not true" and "irresponsible."

Trump also praised Musk at length for providing his company's Starlink systems to restore some internet and cellular access to the western part of the state, where connectivity has been severely limited, if not nearly nonexistent, since the storm swept through the region a week ago.

Federal officials were quick to state on Monday that dozens of Starlink systems had already been or were in the process of being shipped to Western North Carolina, and a White House spokesperson pointed out on social media that the systems had "already" been made available.

Vows to change Fort Liberty back to Fort Bragg

Trump promised to change the name of Fort Liberty back to Fort Bragg if he is elected, which received a massive

roar from the crowd.

He then answered questions from the audience about illegal immigration and the since-rescinded COVID-19 vaccine mandate for the military.

He repeated the vow he's made several times to launch the "largest domestic deportation operation in American history."

He referenced new data that U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement gave Congress last month that showed over 13,000 immigrants convicted of homicide were living in the country outside of the agency's detention, according to NBC News.

What Trump supporters said at the town hall

Joan and Dave Carlson, a military family from Fayetteville, hoped Trump would say something about the devastation in Western North Carolina.

"I want him to acknowledge there are people there dying and they're not getting the help they need," Joan Carlson said before the town hall began.

Both said their top issues are immigration and the economy, in that order.

"I think it's ridiculous that we have to compete with the current administration at all because they're complete failures," said Dave Carlson.

The Carlsons said they're only recently starting to be vocal about their support for Trump. She still won't wear a Trump shirt in public. He tried it at a hardware store recently and got some looks.

"We shouldn't be divided over politics. We're all people," she said.

Ronald Rodriguez, who drove from nearby Clinton with his wife and their two daughters. also wanted Trump to talk "about the hurricane and the way it's being handled."

He said the country has been headed in the wrong direction under Biden.

"It was a whole lot easier four years ago. Groceries were cheaper, fuel, pretty much everything," he said.

"Everything has gone up," his wife Chasity Rodriguez said.

Ronald Rodriguez said high interest rates are killing his car dealership.

"People can't afford to buy," he said. "Last two years, we've had to do more repos than ever. It's never been like that."

Brendon Core also drove in from Clinton, wearing a red Trump-Vance hat, a blazer and blue jeans.

"I'll tell you the real reason I vote Republican," he said. "It's because I'm a Christian."

He said abortion and the border are two of the biggest issues for him. At 21, this will be his first time voting in a presidential election. He's planning to cast his ballot in person on Nov. 5.

"I will be there," he said.

NC Republican warns of 'conspiracy theory junk'

As first responders, volunteers, national guardsmen, and others continue rescue efforts and deliver supplies to the region, there has been increased scrutiny of the emergency response in the immediate aftermath of the storm, and of the federal government's response in subsequent days.

At the same time, local officials and lawmakers have said they've been inundated by people calling about conspiracy theories that have spread across social media.

The situation prompted N.C. Sen. Kevin Corbin, a Republican from Franklin who represents several counties in the western end of the state, to urge people to help stop "this conspiracy theory junk that is floating all over Facebook and the internet about the floods in WNC," calling it "a distraction to people trying to do their job."

"Folks, this is a catastrophic event of which this country has never known," Corbin wrote in a Facebook post. "It is the largest crisis event in the history of N.C. The state is working non-stop. DOT has deployed workers from all over the state. Duke power has 10,000 workers on this. FEMA is here. The National Guard is here in large numbers."

Trump's campaign also launched a GoFundMe fundraiser for victims of the hurricane throughout the Southeast, which had raised more than \$5.3 million as of Friday.

The campaign said it had selected Samaritan's Purse, Water Mission, Clinch Foundation and Mtn2Sea Ministries as recipients for the funds, and had "made an initial disbursement and will continue providing more funds as support continues to come in."

Democrats slam Trump's 'extreme agenda for NC'

The presidential race in North Carolina was already tightening in recent weeks. Averages of recent polls maintained by 538 and RealClearPolitics show Trump leading Harris in the state by 0.9 and 0.6 percentage points, respectively, both of which are well within the margins of error of most polls.

Trump has won North Carolina twice, but by only 1.3 percentage points in 2020. His regular visits to the state have underscored how seriously his campaign has taken the state, as Harris has attempted to put it back in the Democratic column.

Ahead of Trump's visit, Democrats held a press conference in Fayetteville on Friday morning slamming what they said was the GOP nominee's "extreme agenda for North Carolina."

State Sen. Val Applewhite, a Fayetteville Democrat, said Trump was "coming here to spread more of his dangerous lies, just like his running mate J.D. Vance who this week refused to admit Trump lost in 2020."

Fayetteville Mayor Mitch Colvin, meanwhile, said people won't be able to afford four more years of Trump's economic policy, equating his proposed tariffs on other countries to tax increases on working families.

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