

AG Josh Stein visits Boone businesses assisting with recovery efforts

October 18, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Nick Fogleman nick.fogleman@wataugademocrat.com| Section: Local | 692 Words OpenURL Link

BOONE — Attorney General Josh Stein stopped in Boone to speak with local officials and businesses supporting recovery efforts.

"Every community I've been to has been an inspiring story of neighbors coming together to help neighbors. It's just incredible," Stein said. "Folks see people in need and they want to help, and they do help and they do it in an especially thoughtful way."

Stein stopped by FizzEd on Oct. 16 and met with Boone Mayor Tim Futrelle, Boone Police Chief Andy LeBeau, Watauga County Sheriff Len Hagaman and other emergency personnel to discuss relief efforts.

"I can't say enough about how supportive and present state administrators have been to help us transition from emergency response to restoration," Futrelle said.

FizzEd owners Amy and Mike Forrester have been providing meals to emergency personnel and communities hit hardest by Hurricane Helene.

FizzEd has prepared 125 meals daily and distributed them through World Central Kitchen and the Stateline Resource Hub, a distribution site at Zionville Ramp Company near the Tennessee border.

"We started feeding people on Sunday after the storm and started making rural meals on Monday," Amy said. "As long as we have the money, we will keep cooking."

FizzEd has been relying on donations to continue funding their efforts through the purchase of gift cards.

"We feel confident in our connection with Stateline and the fact that the needs are not only immediate but also immense. I confirmed the continued need this morning, who said it is not only "continuing, but getting greater," FizzEd said on social media.

FizzEd said on Thursday they only have enough funding to get through Saturday and are currently looking for more funding and drivers to deliver meals as they continue their efforts.

They have raised more than \$20,000 through this program, all of which went directly to feeding communities.

To purchase a gift card and support their efforts, call FizzEd at (828) 832-8102.

"Thank you so much for stepping in for people that are in need," Stein said.

Stein also met with owners of Mast General Store, Faye and John Cooper, to discuss their fundraising efforts and the impact the storm has had on tourism and business.

"We've been very blessed by this community and it's important to give back," Faye said.

Mast General Store was selling Mountain Strong Clothing. \$10 from the sale of each item and 50% of sticker sales are donated to local relief efforts. They have raised over \$55,000 for nonprofits that support those in need.

"It's really great you're doing this," Stein said.

The Coopers discussed how other local businesses are still paying off loans they received during COVID and are hesitant to take on more loans to reduce the impact the storm has had on sales.

"We're seeing reduced sales," Faye Cooper said. "Everybody has their fingers crossed that we'll have some good activity and have reasonable sales, but nobody is going to make what we usually make this time of year."

"Through COVID we actually grew two businesses, which is astounding," Futrelle said. "But now we're at risk of losing businesses, and it would just be a tragedy on top of tragedy."

After the meeting, Stein gave the Watauga Democrat an update on the Department of Justice's work since Helene and advice as recovery continues.

The DOJ has received more than 300 price gouging complaints and has issued four investigative demands.

As the community transitions into a restoration phase, people still need to be aware of possible scams and bad actors looking to take advantage of those impacted by the storm.

"There's going to be a lot of need for contracting services of all types. Regardless of whether it's home contracting, roof contracting or tree contracting, try to get more than one quote. Make sure the quote is in writing and talk to neighbors to check their references." Stein said. "Once you've chosen your contractor, have that contract in writing, laying out exactly what the work is and what the payment schedule is, and don't pay for the work in advance."

After his visit, Stein went on a tour of the Stateline Resource Hub.

To file a complaint, visit ncdoj.gov/file-a-complaint/ or call 1-877-5-NO-SCAM

"Thank you for stopping by and checking on us," Futrelle said. "We're so fortunate we have amazing people in the community."

