

Football teams returning to the field - Some in WNC resume their seasons in Week 9

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The Mountain Athletic Conference and the Western Highlands Conference will resume their 2024 seasons in Week 9. They missed the last three after Tropical Storm Helene swept through Western North Carolina on Sept. 27, causing extensive flooding.

Last week, the Mountain 7 Conference and Mountain Foothills 7 Conference resumed their seasons. The Smoky Mountain Conference began playing again on Oct. 4, Week 7, missing only a week due to Helene.

With the Mountain Athletic Conference and Western Highlands Conference resuming this week, every NCHSAA conference in WNC has resumed play. The only football teams in WNC that haven't played are the private schools, Christ School, Asheville School, and Asheville Christian Academy.

This weekend, the Mountain Athletic Conference also announced an updated schedule for the rest of the season. Week 9 and 10 games will be held at McDowell or Roberson since they have power and water.

The locations of Week 11 and 12 contests are to be determined.

The Western Highlands Conference hasn't announced an updated schedule as of Monday.

With most of WNC playing football this week, here is a complete schedule of every game in Week 9.

Monday

Chase at Brevard

Polk County at R-S Central

Tuesday

Franklin at Tuscola

Friday

Enka vs. Reynolds, 5 p.m. at Roberson

Madison at Rosman, 6 p.m.

Asheville High at McDowell, 7 p.m.

Erwin at Roberson, 7:30 p.m.

East Henderson at Smoky Mountain, 7:30 p.m.

North Henderson at Pisgah, 7:30 p.m.

Polk County at Chase, 7:30 p.m.

Robbinsville at Andrews, 7:30 p.m.

Swain County at Murphy, 7:30 p.m.

Hayesville at Cherokee, 7:30 p.m.

Tuscola at West Henderson, 8 p.m.

Saturday, Oct. 19

Avery County vs. Mountain Heritage, 1 p.m., at Madison

Mitchell at Draughn, 2 p.m.

Zachary Huber is a high school sports reporter for the Asheville Citizen Times and Hendersonville Times-News. Email him at zhuber@gannett.com or follow him on X @zacharyahuber.

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Fundraising could affect FEMA payouts - Crowdfunding benefits may not be duplicated

October 16, 2024 | Times-News, The (Hendersonville, NC) Author: Lianna Norman; USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA Section: News 891 Words Page: A8 OpenURL Link

For those who lost their homes or belongings as a result of Hurricane Milton or Hurricane Helene, rebuilding and replacing can be daunting.

And there are plenty of rumors flying around about FEMA disaster assistance, which can add a whole other layer of confusion on top of the stress of rebuilding.

Some people affected by hurricanes have made or are considering making a GoFundMe or online fundraiser to help pay for the cost of any damages they have to their home or property. They might be wondering if that interferes with their FEMA eligibility.

The answer: It might. If a person uses crowdfunding or GoFundMe, it isn't likely that they'll be able to receive disaster assistance from FEMA. However, there's still a chance.

According to FEMA's site for mitigating rumors in the wake of Hurricane Helene and Hurricane Milton, FEMA cannot duplicate benefits or funds disaster victims receive from another source. But it depends on the situation.

"If you receive money from a GoFundMe page for a specific disaster-related expense – such as home repairs, funeral expenses or other emergency needs – you may not be able to receive FEMA aid for the same expense," FEMA's website says.

"For example, if you receive donations to clean up storm damage to your home, FEMA may not be able to also grant you financial assistance for home clean up."

FEMA adds, "We encourage all survivors to apply for assistance regardless so we can review your specific case."

There are a wide variety of post-disaster needs that FEMA can help cover – like temporary housing, purchasing a generator or covering costs related to funerals and reburials caused by a storm. Here's a nonexhaustive list of what FEMA money may be used for, provided by the Asheville Citizen Times.

Home repairs

General repairs: Even if there was a preexisting issue with a home, if it receives major damage from Milton, FEMA can provide funds to repair.

Accessibility: Whether a person has a preexisting disability and the accessibility features of their home were damaged, or they suffer a disability caused by Milton, FEMA can fund the repair or installation of features such as ramps, grab bars, paved paths and more.

Privately owned roads, bridges, docks: FEMA will fund these repairs if they are the only access to the home.

Replacement: "Limited funds may be available under rare conditions to replace a disaster-destroyed home," as per the FEMA website.

Housing expenses

Direct temporary housing: Temporary housing units, multi-family lease and repair or direct lease are available to those who have been displaced by flooding.

Displacement: This money helps those displaced by flooding seek immediate housing needs while looking for a longer-term rental.

Personal property: These funds are allocated for replacing essentials lost in flooding, such as kitchen appliances, computers and furnishings, as well as books, uniforms and tools required for school or work.

Moving and storage expenses: If those affected by a disaster wish to store their possessions in a safe place like a storage unit while looking for a rental property, FEMA may assist.

Group flood insurance: If a home suffered flood damage in a Special Flood Hazard Area, FEMA can purchase a group flood insurance policy on the homeowner's behalf. This policy gives three years of coverage.

Clean and sanitize: This pays for minor damages to a home if the FEMA inspector decides that the home remains livable.

Miscellaneous

Serious needs: Funds cover immediate needs like water, food, first aid, prescriptions, infant formula, breastfeeding equipment, diapers, personal hygiene items and fuel.

Funeral: FEMA can assist with payments for funerals and reburials.

Transport: Repairs for a personal vehicle, if there is no other feasible way to get around.

Child care: FEMA can help with new child care expenses caused by the disaster.

It's important to note that "some disaster aid does not have to be paid back, while other types of help may come in the form of loans. The FEMA representative will explain the details to you when you call," FEMA says.

FEMA money can't be used to go to the movies or buy a lottery ticket. FEMA recommends that disaster survivors keep their Hurricane Helene- or Hurricane Milton-related receipts for about three years "to show how you spent FEMA grants and document how your disaster funds were used."

For people who want to use crowdfunding, GoFundMe has set up a general fundraiser with the money going to people impacted by any hurricane. GoFundMe delivers cash grants from this fundraiser directly to those impacted by domestic hurricanes.

The money goes to "verified individuals who qualify and are fundraising for themselves or on behalf of someone else. We may also provide grants to fundraisers benefiting small businesses and community relief efforts, or to vetted nonprofits coordinating long-term recovery," according to the website. Find information at gofundme.com/f/enxh8-hurricane-relief-fund.

GoFundMe also has a landing page for verified nonprofits that are supporting victims of Hurricane Milton, including Team Rubicon, Feeding Tampa Bay, The Red Cross and Americanes at gofundme.com/c/act/hurricane-milton.

Dozens of families impacted by Milton have set up their own accounts on GoFundMe to raise money. GoFundMe has a page for verified fundraisers for people asking for help with replacing and restoring their houses and belongings. Find them at gofundme.com/c/act/hurricane-relief/florida.

Contributing: Jake Allen, Indianapolis Star

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FEMA office opens in Hendersonville

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A FEMA Disaster Recovery Center opened Wednesday at 2111 Asheville Highway in Hendersonville to help people in the wake of Tropical Storm Helene.

A DRC is a temporary office that FEMA sets up after a disaster. Survivors can go there to meet with FEMA staff face-to-face and apply for federal assistance, get information about housing and rental assistance, learn the status of a FEMA application and understand any letters received from FEMA.

FEMA staffers can help answer questions or resolve problems, offer referrals to agencies that might have additional assistance, and provide information about Small Business Administration programs.

The Hendersonville DRC will be open daily from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. No appointment is necessary. Another DRC is located at A.C. Reynolds High School in Asheville. People can also apply for FEMA Assistance online or by phone at 1-800-621-3362.

The DRC does not distribute supplies such as water, food and diapers. For those needs, Henderson County's Resource Hub at 118 McAbee Court, Flat Rock, NC 28731, will continue to be open daily from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Volunteers are needed at that site. To offer assistance, sign up through the United Way of Henderson County at www.liveunitedhc.org/volunteer.

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Water is safe to drink, city says

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HENDERSONVILLE - As of Oct. 12, 100% of the city's water system has been sampled and confirmed safe to drink, according to a news release from the city water department. Some areas may have water pressure that is not as strong as usual, butity workers are trying to restore normal pressure.

The water department is encouraging residents to be mindful of their water usage and conserve so the utility can "remain resilient and assist neighboring communities in need."

On Sept. 27, Tropical Storm Helene wreaked havoc across Western North Carolina, with record rainfall and floods that have killed at least seven people in Henderson County alone. By the next day, the city of Hendersonville had identified multiple line breaks and leaks in the water system, interrupting service in large areas.

Whenever there is an event that could potentially allow contaminants to enter the water distribution system—such as scheduled water line maintenance, water main breaks, or loss of system pressure— the city issues a a notification and recommends that residents boil tap water before using it for drinking purposes. Sign up to receive these System Pressure Advisories at www.hvlnc.gov/wateralerts.

Deirdra Funcheon is the Henderson County Reporter for the Hendersonville Times-News.

More coverage inside

'Apocalyptic' scene awaited nurses who rushed to Asheville. 2A

FEMA Disaster Recovery Center opens in Hendersonville. 3A

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TIEC to partner with Chimney Rock Village businesses this fall and holiday season

October 16, 2024 | Tryon Daily Bulletin, The (NC) Author: Jamie Lewis | Section: Business | 183 Words OpenURL Link

Temporary shops to open at Tryon International October 26

MILL SPRING—The Rutherford County Chamber of Commerce recently announced that Tryon International Equestrian Center will partner with Chimney Rock Village businesses to establish temporary shops on its premises during the fall and holiday seasons. The partnership came after Hurricane Helene destroyed many of Chimney Rock Village's business facilities.

To provide economic relief, the partnership will establish a one-of-a-kind Western North Carolina shopping experience with comradery and passion for helping one another.

Whether it's Halloween treats or Christmas lights, TIEC and Chimney Rock Village promise to bring a unique atmosphere for families to enjoy and to prove that there is, indeed, a rainbow after every storm.

"A big thank you to TIEC for generously providing their facilities to help businesses recover economically as they rebuild their stores and restaurants in Chimney Rock Village," said the Chamber.

The shops are scheduled to open on Saturday, October 26.

Tryon International Equestrian Center is located at 25 International Blvd in Mill Spring.

The post TIEC to partner with Chimney Rock Village businesses this fall and holiday season appeared first on The Tryon Daily Bulletin.

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Not all county sheriffs are the same

October 16, 2024 | Tryon Daily Bulletin, The (NC) Author: Larry McDermott| Section: Life On The Farm- Larry Mcdermott| 619 Words OpenURL Link

In North Carolina, the county sheriff is a powerful person. How he uses that power can make him either a workhorse or a showhorse.

Here in Polk County, we are fortunate to have a sheriff and staff who are all about getting the job done for the people he serves. Just downriver in South Carolina, Spartanburg County's sheriff is, in my opinion, a showhorse, a ring prancer if ever there was one. Right next door in Rutherford County, the fairly new sheriff just put his toe into the show ring and then guickly tried to pull it out. But it was too late.

In case you missed it, Spartanburg County Sheriff Chuck Wright left his post in South Carolina and went to Rutherford County, where he has zero jurisdiction, to meet with Rutherford County Sheriff Aaron Ellenburg and to appear before a television camera for a national news network.

Why? Was there some major announcement of a drug trafficking network being shut down thanks to the work of the two sheriff's departments? No. I feel it was purely a show.

Chuck Wright, who should never be confused with Polk County's Tim Wright, went to Rutherford County to stand beside Ellenburg and fire anti-FEMA and anti-President Biden salvoes, dressed in his full tactical gear.

The South Carolina sheriff literally spat out his words when the interviewer asked if he had anything to say to the federal government: "Let the good men and women around the mountain area and the foothills take care of our own."

The Rutherford County sheriff giddily posted the video on his official sheriff Facebook page. In my opinion, these two brave badge-holders let FEMA workers know that they were not welcome and should get out.

But because of either a backlash from the public or higher-ups, or both, the Rutherford County sheriff soon removed his post and put up one of him with some members of the military serving locally in the muck and despair of Helene. He was profuse in his praise of their help and assistance to people.

The Rutherford County public information officer, Kerry Giles, said the county was getting everything it needed from FEMA while other government agents were helping find the missing.

But the potentially lethal harm already was done by the sheriffs. Surging on a tidal wave of misinformation about FEMA and our government's efforts to help people, these two whetted the appetites of people with an anti-government bent and legitimized their cries of "get out."

Not surprisingly, a Rutherford County man was soon arrested and charged with making armed terror threats against FEMA personnel.

Maybe he had seen the Facebook video of the two sheriffs sending out the call. Who knows, but posted on the man's Facebook page was this:

"We The People are seeking volunteers to join us, to overtake the FEMA site in Lake Lure and send the products up the mountain...We the people are DONE PLAYING GAMES. It is time we show who we are and what we believe. They want to screw our citizens. Now, we return the favor."

The Spartanburg County sheriff has said he isn't apologizing for his initial FEMA-related comments. He later posted a Facebook video in which he said threats against FEMA personnel in Rutherford County were alarming and that it seems that now, FEMA is being helpful. As someone said in response, that's like a firefighter setting a building on fire and then returning to the scene to give advice.

And what was Polk County Sheriff Tim Wright doing during all of this misinformation and incitement? Being a workhorse, not a showhorse, for the people of his county.

Larry McDermott is a local retired farmer/journalist. Reach him at hardscrabblehollow@gmail.com

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SOCCER: Varnadore's late strike lifts Polk to overtime win over R-S Central

October 16, 2024 | Tryon Daily Bulletin, The (NC) Author: Staff Reports | Section: News | 397 Words OpenURL Link

Thomas Varnadore healed quickly and saved Polk County in the process.

