

NCDOT workers from the coast are used to hurricanes. Helene's aftermath is different

October 16, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Richard Stradling, News & Observer | Section: north carolina | 1376 Words OpenURL Link

The hurricane caused historic flooding in North Carolina. Battle Whitley, an engineer for the N.C. Department of Transportation, looked at a map on the wall that showed more than 100 roads and bridges in his county alone that needed repairs. Whitley wondered how his crews would fix them all.

It'll take days at each site, he thought. This will never end.

Then Whitley stepped outside to see a convoy of dump trucks, bulldozers, backhoes and men arriving from Winston-Salem.

"And I'm not embarrassed to tell anybody, I literally broke down in tears when I saw that convoy coming in to help," he said.

The storm was Hurricane Floyd in 1999. Whitley was in charge of highway maintenance in Nash County, just east of the Triangle, one of the hardest hit by flooding.

Now Whitley is the highway maintenance engineer for NCDOT's Division 3, a six-county area in the coastal southeastern corner of the state. The memory of feeling overwhelmed and seeing that convoy arrive is one reason he's more than happy to be lending a hand in the mountains after Hurricane Helene.

IMG_2822.jpgRichard Russell stands on a temporary path where the Hungry River washed out the Big Hungry Road bridge in Henderson County, N.C. Russell is one of dozens of people who live in an area cut-off to traffic since the remnants of Hurricane Helene took out the bridge on Sept. 27, 2024.

Whitley led a group of 21 Division 3 workers to Hendersonville, with equipment and supplies, on Oct. 2, five days after Helene brought torrential rain and wind to the region. They were relieved by about 28 more NCDOT workers from the division a week later, part of a rotation in and out that he expects will extend through Thanksgiving and possibly Christmas.

All of them volunteered for the extra duty, which involves 12-hour days away from home clearing trees and mudslides and reconstructing washed-out roads. Many of the men recall when the mountain NCDOT divisions came to Eastern North Carolina after Hurricane Matthew in 2016 and Hurricane Florence two years later.

"It's kind of return the favor," said Sanford Williams, who has done road maintenance in Division 3 for 19 years.

"And part of our job is helping the public, kind of like a volunteer firefighter. It's just something we do."

Since Helene, thousands of state and local government workers have poured into Western North Carolina, including firefighters from Cary, utility crews from Raleigh and police from the small Union County town of Waxhaw. More than 1,500 search-and-rescue teams, public health nurses, veterinarians and others from 38 states have also come to help under a mutual aid agreement called the Emergency Management Assistance Compact.

Mountain storms are different

NCDOT has its own mutual aid system that pairs each of its 14 geography-based divisions with another. Division 3 is paired with Division 14, based in Hendersonville, on the assumption that a storm will wallop only one end of the state at a time.

The men from Division 3 are accustomed to hurricanes, and in some ways the work in the mountains is familiar.

But the steep terrain and what it does to water is not. On the coastal plain, two feet of rain causes an almost slow-motion flood that can take days to work its way to the ocean.

"We're low and flat. So the water just rises and it just floods everything," said Jeff Garrett, NCDOT's Pender County maintenance engineer. "But it doesn't have any speed to it, for the most part. So it rises, crests and it goes back down, and you're just dealing with what's left."

Two feet of rain in the mountains, in contrast, creates torrents of water that cascade downhill, funneled into streams and rivers with such force that it carries trees, boulders, houses, cars and anything else in its path. That power is something the guys from Division 3 don't normally see.

"Everywhere we went has been a big surprise," Williams said.

A tributary of the Big Hungry River, normally a stream, brought down so many trees and so much debris that it created a logjam 150 feet wide in front of the culverts under Deep Gap Road.

"I don't know that we could have put that logjam in there as thick as the storm put it in there," Williams said. "It was a full day of removal to get it out."

IMG_2850.jpgMen and equipment from N.C. Department of Transportation's Division 3, based near Wilmington, arrive at the NCDOT maintenance yard near Hendersonville on Wednesday, Oct. 9, 2024. The convoy came to relieve another group from Division 3 that had spent the previous week clearing and repairing roads after Hurricane Helene.

Dustin Johnson, an equipment operator from Duplin County who says he can "run just about anything with a steering wheel or levers in it," was part of a Division 3 crew that reached a washed-out portion of N.C. 9 between Black Mountain and Bat Cave.

"There was a gap. Nothing. The road was gone," Johnson said. "We were like, 'How we going to get across?' They're like, 'You're going to build it.'"

They set about pulling soil and rock up the slope and tore up some of the surviving asphalt to move dirt from underneath into the gap, creating a road again. Johnson loved it and asked Whitley if he could stay on another week.

"When things slow down, I'll be ready to go back," he told him. "But as long as I'm still hot and ready to go and there's stuff to be done - big stuff to be done - I thrive for that stuff."

Worst storm in history for NCDOT

Helene has done more damage to the state's roads and bridges than any other storm in history, state Transportation Secretary Joey Hopkins said Monday. Nathan Tanner, a construction engineer who is coordinating the response in two counties in Division 14, can't argue with that.

"It's been way more extensive for us than we ever imagined," Tanner said. "It's not common for us to lose entire roadways."

As the major highways reopen and life appears to get back to normal, hundreds of mostly secondary roads remain closed.

Among them is Big Hungry Road, where men from Division 3 worked. A normally shin-deep stretch of the Hungry River washed over a 20-foot-high steel-and-concrete bridge, carrying most of it downstream and cutting off more

than 70 people who live on Big Hungry Road.

NCDOT and a contractor used pieces of the destroyed bridge to build a walkway across the river and assembled a steel stairway up the steep slope, so people can get across. It will be more than a month or two before a temporary car bridge will be in place, Tanner said.

IMG_2823.jpgWhat's left of the Big Hungry Road bridge over the Hungry River in Henderson County, N.C. Dozens of people live in an area cut off to traffic since the remnants of Hurricane Helene took out the bridge.

The partnership with Division 3 has been a godsend, Tanner said, as have the offers of help from other divisions.

"If you call a coastal county and say I need 72-inch pipe by tomorrow, they find a way to get you 72-inch pipe by tomorrow," he said.

Hot meals, showers, laundry and a cot

The men of Division 3 are sleeping on cots in a warehouse owned by the Biltmore Church, which donated the space off Interstate 26 near Flat Rock.

NCDOT normally puts people in hotels but wasn't sure what it would find given the widespread power and water problems after Helene. It has room for 250 of its out-of-town employees in the warehouse. A contractor from Texas provides meals, water, portable showers and toilets and laundry services.

Whitley said the first group from Division 3 wasn't sure what the accommodations would be like.

"So we said, 'Look, guys, when you're going up there pack as if you're going camping for seven days,'" he said. "We wanted to be self-sufficient so we weren't a burden on anybody up here."

Williams said they brought grills and 50 pounds of pork chops, smoked sausage, hot dogs and baloney, which they managed to eat between meals.

"Nothing went to waste," he said.

IMG_2832.jpgN.C. Department of Transportation engineer Battle Whitley picks up a fallen sign on Big Hungry Road in Henderson County, N.C., on Wednesday, Oct. 9, 2024. Whitley brought 21 other NCDOT workers from the Wilmington area to the mountains to help clean up after Hurricane Helene.

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Viral claim of hypothermia deaths in Avery County 'debunked in all capital letters'

October 16, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Adam Wagner, News & Observer | Section: north carolina | 440 Words OpenURL Link

A viral claim that 15 people died of hypothermia in Avery County this week is "categorically false," Alicia Stemper, an acting spokeswoman for the county's emergency operations, told The News & Observer.