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• Citation (aglc Style)

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Blue Ridge Parkway remains closed in NC, rangers enforcing closure violations

October 18, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Staff Report editor@wataugademocrat.com| Section: Local | 199 Words OpenURL Link

BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY — The entire North Carolina section of the Blue Ridge Parkway remains closed due to portions of the roadway that have been compromised by flooding and tree hazards. Crews continue with emergency stabilization and damage assessments following Hurricane Helene.

For safety reasons, park managers are asking the public to please be patient and respect the closures. Many areas remain unsafe due to visible and hidden hazards, such as weakened and missing portions of the roadway; standing dead and downed trees; unstable slopes; and crews and heavy equipment operating on the road. Unauthorized use also hinders recovery operations of work crews.

The National Park Service is working diligently, and areas will reopen as soon as it is safe to do so. Due to increasing instances of visitors entering closed areas and disregarding or vandalizing safety barriers, rangers will begin enforcing closure violations and issuing citations as necessary. These actions are necessary to prevent accidents and injuries to the public and our crews.

Updates are posted regularly on the parkway website and social media platforms. Updates will be posted on the Blue Ridge Parkway website at www.nps.gov/blri and on the park's social media platforms at @BlueRidgeNPS (Facebook, X and Instagram).

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p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C4AC34234144C0>



The Timely Truth for this week is ... CROSS

October 18, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Jamie Shell | Section: Columns | 804 Words OpenURL Link

As we continue to recover in our area from the devastation caused from recent Hurricane Helene, we are constantly reminded of the anchor that we hold onto as members of the body of Christ. Through the cross, we have an unwavering hope and assurance that despite whatever adversity may come our way, God remains on the throne and in control.

Upon considering the mighty and awesome power of the cross, I was reminded this week of a story I'd read years ago regarding a gifted diver. In 1967 a young student from the University of Cincinnati was working through the issues of his faith. Charles Murray was an Olympic prospect as a very skilled high diver. He was not raised in a Christian home, but his roommate had talked to him about the forgiveness of sin and the saving power of the Cross of Christ. Upon hearing those testimonies, Charles was struggling with God over those issues. Charles began reading the New Testament and continued to debate spiritual issues with his roommate. For some reason, the clarity of God's message did not reach Charles' heart. He became frustrated with his confusion and declined any further discussions on this topic.

Because he was training for the Olympics, Charles had special privileges at the university's pool facilities. One evening he became restless and confused with his spiritual struggle and decided to spend some additional time practicing dives. Sometime between 10:30 and 11 p.m. he went to the pool. It was a clear night in October and the moon was big and bright. The University pool was housed under a glass ceiling. The moon shone brightly across the top of the wall in the pool area. Charles came through the back door, put down his gear and immediately climbed the tall ladder leading to the highest platform. He didn't turn on the pool lights because the glow of the moon filtered enough light into the building.

At that moment the Spirit of God began to convict Charles of his sins. All the Scripture he had read and all the occasions others witnessed to him about Christ flooded his mind. He stood on the platform backwards to make his dive, spread his arms to gather his balance, looked up to the wall, and saw his own shadow on the side of the pool building. The moonlight silhouetted his body projecting the shape of a cross on the blank white wall. When he saw the cross, Charles was no longer able to bear the burden of his sin, and his contrite heart led him to sit down on the platform and seek God's forgiveness and salvation. He made a decision to live for Jesus Christ on a 20-foot platform with only the walls of the building to hear his confession.

Suddenly a door opened, however, and the pool lights came on. One of the maintenance workers had come to check some work he had been doing on the pool. As Charles looked down from his platform, he was shocked to see an empty pool. It had been drained for repairs. He had almost plummeted to his death, but the cross had kept him from disaster.

The cross of Christ stands at the very heart of the Christian faith. It's more than just an ancient execution device; it's a powerful symbol of divine love and unparalleled sacrifice. When we look upon the cross, we see the ultimate act of selflessness: Jesus Christ laying down His life for humanity.