With time ticking away in the second overtime of Monday's home match with R-S Central, Varnadore drew a hard foul on the Hilltoppers' side of the field. He slowly got to his feet, doing so quickly enough to avoid being sent off, and made his way toward the goal to await the ensuing free kick.

Nate Martinez lofted that kick just in front of the net, where R-S Central's goalkeeper batted it down to a waiting Varnadore. He quickly stuffed the rebound into the left side of the net to lift the Wolverines to a 3-2 Mountain Foothills 7 Conference win.

The Hilltoppers (4-9-1, 0-7) had already played twice since returning from a break of almost two weeks in the wake of Hurricane Helene's destructive path through Western North Carolina, and perhaps that helped R-S push Polk County (9-2-2, 4-1) to the limit for all 100 minutes.

The Wolverines did score first, with a bit of fancy footwork from Manny Abraham leading to that tally in the 20th minute. Abraham raced down the left side for a long pass, reaching the ball deep in the corner at the Hilltoppers' end of the field. He feinted and dribbled around a defender, driving within a few feet of the goal before striking a perfect cross to Nate Martinez, who tapped the ball at the back post to give Polk a 1-0 advantage.

R-S Central responded six minutes later, evening the match, and it remained deadlocked throughout the rest of the first half and all of the second, sending the teams tied at 1-1 into two 10-minute overtime periods.

Polk struck first in the initial extra session, with Martinez driving a corner kick near the back post, where Varnadore awaited unquarded. His header slipped just inside the far post to put the Wolverines up 2-1.

The Hilltoppers, though, struck in the first minute of the second overtime session to even the match, and for a time, it appeared that Polk might have its first match of the season to be decided by penalty kicks. Varnadore's strike with 3:06 remaining prevented that.

Polk County will be back in action on Friday, hosting Brevard, with junior varsity action starting at 5 p.m. and varsity following at 6:45 p.m.

The post SOCCER: Varnadore's late strike lifts Polk to overtime win over R-S Central appeared first on The Tryon Daily Bulletin.

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Highlights from the Polk County Board of Commissioners Candidate Forum

October 16, 2024 | Tryon Daily Bulletin, The (NC) Author: Storme Smith| Section: Community | 1527 Words OpenURL Link

COLUMBUS—On Tuesday, October 15, at the Polk County High School Auditorium, the six Polk County Board of Commissioners candidates participated in a Candidate Forum sponsored by Polk Rural Forever.

The candidates in attendance were Paul Beiler (R), Ray Gasperson (D), Jennifer Hargett (R), Libby Morris (D), Karen Pack (D) and Myron Yoder (R). All candidates attended, though Jennifer Hargett left after the first half of the forum to deal with a family emergency.

Conserving Carolina, Polk County Farm Bureau, and Saluda Community Land Trust were co-hosts. Walker, Wallace and Emerson and Town and Country Realty of the Carolinas sponsored the forum, while Jeff Byrd coordinated the program.

During the forum, candidates were allowed to introduce themselves and address questions from the moderator, local podcaster James Hrynshyn, and questions submitted by the audience. The discussions touched on various topics, including disaster preparedness and economic development.

To begin, Beiler expressed his gratitude to everyone who attended the forum, speaking on the importance of community engagement and the challenges faced by the county. Gasperson highlighted his education and long-standing ties to the community.

Hargett shared her background in healthcare, education, and real estate investment, while Morris spoke about her engineering career and community service. Pack discussed her advocacy for saving Highway 9 and the need for public participation in decision-making processes, and Yoder expressed his gratitude for the county's educational system and shared his experience as commissioner.

When asked about preparing for future natural disasters, Beiler highlighted the importance of evaluating responses to unique disasters and strengthening community bonds. Gasperson discussed the need for regular conversations and cooperation between the county and the governing boards of its municipalities. Hargett followed up with her thoughts on prioritizing communication infrastructure and disaster planning.

Morris brought up the need to improve cell phone and broadband coverage, while Pack focused on engaging with experts to identify necessary changes and strengthen infrastructure. Yoder shared the county's proactive steps, including grants for stream debris removal and emergency operations preparedness.

The second question of the night related to guiding economic development as one of the primary responsibilities of a county commission.

Yoder expressed the importance of focusing on businesses that align with the county's strengths, such as agriculture and local family enterprises. Pack spotlighted a desire to encourage locally owned, unique businesses that serve the community and attract visitors.

Morris emphasized the need to keep Polk County rural and prioritize businesses such as agriculture, agritourism, and healthcare. Hargett advocated for improving infrastructure to attract small and medium-sized enterprises, and Gasperson spoke on the importance of maintaining the county's rural character and supporting small and medium-sized businesses.

Beiler brought educational resources to the foreground, such as apprenticeships and getting a heavy equipment

program to the school system so students could leave school job-ready.

The final question of the first half of the forum was, "What role can a commissioner play in making living and working in the county easier without threatening our rural character and the agriculture-oriented economy?"

Morris said there is a need for housing that supports the existing community without transforming the county into a bedroom community. She expressed concerns about large developments turning the area into mini-escapes, highlighting the importance of addressing issues such as infrastructure and traffic when planning new housing.

Pack spoke on the need for public input and community forums to gather thoughts and ideas for growth and development in the county. She proposed updating the 2020 vision plan to align with the county's current needs and goals.

Yoder discussed the delicate balance of creating housing for the workforce while managing development ordinances. He mentioned measures to control density and infrastructure needs, emphasizing the importance of impact studies and sustainable development.

Hargett called attention to the county's vulnerability to developers and emphasized the need for zoning to prevent large developments and apartments. She urged residents to participate in planning board and city council meetings to voice their concerns and preferences for the county's development.

Gasperson proposed the concept of cluster farm developments to maintain the rural nature of the county. He discussed the potential of clustering dwellings while preserving open and rural spaces, aiming to offer housing options that align with the county's character.

Beiler spoke on the scarcity of land and housing in the county, expressing concerns about the rising prices that could make homeownership unattainable for many residents. He highlighted the delicate balance between allowing growth and preserving the county's character, acknowledging the issue's complexity.

The second half of the forum featured audience questions, with the first asking if regulations to protect water and property due to water flow should be reenacted.

Yoder highlighted the importance of addressing the land's slope when considering water protection regulations. He emphasized the need to focus on the slope of the land rather than its elevation, particularly in the context of potential risks such as mudslides. Beiler expressed concerns about water runoff from construction sites and farms, underscoring the need for proactive citizen involvement in identifying and addressing such issues. He also pointed out the absence of dedicated personnel to monitor these concerns, emphasizing the responsibility of citizens to bring them to the attention of local authorities.

Gasperson delved into the impact of steep slope areas on housing costs and proposed the idea of cluster developments as a potential solution to lower individual housing costs, and explained the potential benefits of cluster developments in addressing housing affordability. Pack focused on the maintenance of roads by the NCDOT, highlighting the importance of ensuring proper water runoff from roads to address safety concerns for residents.

Morris brought attention to the environmental considerations associated with land development, emphasizing the need to adhere to parameters set by the State Department of Environmental Quality to prevent soil and silt runoff into streams, which can negatively impact the local ecology.

The next audience question asked if the board has any role in managing the flow of information.

Beiler expressed concerns about the spread of misinformation and proposed organizing community forums to engage with citizens, share information, and address questions. He emphasized the importance of responsible communication and the role of the commissioners in mitigating fear-mongering.

Pack echoed that sentiment, acknowledging the significant communication challenges in the county. She advocated for conducting community forums to directly interact with citizens, thereby providing proper and accurate information.

Morris shed light on the difficulty in accessing reliable information in Polk County. She emphasized the need for discretion in processing such material and highlighted the shortcomings of the county's webpage in providing dynamic and current information.

Gasperson emphasized the need to address misinformation during public meetings and stressed the role of commissioners in preventing the spread of incorrect information, particularly within the citizen commons.

Yoder stressed the importance of correcting misinformation as a commissioner, highlighting the collaborative role of both the private and public sectors in providing accurate information and resources to support citizens. He also emphasized the accessibility of valuable information on the county's website as a resource.

Candidates were then asked to identify one environmental issue they'd like to address.

Gasperson highlighted the need to assess reclamation work for the county's streams, emphasizing Helene's devastating impact on water bodies such as Lake Adger, the Green River, and the Pacolet River. He expressed a strong desire to secure state funding to aid in the reclamation efforts. Morris emphasized the importance of focusing on the health of the watersheds and streams, particularly in terms of sediment load and unexpected contaminants such as heavy metals. She underscored the significance of addressing these issues to preserve the overall health of the county's water systems.

Pack expressed concerns about the potential environmental impact of road paving, and she added the need to prevent further pavement and blacktop runoff that may harm the environment, suggesting that an environmental group should assess the impact on waterways to halt the widening of Highway 9. Beiler mentioned the urgent need for repairs to the Lake Adger dam, estimating the cost to be upwards of 17 billion dollars. He added the crucial nature of this issue and expressed hope for state assistance in funding the necessary repairs.

Yoder identified debris, silt, and runoff erosion control as the primary environmental threats in the county and shared the news that the Army Corps of Engineers had been contracted to clean up roadways and waterways, including the use of sonar equipment to assess the bottom of Lake Adger.

The night's final question was, "If you could only accomplish one thing in the term you're seeking, what would it be and why?"

Pack stressed the importance of increased citizen involvement in local government and expressed a desire for greater public engagement in decision-making processes. Yoder wants to see the expansion of broadband infrastructure as a key initiative, citing a significant investment in fiber optics and internet connectivity. Beiler expressed excitement over his commitment to bringing a YMCA to Polk County, a project he has been actively pursuing.

Meanwhile, Gasperson said the county's rural landscape should be protected, and high-density developments should be prevented. Morris advocated preserving Polk County's rural nature, underscoring the need for collaborative efforts between the county and townships to safeguard farmland and productive land.

Overall, the forum provided valuable insights into the candidates' perspectives and their priorities for Polk County's future.

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Warren County volunteers respond quickly to needs in Western North Carolina

October 16, 2024 | Warren Record, The (NC) Author: Luci Weldon| Section: News| 534 Words OpenURL Link

Since Hurricane Helene devastated Western North Carolina, there have been a number of accounts — both verbal and via social media — of Warren County residents stepping up to help.

Logging crews have worked to clear roadways. Emergency responders have provided assistance and relief for their fellow emergency responders in the mountains. Countless volunteers have collected supplies for people who, in many cases, lost everything they own. There are other examples of what Warren County residents have done to help the residents of Western North Carolina without seeking thanks or recognition.

However, the newspaper learned of a volunteer effort to gather supplies just days after Hurricane Helene moved through North Carolina. In around a week, a number of Warren County residents met to organize a supply drive, collected supplies, and transported them to Western North Carolina.

This effort began with a phone call, gained momentum through the work of the Warren County Sheriff's Office, local fire departments and area residents, and culminated with a tractor-trailer full of supplies on the way to the mountains. While the people involved are not seeking recognition, The Warren Record wanted to share this account as just one example of how local residents have stepped up to help those in need.

Warren County Sheriff John Branche said that he received a phone call from Weldon Capps on Sept. 29 asking if there would be a way to plan an effort to collect supplies. If something could be planned, he knew of someone who could take the supplies to Western North Carolina.

Plans began to develop through a text thread, Branche said. As interest grew, Chief Deputy Benjamin Jackson suggested holding a meeting.

The meeting was held that afternoon. Those joining Branche and Capps at the meeting included Chief Sheriff's Deputy Benjamin Jackson, Chip Capps, Mike Coffman, Ted Echols, Joey Andrews, Steve Barney, Robby Ross and others. The meeting brought together representatives of the Warren County Sheriff's Office, Warren County Fire Association, representatives of Warrenton and Norlina town governments, local fire departments, the Carolina Logging Association and other area resources.

The meeting resulted in the development of a letter shared through resources that included social media. The letter reached out to local residents in a call for donations of supplies ranging from soap to shampoo, canned food to pet food, toothbrushes to deodorant, batteries to flashlights, and cleaning supplies to first aid supplies. Area fire departments became drop-off points for donations.

Branche said that fire departments took what was collected to a staging area at Cast Stone Systems in Warrenton. Volunteers worked from 3-5:30 p.m. on Thursday to sort and pack the supplies before loading them onto a tractor-trailer. On Friday morning, the tractor-trailer left Warrenton for Western North Carolina.

Branche said that the Warren County community came through with an "absolutely great response" throughout the effort. He indicated that it would be difficult to name everyone who participated in some way and wanted to give a special appreciation to everyone who donated supplies, their time and/or their work equipment.

"It was a short amount of time: three days," he said. "People worked hard. In addition to supplies, many people donated their time and equipment to make this possible. The citizens are the ones who came through with donations."

• Citation (aglc Style)

Luci Weldon, 'Warren County volunteers respond quickly to needs in Western North Carolina', *Warren Record, The* (online), 16 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C44D2FA28288A0



Watauga residents can apply for help buying food through D-SNAP

October 16, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Staff Report news@wataugademocrat.com| Section: Local | 1605 Words OpenURL Link

WATAUGA — Residents in 25 western counties — including Watauga — and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians impacted by Hurricane Helene can apply for help buying food through the Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (D-SNAP) which will begin on Oct. 18, according to the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services.

D-SNAP is open to individuals and households not currently receiving Food and Nutrition Services benefits who were impacted by Hurricane Helene. NCDHHS estimates more than 150,000 people will apply for up to \$120 million in D-SNAP benefits.

"We are making up to \$120 million available to more than 150,000 individuals to buy food for their families — an essential step on the road to recovery from the devastation of Hurricane Helene," said N.C. Health and Human Services Secretary Kody H. Kinsley. "We are committed to using every tool to support the recovery of our friends, families, and fellow North Carolinians in western NC — now and for the long haul."