"Mark it debunked in all capital letters, please," Stemper said.

Dr. Mollie James posted the claim Tuesday morning on the social media platform X. James joined other medical personnel at a grassroots disaster relief center set up at the Avery County Airport and posted that 15 people, including children, had died overnight from hypothermia.

As of Wednesday afternoon, the post had been seen more than 900,000 times, had been reposted more than 5,400 times and had been liked more than 8,300 times.

James is licensed in Iowa and Missouri as an osteopathic physician and surgeon. She has hosted a pair of podcasts, with episode titles that address free speech in medicine and that discuss legal strategies against vaccine mandates.

Avery County Sheriff's Office deputies have an active investigation into James and into her intent behind spreading the false rumor, Stemper said.

She said they needed to visit the field hospital to investigate the claim of 15 deaths after seeing the social media post.

"You can't hear information like that and dismiss it. You have to go check it out," Stemper said.

And that means the deputies and investigators can't be taking on other tasks that are needed in the storm-impacted county, she said.

As of Wednesday, there were four deaths and three people reported missing in Avery County. Those numbers have held steady for several days, Stemper said.

Stemper also described fears that the false claim and others like it could lead people who are already having a tough time after living through Tropical Storm Helene to enter a state of despair.

"If you're hanging on to the edge and you hear 15 more people from your county died, that might be the last thing it takes for you to give up all hope," Stemper said. "It's just so painful, unnecessary, hurtful and obstructive."

Helene fact check: Here are the rumors and the reality in Western North Carolina

Hurricane helene deaths by county map embed

NC Reality Check is investigating rumors having to do with Hurricane/Tropical Storm Helene and its aftermath in Western North Carolina. If you have heard a rumor that you would like us to check out, email realitycheck@newsobserver.com

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Lost your voter ID? Here's how you can still cast your ballot in NC's elections

October 16, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Kyle Ingram, News & Observer | Section: voter guide | 442 Words OpenURL Link

All voters are required to show ID to cast their ballot in this year's election, but what happens if you don't have one, or lost it?

This situation is of particular concern given the destruction wrought by Hurricane Helene last month. As much of Western North Carolina attempts to recover from the storm, voters may have lost their ID in the chaos.

State law provides exemptions to the voter ID law for victims of natural disasters.

Here's what you need to know to make sure you can vote this year.

What IDs can be used to vote?

Voters may provide a driver's license, passport or free voter photo ID card from their county board of elections.

The state has also approved dozens of student and public employee IDs for voting.

A full list of approved IDs can be found on the State Board of Elections' website.

Can I still vote if I don't have an ID?

Yes.

Any voter who doesn't have an ID can fill out an ID exception form when they go to vote.

This form provides a variety of options for voters to select as the reason why they cannot provide an ID. These include that the ID was lost or stolen, that a voter applied for an ID but has not received it, or that a voter has a religious objection to being photographed.

Another of those options is that the voter was a victim of a natural disaster within 100 days before Election Day. Anyone affected by Helene would fit into this category.

All votes cast with an exception form will be counted unless the bipartisan county board of elections unanimously agrees that the information contained in the form is false.

Do I still need an ID if I'm voting absentee?

Yes.

Voters casting an absentee ballot must include a photocopy of an acceptable voter ID alongside their ballot.

A copy of the ID exception form will also be included in a voter's absentee ballot packet, which they can fill out if they do not have an ID.

When and where can I vote?

Absentee voting has begun. Voters can request an absentee ballot online using the state's ballot request portal. All

absentee ballots must be delivered to the county board of elections by 7:30 p.m. on Election Day.

Voters in the 25 counties affected by Helene can return their absentee ballot to any county elections office in the state.

In-person early voting begins on Oct. 17. Voters can find early voting sites in their county using the State Board of Elections' search tool online.

Voters can also cast their ballot in-person on Election Day, Nov. 5. A voter's Election Day polling place can be found by looking up their voter registration on the state board's website.

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Under the Dome: NC voter rolls see net gains despite removals

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Author: Caitlyn Yaede and Emily Vespa, correspondents, News & Observer Section: politics government | 890 Words
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Good morning and welcome to today's Under the Dome newsletter, from Caitlyn Yaede. First up, my colleague Emily Vespa reports on some misinformation regarding North Carolina's voter rolls.

There are more voters in North Carolina today than in January 2023, despite hundreds of thousands of voters being removed from the rolls.

From the start of 2023 to Friday, which was the voter registration deadline for the upcoming election, North Carolina saw a net gain of over 278,000 registered voters. That led to some questions online about the state's announcement that it had removed 1,200 registrations from the voter rolls per day, on average.

The state Board of Elections in August announced that counties removed nearly 750,000 ineligible registrations from voter rolls during routine maintenance over a 20-month span. At least one online post, shared in a group discussing election integrity, questioned the veracity of the removal announcement, falsely pointing to the gain as evidence that's not true.

Election integrity groups in recent years have combed public voter roll data in amateur audits for evidence of fraud. But the data files, which the state board posts weekly, are only a snapshot of voter registrations at that point in time, meaning they "do not have the granularity to capture every single change in voter registrations across the state," state board spokesperson Patrick Gannon wrote in an email.

"A net gain in registered voters is to be expected in a state with a growing population, especially in a presidential election year when historically registration activity is greatest," Gannon said.

According to data from the state board:

Seventy percent of the almost 750,000 registrations cut from voter rolls over 20 months were removed in 2023. Nearly 40% of all removals took place in January 2023 as part of routine list maintenance, which happens in odd-numbered years. There was a net gain of about 160,000 voters during the 20-month period.

There are over 7.7 million registered voters in North Carolina. People can still register during early voting, which starts Thursday, through same-day registration.

CANDIDATE CHARGED WITH SIGN THEFT RESIGNS AS PARTY CHAIR

A candidate for N.C. House District 78 resigned from his position as county Democratic Party chair, Tammy Grubb reports, after being charged with stealing political signs from the roadside.

Lowell Simon was arrested in Moore County last week and charged with violating a state law prohibiting the removal or theft of campaign signs during an election period. He is currently free with a written promise to appear.

Monique Baker will serve as interim chair of the Moore County Democratic Party.

"While we appreciate the hard work and dedication he has shown to the Democratic Party and the community, the Moore County Democratic Party cannot and will not condone the tampering of political signs or any other illegal activity," the party said. "Mr. Simon has offered an apology for his actions, as well as his resignation, both of which have been accepted by the MCDP."

MARK ROBINSON SUES CNN FOR \$50 MILLION

Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson announced in a press conference on Tuesday that he is suing CNN for defamation after the publication reported that the candidate for governor made racist and sexually explicit comments on a pornography forum. Kyle Ingram reports that Robinson is filing a \$50 million lawsuit against the network.

"This is a high-tech lynching on a candidate who has been targeted from day one by folks who disagree with me politically and want to see me destroyed," Robinson said at the Raleigh press conference. "We are glad to take these first steps to fight back against what we consider to be one of the greatest examples of political interference in this state's history."

WHAT ELSE WE'RE WORKING ON

On Tuesday, Gov. Roy Cooper joined FEMA Administrator Deanna Criswell to say that misinformation is harming communities in Western North Carolina attempting to recover from Helene. This follows the arrest of a man in Rutherford County who authorities say claimed he was going to harm FEMA workers. Misinformation about FEMA and its disaster relief efforts is an ongoing concern. Adam Wagner has more. School funding and teacher pay - those topics divided state superintendent candidates Michele Morrow and Maurice "Mo" Green at a debate on Monday night. Charlotte Observer education reporter Rebecca Noel has the details.