In John 3:16, we read, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." This verse highlights the significance of the cross, and the gospel, in a nutshell. Jesus didn't just suffer a brutal death. He did so willingly, driven by an incomprehensible love for each of us. He took on the sins of the world, bore the punishment we deserved and opened the door to eternal life.

When we reflect on the cross, we are invited to consider how deep God's love is for us and how much He paid for our redemption. Much as the case with the diver Charles, you and I are also called to a response, one which reflects

gratitude and emulates Jesus' example of humility and sacrifice in our own lives.

Over the past several weeks, our region has endured our fair share of pain and suffering. But in that storm, the cross stands as a beacon of hope. It reassures us that no matter how dark our circumstances, God's love is stronger. The resurrection that followed the crucifixion confirms that death is not the end, but a new beginning. This week, remember that through the cross, we find not only salvation, but also a model for living a life marked by grace, love and unwavering faith.

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Jamie Shell, 'The Timely Truth for this week is ... CROSS', *Watauga Democrat, The*(online), 18 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C49349C97AF0E0



BRWIA hosting local meat sale Oct. 24

October 18, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Staff Report news@wataugademocrat.com| Section: Community | 658 Words OpenURL Link

BOONE — Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture will host the third annual High Country Food Hub Local Meat Sale to offer local meat at a discounted price as many farmers face an early end to the growing season and so that people can begin to restock their freezers in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene.

The Local Meat Sale will take place from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Thursday, Oct. 24, at the High Country Food Hub in the Watauga County Conference Center at 252 Poplar Grove Road.

The sale will feature a variety of local meat producers, samples to try unique cuts of meat, a burger lunch fundraiser, and a 6.9 cubic ft. freezer raffle. All proceeds will benefit Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture's Double Up Food Bucks program, which helps make local food more affordable for those in need.

"As the fall harvest season approaches, many farmers need to clear out freezer space both at the Food Hub and on their farms. This freezer sale is an opportunity to move product at a decreased cost to the local community and open up freezer space," said High Country Food Hub Manager Taylor Campbell. "Thousands of folks lost power during the Hurricane, including farmers. Luckily, the Food Hub was able to help farmers store thousands of pounds of local meat. Now more than ever, farmers need local support to stay in business and people need to restock their freezers.Let's support one another."

The event id also a great opportunity to connect with local farmers, learn how to use different cuts of meat, and stock up your freezer. Products will be discounted from 10 to 50% off. Cash or credit payments will be taken by individual farms, and Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture's Double Up Food Bucks program will provide assistance to customers with SNAP benefits so that more people have the opportunity to afford local food.

To use the Double Up Food Bucks program, visit the Food Hub manager's booth and tell them how much you'd like to spend with your SNAP/EBT card to receive double the amount in tokens for shopping.

Customers can park at the High Country Food Hub at 252 Poplar Grove Road in Boone (Watauga County Conference Center), or in the gravel parking area by Poplar Grove Road.

Shopping locally is an essential way to improve community resilience, BRWIA stated in a press release. Buying local products supports the community by helping local small farms and business owners, stimulating the local economy by keeping food dollars within the region, and relying less on commercial agriculture.

About The High Country Food Hub

The High Country Food Hub, operated by Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture, is an online retailer for local farmers and producers that provides community members an opportunity to access quality, local products all year long. The High Country Food Hub has reinvested over \$4 million dollars back into the local food economy since 2017. There are several pickup locations around the High Country which helps make local food more accessible to all. To learn more about the High Country Food Hub, please visit Facebook @HighCountryFoodHub, Instagram @highcountryfoodhub, or www.highcountryfoodhub.org/.

About Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture

Formed in 2003, Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture (BRWIA) is a women-led organization that builds an equitable, sustainable High Country local food system by supporting producers and cultivating community connections that

educate, inspire, and increase the demand for local food. To learn more about BRWIA, please visit Facebook @BRWIA, Instagram @brwia, or www.brwia.org.

