

'It reinstills your faith in people.' What Western NC lawmakers say about Helene aftermath

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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 to 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 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 life-giving. 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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Obituaries

Joseph Bruce Cleasby

August 28, 1932 - September 1, 2024

by his sisters Libby Sutton, Dorothy Ladamus, Janet Brown (Phil), Mimi Bickling (Keith) and brother Dick (Jodie). He was preceded in death by his brother George and Tom and sister Brenda. He had many nieces and nephews, and he loved each of them in his own unique way.

Bruce proudly served in the US Air Force for 22 years, serving in the enlisted ranks before retiring as a Major in 1973. From there, he attended Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, KY, and spent 25 years serving as a pastor with the United Methodist Church. Bruce was a friend to all, loved his church family, his neighbors, and his friends, but the loves of his life were Nancy and his four girls.

The family will host a memorial service at St. Andrew Methodist Church (Easley) at 10:00 AM on October 12, 2024, with a reception following the service. A private graveside service will take place in the MJ Dolly Cooper Veterans Cemetery. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to Samaritan's Purse or St. Andrew Methodist Church.

Visit RobinsonFuneralHomes.com or [Robinson Funeral Home & Crematory-Downtown, Easley](http://RobinsonFuneralHome&Crematory-Downtown.Easley). The second of nine children, Bruce is also survived

Kathleen (Miller) Mulvaney

May 18, 1942 - September 23, 2024

back to it, scheduling time and travel around her nine grandkids' busy lives.

In between all of her other roles, Kathy was singularly herself: ballet dancer, beauty queen, board member, bridge player, and even league bowler at Charlotte's Park Lanes. Add to the list: teacher, donor, best friend, aunt, art collector, theatre lover, mimosa enthusiast, and movie buff. Walker, World Traveler, Fantasy Fester. The life of the party, she had an easy smile and understated elegance that put everyone at ease.

Kathy lived a fascinating life, joy-filled but certainly not free from grief and great loss. Her unique ability to balanced resilience and grace in the face of hardship -- even until her final days -- is one of many legacies she leaves behind.

Mrs. Mulvaney is survived by her children Mick (Pam), Ted (Erin), and Kerry Ferguson (Mark); and grandchildren Caroline, Finnegan, James, Nathaniel, Elizabeth, Caleb, Mirabelle, Beckett, and Felicity, all who adored her. She was predeceased by her husband Mike, grandchild Grace, brother Jerry Miller, and a handful of her favorite friends.

The family wishes to thank Kathy's dedicated community of caregivers.

A memorial will take place at 6:00 p.m. on Saturday, Nov. 23rd in the Queens Hall Parlors, Queens University, Charlotte. A Key West event will take place this summer.

Obituaries

OBITUARY INDEX

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NAME	AGE	CITY	DEATH	ARRANGEMENTS
Cleasby, Joseph Bruce, 92	Easley	Sep 01	Robinson Funeral Home	
Davenport, Pearl, 96	Charlotte	Oct 07	Grier Funeral Service, Inc	
Johnston, James Allen, 88	Charlotte	Oct 07	Forest Lawn West	
Mulvaney, Kathleen (Miller), 82	Spartanburg	Sep 23	Dunbar Funeral Home	
Ware, Linda Ellen, 76	Indian Land	Oct 09	Heritage Funeral Home Ballantyne Chapel	

Bold Listings indicate expanded obituaries

James Allen Johnston

August 20, 1936 - October 7, 2024

where he served as a Fire Fighter, Chief, and EMT. He received many awards for his service through the years, most recently, The Order of the Long Leaf Pine, The Order of the Guardian. He touched many people in the community as he would often be the first one to arrive on a call for help. He was a founding member of Garden Memorial Presbyterian Church where he served as a Sunday School teacher, Youth Leader, Lay Preacher, Choir Director and Elder. For many years he and his wife welcomed the young people into their home every Sunday night for fellowship and a safe place to hang out.

His career was with UNICAL 76 Corporation where he started out as a truck driver moving to Dispatcher and then Operations manager. He retired with over 31 years of service. Not one to actually retire, he then worked for Atlantic Landscaping, thus feeding his love of the outdoors and gardening.

James always had a large garden and shared the fruits of his labor with his family, friends and neighbors.

He, along with his brother, enjoyed many years as members of the Power of the Past Antique Tractor Club. One of his favorite ways to serve was pulling the float for the Holy Angels residents in the Belmont Christmas Parade.

James was a member of the Moore's Chapel Volunteer FD then the West Meck Volunteer FD for over 60 years.

He loved his family and

was always willing to help them any way he could. In his retirement he enjoyed spending time with his great-grandchildren and teaching them how to garden.

James served his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ every day of his life.

Survivors include his children, James Daniel Johnston (Donna), Sandra J. Kelly (Eric) and Samuel Jay Johnston (Wendy); grandchildren, Joshua (Rachel), Joseph (Dondra), James Adam (Kristi), Cameron, Maddie, Sadie Johnston, Anna Deaton (Justin and Jimmie Kelly (Kiarra)); great-grandchildren, Taylor, Uriah, Kate, Avery, Abigail, Ben Deaton, Grayson James and Beckham Kelly.

He was preceded in death by his beloved wife, Joanne Henry Johnston; parents, Mack Jay and Mary Springs Johnston; sisters, infant sister, Dorothy Ann, Mildred Johnston and Frances Auten and his brother, Grady Johnston.

Frends are cordially invited to a visitation with the family starting at 10:00 AM. On Saturday, October 12, 2024, at Garden Memorial Evangelical Presbyterian Church, 2324 Sam Wilson Road, Charlotte, NC 28214. A Celebration of James' Life will begin at 11:30 AM following the visitation. Memorials may be given to Garden Memorial Evangelical Presbyterian Church.

As a wife, Kathy was a loyal partner for close to 60 years. As a mom, she was her children's biggest fan and rarely missed any of their games, plays, concerts, speeches, or events. As a grandmother, she was right