NCDHHS received federal approval to begin phase one of the program from the U.S. Department of Agriculture beginning on Oct. 18, 2024. People can start applying for assistance three days before the program starts during online pre-registration beginning Oct. 15 and will have seven days from the start of the program to apply. The application period will close on Oct. 24, 2024.

Eligible households will be notified within three days of completing the application and receive a one-time benefit on a special debit card (called an Electronic Benefits Transfer, or EBT card) to help buy food. The exact amount will depend on household size, income and disaster losses. While there are income eligibility standards, a number of considerations are taken into account. Individuals above these limits may still be eligible dependent on disaster expenses, so we encourage everyone who needs support to purchase food to begin their application by calling the DSNAP Virtual Call Center at 1-844-453-1117.

The benefits are good for up to nine months. Benefit cards will be available for pick up at the D-SNAP locations in each county or you can get the EBT card mailed to you overnight at the address you specify on your application.

To be eligible, a person must:

Live in Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Clay, Cleveland, Gaston, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Lincoln, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Transylvania, Watauga, Wilkes and Yancey Counties.Be a member of the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians living in zip code 28719Have suffered losses/damages related to Hurricane Helene, such as damage to property or loss of income. Have proof of identity and proof of residency (if available). Have income and resources below certain levels. Not currently be receiving benefits through the Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) program. People receiving FNS can also get extra help buying food, but do not need to fill out a D-SNAP application. They can get more information about how to get the extra help on the FNS webpage.

Residents are encouraged to apply for D-SNAP by phone, when possible, by calling the D-SNAP call center at 1-844-453-1117. The D-SNAP call center will be open at the following hours:

Weekdays (Friday, Oct. 18; Monday, Oct. 21; Tuesday, Oct. 22; Wednesday, Oct. 23; and Thursday, Oct. 24) from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.Saturday, Oct. 19, and Sunday, Oct. 20, from 9 a.m. to noon.

Residents are encouraged to apply for D-SNAP by phone on their assigned day by last name but will not be turned away if they apply any time during the application period.

Oct. 18 - A-GOct. 19 - H-MOct. 20 - N-SOct. 21 - T-ZOct. 22 - Open to allOct. 23 - Open to allOct. 24 - Open to all

Residents can also use the online ePASS Pre-Registration Tool, which will open on Tuesday, Oct. 15 and close on Tuesday, Oct. 22. Once the pre-registration is completed, applicants will be issued a confirmation number and will need to call 1-844-453-1117 between Oct. 18 and Oct. 24 to complete the interview part of the application.

Residents can also apply for D-SNAP in-person at any of the following locations listed below. The D-SNAP sites listed below will be open at the following hours:

Weekdays (Friday, Oct. 18; Monday, Oct. 21; Tuesday, Oct. 22; Wednesday, Oct. 23; and Thursday, Oct. 24) from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.Saturday, Oct. 19, and Sunday, Oct. 20 from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Los habitantes del oeste de Carolina del Norte pueden solicitar ayuda para comprar alimentos tras el huracán Helene

Los habitantes de 25 condados del oeste y la Banda Oriental de Indios Cherokee afectados por el huracán Helene pueden solicitar ayuda para comprar alimentos a través del Programa de Asistencia Nutricional Suplementaria para Desastres (D-SNAP, por sus siglas en inglés) que comenzará el 18 de octubre de 2024, anunció hoy el Departamento de Salud y Servicios Humanos de Carolina del Norte (NCDHHS, por sus siglas en inglés). D-SNAP está abierto a personas y hogares que actualmente no reciben beneficios de Servicios de Alimentación y Nutrición y que se vieron afectados por el huracán Helene. El NCDHHS estima que más de 150,000 personas solicitarán hasta \$120 millones de dólares en beneficios de D-SNAP.

"Haremos \$120 millones de dólares disponibles a más de 150,000 individuos para comprar comida para sus familias — un paso esencial en el camino a la recuperación de la devastación del huracán Helene", dijo el secretario de Salud y Servicios Humanos de Carolina del Norte, Kody H. Kinsley. "Estamos comprometidos a apoyar la salud y el bienestar de las personas afectadas en todos los rincones del oeste de Carolina del Norte, ahora y a largo plazo".

El NCDHHS recibió la aprobación federal para comenzar la fase uno del programa del Departamento de Agricultura de los Estados Unidos a partir del 18 de octubre de 2024. Las personas pueden comenzar a solicitar asistencia tres días antes del inicio del programa durante la preinscripción en línea a partir del 15 de octubre y tendrán siete días desde el inicio del programa para aplicar. El plazo de la aplicación se cerrará el 24 de octubre de 2024.

Los hogares elegibles serán notificados dentro de los tres días posteriores a completar la solicitud y recibirán un beneficio único en una tarjeta de débito especial (llamada transferencia electrónica de beneficios, o tarjeta EBT, por sus siglas en inglés) para ayudar a comprar alimentos. La cantidad exacta dependerá del tamaño del hogar, los ingresos y las pérdidas por desastres. Aunque existen requisitos de ingresos, se tomarán en cuenta varias consideraciones. Los individuos con límites de ingreso superiores podrían calificar dependiendo de sus gastos debido al desastre, así que animamos a todos los que necesiten ayuda para comprar alimentos a comenzar la aplicación por medio de llamar al centro de llamadas virtuales de D-SNAP al 1-844-453-1117.

Los beneficios son válidos hasta por nueve meses. Las tarjetas de beneficios estarán disponibles para recogerse en las ubicaciones de D-SNAP en cada condado o puede recibir la tarjeta EBT por correo durante la noche en la dirección que especifique en su aplicación.

Para ser elegible, una persona debe:

Vivir en los condados de Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Clay, Cleveland, Gaston, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Lincoln, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Transilvania, Watauga, Wilkes y Yancey. Ser miembro de la Banda del Este de los indios Cherokee que viven en el código postal 28719. Haber sufrido pérdidas o daños relacionados con el huracán Helene, como daños a la propiedad o pérdida de

ingresos. Tener prueba de identidad y prueba de domicilio (si está disponible). Tener ingresos y recursos por debajo de ciertos niveles. Actualmente no está recibiendo beneficios a través del programa de Servicios de Alimentos y Nutrición (FNS, por sus siglas en inglés). Las personas que reciben FNS también pueden obtener ayuda adicional para comprar alimentos, pero no necesitan completar una aplicación para D-SNAP. Puede obtener más información sobre cómo obtener ayuda adicional en la página web de FNS.

Se alienta a los habitantes a solicitar D-SNAP por teléfono, cuando sea posible, llamando al centro de llamadas de D-SNAP al 1-844-453-1117. El centro de llamadas de D-SNAP estará abierto las siguientes horas:

Días laborables (viernes 18 de octubre , lunes 21 de octubre, , martes 22 de octubre, miércoles 23 de octubre y jueves 24 de octubre), a partir de las 8 de la mañana hasta las 4 de la tarde. Sábado 19 de octubre y domingo 20 de octubre, a partir de las 9 de la mañana hasta el mediodía.

Se alienta a los habitantes a solicitar D-SNAP por teléfono en su día asignado según la primera letra de su apellido, pero no serán rechazados si solicitan en cualquier momento durante el período de solicitud.

Octubre 18: A-GOctubre 19: H-M Octubre 20: N-SOctubre 21: T-ZOctubre 22: Abierto para todos Octubre 23: Abierto para todos Octubre 24: Abierto para todos

Los habitantes también pueden utilizar la herramienta de preinscripción en línea ePASS, que se abrirá el martes 15 de octubre cerrará el martes 22 de octubre . Una vez que se complete la preinscripción, a los aplicantes se les emitirá un número de confirmación y deberán llamar entre el 18 y el 24 de octubre al 1-844-453-1117 para completar la entrevista que es parte de la solicitud.

Los habitantes también pueden aplicar para D-SNAP en persona en cualquiera de los siguientes lugares que se enumeran a continuación. Los sitios D-SNAP que se enumeran a continuación estarán abiertos a las siguientes horas:

Días laborables (viernes 18 de octubre, lunes 21 de octubre, martes 22 de octubre, miércoles 23 de octubre y jueves 24 de octubre), a partir de las 8 de la mañana hasta las 4 de la tarde. Sábado 19 de octubre y domingo 20 de octubre, a partir de las 9 de la mañana a las 2 p. m.

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p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C46124E072C340>



Hood: Helene shows value of fiscal restraint

October 16, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: John Hood | Section: Opinion | 649 Words OpenURL Link

The devastation wreaked on North Carolina by Hurricane Helene will take weeks to assess, months to clear out, and years to repair or rebuild. Second only to the value of the lives lost will be the exorbitant fiscal and economic costs of our recovery.

Our state government is reasonably well-prepared to shoulder its share. Our federal government is not.

Last week, the General Assembly authorized an initial \$273 million withdrawal from North Carolina's rainy-day fund to cover initial recovery expenses and changes in elections administration. Gov. Roy Cooper signed the bill.

That's only the first tranche of state expenditure. Lawmakers will return to the capital more than once before year's end, then commence regular session in early 2025. They'll appropriate much more money for various reconstruction efforts, from academic campuses and government offices to highways, bridges, water systems, and other infrastructure.

North Carolina has lots of money set aside. The rainy-day fund itself still contains about \$4.5 billion. Other accounts and our unreserved credit balance contain billions more. I don't mean to minimize the storm's staggering costs. I'm just pointing out that the General Assembly won't have to cut other programs, raise taxes, or borrow money to fulfill its responsibilities.

Congress is another story. Over the past couple of decades, presidents and lawmakers of both parties have run massive federal deficits and made exorbitant spending promises that far exceed any reasonable expectation of revenues at economically sustainable tax rates.

In a recent Reason magazine piece, Veronique de Rugy of the Mercatus Center pointed out that the federal debt now exceeds \$28 trillion — \$2 trillion more than last year and \$6 trillion more than when the Biden-Harris team entered the White House.

"This debt stands at 100% of America's gross domestic product, which, other than a one-year exception at the end of World War II, is the highest ratio we've ever had," she wrote. "Unlike in 1946, today's debt is only going to grow. Indeed, debt-to-GDP took a nearly 30-year dive to reach 23% in 1974. Today, federal debt is projected — under the rosiest scenarios — to rise to 166% in 30 years."

In other words, every dollar Congress authorizes and the executive branch distributes for hurricane relief in North Carolina is, in effect, a borrowed dollar. It represents a debt to be paid in the future, not a gift.

Of course, North Carolinians aren't the only ones who must pay each dollar back (with interest). Decades ago, our politicians essentially nationalized the provision of relief and reconstruction after natural disasters. I don't think that was wise. States and localities ought to make their own preparations and save their own money to handle future emergencies.

But at this point, I'm not sure how to extricate ourselves from this process. If Congress passed a law next year to slash federal disaster relief and then Kansas gets clobbered by tornados, their taxpayers could reasonably complain that they helped clean up after North Carolina's disaster and then didn't get their "turn" at withdrawing funds for their own.

The next best thing, then, is for future Congresses and presidents to take their budgeting responsibilities more

seriously. As I've pointed out many times, the opportunity to bring federal revenues and expenditures closer to alignment without painful adjustment has long since passed. The gap is too large.

It can't be substantially closed by eliminating "waste, fraud, and abuse." Nor can it be substantially closed by "tax hikes on the wealthy." Contrary to popular misconception, the United States already has one of the most steeply progressive tax codes in the developed world. According to the left-wing Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, the bottom quintile of American taxpayers pay an average of 17% of their income in federal, state, and local taxes. The middle quintile pays 26%. The wealthiest 1% pay 35%.

Washington's fiscal recklessness should be one of the top voting issues this year. Alas, it isn't. But ignoring the problem won't make it go away.

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Hurricane Helene hit on several levels for App State's Robinson

October 16, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Zach Colburn | Section: Sports | 1049 Words OpenURL Link

BOONE — On the surface, the Oct. 8 football practice at Kidd Brewer Stadium appeared business as usual for Appalachian State.

But while the Mountaineers prepared for this past Saturday's game at Louisiana, the lingering effects of Hurricane Helene were still evident.

In addition to their duties on the football team, members of the Mountaineers have been pitching in around the community and keeping in contact with loved ones.

They kept that same mindset this past week.

"I think that's the most important thing right now, to get out and give back — our community means a lot to us," Appalachian State head football coach Shawn Clark said during his weekly press conference on Oct. 7. "We mean a lot to them, so to make sure we give back and make them proud, but we're going to make sure we continue to do the right thing, the right things to volunteer, to get with people in the community, get with other organizations, and I think that speaks volumes to the character we have right now.

"Football, we're not winning right now the way we should be winning, but again, I'm very proud of our players, the way they represent this university, and the way they represent this town," added Clark. "There's nobody who wants the Appalachian to win more than me, I can promise you that, but the people in this town mean something to me, and we want to make sure we're here for them."

Giving back to the community hasn't been lost on Kaedin Robinson, one of Appalachian State's wide receivers and team captains.

Robinson is one of a handful of players on the Mountaineers' roster with ties to Western North Carolina as a native of Buncombe County — one of the hardest hit areas in the state regarding the effects of the hurricane.

The sixth-year senior for the Mountaineers played his high school ball at both A.C. Reynolds and Christ School before playing the 2020 season of college football at ASA Brooklyn — a junior college in New York. He then signed with Central Florida before 2021 before transferring to the Mountaineers the next season.

"It means a lot just getting out here and helping the community because the community means a lot to us as players, as a university. So getting out and helping out is everything for us," Robinson said about giving back to the Watauga County community.

Robinson, the Mountaineers' leading receiver this season at 39 catches for 565 yards, didn't initially realize the extent of the damage despite knowing the forecast.