WHAT ELSE WE'RE LISTENING TO

Leoneda Inge of WUNC's "Due South" podcast hosted reporter Paul Specht for an episode about misinformation surrounding Hurricane Helene. The WRAL PolitiFact reporter talked through common misconceptions he has seen in the wake of the devastation in Western North Carolina.

VOTER GUIDE

In the latest candidate questionnaires from our 2024 NC Voter Guide, see what candidates for U.S. House District 8 have to say about the issues, and learn more about their biographies.

Both candidates answered our questions:

Democrat Justin E. Dues

Republican Mark Harris

Today's newsletter was by Caitlyn Yaede with contributions from Emily Vespa. Check your inbox tomorrow for more #ncpol.

You can sign up to receive the Under the Dome newsletter at newsobserver.com/newsletters. Want your friends to get our email, too? Forward them this newsletter so they can sign up. We want to know what you would like to see in the Under the Dome newsletter. Do you like highlights from the legislature? Political analysis? Do you have a question you'd like The News & Observer team to answer? Tell us here. You can also email us at dome@newsobserver.comDon't forget to follow our tweets and listen to our Under the Dome podcast for more developments.

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Early snow, possible frost & a chance of tropical storms. This NC forecast has it all

October 16, 2024 | News & Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (Raleigh, NC) Author: Martha Quillin, News & Observer | Section: weather news | 508 Words OpenURL Link

In an unusual clash of seasons, the North Carolina mountains are dealing with an early snowfall and frost warnings while forecasters also are watching two systems offshore for potential tropical storm development.

Along the North Carolina-Tennessee border, some elevations above 3,500 feet saw up to 2 inches of snowfall Tuesday into early Wednesday, according to the National Weather Service. The snow accompanied a cold front that swept across the state, bringing scattered showers, cool breezes and chilly temperatures.

umm...what graphic nws.jpgThe National Weather Service's Wilmington office noted Wednesday's unseasonable cool temperatures with a Facebook post that asked, "Um....what?"

Is this normal weather for North Carolina?

No.

The National Weather Service's Wilmington office noted the unseasonable temperatures in a Facebook post Wednesday, Oct. 16 that showed highs in the low 60s across the region. Above the map, a forecaster had added, "Highs Wed near normal...for mid-December!"

As for the mountains, meteorologists say it's common to see snow in mid-October for elevations above 5,000 feet, such as Mount Mitchell and Beech Mountain. But it's rare for measurable snow to fall at lower elevations in the state before the end of October.

High temperatures Wednesday in the mountains were in the mid-40s to low 50s.

What parts of the state are under a frost advisory?

Much of the western half of North Carolina is under a frost advisory Thursday night, Oct. 17, and the National Weather Service said counties in the central part of the state could see patchy frost Thursday night.

In Raleigh, the low Thursday night is expected to be around 40 degrees.

Is there a tropical storm coming to NC?

The National Hurricane Center is watching two disturbances in the Atlantic:

« One is an area of low pressure that continues to produce showers and thunderstorms in an area east of the Leeward Islands. The system became less defined late Tuesday, Oct. 15 and Wednesday, Oct 16. It's expected to move generally to the west or northwest, with some gradual development possible by Friday.

Forecasters on Thursday gave the system just a 30% chance of developing into a tropical depression over the next week.

« A second low-pressure system has been creating showers and thunderstorms in the southwestern Caribbean. Forecasters said Thursday that system has about a 20% chance of developing into a tropical depression over the next week.

Some gradual development is possible if it stays over water for many days, forecasters said. Either way, it's likely to produce over portions of Central America and southern Mexico through the weekend, the Hurricane Center said.

atlantic graphic thursday afternoon.pngThe National Hurricane Center is watching two systems for possible development into tropical depressions: one east of the Leeward Islands and one in the Caribbean.

There have been 13 named storms in the Atlantic so far this year, plus one system that behaved like a tropical storm but didn't get a name. If another tropical storm develops, it would be called Nadine.

The Atlantic Hurricane Season lasts through Saturday, Nov. 30.

A cart of flowers lifts spirits and brings color back to Western NC's dire landscape

'Hopeless and helpless': River Arts District in Asheville was another casualty of Helene

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Burke schools' fall semester extended to Jan. 17 due to Helene

October 16, 2024 | News Herald, The (Morganton, NC) Author: Sharon McBrayer | Section: Education | 596 Words OpenURL Link

The Burke County Public Schools' fall semester will now end in January, after the Christmas break.

That decision came Tuesday night during a special-called Burke County Board of Education meeting, where the board revised the school system calendar for the year due to the days missed because of the impact of Hurricane Helene. The storm caused the school system to have to shut down schools due to power losses.

Karen Auton, deputy school superintendent, said changes to the school calendar were allowed by a state bill.

The school board changed the fall semester end date to Jan. 17, rather than the original Dec. 20, which will become a holiday. Auton said the school system lost nine school days with students (58 instructional hours) due to the storm. She said the lost time takes the semester from 78 days to 69 instructional days.

Moving the fall semester end date will help balance out the two semesters, Auton told the school board. She proposed adding the additional days to give the fall semester 89 days and spring semester would get 83 days.

The fall semester originally had 94 days in it before Helene.

Making the change also will preserve holiday breaks and keep the last day of school the same, Auton said.

Auton said the change may impact some mid-year students and those who also attend community college. The schools system can work with individual students to make it work, Auton said.

Board member Wendi Craven, who also is principal of Hickory High School, said it's imperative to get those extra nine days because the semester would be too short, otherwise. It would be too hard for high school teachers to complete courses, Craven said.

Board member Leslie Taylor suggested making Dec. 20 a half-day in the amended calendar, which is what it was in the original calendar.

Jan. 21-22 will become work days for staff and the spring semester will start Jan. 23, according to the changes.

Auton said Sept. 26 and 27 were originally remote learning days, while Sept. 30 and Oct. 1-2 classes were out and Oct. 3-4 and Oct. 7-8 were optional teacher work days.

The change to the calendar will keep Sept. 26 as a remote learning day, but change the other days to regular student instructional days.

With the potential for bad weather later this school year, Auton said they want to preserve the remote learning days.

The board also agreed to move the March 4 and 14 work days to March 20-21. May 30 will be a half day for students.

In addition to making calendar changes, the board approved employee compensation for the period of the storm's impact, which is allowed by the state.

Keith Lawson, finance director for Burke County Public Schools, said all eligible employees will be credited for a full 7.5 or 8 hours a day for a total of eight days Sept. 27 through Oct. 8.

Actual hours worked during those days by classified staff such as custodians, teacher assistants, maintenance and school office staff will be credited compensatory time for the days and hours staff were able to work, he said.

Lawson said it was everyone's intent for those who were able to assist during Hurricane Helene and recovery to be recognized and compensated. Work by staff such as teachers, instructional coaches, media coordinators, guidance counselors, instructional technology facilitators, nurses, speech services and others will be managed at the school level by the principals, Lawson said.

Permanent employees, school nutrition employees, temporary employees, some contracted employees, bus drivers, retirees and substitute teachers who were scheduled to work and some others are all eligible, he said.

Board member Don Hemstreet was absent from the meeting.

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Burke commissioners approve \$13 million construction of EMS headquarters, animal shelter

October 16, 2024 | News Herald, The (Morganton, NC) Author: Sharon McBrayer | Section: Government Politics | 564 Words OpenURL Link

Burke County commissioners on Tuesday night approved contracts for the county's new EMS headquarters and animal shelter.