About Double Up Food Bucks

Operating since 2017, Double Up Food Bucks is BRWIA's food equity program that doubles the value of federal nutrition benefits (food stamps) when spent on local food. Double Up is available at the King Street Market, Watauga County Farmers Market, and online on the High Country Food Hub. This program has distributed \$200,000+ to over 650 families since its inception and fills a much needed gap in making local food more accessible and affordable to the local community. Learn more at brwia.org/doubleup

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WCS announces date students will return to the classroom

October 18, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Moss Brennan moss.brennan@wataugademocrat.com| Section: Local | 385 Words OpenURL Link

WATAUGA — Watauga County Schools will welcome students back to the classroom starting late next week.

The school system will utilize Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday as teacher workdays, giving teachers and staff time to prepare classrooms and giving bus drivers the opportunity to drive their new, updated routes that include many new community stops, according to the school system.

WCS then plans to welcome students back on Thursday, Oct. 24, and will follow the regular schedule. Students have been out of school since Sept. 26 due to damage from Hurricane Helene.

Some of the schools received minor damage like trees down and water damage to ceiling tiles, but the current Valle Crucis School received the most, which has prompted the school system to relocate those students. The new Valle Crucis School that's still being built did not have damage.

While closed, many of the schools served as distribution centers and places for community members to get a hot meal.

On Friday afternoon, families received a transportation survey from their principal requesting information so that the school system may solidify their child's new stop along with pick-up and drop-off times.

"Please respond to that survey even if your child is not using bus transportation," WCS Superintendent Leslie Alexander said in a social media post. "This will help us plan and ultimately give you the information you will need so that you may plan your day."

The survey should be completed by 10 a.m., Monday, Oct. 21.

By Tuesday afternoon, the transportation team will have finalized bus routes, including drop-off and pick-up times for parents. This information, along with relevant protocols needed to ensure student safety, will be provided to parents.

For planning purposes, parents should be aware that because these are community stops and not neighborhood stops, all students K-8 must be picked up by an approved adult. Those who need to make different arrangements for middle school students after Oct. 25 can work directly with their school administration.

The school system also announced that Oct. 30 and 31 are no longer early release days since there have been a number of days missed due to the hurricane, the school system needs to maximize the remaining instructional hours available.

"Again, we are excited to welcome our staff and students back to school and look forward to returning to a normal schedule," Alexander said in the post.

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More than 2,500 people voted early on the first day in Watauga County

October 18, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Moss Brennan moss.brennan@wataugademocrat.com| Section: Local | 457 Words OpenURL Link

WATAUGA — More than 2,500 people cast their ballot on the first day of early voting in Watauga County.

According to Watauga County Director of Elections Matt Snyder, 2,521 people voted on Oct. 17 — the first day of early voting. In Watauga County, 45,096 people are registered to vote, according to the North Carolina Board of Elections.

"We were very pleased that our Day 1 early voting numbers. (They) were very comparable to Day 1 in 2020, even with a few hours less of operation," Snyder said.

In 2020, Snyder said 2,863 people voted on the first day.

The App State location has had the most votes, 764, while the Meat Camp location has had the fewest, 151.

The other sites saw the following number of voters in the first hour:

Watauga County Administration Building: 668Blowing Rock: 387Deep Gap: 323Western Watauga Community Center: 228

In 2020, the last presidential election, 32,346 Watauga County voters cast their ballot — a 71.62% turnout.

Early voting times are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on weekdays and Saturdays and 1 to 5 p.m. on Sundays between Oct. 17 and Nov. 2. The last day of early voting, Nov. 2, will be from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. The Watauga County Board of Elections approved the new early voting hours on Oct. 10.