Robinson hails from the Fletcher area in southern Buncombe County, which had either no cellular service or spotty cell service, no power, and no running water a couple of days after the hurricane.

Nearly two weeks later, some places in that area still do not have running water.

When asked his frame of mind after the events, Robinson admits that, "I'm maintaining."

"The area I'm actually in in Boone was not impacted at all, we just had a lot of rain over there. I lost power for maybe an hour," said Robinson. "I took a nap, woke up because the light was on and everything was working, Wi-Fi, everything, so I was at my house, and everything was straight.

"I didn't think it was going to be as bad as it was, honestly. I remember the rain was coming, it was loud thunderstorms," added Robinson. "I just woke up the next morning and the whole town was flooded. And I'm like, 'whoa'. I tried to call people, make sure everyone was straight. But they didn't have cell service for a day or two. So, that was rough for me because I didn't know anything — I was just stuck up here."

In addition to the hurricane hitting the area the day before the Mountaineers were scheduled to host Liberty, classes were also canceled.

With a lot of things in limbo, Robinson was able to find solace in his teammates, helping keep them focused during a tough time — a key element of helping Robinson.

"These guys keep all of us going. I mean, we're laughing, still having fun, trying to make the situation better than what it is; I think that's what's keeping me going, honestly," said Robinson. "We just try to keep each other up, keep each other up in spirits. We check on each other, check on each other's families. I'm real close with a lot of these guys' families, so I think that's what it is."

Robinson's family still resides in Buncombe County and are safe with no damage to their home but as everything was unfolding, communication with his parents was spotty and a cause for concern.

After hearing from both of them and getting some needed words of encouragement, Robinson was able to shift his attention to what he was at App State to do.

Now in his third season with the Mountaineers, Robinson is focused on getting the team back on track after losing four of their last five games. Appalachian State has five games left in the regular season.

"It means everything. That's where I'm from, and that's all I've known is Western North Carolina, so it was devastating when it happened, and I still see the videos come up across my social media page, and I'm just like, 'man, it's crazy' — you would never think that would ever happen in a place like this," said Robinson. "I didn't know anything because there wasn't any cell service; then I was just only assuming, I seen the day before, I think the Biltmore area had flooded. I had seen the cars and I was like, 'maybe this will get kind of bad.' And then I woke up the next morning and just couldn't communicate with anybody. I called my mom, and it was just breaking in and out, and I just couldn't talk to them, so that was the tough part for me.

"When I finally got to talk to my dad, he was just like, "man, we're fine here; you just worry about what you got to worry about up there,' which is school and ball and getting this thing on the right track," added Robinson. "That's been my main focus, just keep the main thing up here and just trying to encourage these guys like this thing isn't over — we still got life."

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2024 Voter Guide: NC House of Representatives District 93

October 16, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Moss Brennan moss.brennan@wataugademocrat.com| Section: Local | 2022 Words OpenURL Link

The following are answers from candidates for NC House of Representatives District 93 Ben Massey (D) and Ray Pickett (R). Each candidate received the same questions on the same day. Candidates were given a maximum of 200 words for their answer. If a response exceeded 200 words, the last sentence was removed until it met the requirement. The answers are listed in the order the candidates appear on the ballot. To read the responses to all six questions, visit www.wataugademocrat.com.

What is your No. 1 goal if elected?

Massey: Effective Communication: To actually listen to and represent everyone in District 93 and make decisions based on their input, and research and advice from experts and advisors. Decisions should be based on the greater good for the community from a 30,000-foot view always keeping in mind the impact on our environment, all our citizens, economic development, and an eye on both the immediate and long-term future. I plan to make myself available in all 3 counties at least 2 times monthly to personally meet with constituents and be available for phone calls / videoconferences. It is totally ridiculous that constituents must drive 3-4 hours to Raleigh to meet with their Representative when he lives right here in the District. This should be about service to the community, not service to the political party in Raleigh. My life as a physical therapist and lifetime volunteer has always been about service. I came out of retirement from a wonderful life on a farm because I wanted to serve my neighbors and because the elected officials of the Republican Party are systematically taking away the rights of the majority, especially women's reproductive choice, by imposing their minority political and religious dogma upon us.

Pickett: My number one goal is to continue to further policies that make the High Country the best place to live, work, and raise a family. My immediate priority is helping our area recover from the effects of Hurricane Helene. The commonsense policies that I have supported in the General Assembly have left my constituents with more money in their pockets and more opportunities in their communities. I joined my colleagues in the General Assembly in passing legislation to cut taxes by \$1.2 billion, expand rural broadband and healthcare access, and invest in our schools. I've brought back tens of millions of dollars to Watauga County alone during my time in office for infrastructure projects, local law enforcement agencies, and Watauga Medical Center, to name a few. My office has helped hundreds of constituents with issues with various state agencies, coming to the aid of hardworking North Carolinians facing a maze of bureaucracy. Looking forward, I still see work to be done to address infrastructure needs, childcare, and broadband access. I humbly ask for your vote in this upcoming election so that I can continue to deliver for Watauga County and the rest of the High Country.

What issues do you see facing North Carolina, specifically Watauga County, in 2025 and beyond?

Massey: To me, the number one issue facing everyone in NC including Watauga County is the way that elected officials of the Republican Party are taking away our rights, which include a woman's right to make her own choice about healthcare, voting rights, and rights of our LGBTQ community. These decisions are not supported by the majority of our citizens. Housing and childcare are high priorities. Employment, business, and economic development are dependent upon having attainable housing and quality childcare, not to mention that the future of our next generation starts with early education. Another important issue is the unfair ways that the elected officials of the Republican Party have gerrymandered districts, including the County Commissioner Districts in Watauga County. Rather than compete for the support of voters, based on issues of concern to voters in fair and equitable districts, they draw districts that almost guarantee election of Republicans. They are taking away our right to choose our officials by allowing them to choose their voters in order to elect themselves. Other priorities of mine are public education, gun violence, climate change and environment, affordable healthcare for all, and agriculture.

Pickett: Without a doubt, the most pressing issue here in the High Country currently is the destruction from Hurricane Helene. Our communities will need support from all levels of government in the wake of this catastrophic event, and I'm committed to continuing to advocate for them in Raleigh. Even before Hurricane Helene hit, we had many infrastructure needs in Watauga County. I will continue to build on my track record of securing appropriations to address these concerns. Thankfully, because of the responsible fiscal leadership of my colleagues and me in the General Assembly, the state has a robust rainy-day fund that can power relief efforts for those suffering in Watauga County and the WNC region as a whole.

What can state legislators do to help improve the housing situation in the district?

Massey: Everyone deserves a safe place to live. We need bold steps, like Kamala Harris's plan for construction of 3 million new housing units. The housing crisis can only be solved by federal, state, and local government agencies, private sector, and non-profits working together and, most importantly, the will of the people to do it. I'd like to expand the Council of State and elect a Commissioner of Housing. I'd also support the adoption of 1) a "Housing Expansion and Affordability Act" to incentivize construction of new housing by removing barriers to development that have contributed to the current supply shortage; 2) a "Housing and Community Financing Act" to help homeowners maintain their homes in livable conditions, address vacant houses, and seek federal funding for investments in housing projects by the business community; 3) a "Renters' Rights and Stabilization Act" to protect renters who are experiencing housing instability and establish an 'Office of Tenant and Landlord Affairs'; 4) tax incentives for first time home-buyers and create new pathways to home ownership by providing tenants with the opportunity to purchase their homes; and 5) advocate for increased and consistent support of the Housing Trust Fund and the Workforce Housing Loan Program (WHLP).

Pickett: Obviously, rebuilding in the wake of Hurricane Helene will be the priority, and we need to ensure that disaster relief funds are distributed quickly and adequately while being utilized effectively. Because the state is not in the business of building housing, I see my role as leading on policy matters that create a regulatory landscape conducive to innovative solutions in the private sector. Workforce housing will be crucial in addressing some of the challenges we face with housing in the High Country. There is no easy solution to the housing challenges in Watauga County, but I will support solutions by fostering productive dialogue between government and the private sector.

What local infrastructure projects can be benefited by state allocations in upcoming budget cycles?

Massey: After the devastating effects of Hurricane Helene, the entire State and much of the South realizes that nowhere is safe from the effects of climate change. In addition to immediately implementing policies that address climate change, federal, state, and local governments should work together to diagnose and strategically plan for and be prepared for future catastrophic disasters. We (all citizens) need to accept that addressing climate change and the environment begins at home with us and with every decision that we make. In addition to traditional hard infrastructure projects (roads and bridges), we need to address soft infrastructure projects including assistance in our district with technology access and resiliency, child and eldercare programs, and transportation. There are still areas of Watauga County without access to high-speed Internet or cell service. Many individuals find access unavailable, unaffordable, or do not have smart devices to take advantage of connectivity. Cell service is also intermittent and a deterrent to safety, business access, and access to educational opportunities, health and behavioral health care in many areas of our County. I will work to extend child care subsidies and tax credits for families and consider similar programs for elder care.

Pickett: The answer to this question changed completely when Hurricane Helene hit. Addressing storm-related infrastructure damage and loss is my priority now. I can't comment on specific projects because we are still taking stock of Helene's impact. As with any other budget process, I will be sitting down with elected officials, local government staff and leaders from community organizations as I figure out which needs to prioritize. Throughout my time in the House of Representatives, I have worked hard to support and grow our infrastructure to keep up as more people move to Watauga County and as App State and the tourism sector continues to grow.

What steps will you take to protect North Carolina's resources?

Massey: I support Governor Cooper's clean energy economy and plan to reach zero emissions. I am concerned about newly loosened permitting and environmental rules and changes ending environmental protections for millions of acres of wetlands and bans on state agencies from joining regional climate initiatives. This deregulation may help some farm operations, but at a serious cost to the environment. I will be seeking the expertise of climate and natural resource experts for advice on future plans to protect our environment especially here in the high country. I will advocate for and support our local visionary and extremely well managed non-profit conservancies. I am pleased that I was endorsed by the Sierra Club and I plan to support and champion legislation that will protect our natural resources and further mission of our local, state, and national non-profit conservancies.

Pickett: I will always work to preserve our resources by protecting our landscapes, watersheds, waterways, wildlife, and agriculture. I've also supported and will continue to support the responsible construction and maintenance of places where people can enjoy the natural beauty of the High Country. This is an area where I've benefited from strong partnerships with organizations like the Blue Ridge Conservancy and the New River Conservancy. Our tourism sector depends on visitors enjoying the natural beauty of our region, and I am committed to representing our district in a manner that prioritizes the preservation and cultivation of our natural resources.

How would you work to increase health care access to your constituents?

Massey: Closing the gap on access to affordable health care is critical to the health and well-being of all the people of North Carolina and to our local economies. It is too early to determine the long-term impact of Medicaid expansion on our rural communities; however, based on my own experiences as a health care provider (physical therapist) and as a beneficiary, I know we need to build capacity and redesign payment policies to support newer, more effective, and more accessible models of care delivery like telehealth and integrated care. I will work to decrease the administrative burden on both health care providers and beneficiaries to ease access for patients and increase the number of willing providers across insurance plan. I will also work to find ways to balance the need for accountability with the urgent need for improved quality and access. Finally, we need to revisit our priorities and consider creative ways to expand access to wellness and prevention. We need to significantly increase funding for behavioral and mental health services, reduce the stigma, and increase access as behavioral health which was ranked as the number one health issue in Watauga County in a survey by App Community Health Report.

Pickett: I was part of the bipartisan majority that voted to expand Medicaid, and since its expansion, over 500k North Carolinians, including over 1000 people in Watauga County, have gotten coverage through Medicaid. Beyond the health insurance component, we must look at policy and licensing process changes necessary to attract providers to our area. I am in support of the SAVE Act, which would give Advanced Practice Registered Nurses full practice authority; this legislation would help bring more primary care providers to the High Country. I also secured a \$12m appropriation in our last state budget for improvements to the Watauga Medical Center, helping to keep the facility in the best shape possible to provide premier care to the residents and visitors of Watauga County and surrounding areas.

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2024 Voter Guide: US House of Representatives District 5

October 16, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Moss Brennan moss.brennan@wataugademocrat.com| Section: Local | 1260 Words OpenURL Link

The following are answers from candidates for US House of Representatives District 5 Virginia Foxx (R) and Chuck Hubbard (D). Each candidate received the same questions on the same day. Candidates were given a maximum of 200 words for their answer. If a response exceeded 200 words, the last sentence was removed until it met the requirement. The answers are listed in the order the candidates appear on the ballot. To read the responses to all six questions, visit www.wataugademocrat.com.

What is your No. 1 goal if elected?

Foxx: Today I am laser-focused on helping my constituents recover from the devastation wrought by Hurricane Helene in North Carolina's High Country and channeling federal resources to where it is needed. My constituents know that I work tirelessly to represent them in Congress, to solve problems and to fight for North Carolina values. I have a record that proves I take constituent service seriously and that I will not be out-worked by anyone. I'm running to serve and faithfully represent the hard-working North Carolinians of the 5th Congressional District. Every day I hear from people across the District who are fed up with the Biden-Harris administration's high inflation, big government policies and national security failures at our borders. I plan to continue to build on my track-record of successfully fighting for my constituents, for standing up to the Biden administration, and enacting conservative solutions that actually work.

Hubbard: To be a strong voice for the working class people of North Carolina.

What issues do you see facing North Carolina, specifically your district, in 2025 and beyond?