The Burke County Board of Commissioners approved a bid of \$13.5 million by Beam Construction Company Inc. for the construction of both facilities. Beam Construction Company was the lowest responsible bidder, according to county officials. The cost of the EMS headquarters is \$6.1 million and the cost of the shelter is \$7.3 million, according to the county.

The contract includes three alternate bids for emergency radio responder (\$130,000), FireLite fire alarm (\$0) and stone flooring (\$28,000) for both buildings, according to the bid.

Burke County Manager Brian Epley said the money for the buildings is coming from a one-time allocation of federal grant dollars. He said no local property tax or sales tax dollars will be used to pay for the facilities. He said the facilities will not require more operational costs or additional staff.

The county purchased 4.25 acres at 102 Drexel Road in early 2023 for the EMS headquarters. The money came from the state for the EMS base, Epley said.

Epley said EMS base No. 1, which the new headquarters will replace, is on the UNC Health Blue Ridge Hospital property and the lease expired in 2023. He said the hospital has been working with the county, knowing it is building a new base.

He said bringing training and administration, as well as being an EMS deployment base, under one roof will be beneficial and productive for the county and EMS. He said the location of the new base correlates well with the calls for service volume and population density of the Morganton area.

The county already owned land for the animal shelter, which is adjacent to the 911 center on Kirksey Road in Morganton.

Epley said the current animal shelter only has 16 dog kennels and not enough space for cats. He added that it is a lot of work for staff to keep the building in adequate shape for inspections and to meet all of requirements of the N.C. Department of Agriculture.

"So we're really looking forward to being able to offer the community a little better place to do business," Epley said. "And we think both of these will be long-term solutions to these critical departments."

A groundbreaking on the two facilities was canceled due to Hurricane Helene but has been rescheduled for 3 p.m. on Friday, Nov. 8, at 636 Kirksey Drive, Morganton, which is the site of the new animal shelter.

Operation Green Light

The board also approved a resolution from Veterans Services in support of Operation Green Light from Nov. 4-11 in support of military veterans.

Residents and businesses are asked to change at least one light bulb to a green bulb to show support for veterans. Veterans Day is Nov. 11.

Forever heroes

Commissioners recognized and applauded county employees, including emergency services and responders, 911 telecommunications, as well as volunteers who worked throughout Hurricane Helene and its aftermath.

Burke County Attorney J.R. Simpson told commissioners about his up-close and personal experience with a swift-water rescue team during Helene. He said rescuers were able to rescue his 94-year-old disabled mother, get her in a boat, keep her calm the entire way and deliver her to her family, who was waiting for her on dry land.

"They're forever heroes to the Simpson family," he said.

The board approved Burke County receiving and allocating \$3 million in total from FEMA and the state for Helene recovery costs.

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Draughn hits field after monthlong hiatus for homecoming vs. Mitchell

October 16, 2024 | News Herald, The (Morganton, NC) Author: JUSTIN EPLEY Sports editor | Section: Football | 720 Words OpenURL Link

VALDESE — After a month off due to Hurricane Helene, which devastated many of the mountain communities that belong to the Western Highlands 1A/2A Conference, the Draughn football team finally will hit the field again this weekend.

The Wildcats will host Mitchell at 2 p.m. on Saturday in Valdese for DHS' homecoming.

Draughn (3-2, 1-0 WHC) have had the 1A powerhouse's number the last couple seasons, including a 57-42 shootout win on the road in Bakersville last fall that helped the Wildcats secure second place in the WHC. DHS defeated Mitchell twice in 2022, winning 56-21 in the regular season and 35-10 in the second round of the NCHSAA 1A state playoffs, both in Valdese, as the Wildcats won the WHC title, the first in program history, and advanced to the 1A Western Regional finals.

Those three wins give Draughn a 3-1 all-time lead in the series following a 62-14 loss at Mitchell in 2021, the teams' first year together in the WHC.

This year's Wildcats are led by senior quarterback Sterling Radabaugh, who has taken over as the fulltime starter with a full complement of targets in Kayden Lytle, Cayden Roscoe, Jacob Mull and Connor Houston. Marshall Brinkley is the team's top running back.

The Mountaineers (4-1, 1-0 WHC) are led by senior quarterback Caleb Cook, who has completed 59 of 85 passes for 890 yards and nine touchdowns with three interceptions. His favorite targets are junior DeShawn Orr (16-269-4) and fellow seniors Fernando Flores (18-235-1), Chris Wences (5-89-1) and Jace Blanton (4-83-1). Mitchell also is effective on the ground, led by junior running back Kaj Pittman (44-342-5), sophomore Owen Riddle (20-179-2), senior Cole Young (23-169-1) and the dual-threat Cook (49-155-2).

Mitchell's only loss this season came in the season-opener versus NCISAA member Charlotte Latin, 28-14 at home.

Prediction: Mitchell.

South Caldwell (2-4, 0-1) at Freedom (3-3, 0-1)

Both the Patriots and the Spartans are in search of their first Northwestern 3A/4A Conference win as they meet up on Friday night at Morganton's Patton High School.

FHS fell 30-20 in its league-opening home game to Alexander Central at Patton last week while South Caldwell lost a bitter rivalry game to Hibriten, 21-20 in double-overtime on the road in Lenoir.

Freedom leads the series, which dates back to 1977, by a 30-6 all-time margin, including a 37-30 thriller in Sawmills last season. A 37-21 victory in Morganton in 2022 means the Patriots are going for their third straight win over the Spartans following a 20-14 road loss in the fall of 2021.

Junior quarterback Kaden Davis has been effective through the air and on the ground for Freedom this season. His top receivers are Kobe Johnson, Tiras Walker, Justice Dominguez and Kaleb Pearson. FHS has used a committee at running back, including Jaiden Belin, Jaiveon Belin, Cam Brown and Andrew Leonard.

The South Caldwell offense is guided by junior Corbin McGhinnis, who has completed 31 of 58 passes for 502 yards

and two touchdowns with two interceptions. His leading receivers are seniors Carter Bly (7-103-0) and Connor Setzer (14-100-0) and juniors J.P. Smith (5-95-1) and Bryce Johnston (3-83-1). Leading the ground game are Landon Borders (69-307-6), Khian Oates (40-249-2), Kaden Loritts (31-213-2) and Bryson Genwright (33-116-3). Luke Church (8-98), McGhinnis (29-78) and Patton transfer Burke Wilson (17-46) also have one rushing TD apiece.

Prediction: Freedom.

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

The Cavaliers will seek their first Catawba Valley 2A Conference win of the season, following losses to Maiden and Bunker Hill, when they host the Wolves on Friday in Icard.

EBHS is 0-3 against Lincolnton all-time, with all three meetings coming since the teams joined the CVAC together ahead of the fall 2021 season. The Wolves won 35-20 in Lincolnton that season, 21-17 in Icard in 2022 and 42-14 at home last fall.

EB has done most of its damage on the ground this fall, led by ball-carriers Zayne Newman, Darren Hammons and Caden Buff. Quarterback Carter Bennett has distributed the ball to targets Barger Shook and Cannon Morrison.

The Wolves have a fairly-balanced but young attack, led by senior running back Treylen Bost (120-845-6), sophomore quarterback Rashad Lynch (54-220-1), freshman Richard Lynch (25-135-2) and sophomore Jalaythan Mayfield (20-122-2). Rashad Lynch has completed 49 of 80 passes for 647 yards and eight touchdowns with seven interceptions, hitting receivers junior Trashad Lineberger (11-221-2), Richard Lynch (22-204-3), Antonio Wilson (10-135-0), Bost (7-104-1) and Karson Cloninger (7-69-2).