Early voting polling sites are located at:

Watauga County Administration Building (Commissioners' Board Room 814 W. King Street, Boone)Blowing Rock American Legion Building (333 Wallingford Street, Blowing Rock)Deep Gap Fire Department (6583 Old 421 S, Deep Gap)Meat Camp Fire Department (4797 NC Hwy 194 N, Boone)Plemmons Student Union Blue Ridge Ballroom (263 Locust Street, Boone with parking available at 644 Howard Street)Western Watauga Community Center (1081 Old US Hwy 421, Sugar Grove)

If you are registered to vote in Watauga County, you may vote at any early voting site you choose. Same Day Registration is available at every early voting site, but voters must provide proof of residence in Watauga County.

A photo ID is required to vote. Voters who may have lost their ID due to Hurricane Helene have the following options:

Fill out a Photo ID Exception Form at your voting site or send the form back with your absentee ballot. (A blank Exception Form will arrive with your absentee packet.) Check the box for "Exception 3: Victim of a Natural Disaster." Make sure to sign the form.Go to your county board of elections office. If you are a registered voter, they can take your photo and print an acceptable ID on the spot. For details, go to Get a Free Voter Photo ID.Get a free ID from an NCDMV office in your area. For details, see State IDs | NCDMV.

For details about North Carolina's photo ID requirement, including a list of all acceptable IDs, go to BringltNC.gov.

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Pioneer football ready to open up league play

October 18, 2024 | Watauga Democrat, The (Boone, NC) Author: Zach Colburn | Section: Sports | 1100 Words OpenURL Link

BOONE — After what turned into an extended bye week, the Watauga football team is eager to pick up where it left off when it travels to Alexander Central this coming Friday.

And where the Pioneers pick up is looking to maintain their undefeated 5-0 record as it opens up Northwestern 4A/3A Conference play against the Cougars on the recently christened artificial turf at Cougar Stadium and Glen Wilson Field. Kickoff is scheduled for 6:30 p.m.

Even though the last few weeks have been unusual, Watauga head football coach Ryan Habich feels fortunate that they were able to start practicing again late last week.

The Pioneers elected to have a full week of practice to prepare for the Cougars while everyone else in the NWC, except for Ashe County, resumed play last Friday.

"It would have been difficult to play this past week, so it was good to have a few practices in this week to see what you had. Next week will be a challenge, but I think our kids will be up to it," Habich said. "We're very, very excited about being back, able to play games where we know some schools in Western North Carolina were hit pretty hard where they're not able to play, so we're very fortunate that we get a chance to play.

"Our kids are excited to get an opportunity to play, and that's what we're very fortunate and that we're very blessed that we get the opportunity to play — we're very grateful for that."

The game will mark the first time in almost a month since Watauga last played, which was a 47-21 win at home against North Davidson on Sept. 20 to close out nonconference play.

The visit to Alexander Central is a week later than originally scheduled before Hurricane Helene halted everything on Sept. 27.

In terms of scheduling, the Pioneers only had two games postponed, and their bye week was the week of Sept. 27.

The game with South Caldwell, which was originally the Pioneers' conference opener for Oct. 4, will now be the final week of the revised season on Nov. 8.

"It was a very long bye week; some of our kids have made a good analogy, it felt somewhat like COVID, but we were only once affected, just being away for so long. It was good to get back to practice this week, but it was unique because you didn't have everyone," said Habich. "We're hoping to have a little bit more normalcy next week. I know we'll be out of school, that'll be a challenge, but getting the kids back to practicing with a goal of playing a game, which it looks like we're playing both a JV game Thursday night and a varsity game Friday, so that will be good. This week was certainly a challenge; again, I can see how Appalachian State playing Marshall, you know, after everything, it's hard to get the kids mindset."

Busy stretch to close out season

The league opener at the Cougars will mark a stretch of five games in the final four weeks of the season as Watauga makes a run at its seventh-straight league title and a spot in the North Carolina High School Athletic Association 4A playoffs.

After Friday's game, the Pioneers will return home for two straight league games against Hibriten and Freedom on Oct. 25 and Nov. 1, respectively.

The contest against the Patriots will also signal a stretch of three games in eight days to close out the season.