Foxx: Our communities are reeling from the impact of Hurricane Helene. I'm working with my dedicated and professional staff to help those whose lives have been turned upside down by this terrible storm and to ensure that federal resources reach those in need. We are laser-focused on helping our neighbors across the High Country to recover and rebuild. Additionally, my constituents are fed up with the Biden-Harris economy, which is crushing average, hard-working North Carolinians, thanks to spiraling inflation and job-killing regulation. The Biden administration's policies have produced a punishing cost of living and a slowing economy, which are harming families in the High Country. If elected, I will continue to fight for legislation to rein in wasteful spending of taxpayer funds. I will support legislation to restart using tax-payer-owned federal lands to safely produce American energy-which the Biden administration has basically banned, helping drive up energy costs. We also must address our illegal immigration crisis. The Biden-Harris administration stood idly by while our nation suffered the worst influx of illegal immigration in United States history. The result of this administration callously turning a blind eye to rampant illegal immigration is the effective displacement of many in America's working class from job opportunities.

Hubbard: Economic opportunity, liveable wages, affordable housing, funding for public schools.

How will you improve communication and representation with your constituents in the congressional district?

Foxx: As my constituents know, I have a strong track-record of listening to and communicating with the North Carolina workers, families and small businesses that I represent in Congress. I will continue to focus on hearing from and talking with people from all parts of the 5th Congressional District. Over the course of my service in Congress I have learned that the best ideas and solutions to the problems we face come from the people I represent. Washington does not have the answers, the people I serve and represent have the answers. That's why I will continue to work hard to listen and learn from everyday people, so that we can come up with solutions that actually

address the problems they face.

Hubbard: My staff and I will be available to the public for comments, concerns, and meetings. I will continue to be present throughout the district as much as possible to meet with constituents.

How will you ensure the local community's values are represented in congress?

Foxx: Excellent and responsive constituent service has always been a top priority for me and my dedicated staff. I will continue to fight for my constituents-including all those in the High Country-while also fighting to ensure that any one of my constituents who deals with any federal agency or bureaucracy is treated with the fairness and respect due to every citizen. Most importantly, I will never stop listening to the people I represent. The voice of the people of the 5th district matters to me. When I travel the district and talk with folks I meet, their stories of success, hardship or struggle serve to inspire me to work tirelessly on their behalf. That's what motivates me to tackle tough problems like recovering from Hurricane Helene or our border security and immigration crisis. The truth is, we can't afford another four years of Biden-Harris policies. So I'm working hard to ensure we get back to focusing on growing our economy, keeping inflation in check and securing our border. By addressing these issues with conservative solutions that empower people, we can make life more prosperous and more free for everyone in the High Country.

Hubbard: My priorities will be guided by my constituents and the issues that have come up time and time again on the campaign trail. I will continue to make myself available to the public for suggestions.

What steps will you take to protect North Carolina's natural resources?

Foxx: As we have witnessed in the past weeks, North Carolina's natural resources are a cornerstone of strong communities and healthy local economies across the High Country. As we recover and rebuild I am dedicated to ensuring our communities have access to the natural disaster recovery resources of the federal government. Wisely stewarding our natural resources will be a key part of the process of helping communities devastated by this hurricane. I plan to be at the forefront of the federal government effort to help our communities rebuild stronger and continue to take advantage of the natural resources that helped us forge strong and beautiful communities in the first place.

Hubbard: Natural areas like the Blue Ridge Parkway are huge economic drivers in the area. We should do everything we can to retain funding for upkeep of trails and roads while maintaining the natural beauty for locals and tourists alike.

How do you plan to work across party lines to pass policy that will benefit North Carolinians?

Foxx: It's no secret that I have a strong, conservative voting record and a reputation of providing top-notch constituent services to folks across the Fifth Congressional District. My experience means I know how to get things done. While I've demonstrated my dedication to conservative values with common sense solutions that work for all North Carolinians, I also successfully passed bipartisan legislation as the chair of the House Education and Workforce Committee. Commonsense solutions means things like my legislation, the SKILLS Act, which is helping workers build 21st century job skills, while slashing bureaucracy and wasteful spending. I am currently leading a successful bipartisan investigation into rampant antisemitism at college campuses—which has already resulted in the resignation of university presidents who had tolerated antisemitism and discrimination on their campuses. There's also my very first bill, the HERO Act, which is now helping our military men and women by increasing their access to retirement savings accounts. I'm an educator, mother, grandmother and small businesswoman, allowing me to understand many of the issues my constituents must grapple with. I am 100% committed to fighting for the North Carolina values we hold dear and solving our problems with conservative solutions to our tough problems.

Hubbard: I will work with anyone willing to do something reasonable.

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2024 Voter Guide: NC State Senate District 47

October 16, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Moss Brennan moss.brennan@wataugademocrat.com| Section: Local | 898 Words OpenURL Link

The following are answers from candidates for NC State Senate District 47 Ralph Hise (R) and Frank Patton Hughes III (D). Hughes has not responded to the Watauga Democrat after multiple attempts to contact him. Each candidate received the same questions on the same day. Candidates were given a maximum of 200 words for their answer. If a response exceeded 200 words, the last sentence was removed until it met the requirement. To read the responses to all six questions, visit www.wataugademocrat.com.

What is your No. 1 goal if elected?

Hise: My top goal if reelected to the North Carolina Senate is to rebuild our infrastructure in the wake of the devastation of Hurricane Helene. Thankfully, over a decade of responsible budgeting under Republican leadership means we have cash on hand to meet our needs. I have had the honor of representing western North Carolina in the state senate for 14 years. During that time, Republican legislative majorities have transformed the state budget and regulatory environment. We inherited a structural budget deficit and over \$2 billion in debt to the federal government in 2011. Today, we have a record of budget surpluses, lower taxes, and a nearly \$5 billion Rainy Day Fund. This fiscal responsibility will now enable us to rebuild Western North Carolina following the devastation of Hurricane Helene. We have years of infrastructure repair ahead of us in many communities. If reelected, I will keep hurricane recovery at the forefront of my work in Raleigh next year.

What issues do you see facing North Carolina, specifically Watauga County, in 2025 and beyond?

Hise: Watauga County, and western North Carolina more broadly, will be dealing with the aftermath of hurricane destruction for months or years to come. The General Assembly will need to focus on infrastructure repair and leveraging federal assistance for municipalities, businesses, and individuals. This is especially important for restoring the area's tourism industry. Beyond hurricane-related issues, I see access to healthcare and workforce training as other pressing issues in my district. As chairman of the Senate Base Budget/Appropriations, I oversaw the distribution of hundreds of millions of federal dollars last year that we targeted towards healthcare infrastructure and healthcare workforce training. I have also been an advocate for the state's community college system, which bridges the gap between job creators and job seekers in North Carolina.

What local projects, infrastructure and otherwise, do you see state allocations benefitting in upcoming budget cycles?

Hise: Communities across western North Carolina will require hundreds of millions of dollars in federal and state funding to repair roads, bridges, facilities, and water treatment systems in the years to come. The silver lining of rebuilding is that we can utilize modern technology and materials to leave our infrastructure better than it was before. Outside of infrastructure, the state has recently made significant investments in improvements to the campus at Appalachian State University. We have been able to secure over \$200 million in authorized state spending for capital improvements at ASU since 2021.

What steps will you take to protect North Carolina's natural resources?

Hise: North Carolina has a diversity of natural resources that rivals any state in the nation. We have an obligation to be good stewards of these resources. The 2023 state budget included \$213.5 million over a two-year period for parks, trails, and land preservation grants.

How would you work to increase health care access to your constituents?

Hise: Increasing access to healthcare has been one of my top priorities during my time in the NC Senate. I have successfully advocated for hundreds of millions of dollars of state investment in expanding workforce training for medical professionals to increase our supply of providers in North Carolina. We also expanded state health insurance to all low-income North Carolinians last year. But there are still significant barriers to health care access that I am fighting to overcome. The first is the overly burdensome Certificate of Need law, which requires providers to obtain government permission before opening facilities, acquiring some additional equipment, or expanding certain services. We have made progress rolling back CON, but the entire system should be repealed to allow providers to better serve their communities. The other top issue is expanding full practice authority to Advanced Practice Nurses so they can serve their patients without burdensome and unnecessary fees and oversight.

What can state legislators do to help improve the housing situation in the district?

Hise: Like other markets, the housing market is driven by the forces of supply and demand. One challenge facing many communities in North Carolina and beyond is an artificial suppression of the housing supply by government regulations. Some of those regulations come from the state level, while others are locally-imposed, depending on the municipality. As state legislators, we have an obligation to evaluate state regulations to ensure that they are not overly burdensome as we try to meet our state's housing needs. We have done just that, working with the North Carolina Association of Homebuilders last year to reform the state's regulatory environment to expand the market while still protecting the public from bad actors. North Carolina is fortunate to be a top destination for relocation from other states. Rightfully so, given that conservative policies have resulted in our consistent ranking as a top state for business. But we will need to make sure that unnecessary fees or regulations don't stand in the way of meeting the increased demand for housing across the state.

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Ag community mourns loss of Brittany Robinson

October 16, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Luke Barber luke.barber@wataugademocrat.com| Section: Local | 906 Words OpenURL Link

BOONE — The local agricultural community is mourning the loss of Brittany Robinson, who passed away on Friday, Sept. 27 after a landslide destroyed her mother's home, where the family was sheltering from Hurricane Helene.

Brittany was born in Gainesville on April 24, 1988, and attended local schools, including Wiles Elementary and Kanapaha Middle School until moving to Rocky Mount, NC in the 9th grade. She graduated from Chatham Hall Boarding School in Chatham, Virginia and UNC Chapel Hill with a degree in environmental science, according to her obituary.

Her subsequent work in plant research at BASF in Raleigh Durham led to her interest in sustainable food sources and organic farming. She worked at community food bank co-ops, before moving to Shawsville, Virginia to manage a cattle farm.

More recently, on her farm in Boone, she became an owner/operator of Four Winds Farm, marketing her pork, eggs and produce through her website, the farmer's markets and local restaurants.

Brittany was a multi-talented young woman with many outside interests, including soccer and basketball, where she excelled in her high school years. She also enjoyed camping, fishing, water sports, gardening, animals and music and concert venues, especially Billy Strings, Phish and her Dad's music.

Brittany could hit a 200-yard golf ball with scary accuracy. Her smile was infectious and her friends were bountiful. Her two amazing dogs, Gus and Royal, were trained by her and responded instantly to the sound of her voice.

A Memorial Celebration of Life service was held at First Presbyterian Church in Gainesville on Tuesday, Oct. 15.

In response to Brittany's passing, the King Street Farmers Market, Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture and the High Country Food Hub released a joint statement in remembrance of Brittany:

"Brittany brought a sense of joy, creativity and excitement to every King Street Market. One day this fall, Brittany was stressed about her pigs that were about to give birth late in the pouring rain (and of course, she would be there delivering the babies). Even still, after days of farming in the rain and that concern looming, she put on fun music on our speaker at the market and was eager to share recipes and beautiful produce with everyone she met. This was a defining characteristic of Brittany. She had a sense of vivacity—an aliveness that made it very apparent to anyone she met that she was in exactly the right line of work. She was fun! Brittany loved her pigs and her farm work and brought that love to the market each week in the form of generous smiles and glowing produce."

Brittany started Four Winds Farm with her parents four years ago after many years working on other farms and at other markets in Virginia. As a new farm to the local agricultural scene in the High Country, Four Winds Farm found success under Brittany's direction, growing incredible organic produce, raising pigs with care from farrow to finish and bringing a truly enjoyable presence and fresh face to the community.

"Brittany became a true staple in our community, and we mourn that she is gone from us too soon," the organizations stated.

Likewise, friends and associates of Brittany expressed their condolences and shared fond memories of the time they shared with her.

Paige Fulk said Brittany came into her life when she needed her after having a rough experience at another farm.

"She welcomed me with open arms, and in no time, I was learning how to feed pigs, milk goats and handle the rhythm of farm life," Fulk said. "Brittany's kindness and trust gave me room to grow as a gardener and farmhand. I'll never forget her patience and generosity."

Hanna Houpe recalled the impact that Brittany had on her life.

"I started working at Four Winds Farm early this year on a whim. I wanted to work outside and try something new, but I never expected to find such a welcoming, kind and supportive person to work alongside. Brittany was my boss, but she was also an amazing teacher and patient friend and someone I grew to love," Houpe said. "Her kind heart and beautiful soul will never be forgotten."

Jess McClelland and Alex O'Neil with Daybreak Homestead remembered Brittany's generosity, knowledge and hardwork as she helped them with their own farming operations.

"Brittany was one of the most casually hardcore people I have ever met. She would wrangle a 300 pound pig with a smile on her face. She absolutely loved farming and the lifestyle and was always down to help. The first time we met in person, she sat in our nasty pig barn and taught us how to castrate piglets. She didn't know us at all, but she came to help out some strangers with literally the worst job ever! We are so, so sad to have lost her. We are so lucky to have known her," McClelland and O'Neil said.

The King Street Farmers Market will celebrate Brittany's life with a memorial space at the market on Oct. 22 from 1 to 4 p.m. People are welcome to bring flowers, tokens, photos or share notes of memories and wishes in honor of Brittany.

Brittany is survived by her mother and step-father, Patrice and Frank Courts, her father and step-mother, Russell and Brenda Robinson, her true love and soul mate, Jeremy Gilmer, two step-brothers, Daniel (Raquel) and Patrick (Haley), her step-sister, Jennifer, many nieces, nephews, aunts, uncles, and cousins, and friends, and her two "children", Shiloh Shepards Gus and Royal. She was pre-deceased by her brother, Geoffrey Robinson.

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Locals farmers working to recover from hurricane impact

October 16, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Luke Barber luke.barber@wataugademocrat.com| Section: Local | 647 Words OpenURL Link

WATAUGA — In the first days after the storm, Gray Shipley of Shipley Farms and Watauga Butchery in Vilas said the experience was like being back in the 1800s, as they and their neighbors on Linville Creek Road began to grapple with its implications.