Prediction: Lincolnton.

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• Citation (aglc Style)

JUSTIN EPLEY Sports editor, 'Draughn hits field after monthlong hiatus for homecoming vs. Mitchell', *News Herald, The* (online), 16 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C3EBF479D6CEF8



Baxter IV fluid manufacturer says more than 1,000 employees are back at McDowell County plant

October 16, 2024 | News Herald, The (Morganton, NC) Author: RICHARD CRAVER Winston-Salem Journal | Section: Business | 453 Words OpenURL Link

Baxter International Inc. said Monday it has started sourcing IV fluids and peritoneal dialysis solutions from its global resources as it continues to assess the damages to its Marion manufacturing plant.

Baxter is the largest U.S. manufacturer of these solutions.

Baxter said it will use air and other methods of transportation "to get products to the U.S. as quickly as we are able" from its seven global plants.

The Food and Drug Administration announced Oct. 9 it has authorized temporary importation for five Baxter manufacturing facilities in Canada, China (two sites), Ireland and the United Kingdom.

"Temporary importation authorization across these sites includes 19 IV solution and dialysis product codes," the manufacturer said. "We are working closely with FDA to authorize temporary importation for additional Baxter manufacturing sites and products, which could provide additional inventory in the near term."

The North Cove manufacturing plant experienced significant flooding damage from the remnants of Hurricane Helene. The Marion campus remains closed for production.

It is Baxter's largest manufacturing facility, with more than 2,500 employees.

"Our goal is to begin restarting North Cove production in phases by the end of this year," the company said in a news release. "We do not yet have a timeline for when we expect production to be fully restored to pre-hurricane levels."

Baxter said it has brought more than 1,000 employees back to work to contribute to cleanup and recovery efforts, as well as having about 1,000 remediation contractors on site.

"This week, we expect to have 3,000 people contributing to recovery efforts — with nearly two-thirds of those being Baxter employees," the manufacturer said.

"We also continued to serve 100-plus colleagues every day at our employee support center, where we offer food, water and toiletries, as well as access to showers, laundry facilities, computers and generators. Many of our employees still don't have access to power."

Baxter said the current cleanup and recovery priorities remain completing deep cleaning of the facility, including floors and equipment, as well as assessing the status of all equipment and production lines.

The recovery efforts are benefiting from a second temporary bridge at the site that is allowing additional truck and equipment traffic.

Baxter said it has transported more than 350 truckloads of finished product off site and is beginning shipments to customers.

"Our goal remains to return to 90% to 100% allocation of certain IV solution product codes by the end of 2024,"

Baxter said.

"We have requested that healthcare professionals limit new PD patient starts to pediatric patients (those under 18 years old) and other medically necessary patient exceptions may be considered.

"While our priority is to ensure our existing patients and customers get the supplies they need, we are looking for every opportunity to expand our support to address new patients as we progress toward recovery."

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• Citation (aglc Style)

RICHARD CRAVER Winston-Salem Journal, 'Baxter IV fluid manufacturer says more than 1,000 employees are back at McDowell County plant', *News Herald, The* (online), 16 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C3EBF461A455D0>



BRIEFLY

October 16, 2024 | News Herald, The (Morganton, NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: Briefly | 257 Words OpenURL Link

US MILITARY: The Pentagon announced Tuesday more than 800 military personnel have seen their service records upgraded to honorable discharges after previously being kicked out of the military under its former "don't ask, don't tell" sexual orientation policy.

LISTERIA OUTBREAK: U.S. Agriculture Department officials have launched an internal investigation into how the agency handled reports of serious problems at a Boar's Head deli meat plant tied to a listeria outbreak that has killed at least 10 people and hospitalized nearly 50 in 19 states since May, U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal said Tuesday.

OHIO VOTING: The Justice Department will send election monitors to Ohio's Portage County, where Republican Sheriff Bruce Zuchowski has been accused of intimidating voters. Last month, he said people with Kamala Harris yard signs should have their addresses written down so immigrants can be sent to live with them if the Democrat wins the presidency.

UNIONS: The number of petitions by workers to have union representation has doubled during President Joe Biden's administration, according to figures released Tuesday by the National Labor Relations Board.

FEMA THREATS: Federal Emergency Management Agency Administrator Deanne Criswell said Tuesday that FEMA personnel have resumed door-todoor visits as part of Hurricane Helene-recovery work in North Carolina, an effort suspended amid reports they could be targeted by militia.

HAITI: The second-in-command of the Kraze Baryè gang — one of Haiti's most powerful gangs — was injured in a shootout with Haitian and Kenyan police in their first major incursion into gang-controlled territory since a U.N.-backed mission began earlier this year, police said Tuesday.

Associated Press

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Staff Writer, 'BRIEFLY', *News Herald, The* (online), 16 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C3EBF4599C9460>



Disaster unemployment assistance available in North Carolina

October 16, 2024 | News-Topic, The (Lenoir, NC) Author: STAFF REPORTS | Section: Archives | 284 Words OpenURL Link

Residents in designated areas of North Carolina who lost income due to Tropical Storm Helene may be eligible for Disaster Unemployment Assistance (DUA), according to a press release from Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

DUA Availability and Eligibility Requirements

DUA is available to individuals in Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Clay, Cleveland, Gaston, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Lincoln, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mecklenburg, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Swain, Transylvania, Watauga, Wilkes, Yancey counties and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, according to the press release.

People, including self-employed, or business owners may be eligible for DUA if:

- You lived, worked or were scheduled to work in an area designated under the major disaster declaration.
- You lost employment or had your employment interrupted as a direct result of the disaster; and
- You have exhausted or are not eligible for state unemployment benefits.

To qualify for DUA benefits, you must be out of work as a direct result of Tropical Storm Helene, according to the press release.

How to File a Claim

The fastest way to file a claim is online at the North Carolina Department of Commerce's Division of Employment Security webpage: des.nc.gov. You may also file over the phone by calling 888-737-0259, according to the press release.

Apply for Disaster Assistance

Homeowners and renters in the designated counties can apply for FEMA assistance online at disasterassistance.gov, by calling 800-621-3362 or by using the FEMA mobile app. If you use a relay service, such as video relay (VRS), captioned telephone or other service, give FEMA the number for that service.

For the latest information on North Carolina recovery from Tropical Storm Helene please visit Hurricane Helene | NC DPS or fema.gov/disaster/4827. Follow FEMA on X, formerly called Twitter, at twitter.com/femaregion4 and at facebook.com/fema.

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Caldwell Commissioners honors retirees in October meeting

October 16, 2024 | News-Topic, The (Lenoir, NC) Author: SHELBY POWELL spowell@newstopicnews.com| Section: Archives | 661 Words OpenURL Link

During its regular meeting on Monday, Oct. 14, the Caldwell County Board of Commissioners held public hearings and held presentations on a number of issues.

The meeting began with an invocation by and special recognition of Pastor Nicky Waters of Poovey's Chapel Baptist Church for efforts made to secure and distribute resources following the impact of Tropical Storm Helene.

The council took the time to honor 2024's retirees, with retirement clocks and special recognition given to Randy Knauf of the Department of Economic Development, Adam Minor of the Sheriff's Office, George Durfor of the EMS and. Chanda Watson of the Health Department. Susan Barnett of the Department of Social Services also retired this year, but was not present at the meeting.

Jason Powell of Caldwell RESTART, the county's drug and overdose response program, gave a report discussing changes in the program over the course of the last year, including numbers of calls and responses, doses of naloxone administered, overdoses interrupted and an estimation of lives saved.