Watauga will travel to Ashe County on Nov. 5 before the regular-season finale at the Spartans on Nov. 8 at South Caldwell with the state playoffs scheduled to begin on Nov. 15.

"It's going to be a challenge," said Habich. "The guys are going to have to be in good football shape, and we're going to have to have depth too, because when you're playing that many games, you lose someone quickly; there's not enough time to really rehab to get back, so you're going to have to build some depth."

Current team leaders

When it comes to the Pioneers' offense, Maddox Greene is definitely a focal point as he's accounted for more than half of his team's 18 touchdowns this fall.

The senior quarterback has passed for 531 yards and seven touchdowns (versus one interception) through the air and 505 yards and five touchdowns on the ground.

Everett Gryder (328 yards on 44 carries and one touchdown) and Matthew Leon (249 yards and two touchdowns on 35 carries) complement Greene on the ground.

Through the air, Landon Smith has seven catches for 216 yards and three touchdowns. Evan Burroughs has added 10 catches for 181 yards and one touchdown.

Luke Edmisten (26 solo) and Trathan Gragg (25 solo) headline the Pioneer defense with 36 and 34 tackles, respectively. Smith has registered 27 tackles and Dillon Zaragoza has 24; Nyle Peays and Carson Gunnell-Beck both have 20 tackles.

Brady Lindenmuth is Watauga's sack leader with four, and Leon isn't far behind with three. Greene, Gragg, Peays, Zaragoza and Burroughs have all intercepted a pass.

Inside the Cougars' Den

Alexander Central is 3-3 and 1-0 in the conference after this past Friday's 30-20 win against Freedom in the league opener at Patton High School.

Despite a .500 record, the Cougars are 0-1 against 4A schools this season. The defeat came in a 42-10 loss at home to Sun Valley on Sept. 20.

In last Friday's win against the Patriots, Alexander Central did not complete a pass (and only attempted three), as all 363 yards of offense came on the ground.

Sawyer Chapman-Mays paced the Cougars with 162 yards (on 30 carries) and two touchdowns, while fellow junior Jeremiah Whitaker added 95 yards and two touchdowns on 12 carries.

On defense, sophomore Maurice Howell Jr. led the way with six tackles (five solo).

For the season, quarterback Wade Queen leads the Cougars through the air with 230 yards and just one touchdown (with three interceptions) on 20-of-45 passing. The senior has also added 193 rushing yards and two touchdowns.

Tight end Garrison Millsaps (six catches for 115 yards and a touchdown) and Jamison Rowe (four receptions for 84 yards) have been Queen's top targets through the air. Millsaps, along with head coach Butch Carter, were recently

named to the North Carolina team for the Shrine Bowl of the Carolinas. Carter was selected as an assistant coach.

Whitaker leads Alexander Central's rushing offense with 574 yards and six touchdowns on 63 carries, while Chapman-Mays has added 394 yards and seven touchdowns on 89 carries.

Hunter McGuire is one of seven Cougars with 20 or more tackles this season, and the sophomore leads the way with 32. Howell Jr. is second on the team with 29 (18 solo).

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• Citation (aglc Style)

Zach Colburn, 'Pioneer football ready to open up league play', *Watauga Democrat, The* (online), 18 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C49349D5785680



Cooper approves more money for hard-hit Helene victims - Up to \$600 approved in weekly state unemployment benefits for Helene disaster victims; Forsyth residents now included

October 18, 2024 | Winston-Salem Journal (NC)

Author: RICHARD CRAVER Staff Reporter | Section: A | 949 Words

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Gov. Roy Cooper issued Wednesday an emergency executive order than nearly doubles the maximum weekly unemployment benefit amount - from \$350 to \$600 - for North Carolinians whose job has been affected by Hurricane Helene.

As of Thursday, the expanded weekly unemployment benefit now includes residents in Forsyth, Surry and Yadkin counties.