"At first, we were completely cut off and couldn't get in or out. And then something would open up. And you found, all right, I made it all the way to the Dollar General, but the road washed out, but we could get this far. All your information was just asking people, 'What did you find out when you went over there?'" Shipley said.

For days, communications were sparse, as news of the storm's effects spread throughout the most rural parts of the county via word of mouth. It did not take long before news of road washouts, landslides, and supply shortages prompted the Shipleys and their neighbors to bring out their tractors and chainsaws to begin clearing paths through the debris.

Shipley Farms also quickly became a supply distribution site that provided food, water, non-perishables, diapers, baby formula, cleaning supplies, and other material needs to the communities surrounding Linville Creek.

"I've only lived here full time for a couple of years, but his farm's been here in the family for 152 years. I've met more of our neighbors in the past week than I have in 10 years by a factor of 10. It used to feel like we were in a valley," Shipley said.

Many farmers, particularly those who deal in livestock, are facing similar issues. The storm's effects have imposed unique challenges on those whose businesses rely on large swaths of land.

Shipley said the farm experienced seven mudslides, which tore up parts of the land, moved streams and filled pastures with rocks. The farm's office and store front also flooded, but Shipley said there wasn't any damage to the building.

One of the biggest challenges they and other farms face is the amount of fencing that was either washed out or destroyed by fallen trees. The Shipleys and other farmers also need hay to help them get through the winter.

While these needs are more immediate, farms are also facing the looming challenges imposed by missing out on the busiest time of the year for them and many other businesses as leaf season comes and goes without experiencing the bump in revenue from tourism to the area.

"For the long-term health of the community, you have to have businesses, jobs, and employment for that viability. Up here, the part of that's dependent on tourism is shot. The part that's dependent on agriculture is really suffering. A lot of our agriculture is either a second job or a side hustle for people. Especially so for us, we don't make very much margin on raising cattle. Our margin is in the specialty value-added, you know, selling the meat, the dry aging, the sausages, the burgers, the Christmas packages, serving restaurants. Our restaurants are either closed, washed out or empty. This is supposed to be our busiest month," Shipley said.

As someone who lived on the Gulf Coast during the infamous oil spill in 2010, Shipley said it will be especially important for the area to focus on its messaging around tourism as the region begins to open up once more as conditions improve. He said he saw first-hand how pervasive negative messaging can drive tourists away for years after conditions surrounding a disaster improve.

As for the cattle themselves, Shipley said they didn't seem to mind the historic rainfall one bit.

"During the absolute worst of the storm, which was at about 11 o'clock on Friday morning, I looked out the window and they looked like they were about as happy as they could possibly be," Shipley said.

For more information on Shipley Farms and Watauga Butcher, visit shipleyfarmsbeef.com.

For more information on how to support area farmers affected by Hurricane Helene, visit watauga.ces.ncsu.edu.

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App State Sports In Brief: Oct. 16

October 16, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Compiled By Moss Brennan sports@wataugademocrat.com| Section: Asu Sports| 1736 Words OpenURL Link

The following are recaps from App State athletic teams for the week of Oct. 4 to Oct. 14.

Oct. 4

NOTRE DAME, Ind. – The App State men's and women's cross country teams wrapped competition at Notre Dame's Joe Piane Invitational on Friday. The women's team finished second with 106 points in the team standings of the women's gold 5K and saw seven personal bests on the day. The men's team saw five personal bests and finished 19th in the men's blue 8K team standings with 507 points.

"On paper, the team had a great meet with a second-place finish in a field of 23 teams, a number of personal bests, and improvement on our team average," said women's distance coach Annie Richards. "What doesn't necessarily show on paper is how the team has carried themselves this week, as we've navigated the aftermath of Hurricane Helene. I'm exceptionally proud of this group of women. They have handled the uncertainty of the week while supporting each other and our community. We're grateful to be competing and doing what we do best."

Senior Jasmine Donohue set pace for the Mountaineers, finishing ninth overall with a personal best time of 17:24.5 in the women's gold 5K. Fellow seniors Emma Russum and Lauren Johnston were next to cross the finish line to finish 16th (17:37.1, PR) and 17th (17:39.8), respectively. With a personal best time of 17:50.3, senior Lana Farris placed 24th overall. Sophomore Rhys Ammon rounded out the top-40 with a personal best time of 18:05.2.

In the women's open 5K race, sophomore Mary Biagini clocked a personal best of 18:56.1 to place 68th overall. Junior Maddie Quinn stopped the clock at 19:04.5 to place 77th.

Graduate student Ethan Turner set pace for the Mountaineers in the men's blue 8K race, finishing 69th with a personal best of 23:47.6. Redshirt junior Chase Burrell rounded out the top-80 with a personal best of his own, stopping the clock at 23:53.0.

"As a team, we need to battle for the entire 8K," said men's distance coach Brad Herbster. "Ethan Turner raced well and continues to show good improvement. Chase Burrell put together a nice race. It has been a long week for our team and now, as we are firmly in October, we will determine the next race for our group, as we are unsure of hosting a home meet due to the hurricane."

Freshmen Aaron Kidd and Thomas Wlazlowski stopped the clock at 24:31.2 and 24:45.6, respectively, to record 8K personal bests. Rounding out the Mountaineers' five scorers was junior Ethan Lipham, who stopped the clock at 25:01.7.

KENT, Ohio - The App State field hockey team defeated the Kent State Golden Flashes on Friday to a score of 1-0.

The Mountaineers (7-3, 4-0 MAC) never trailed in Friday's matchup, with Frederique Grimbergen finding the back of the cage late in the fourth period.

The App State defense was on point today, holding Kent State (2-8, 2-1 MAC) to not a single shot in the last 15 minutes of play. Goalkeeper Claire Grenis earned her fifth shutout on the season, making her first in the MAC in shutouts.

CHARLOTTE - In a hard-fought, sporadic contest that was moved to the campus of Queens University in Charlotte

due to the effects of Hurricane Helene, a late score from Kyli Switalski in the 72nd minute of play evened the score at one apiece, forcing a 1-1 draw on Friday night against Georgia State. The goal was the freshman's second of the year.

The draw allowed App State (5-3-3, 2-0-1 SBC) to remain unbeaten in Sun Belt play, making them one of three teams with an unbeaten conference record as of Friday's games.

Despite being held scoreless for 72 minutes to start the game, the Mountaineers were not held quiet on offense as they tallied 12 shots, 10 coming in the second half alone, with four being on goal. Wood generated several scoring chances herself, which included two shots almost consecutively in the 58th minute.

Georgia State (1-6-5, 0-1-3) opened the scoring with a late first-half goal off the left foot of Aaliyah Faddoul, the Panthers' leading scorer. It was the only goal to get past Mountaineer keeper Sarah Wommack all night.

Action picked up significantly in the second half of this high-tempo contest as App State controlled the ball in attacking position for most of the period before Switalski's goal. Shots came from all over with both Ellie Garrison and Sydney Snowden cracking the net, but the score held serve.

It wasn't until a free kick after a foul on the Panthers did the Mountaineers' persistence pay off. From just outside the box, Switalski took the free kick chance and rifled a shot to the lower third of the net, finally helping the Mountaineers break through on the scoreboard.

After the equalizer, App State remained aggressive, firing three more shots at the net in the final 18 minutes. A rocket off the foot of Barbosa nearly gave the Mountaineers a late lead, but it missed just high.

As part of App State's 12 shots, nine came from the trio of Wood, Barbosa and Garrison.

Oct. 6

LYNCHBURG, Va. - The App State field hockey team fell to the No. 18 Liberty Flames on Sunday by a score of 5-0.

The Mountaineers (7-4) came into Sunday's matchup on a five-game winning streak, with the loss to Liberty (6-5) being their first since Sept. 13.

Senior Claire Grenis tallied a career-high 10 saves, beating her previous high of eight from the Sept. 13 matchup against Wake Forest.

Oct. 7

ELON, N.C. - The App State tennis team concluded their third fall tournament of the season, participating in the Elon Invitational last week.

App State faced off against Queens, Elon, Liberty and Sun Belt opponent Coastal Carolina. This is the second time the Mountaineers have played Queens this fall, first playing them in the Mountaineer Hidden Duals.

The Mountaineers tallied 17 wins in the two-day tournament, with Savannah Dada-Mascoll and Isabella Romanichen going undefeated over the weekend. Olwyn Ryan-Bovey stayed perfect in singles in the invitational, defeating both Elon and Liberty.

App State is slated to take the court for the last time this fall at the ITA Regionals, starting on Oct. 17-21.

Oct. 10

BOONE — Playing on its home turf for the first time in 35 days, App State Soccer increased its unbeaten streak to

five consecutive games, following a 2-2 draw with Coastal Carolina at The Valley.

The Mountaineers (5-3-4, 2-0-2) wasted no time getting on the scoreboard. Less than four minutes into the contest, Olivia Simon jumped a passing lane to win possession and threaded a pass through the legs of a Chanticleer defender to find Izzi Wood who drilled it into the top-right corner of the goal.

Coastal Carolina (5-4-5, 1-1-3) equalized in the early minutes of the second half. Yasmin Azar was able to beat her defender down the near sideline and fed a pass in front to Eleanor Ashton who was able to tap it home to tie the score at 1-1.

Following the equalizer, App State stepped on the accelerator, generating numerous scoring chances in the minutes that followed and paying it off with a go-ahead goal in the 62nd minute.

Off a Stephanie Barbosa corner kick, Ellie Garrison was able to leap in the air and head the ball to Wood, who delivered a header of her own into the back of the net. The goal was Wood's eighth of the season to tie the conference lead and the 23rd of her career to move her into fifth place on the all-time scoring list. She has now scored seven goals in her last seven games.

App State carried that lead into the closing minutes, but with two minutes to play Ashton came through with a brace of her own, curling a free kick just inside the near post to level the score at 2-2.

App State outshot the Chanticleers 14-6 overall and 8-4 in shots on target, led by six shots from Wood and five from Garrison.

Ella Hoover made her first career start for the Mountaineers, while Shannon Studer returned to action after missing her past three games due to injury.

Oct. 11

OXFORD, Ohio - The App State field hockey team was defeated by the Miami (Ohio) Redhawks 1-0 on Friday.

It's the first league loss for the Mountaineers (7-5, 4-1 MAC) this season following four victories.

The Mountaineer defense held firm in Friday's matchup against Miami (7-6, 4-1 MAC), holding a Redhawk offense that averages eight shots on goal a game to five.

NORFOLK, Va. – The App State volleyball team defeated Old Dominion, 3-1 (25-18, 21-25, 25-22, 25-11), on the road Friday. The Black and Gold rises to 9-5 on the season and 3-0 in Sun Belt play.

The Mountaineers will return to the court at 2 p.m. on Saturday for their second match against the Monarchs.

Oct. 13

BOONE — The App State field hockey team fell to No. 1 North Carolina on Sunday to a score of 5-0.

The Mountaineers (7-6, 4-1 MAC) came into today's matchup after previously falling to Liberty, with today's loss to North Carolina (10-0, 4-0 ACC) the second loss to an ACC opponent this season.

Senior Claire Grenis tallied a career high 11 saves in Sunday's matchup, beating her previous high of ten in the Oct. 10 matchup against Liberty.

HUNTINGTON, W.Va. – Mumu Guisasola scored her first career goal, tying the score in the second half, to help the Mountaineers come back to earn a 1-1 draw on the road against Marshall.

App State (5-3-5, 2-0-3) extends its unbeaten streak to six consecutive games, the longest streak for the program since 2012.

Trailing since the eighth minute of play, App State finally broke through in the 70th minute of the contest. Off of a Shannon Studer corner kick, Guisasola leaped in the air and delivered a header just inside the near post to level the contest.

The Mountaineers were inches away from grabbing the lead just minutes later as Ellie Garrison rang a shot off the right post. Garrison led the team with four shots, while Izzi Wood added three shots. The Mountaineers held a 12-10 shot advantage in the contest, including 5-3 in shots on target.

Goalkeeper Sarah Wommack was outstanding in net. She made a leaping save in the first half to tip a Marshall (3-5-4, 1-2-3) shot over the crossbar, and then in the second half made a highlight-reel play, diving across the goal line to keep the ball from trickling across.

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2024 Voter Guide: Watauga County Board of Education

October 16, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Moss Brennan moss.brennan@wataugademocrat.com| Section: Local | 5276 Words OpenURL Link

The following are answers from candidates for the Watauga County Board of Education — Adam Hege, Alison Carroll Idol, Charlotte Mizelle Lloyd, Tom Ross, Marshall Ashcraft and Chad Cole. Each candidate received the same questions on the same day. Candidates were given a maximum of 200 words for their answer. If a response exceeded 200 words, the last sentence was removed until it met the requirement. The answers are listed in the order the candidates appear on the ballot.

What is your No. 1 goal if elected?

Hege: Short term, my number 1 goal is addressing the wide-ranging needs of our community and school system due to the impacts of Hurricane Helene. My heart goes out to everyone, and I understand there will be much trauma with this catastrophic event for our public-school students, teachers, staff, and their families; we must have a keen sense of this as we move forward. As elected officials, we must advocate for the resources (federal, state and local levels) we need as we recover and rebuild. Longer term, my number 1 goal is to use my professional expertise and experience in higher education to help support the school system in pursuing its vision, mission and strategic plan. I would use my leadership gifts and qualities of active listening and communication, empathy, and humility to continually help improve our school cultures and climate, expand and enhance opportunities for students, and collaborate with other board members, community stakeholders, and the superintendent's office in the recruitment and retention of high-quality teachers and staff. Hiring and retaining/supporting the best teachers and staff feeds down to creating supportive and positive school culture and environments and leads to innovative experiences for our students.

Idol: A school system where every student can thrive, and every teacher has what they need is my goal when I'm elected to the Watauga County School Board.