In addition, testimony was given from a woman named Angel, whose life was saved due to the intervention of RESTART personnel and whose relationship with the program's workers led to her overcoming a particularly dark point in her life, after which she has undergone training and become an EMT. Angel's mother also testified at the meeting, thanking RESTART for saving her daughter. The full testimony can be listened to through a recording of the board's October meeting uploaded to the CCGTV Youtube channel.

Another presentation was given by Ben Willis of the Western Piedmont Council of Governments regarding WPCOG's Homelessness Response Team. The team seeks to establish contact with homeless individuals in the areas in which the team serves in order to learn what they need and what resources can be made better available to them. Willis, and other WPCOG representatives at the meeting, discussed the impact the group has had on the local homeless population and the useful information it has gathered in the process.

A resolution was passed celebrating Veteran's day in preparation for the holiday next month.

"On November 11 each year, our nation honors the bravery and sacrifice of the men and women who have served in the armed forces ... these veterans have dedicated their lives to the protection of our freedoms, security, and the values we hold dear," read the resolution. "We recognize the courage, commitment, and selflessness exhibited by those who have answered the call to serve, often at great personal sacrifice ... we reaffirm our commitment to support and honor our veterans through various programs and initiatives that foster their well-being and integration into our community."

Shelley Stevens, the county planning director, discussed updates in an ongoing project at the northern end of the county on Blackberry Rd. to build a neighborhood that is expected to be used primarily by retirees.

The board approved a measure that would allow some more flexibility in the amounts of waste that can be dumped at the Foothills Environmental Landfill, operated by Republic Services. The measure was approved just in case debris cleanup from Helene causes the county to exceed the amounts it is contractually allowed to dump at the landfill.

A public hearing was held regarding the 2025 Tax Revaluation.

Ashley Bolick, county economic development director, presented plans regarding an Interlocal Agreement with Cajah's Mountain, involving both the building of a new EMS base and new housing, some of which will be reserved for public service personnel. Bolick showed off multiple options that were being considered for how the housing would be constructed.

A resolution was passed to convey surplus Animal Care vehicles to Cherokee County for use by the county's sheriff's office. If sold, the funds raised from the vehicles' sale must be returned to Caldwell.

Other decisions were made, including budget revisions for the purchase of equipment and the receipt of grant funds, and the appointment and reappointment of two committee members. Additional details on the meeting can be found through the agenda packet at the Caldwell County, NC website.

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SHELBY POWELL spowell@newstopicnews.com, 'Caldwell Commissioners honors retirees in October meeting', *News-Topic, The* (online), 16 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?
p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C45E50AAA724C8>



NC State Board of Elections gives tips for voters as early voting begins

October 16, 2024 | News-Topic, The (Lenoir, NC) Author: STAFF REPORTS | Section: Archives | 753 Words OpenURL Link

In-person early voting for the 2024 general election began Thursday and ends at 3 p.m. Nov. 2 in all 100 counties.

Statewide, 419 early voting sites will open on Thursday across North Carolina.

"In-person early voting has been the most popular method of voting in recent general elections, and we expect that will continue in 2024," said Karen Brinson Bell, executive director of the State Board of Elections.

In 2020, 65% of North Carolina voters chose in-person early voting as their voting method. And in the presidential election of 2016, 62% of NC voters cast their ballot early.

The following are 10 tips for voters as early voting begins, from the State Board of Elections:

Early voting locations. Eligible voters may cast a ballot at any early voting site in their county. For sites and hours in all 100 counties, use the Early Voting Sites Search tool. Also see Early Voting Sites for the November 5, 2024 General Election (PDF). The busiest days for early voting are often the first day and the last couple of days.

Candidate info. Sample ballots are available through the Voter Search tool. For information on candidates for the state Supreme Court and Court of Appeals, see the State Board's Judicial Voter Guide: 2024 General Election. The Guide is also being mailed to all NC households. Election officials do not provide information about candidates for other contests, but some media outlets and advocacy groups do. Many candidates also have websites and social media accounts. Being familiar with your ballot choices will help your voting experience go more smoothly.

Bring Your Photo ID. Voters will be asked to show photo ID when they check in to vote. Most voters will show their driver's license, but many other forms of photo ID will be accepted. Voters who do not have photo ID can meet the photo ID requirement by either (1) filling out a form explaining why they are unable to show ID, or (2) showing their ID at the county board of elections office by 5 p.m. November 14. More information about the photo ID requirement is available at BringItNC.gov.

Free Photo IDs. Any registered voter who needs a photo ID can get one for free from their county board of elections office during the early voting period, which ends on November 2. For details, go to Get a Free Voter Photo ID.

Register to Vote. The regular voter registration deadline was October 11. But any North Carolinian who is eligible to vote may still register and vote during the early voting period. Registrants must provide proof of their residence address, which can be a driver's license or other government document, paycheck, utility bill, or bank statement. For more information, visit Register in Person During Early Voting.

Updating Registration. During early voting, registered voters may update their name or address within the same county, if necessary.

Absentee Ballot Drop-off. Voters who vote by absentee ballot can return it by mail or hand it to an election official at an early voting site in their county. They can also drop it off in person to their county board of elections office. Voters registered in the 25 counties in the Helene disaster area in Western North Carolina may return their absentee ballot to any early voting site in the state during early voting hours. Ballots will be kept secure and delivered to the voter's county board of elections for processing. For more information on returning absentee-by-mail ballots, see Detailed Instructions to Vote By Mail.

Voting in Person Instead of Absentee. Voters who requested an absentee ballot but have not yet returned it may choose instead to vote in person during the early voting period or on Election Day, November 5. Voters may discard the absentee ballot and do not need to bring it to a voting site.

Peace at the Polls. All voters should respect the rights of others to participate in the election. Election officials are trained to quickly address incidents that might interfere with a voter's ability to cast their ballot. Intimidating any voter is a crime. Voters who feel harassed or intimidated should notify an election official immediately.

Voters in Need of Assistance. Voters in need of assistance may bring an eligible person to help them enter and exit the polling place or to help them complete their ballot according to the voter's instructions. Election officials are also available to help voters. Curbside voting is also available for voters unable to enter the voting site. For more information, visit Curbside Voting.

For more information about early voting, visit Vote Early in Person.

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STAFF REPORTS, 'NC State Board of Elections gives tips for voters as early voting begins', *News-Topic, The* (online), 16 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C45E5094D20078>



Helene shows value of fiscal restraint

October 16, 2024 \mid Robesonian, The (Lumberton, NC) Section: opinion \mid 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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They Said It

October 16, 2024 | Robesonian, The (Lumberton, NC) Section: opinion | 232 Words OpenURL Link

"We have been very blessed."

Tina Bowen, founder and executive director of Suds of Love Inc., which serves children and families in the greater Robeson County region by providing free laundry and shower services.

"Neither the disaster recovery center nor the community care stations would be possible without our FEMA partners at the table at the federal level. Anything to the contrary would simply be untrue."

Buncombe County communications director Lillian Govus answering critics of FEMA efforts in western North Carolina.

"It's like my pageant day all over again. Look at these flowers, y'all."

Nicole Hall, who was recently crowned "Miss America's United States 2024, joking about the Lumberton City Council honoring her accomplishment by naming a day after her.

"We are going door to door, helping those who need it most."

A post on X by the XVIII Airborne Corps & Fort Liberty (@18airbornecorps)

"VP Kamala Harris' "opportunity economy" plan is more of the same failed policies that's destroyed the American Dream:

"-More spending "-More taxes "- More regulation "- More big government

"This is Bidenomics 2.0 and Americans can't afford four more years of it."