Lloyd: I plan on working with the Watauga County Commissioners to build new housing specifically for our teachers and school staff. No college students would be allowed to be housed in this property. If demand for this housing for teachers is met, then other local medical staff and law enforcement personnel could fill those units. In fact, the Watauga County Commissioners are working on this now.

Ross: My No. 1 priority will be increasing the emphasis on the basics, reading, writing, and arithmetic. I have been told that this is not an exciting priority and I should emphasize STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) and the Arts, I respectfully disagree. I highly value STEM and the Arts but success in these areas is first contingent on the ability to read for comprehension. Student should first understand the history of these fields before they conclude where the future might lead. Second, practitioners in these fields must be able to successfully communicate with others, effective writing (organizing information) is the starting point for all communication. Finally, math is essential to understanding the world, those with poor math skills are more likely to make bad choices due to their inability to compare quantities, e.g., poor economic choices are the direct result of the inability or unwillingness to assess costs and benefits. Reading, writing, and arithmetic may be unexciting to some but our students' future depend upon mastering these skills before they undertake higher activities. I want Watauga schools to be first in North Carolina in education.

Ashcraft: My number one goal is for us to do all we can to retain, recruit, and support the high quality personnel that make the system successful. We have long had the luxury of choosing among large pools of qualified applicants to find the very best teachers and other personnel. That is no longer the case. Our superintendent, as well as her predecessor, have taken important steps to address this issue and we see the results in the high quality of our new personnel at a time when many systems struggle to fill open positions with any qualified applicants. We

have also received important support from the county commissioners, who this year approved a plan to increase local salary supplements by 25% over three years. A continued focus on this priority is essential.

Cole: To maintain a close working relationship with the faculty, staff, students, parents, community and Government officials. I feel like we have a great working relationship with these folks already, so I want to keep building on what's already in place.

Why should voters vote for you?

Hege: I'm passionate about public education and recognize its importance to our democratic society — it has significant intergenerational implications. I will strive for all children in our county to have the opportunities/resources needed to reach their full potential, academically and personally. I believe that critical thinking, collaboration, communication, compassion, and character are all vital to the educational experience. I have the training and expertise to be successful in this role. I was educated in public schools from kindergarten through my doctoral studies, with graduate work in public administration and public health. I have nearly 20 years of professional experience in local government and higher education leadership. I've been active in our local community as a professor/researcher at Appalachian State University, through my daughter's school activities, and service/outreach with several of our local nonprofit agencies and coalitions. My daughter is now a sophomore at Watauga High and my niece is a current first grader at Blowing Rock; I'm deeply invested in the current and future status of the school system and the broader community. These experiences help me to more fully understand the assets and needs across our county and who and how to effectively collaborate with key stakeholder groups.

Idol: I'm a mom and that's a valuable perspective. I have real life experience in things that only a mom can really relate to. I want to be an approachable advocate, and a voice for parents that sometimes get a bad rap because of our passion for our kids and their education. Since I was born, I've never not been involved as a student, as the daughter of a teacher as a parent, a volunteer, and now as a grandparent in the Watauga County school system. I want nothing more than for every child and young person to have a safe, quality and enjoyable education. I want to provide them the tools they need to thrive. Our scores show that our academic achievements place us 4th in the state and that's impressive. But students are people. They are not just a score; they are artistic and athletic and talented in many ways. They are the future of this community, this country, and our world. I want them to be the best they can be with a little help from me!

Lloyd: I have lived a life of service, beginning with over 35 years in healthcare. The opportunity to serve on the School Board is a job of service that I will devote my attention to, with the education of our children at the forefront. Educated young people are critical to the future of Watauga County and North Carolina's workforce. I bring experience and understanding to the problems with hiring and firing hundreds of employees and overseen many million-dollar capital improvements of a highly technical nature. I have served a term on the Boone Town Council and served as a Guardian ad Litem, for 10 years in Watauga County, (a court appointed advocate for children). I have served on the Grants Committee with the Women's Fund of the Blue Ridge to help women finish their education, which sometimes enables them to get out of seriously abusive domestic situations. I currently serve as president of the Mountain Laurel Garden Club. We enjoy maintaining a raised herb and bee-friendly garden on the Greenway and doing projects for the elderly in local facilities.

Ross: I spent more than 30 years working in universities witnessing the declining performance of students and believe the educational system is failing students at all levels and can do better. I have a background in economics, accounting, finance, and performance improvement. I believe every institution can and should use the resources they are entrusted with more efficiently and effectively. My background in performance improvement emphasizes results rather than plans so I will be looking for programs with demonstratable results. Too many educations programs have promised much and delivered little. Quality and excellence are often discussed but rarely are these concepts translated into measurable outcomes. I will work to define measurable outcomes as well as identify and eliminate low value programs and reallocate their resources to more fruitful areas.

Ashcraft: I believe that my knowledge of the system, my strong commitment to the importance of high quality public education, and my desire and capacity to work effectively as part of a team devoted to serving students

make me a strong candidate for the Board of Education. I also have direct experience with our schools as a parent (our daughter completed her entire K-12 education in WCS), as an employee for almost 14 years, and as a board member for the last four years. Another important factor is that I bring no personal or political agendas to the board, only a steadfast commitment to doing all that I can to help make WCS the best system in NC to learn and work.

Cole: I have a current parents perspective. Not just someone that had a child in the school system, I have a student in the system and will for the next 15 years (I have a 3 year old at home). I have one child that just graduated in June and I have an 8th grader, so I see and hear what's going on daily. I would also bring with me 25 years of Emergency Service experience and with that about 10 years as an instructor. All these years of service have been right here in Watauga through various different agencies. The wonderful thing about serving in these capacities is that you learn that the cultures are different in each community. What works in Bethel may not work in Triplett, what works in Blowing Rock may not work in Zionville, and what works in Boone, well, probably will not work anywhere in the County. I was born in Watauga, raised in Watauga, educated in Watauga and want to give back to what is and will always be home.

What issues do you see facing Watauga County Schools?

Hege: Teacher and staff recruitment and retention. Our school system is continually one of the best in the state of North Carolina due to the expert and passionate teachers and staff. However, new recruitment and the retaining of teachers and staff is more and more challenging due to the pay not being sufficient and the ever-growing cost of housing in our area. I will be passionate about advocating for increased teacher/staff pay and adequate funding for our school system and will work collaboratively with local stakeholders to address such challenges as housing. Infrastructure and school safety. Several needs exist regarding building maintenance and the building of new schools. Some of these may be more immediate than originally planned due to Hurricane Helene. When thinking about infrastructure, safety must continually be considered as well. Teachers and staff need continual training and professional development regarding school and classroom climate and culture. Mental health and social service resources. Academic performance goes way beyond the classroom. Students and families have numerous needs that impact performance. I will be an advocate for increased funding and support directed at the mental health and social service workforce and their work to support students and their families.

Idol: 1. Watauga County Schools struggles to hire for open positions. 2. Our schools have aged and need some major repairs and physical improvements. 3. Some of our schools are overcrowded. 4. Our high school needs academic advisors in addition to counselors.

Lloyd: A. Our schools are excellent, always in the top 5 in all of North Carolina, and currently #4 As a result, good teachers really want to teach here. However, we do have a real problem: A lack of reasonably priced and available housing that is close enough to our schools for our cold winters. B. I want all of our children to receive free breakfast and lunch. At this time, about 80% of our children qualify. It is easy for the students to see who is in the program and who isn't, and are thus singled out. Children need to eat to learn. And children shouldn't feel singled out over food. The economics of surrounding counties entitle them to Title I benefits and their kids all get to eat, no matter what their financial circumstances are. C. I am opposed to dividing the county into voting districts. This could create a problem with attracting dedicated and qualified candidates for the School Board. We have had a politically diverse School Board for many years. They have worked to best serve our children and have worked well together for years, no matter their political party affiliation. That is more important than dividing our county into districts.

Ross: WCS is facing declining student performance like every county in NC and the country. I am proud of WCS' ranking 4th in the state but NC ranks 33rd in the country and 28th among the industrialized countries. As a college professor I observed declining reading, writing, and math skills in my students. Respect for education must be increased. My parents instilled in me and my sister that education was the path to a better life and we both had wonderful careers that provided satisfaction and a high standard of living. The present lack of respect for education reduces the effort many students put into educational activities, the job satisfaction of those working in schools, and ultimately the abilities that our students will bring to our communities. Educators must do a better job of

demonstrating to students and parents how education is essential to building the knowledge and skills necessary for a life that will provide monetary and nonmonetary satisfaction for students whether this involves going into a trade or pursuing a college degree. I believe education is essential and more parents must become partners with teachers to assure students put more effort into their students.

Ashcraft: As stated above, I think the number on issue is our ability to recruit and retain the very best educators and other school personnel. Much of this is challenge is because the NC General Assembly has not given public education nearly enough support, even after years of large budget surpluses. They need to step up in a big way to give educators the higher pay and greater respect that the profession deserves. A second pressing issue is the need to maintain, improve, and add school buildings and equipment. We are fortunate that our county commissioners have committed to funding a local salary supplement increase of 25% and that they are working to help us upgrade and replace school facilities. We will need still greater support for these priorities in the years ahead.

Cole: The school system itself is so incredibly strong with a reputation that is unmatched in the State. We have amazing leadership with little to no internal issues that need to be addressed (at least from the outside looking in). What we do have is infrastructure declining at a rate that could be costly if not fixed soon. These concerns are known and already being discussed, but the next four years will be crucial in getting funding secured and reputable contractors in place to do the job and do it right.

How do you plan to address issues related to student performance?

Hege: As a school board member, I would focus on three areas: I would work with the superintendent's office and administration to assess and understand the needs of our students. I would use the data to help explore and support evidence-based approaches. I would advocate for and support training and continued professional development for teachers and staff. I would advocate for, support and pursue resources vital to student/family health and wellbeing (housing, food, etc.). As I said previously, we often underestimate the importance of student and family wellbeing outside of the school as it relates to student performance in the classroom.

Idol: I want to address student performance first by gaining a better understanding of the curriculums we use. As a parent, I remember the frustration of my children having to learn a new way to get an answer, a new way to write their ABCs, or a new way to do math. New curriculums often come with a lot of changes that can be confusing for students and add extra work for teachers. How long do schools typically use a chosen curriculum before making changes? Are curriculums changed based on student performance and test scores? Is it a state requirement to change curriculums on a regular basis, or do schools have flexibility in making those decisions? I strongly believe that our high school students would greatly benefit from having access to both academic advisors and counselors. There are so many different paths to graduation and ways for students to achieve their goals. Whether they seek a secondary education or a career straight out of high school, I don't believe that all our students fully understand the opportunities available to them. Without this awareness, they may not be taking full advantage of the resources and options at their disposal.

Lloyd: My husband and I are the product of the public school system, as are my children. Same for our college educations. UNC-CH, NC State, ECU, Winston-Salem State, Nash Community College, ASU are some colleges that my family have attended. I believe that our educators are tuned into what is best for educating our children. As issues or teaching advances come up, I will listen attentively to them, as well as research new ways to teach and help our students. When there is a need for extra focus on a student's problems, I would support the best way to help them. For instance, we have a Spanish translator to assist when their help is needed. Fortunately, young children pick up English quickly. We also have a free summer program for students who need academic help. Scores show that this additional summer class time helps these children. I would support programs like this whole heartedly as they come up.

Ross: First, I will support plans to shift to a 12-month school calendar and increase the number of school days. I realize this is a radical change that needs to be approved by a majority of parents. The shift to a 12-month year with the same number of school days is to reduce the learning loss students suffer during a 3-month summer absence. The lengthened school year recognizes that many of the industrialized countries with higher student

performance go two or more weeks longer than students in the U.S. I expect higher student performance will only result from administrators, teachers, and students doing things differently and working harder. Second, I will advocate for lower use of information technology in the classroom. Word processing, spreadsheet, and AI programs have undermined students' ability to spell, construct sentences, write reports, and perform math. I would also strive to reduce remote learning as it is a poor substitute for face-to-face instruction. The essence of an educated person is knowing things, it is not the ability to look things up on the internet. Accordingly, I support banning cellphones from the classroom, they are a distraction from the educational process.

Ashcraft: Let's start by acknowledging what exceptional educators we have in our schools and by recognizing (and being grateful for) their excellent and vital work. Overall, our schools rank about fourth out of 115 school systems in NC and — no coincidence — we have one of the very highest quality teacher workforces in the state. There is no school system anywhere that I would have preferred my daughter to attend, and that is a very common sentiment in Watauga. That being said, we still need to improve student success. Both current superintendent Dr. Alexander and her predecessor Dr. Elliott rightly put a great deal of emphasis on school culture, on making it clear that teachers and other personnel are valued and respected as professionals, that collaboration and mutual support are crucial, and that professional growth is supported and expected for all teachers. This factor, one over which we have a great deal of control, is a big factor in our school system's success and a crucial element in improving student performance. The other key factor is a relentless focus on recruitment and retention of high quality personnel.

Cole: This has been an issue since Covid unfortunately. I wholeheartedly feel like the home life for some students isn't the best, so this in return affects their academic performance. Our school system is not an awesome job supporting our students in the classroom, but we need to expand past the chalkboards and desks. I honestly feel like we are in a mental health crisis at so many different age levels. We're seeing too much depression, violence, suicide and failing grades that we can only attribute them to mental health. I would love to see (if we can budget this) a few more counselors that are geared more towards mental health awareness. As a first responder myself, I know first hand what it's like to not address the elephant in the room (mental health), but to also reach out and receive the necessary means to combat this ugly beast that is destroying so many lives.

How do you plan to address issues with staff retention? (i.e. teacher, bus drivers, custodians, etc.)