U.S. Rep. Richard Hudson, R- NC-9th District (@RepRichHudson)

"Susan and I are grateful for all the amazing organizations and volunteers who have dedicated their time and efforts to help Western North Carolina recover from Helene. The selflessness and hard work has truly been inspiring. Together, we will make WNC whole again."

U.S. Sen. Thom Tillis, R-NC, (@SenThomTillis)

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Helene brought out the best in Carolinians

October 16, 2024 | RockinghamNow (NC) Author: JOHN HOOD Columnist, Lee Newspapers | Section: Rockingham Now | 653 Words OpenURL Link

RALEIGH — As we mourn the deaths and grapple with the destruction inflicted on our state by Hurricane Helene, I submit that the storm has brought out much that is good about North Carolina — and much that is vile about social media.

I'll start with the positive. Residents of the mountain counties most affected by Helene have fought heroically for their lives, their families, and their neighbors, often against long odds and terrifying threats. They haven't fought alone. Others from across North Carolina and beyond flocked in to help.

We've only just begun to collect their stories of prudent planning, daring rescues, and dogged determination. These tales feature the likes of Hendersonville's James White, who led more than a dozen neighbors sheltering in his home to safety with ropes and lifejackets, as well as Eddie Hunnell, recently moved to North Carolina from Colorado, who leapt into the swollen New River to save a stranger, Lesley Worth, separated from her husband by the raging stream.

At larger scale, hundreds of churches, charities, companies, and volunteer networks sprang to the assistance of their fellow Carolinians. So did law enforcement, fire and rescue teams, and emergency-response personnel from counties, municipalities, state agencies, and other public authorities.

On the ground, we've seen a great deal of cooperation across jurisdictional and political boundaries. Agriculture Commissioner Steve Troxler, for example, sent North Carolina Forest Service staffers familiar with the rugged terrain to guide National Guard units into position. On October 7, Democratic and Republican appointees on the State Board of Elections voted unanimously to empower local boards in 13 hard-hit counties to modify the locations and hours of early-voting sites and other election procedures — but only by bipartisan votes of those boards, a prudent constraint to reassure a jittery public.

Democratic mayors have worked closely with Republican county commissioners to coordinate relief. Gov. Roy Cooper, U.S. Sens. Thom Tillis and Ted Budd, lawmakers from both parties — all have pitched in to comfort victims, survey damage, coordinate responses, and convey timely, accurate information to the public.

That's not to say there haven't been miscues and disagreements. Tillis and Budd questioned the pace at which military personnel from Fort Liberty and other bases were deployed into the devastated counties after the storm. Others have criticized the adequacy of response by the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

While it will take some time to sort out all the claims and counterclaims, it's not too early to label these issues as legitimate topics for debate.

Unfortunately, much of the "debate" unfolding on social media over the past week has been anything but legitimate. Whether spreading wacky conspiracy theories about lithium mines and weather control or uttering grotesque slanders about Kamala Harris and Joe Biden intentionally "letting" Republican voters "drown," a host of very-online, supposedly conservative provocateurs and hacks have made a bad situation immeasurably worse.

Here's what a real conservative leader, state Sen. Kevin Corbin, had to say. "PLEASE help stop this junk," wrote Corbin, who represents North Carolina's eight westernmost counties. "It is just a distraction to people trying to do their job."

"Folks, this is a catastrophic event of which this country has never known. It is the largest crisis event in the history

of N.C. The state is working non-stop. DOT has deployed workers from all over the state. Duke [Energy] has 10,000 workers on this. FEMA is here. The National Guard is here in large numbers."

Some incendiary memes are likely the product of misunderstandings, such as emergency officials redirecting volunteers away from dangerous roadways or relief agencies refusing certain donated items they aren't equipped to store or distribute. Others may well be the result of bad calls made in good faith, in stressful conditions, by officials with incomplete information or inadequate training.

Can policymakers properly second-guess such decisions after the fact? Of course! That time will come. Right now, our immediate challenges remain rescue and relief — challenges our fellow North Carolinians have met with magnificent resilience.

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Novant offers mobile clinic, urgent care, telehealth to western NC

October 16, 2024 | RockinghamNow (NC) Author: Richard Craver | Section: Rockingham Now | 582 Words OpenURL Link

Novant Health Inc. has commenced its Hurricane Helene relief efforts in western North Carolina with in-person urgent care and telehealth services.

"Western North Carolina is facing immense challenges in the wake of this disaster, and our teams are working together to support these communities — both in-person and across the Carolinas," said Carl Armato, Novant's president and chief executive.

The system began operating Friday a mobile clinic and pharmacy at A.C. Reynolds High School in Asheville, joining a Federal Emergency Management Agency comfort care station initiative. Services will be available daily from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at 1 Rocket Drive.

The clinic will feature a community care cruiser to offer urgent care services, including connections to obstetric and pediatric care. These medical resources will be available to all patients at no cost.

The deployment includes physicians, advanced practice providers, pharmacists, and other clinical and nonclinical team member volunteers.

Novant said it has deployed "dozens of team members" that include from its New Hanover Regional Medical Center and an ambulance, as well as utilizing its Critical Care Transport team to support patient transfers as needed.

"Our teams have been on the ground in these communities and have seen the challenges people are facing to gain access to care," said Dr. Pam Oliver, Novant's chief medical officer.

"We are committed to offering as much support and as many resources as possible, and we will continue to partner with communities across Western North Carolina to identify ways Novant Health can assist."

The telehealth services also will be provided at no cost at NovantHealth.org/VirtualCare.

Virtual care offers treatment around the clock for conditions, such as fever, COVID, cold and flu, ear infections, shortness of breath, rash and common skin conditions, back pain and urinary tract infections.

However, Novant cautioned that virtual care should not be used for emergency care. Those experiencing a medical emergency should call 911.

Novant is working with the Buncombe County American Red Cross chapter to operate a shelter at 1815 Hendersonville Road in Asheville. For shelter details, go to RedCross.org/Shelters.

For western N.C. residents who have been displaced by flooding and other Helene impacts, they can make an appointment at NovantHealth.org/doctor or by calling 855-875-8310.

Novant in western NC

Novant has been expanding its presence in the Asheville market in recent years, such as expanding urgent-care services with three GoHealth urgent-care centers in Asheville and Black Mountain.

In November, it opened Novant Health Surgical Partners — Biltmore.

In May, Novant disclosed plans for a projected \$249.7 million capital investment in establishing an operational hub — foremost a 26-bed Asheville Medical Center focused on cancer care — through filing a certificate-of-need application with the N.C. Division of Health Service Regulation.

The proposed Novant hospital would be built on a 24-acre site located at 455 Long Shoals Road. The capital investment amount is significantly higher than what similarly sized hospitals typically cost, which is in the \$50 million to \$150 million range.

There are competing applications from AdventHealth Asheville and Mission Hospital Inc. that also would add 26 acute-care beds.

The applications come 17 months after state health regulators denied Novant's bid to open a 67-bed community hospital in Asheville and chose instead to approve the CON application for 67 beds from AdventHealth over Novant and Mission Hospital Inc.

Novant had planned to spend \$328.7 million on the 67-bed hospital.

Novant said another step would be committing \$20 million over the next five years "to further develop rural primary care."

As part of that effort, Novant said it has acquired space at 1815 Hendersonville Road in Asheville to open a multispecialty medical office building.

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Number of people missing in Helene's aftermath believed to be 92

October 16, 2024 | Rocky Mount Telegram: Web Edition Articles (NC) Author: Alan Wooten The Center Square | Section: State | 522 Words OpenURL Link

In the third week since Hurricane Helene struck the North Carolina mountains, as many as 92 people might still be missing.