Hege: As I said previously, I believe this is the most central issue impacting our school system moving forward. To be successful, a school system must retain their teachers and support staff — it takes everyone! Workers, at all levels, perform better when they feel valued and supported, and they are happier and healthier as well. To support these efforts, I will: Work collaboratively with the superintendent's office and other board members to assess and understand the needs and multiple factors involved with retainment (pay, local housing costs, support systems within the workplace, etc.) — this includes active listening and engagement with teachers and support staff at all levels. Advocate for and support increased pay, locally and at the state level — this would also involve active and ongoing communication and collaboration with county commissioners. Advocate for and support those addressing housing challenges — I've been fortunate to have done some work with the Watauga Housing Council and other local agencies. I will work with community stakeholders to explore and support opportunities for enhanced opportunities for accessible and affordable housing for teachers and staff.

Idol: With a student/teacher ratio of 12:1 and an average of 93% of our teachers having 3 or more years' experience, I don't believe the problem lies in retaining teachers. If we examine the current open positions, most of them are for support staff roles such as assistants, administrative, cafeteria workers, bus drivers, custodians, and coaches. When hiring for any position, the primary consideration is the compensation package. We need to review the benefits offered for these support staff roles and identify why they may not be appealing to job seekers. It's important to think beyond just the base pay, which may not be easily adjustable, and explore ways to make these positions more attractive. As a member of the Board of Education, I would like to: Evaluate the competitiveness of the benefits package, including health insurance, retirement contributions, and paid time off. Explore opportunities to provide professional development or career advancement paths for support staff. Communicate the importance of these roles in supporting the overall educational mission and the positive impact they have on students. By addressing the underlying factors that may be hindering the appeal of these support staff positions, we can work

towards attracting and retaining talented individuals.

Lloyd: Reasonably priced housing is a critical need. Make a valiant effort to fully staff the school bus drivers ASAP so that our Teacher Aides and other staff, don't have to fill in when there is a shortage of drivers. This happens often. Finding qualified bus drivers has turned out to be very difficult her and all over the country. The pay in Watauga has been raised considerably and it is still difficult to find qualified drivers with a clean criminal background and CDL License who are ready to work. I plan on lobbying the State Legislature to raise the state's portion of teacher pay. We are in the bottom 5 out of 50 nationally for teacher pay, depending on the survey you read. That is shameful. Fifteen years ago, we were in the middle pay-wise. We need to get back there. Electing people to our State Legislature who truly value education. Electing leaders like Mo Green to lead the State's Office of Public Instruction are critical to our success.

Ross: I believe non-monetary issues are more important than monetary issues in retention. I believe people change employers when they feel under-appreciated or in some cases disrespected. Problems with management is one of the first reasons cited by U.S. workers for changing employers. Feeling you are making a difference in a student's life in my opinion is the best reward. I support higher pay for teachers and raising teachers' salaries proportionately with any increase in school days should parents agree with lengthening the school year. I will work to identify why staff are leaving, share this information with the public, and work on solutions for each of the major retention issues.

Ashcraft: As noted in previous answers, we need to do all that we can to offer better pay and to continue emphasizing a strong and supportive workplace culture. As also noted, we need much more help on the state level to address this issue at the necessary scale. In making their decisions on state elective offices, I hope voters will ask themselves which candidates show the greatest commitment to supporting public education and the strongest opposition to diverting state revenues to private schools and more tax cuts for the very wealthy. Public education, especially teacher pay and recruitment, should be our number one priority in NC.

Cole: This has got to be this election's hot topic (better than two years ago). Retention is bigger than the school board and school system. I know for a fact that we have the best of the best when it comes to educating our children and administratively running our school system. Like any position, pay is never enough, but I think we need to look past money and look at support. We hold our educators to an extremely high level of value, so just supporting them as a community and making them feel welcomed, appreciated and loved goes a long way. Having more community support for their role in molding our children's lives will help keep them around for years to come. I am seeing where we keep teachers for 3-5 years and then they move on to other counties, or worse, leave teaching altogether. I don't want to see that! I like how it was when I was growing up, I had the same teachers my parents had.

What capital improvements are needed across the school district?

Hege: As I said in my previous responses, in the short term there may be some immediate improvements due to Hurricane Helene that were not expected. It will be an ongoing process over the coming weeks and months, and I will work with the superintendent's office, other board members, and county commissioners to assess those needs. It was great to hear that the new Valle Crucis building suffered no significant damage and hopefully that project can continue to progress over the next few weeks/months to its completion. Moving forward, there is the recognition that many of the buildings (Bethel, Blowing Rock, Parkway) across the county will need continued maintenance and renovation in the next few years. The biggest project will be the plans for a new Hardin Park School, and it will have to come from a variety of funding sources. This will, of course, involve much collaboration with community and state-level stakeholders. I look forward to being actively engaged in the process and using my experience and skill sets to address and support these projects.

Idol: The condition of our school facilities is a significant concern. Many of our school buildings have aged significantly and need extensive repairs and upgrades. One of the biggest issues we face is the lack of air conditioning in our elementary schools. On some of the warmer early fall days, classrooms have been known to reach temperatures in the mid to high 80s. This is simply not a healthy or conducive environment for students to

learn in. Additionally, some of our older school buildings have reached the point where they need to be replaced entirely. Our county commissioners have always worked to provide the necessary funding to address the most immediate needs of our schools, including building new facilities. However, the cost of major structural rebuilding and repairs means that this must be done on a reasonable timeline and within our budgetary constraints.

Lloyd: We need to complete the construction and occupancy of the new Valle Crucis Elementary School, which is likely to be completed by Easter 2025. We need to make plans to replace or renovate Hardin Park Elementary School, the largest elementary school in Watauga County. Funds for a large capital project like this one will be more available when the high school is paid for in about two years. It will take that long to develop plans and prepare for the construction to begin on this new school. Replacing the trailers at Parkway Elementary School is our next project that should happen in the coming year.

Ross: I can not answer this question as I would need information from the principals of all facilities to prioritize capital needs. If elected I will advocate for facilities that meet educational needs and are not financially extravagant. I believe the school board should treat taxpayer money as if it were their own.

Ashcraft: First, let's remember that the new Valle Crucis School, which will be opening in less than a year, is a huge improvement for our system. Kudos to the county commissioners for their commitment to this essential project. Other big ticket improvements we need include adding air conditioning for our existing K-8 schools, the replacement of Hardin Park School, and additional space at a couple of schools where enrollment has been increasing. Funding these and other needed capital improvement needs will not be easy, but I believe that the people of Watauga County and their elected representatives will rise to the challenge on behalf of our students.

Cole: Everyone is going to say the same thing, Parkway and Hardin Park, and they are correct. But what about Bethel, Green Valley, and Blowing Rock? They all have specific needs that we have to consider as well. They may not need a new school built, but they have major additions and remodels to consider in the near future. What are they and what timeframe do we have to get it done? Will it be 5, 10 or 15 years down the road? We need an intense study done, by someone reputable this time, and make sure we know all the facts, good, bad or indifferent so we can plan accordingly. One suggestion that keeps getting louder and louder every year is the idea of a middle school, or two (east and west). Is Watauga ready for this, I'm not sure, but it is something we need to consider if this County continues to grow.

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2024 Voter Guide: Watauga County Board of Commissioners District 3

October 16, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Moss Brennan moss.brennan@wataugademocrat.com| Section: Local | 1526 Words OpenURL Link

The following are answers from candidates for Watauga County Board of Commissioners District 3 Braxton Eggers (R) and Jon Council (U). Each candidate received the same questions on the same day. Candidates were given a maximum of 200 words for their answer. If a response exceeded 200 words, the last sentence was removed until it met the requirement. The answers are listed in the order the candidates appear on the ballot. To read the responses to all six questions, visit www.wataugademocrat.com.

What is your No. 1 goal if elected?

Eggers: My number one goal is to continue to serve the people of Watauga County. For a long time the current commission majority has failed to work with our governmental partners in Raleigh to meet the financial needs of Watauga. From roads to schools to public safety, I will work with the General Assembly, the Department of Transportation, and other governmental agencies to meet the needs of our community. I will be a good steward of your tax dollars, and provide an efficient and responsive county government.

Council: If elected, I intend to enact and support policies that provide for our working class and low-income residents here in Watauga County. Advocating for the folks who have historically not had a voice or authentic representation on our local boards is the pillar of my campaign. I aim to serve the public in a transparent and accessible manner, ensuring that our most vulnerable residents have an opportunity for their voices to be heard. Issues like housing, environmental protection, and reliable infrastructure are at the forefront of my platform.

Why should voters vote for you?

Eggers: I am asking the citizens for their vote because I understand the needs of the community. Having served on the County Commission for two years, I have witnessed the needs first hand. Having grown up here, I attended Watauga High School and am invested in the success of this County. I will work hard for the citizens and want Watauga County to be a place my children and grandchildren are as proud to call home as I am.

Council: I do not believe that partisanship has any place in local politics. Assigning our needs and championing issues based on the aims of a national two-party system is not an effective or equitable way to serve the residents of a tight-knit community like Watauga County. I have always been an independent voter, unaffiliated with either party, and I aim to bring a community-oriented point of view to a position that has, sadly, become mired in the greater political landscape of our nation. If we are to better protect and benefit the people that call our county home, we must divorce our local politics from the ideology and tenets of a broken system. I am a working class member of the community and I am thoroughly aware of the issues that our residents and neighbors face on a daily basis. I intend for my role to be that of a public servant, not a politician.

What do you see as challenges facing the county in 2025 and beyond?

Eggers: The County faces important infrastructure needs in the future. Part of this will be working with our partners in the General Assembly to meet these financial needs. We need to expand our emergency services to meet the needs of a growing population. This includes support for ambulances, sheriff's deputies, and fire departments. For a long time the majority on the current commission have tried a 'go it alone' process and not coordinated with our State Representative or State Senator. We need productive relationships to maximize the efficiency of our county government.

Council: I believe that in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene we have seen many of our most pressing issues become

amplified in an undeniable way. Our growing housing crisis will continue to intensify as we reckon with the destruction brought by the storm. We have to ensure that our neighbors can continue to live and work in the areas that have been most affected. This unfortunately means that our issues with environmental quality and rampant development will continue to complicate the process. With nearly 40% of our housing stock currently being utilized as short-term rentals, we cannot provide for the numerous Wataugans who have been displaced by the storm. This does not account for our residents who were already housing-insecure and cost-burdened prior to the disaster. If we continue to allow developers and out of state investors to dominate our housing market and limit our available land we cannot provide for the working class residents who are needed for the jobs that our local economy requires.

If elected, how would you work to improve working relationships between the town and county?

Eggers: I have a very good working relationship with the towns of Seven Devils, Beech Mountain, and Blowing Rock. Relations with the Town of Boone can be improved by sitting down at the table and having regular discussions about our needs and their needs. Better cooperation would serve all of Watauga County, and bring Boone into the good relationships I have already forged with the other towns.

Council: I think that in many cases the strained relationship between Watauga County and our larger municipalities are a direct result of partisanship in local politics. As an unaffiliated, working class Wataugan, I hope to be able to navigate the barriers that have stood in the way of enacting real change and beneficial policy in our community. I already have solid working relationships with many of our local elected officials (both in the town and the county) as a result of my years of volunteer work and community service. The strained relationship between our towns and the county at large is representative of our local boards neglecting each other when it comes to deciding policy. I would like for our combined local governments to stand united in the face of outside pressure, be it from Raleigh, the Capitol, or the state university system.

How do you plan to attract new businesses and industries to Watauga County?

Eggers: To draw businesses, one of the government's primary roles is to provide infrastructure that will make it possible for them to locate here. We need to work with our partners on our overtaxed road system, natural gas and electrical distribution, and fiber-optic providers to make this an attractive place for high paying jobs. We also need to get the government out of the way when it comes to overbearing regulations which are driving businesses off the mountain. Six figure jobs aren't locating here because the regulation and development costs imposed by the government are financially prohibitive. We can protect our natural resources and beauty while still making Watauga County a place where our kids and grandkids can earn a comfortable living.

Council: My opinion is that we need to be fostering local entrepreneurs rather than attracting large corporations and new industries from outside the area. In the interest of efficiency, sustainability, and our local capital economy I believe that we should be very cautious when providing incentive for outside corporate interests. We have a duty to the people that live and work here. Ensuring that we are mitigating the dangerous effects of overdevelopment and imprudent investment is the path forward to a thriving economy and workforce that provides needed jobs and stability to our residents. There are numerous examples of short-sighted industry development with the stated goal of an instant boost to profit margins backfiring on the localities where it was implemented, damaging the local economy and workforce in ways that are difficult to recover from. I believe the safest and smartest path towards business and industry development is one that begins within the community with the intelligent and realistic folks that live here. Allowing our hands and heads to be guided by wealthy corporations with no vested interest in our land or our culture is a dangerous and unsettling precedent that could have detrimental effects on the future of our region.

What strategies will you use to support small businesses and entrepreneurs in our area?

Eggers: In addition to coordinating with our state and regional partners on infrastructure, we should support the business incubator sponsored by the County. Under previous Republican leadership, we had a successful software company form and grow into a premiere company in its industry. We need to restore the support for the business incubator and focus on creating an environment where small businesses can form, grow, and be successful.

Council: As I mentioned in my previous response, fostering local entrepreneurs and small businesses is of the utmost importance to our continued viability as a county and a community. I think that partnering with institutions such as the NC Community College System and expanding business, vocational, and trades education programs is a good first step towards a self-sufficient economy and workforce. Modifying and adding to existing budget lines so that we ensure that our local businesses have the resources and incentives they need to succeed in today's market is the path forward to their long-term success. I believe that we should be protecting our local business owners from market intrusion by large corporations in order to protect our culture, working class, and local identity.

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