In media availability on Tuesday, Gov. Roy Cooper said the number "is not a definitive count because the task for (recovery) is continuing its work."

"The number," the second-term Democrat said, "will continue to fluctuate as more reports come in and others are resolved."

It also seemed to back up Republican U.S. Rep. Virginia Foxx saying in a Thursday interview with Fox News Radio, "I keep hearing the number over 100 that are unaccounted for. I don't know whether that's in my area or down west from me; but in my area, I think there are still many people that we haven't been able to get to because of the washout of the roads."

Recovery efforts have been challenged by arguably the state's worst natural disaster, comparable to Hurricanes Hazel in 1954 — the only Category 4 to make landfall in the state — and Floyd in 1999, producer in eastern North Carolina of what was deemed a once-in-500-years flood.

Tuesday morning, the state's road closure report included 579 — three on interstates, 38 federal highways, 58 state roads and 480 secondary roads. Early estimates are for about 100 mountain bridges to need replacement.

Add in layers of both failed infrastructure like 12,000 without power on a Tuesday morning with temperatures in the 30s, water systems still failed and circulating misinformation, and the task has grown past enormous.

"I have directed the Department of Public Safety to coordinate law enforcement assistance for FEMA and other responders who need it to help ensure their safety and security so people can keep getting the help that they desperately need," Cooper said.

Deanne Criswell, administrator of FEMA and a leader among more than 2,000 from the federal government responding, said operational changes have been made.

"It's heartbreaking to see words or active acts of hatred toward anyone, let alone federal responders who are here to help people in this critical time," she said.

Helene came ashore in the Big Bend of Florida on Sept. 26 as a Category 4 hurricane. It moved swiftly through Georgia and dissipated over the Appalachian Mountains and Tennessee, dumping more than 30 inches of rain into multiple locations.

An exact number of deaths across multiple states is unclear, though it is believed between 206 and 251. There are two different numbers, respectively, for North Carolina (95 and 124), Tennessee (six and 17) and Florida (20 and 25); published reports put the figure at 49 for South Carolina, 33 for Georgia, two in Virginia and one in Indiana.

For context, different agencies such as public safety or medical examiner's offices may have differing metrics for linking fatalities to storms. For example, a death that happened in Wake County — about 250 miles east of Asheville — has been counted by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services because it was a Buncombe County resident in temporary housing displaced by Helene.

Only three times since 1950 have more people been killed by hurricane: Katrina in 2005 caused 1,392 deaths; Audrey in 1957 caused 416 deaths; and Camille in 1969 caused 256 deaths.

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Farmers encouraged to assess soil damage from hurricane

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Soil assessments for damage to fields inflicted by Hurricane Helene is being encouraged by North Carolina agriculture leaders.

"Hurricane Helene caused great devastation throughout much of western North Carolina and farm fields were not spared," the N.C. Department of Agriculture said Friday. "This situation calls for a vigilant approach to soil and crop managements that includes assessment on a field-by-field basis."

In addition to clearing fallen trees and limbs and washed out bridges, farmers should examine fields for soil washed away by the hurricane, the state said.

"For areas where erosion has occurred significant topsoil is lost," the department said. "If so, phosphorus, potassium and significant microinutrients such as manganese, zince and copper may have been removed."

In addition to the problem of lost soil is dirt that has been carried by flowing storm water onto a farmer's fields, the state said. That soil may be better or worse that the soil that was in the field before the hurricane hit.

"Sediment or soil eroding from other locations may be deposited over native soil in fields," the state said. "This can potentially impact fertility. Since this deposition is often topsoil from other locations to floodplain areas, it may have high nutritive value. If predominantly sand has been deposited, it may have relatively low nutrient levels."

While 2 inches or less of new soil might cause only minimal changes to the fields, the state advised to perform testing on any levels higher than 4 inches.

Soil washed in from another location by flood waters could also be contaminated, the state advised.

"Given the widespread origin of floodwaters, it is difficult to assess contamination of soils since various unknown chemicals can be associated with these events," the state said. "If there are known chemicals of concern at a given location, use of a commercial environmental lab that offers analysis for contaminants is an option but can be expensive."

Even replacing lost soil can be challenging.

North Carolina does not have regulations on the quality of top soil.

"Any fill for reconstruction purposes (grading, filling gullies) should be tested for general soil fertility prior to use," the state said. "It is buyer beware."

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Froma Harrop: Climate change is coming for Florida's economy

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Florida was the future. The weather's balmy in winter, the beaches are divine and there's no personal income tax. All that and a lower cost of living had set off a sizable migration of companies from New York, Chicago and California. Between 2021 and 2023, Florida was the fastest-growing state.

Now as a second monster hurricane in two weeks smashes the western coast, many Floridians have been turned into serial refugees. Florida is no stranger to the occasional big "blow," but climate change may have completely rewritten the meteorological future, and it's not sunny.

We can't say no one expected this. Nor is the western coast the only area under threat. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration projects that by 2100, more than 30% of Southeast Florida could be underwater, including much of Miami and Fort Lauderdale. Other more extreme scenarios put that figure closer to 70%.

Yet the extent of the threat has been kept under wraps by politicians unwilling to do the hard work.

Former Florida Gov. Rick Scott was said to have banned the use of "climate change" by the state's government agencies. He denies doing that, but employees report being pressured not to use the term, especially in documents related to environmental and coastal policies.

Donald Trump issued a tweet in 2016 that called climate change a "hoax" created by China.

Project 2025, the blueprint for another Trump term, criticizes Joe Biden's climate initiatives as "radical" and "extreme." (Trump called it "the Green New Scam.") The Project says, "The Biden Administration's climate fanaticism will need a whole-of-government unwinding."

The document totally lost it over the Biden administration's promotion of "international partnerships" to address the crisis. The transition to a low-carbon economy must be worldwide.

Project 2025 went so histrionic over Biden's climate law that even Big Oil has been urging Trump not to gut it. The likes of Exxon Mobil, Occidental Petroleum and Phillips 66 oppose the Project's call "to fully repeal recently passed subsidies in the tax code, including the dozens of credits and tax breaks for green energy companies."

Major oil companies have themselves become part green-energy enterprises. They're using the Inflation Reduction Act tax credits to invest in renewable fuel, carbon capture and hydrogen. These are expensive ventures that need government support to get off the ground.

Back in Florida, fierce weather has raised insurance premiums by as much as 400% over five years. As a result, Floridians are having an extra-hard time selling their properties. And those rebuilding homes smashed up by storms are finding that the policies have become a lot tougher, with higher deductibles and stricter limits on what's covered. Few cover flood damage. (Few homeowners have separate flood insurance issued by FEMA.)

Personal wealth goes only so far in protecting people from dislocation. Dynasty Financial Partners was one of the companies that left New York City in 2019 for St. Petersburg, Florida. Its chief executive lost his home in Hurricane Helene. The family moved into a cramped condo downtown. As Hurricane Milton barreled their way, they had to evacuate again.

First Street foundation reports that 3 million Americans became climate migrants between 2000 and 2020 — many

of whom lived far from coastlines. Texas Hill Country, for one, is known as Flash Flood Alley. Entire blocks have been hollowed out of residents. Meanwhile, Progressive says it will join others no longer writing home insurance policies in Texas.

And the world saw how Hurricane Helene visited devastation on lovely Asheville, North Carolina, up there in the mountains, far from landfall in Florida's Big Bend area.

Climate change is coming for Florida and elsewhere. Americans can confront the crisis or not. The weather doesn't care.

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