However, the number of state unemployment benefit weeks remains capped at 12, per state law approved in 2013 by the Republican legislative super-majority. Only eight states have a lower weekly maximum unemployment benefit than North Carolina.

The N.C. Division of Employment Security announced Forsyth, Surry and Yadkin are among 12 newly qualified counties approved for federal Disaster Unemployment Assistance. The others are Cabarrus, Cherokee, Graham, Iredell, Lee, Nash, Rowan, Stanly and Union.

There are now 39 counties eligible, as well as the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians of N.C. Alleghany, Ashe, Watauga and Wilkes counties were among the initially eligible.

Prior to Cooper's executive order, many low-income and part-time workers would have received less than the \$350 weekly maximum.

The 10-member Council of State voted unanimously to approve Cooper's executive order, including Republican Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson, who had missed previous votes on disaster relief executive orders.

The division of employment security estimates it may take between two and three weeks for impacted individuals to see the impact in their weekly benefit checks.

The benefits for eligible claimants will be retroactive to Sept. 29, with adjustment payments being issued for benefit weeks going back to that date.

"As I've traveled for days around western North Carolina, I've heard concern from many small business owners about their employees who are unemployed because their businesses are temporarily closed," Cooper said in a statement.

"This executive order will increase unemployment benefits and help ease the financial burden for impacted North Carolinians as they work to recover from the storm."

Another surge in unemployment claims

The boost in the weekly unemployment amount comes amid another surge in initial unemployment claims for the week that ended Oct. 12.

The U.S. Labor Department reported Thursday there were 9,251 new claims, compared with 11,655 for the week that ended Oct. 5. About 79% of those claims were filled by people in the 25 counties in the disaster relief region.

Before the remnants of Helene arrived in western N.C., there were 2,941 new weekly unemployment claims for the week that ended Sept. 29.

Overall, there are 22,530 North Carolinians currently receiving state unemployment benefits as of Oct. 5. That number is expected to rise significantly over the next few weeks.

The emergency executive order is tied to the state of emergency for Helene and remains in effect until the end of the emergency, or until it is rescinded.

Although federal law requires the elevated state payment to apply statewide, the increased benefits would largely go to workers from counties impacted by Helene.

Meanwhile, workers who lived or worked in the 27 impacted North Carolina counties - including Alleghany, Ashe, Watauga and Wilkes - and are out of work due to the disaster will qualify for up to 14 weeks of federal benefits.

Those benefits will be paid through March 29 under the federal Disaster Unemployment Assistance program.

Cooper's news release said that "to provide relief to employers impacted by Helene, and due to the extraordinary size of the trust fund balance (at \$4.8 billion), employers would not see any increase in unemployment taxes due to the increased benefit."

The Employment Security division estimates that for every 10,000 North Carolinians who receive elevated state benefits, the additional cost to the Unemployment Insurance Trust Fund would be \$2.5 million per week.

If 50,000 North Carolinians from impacted counties received the full additional state benefit for all 12 weeks, the additional cost to the Trust Fund is estimated to be \$150 million.

Those same 50,000 workers would then be eligible for an additional 14 weeks of federal benefits, totaling an additional \$175 million paid by the federal government.

"Many currently unemployed workers will likely return to work before receiving the full benefit they are entitled to claim, so the actual fiscal impact of the increased benefits is expected to be lower," according to the news release.

Federal aid details

The eligibility for federal unemployment benefit assistance is a byproduct of the Biden administration's declaration of a state of emergency in N.C. from the devastating rainfall and flooding caused by the remnants of Helene.

The disaster unemployment assistance covers individuals who are unemployed as a direct result of Helene. Business owners and self-employed individuals affected by the storm also may qualify for benefits.

The other 23 approved counties are Alexander, Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Clay, Cleveland, Gaston, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Lincoln, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mecklenburg, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Swaim, Transylvania and Yancey.

Eligible individuals have until Dec. 2 to file an application for disaster unemployment assistance at des.nc.gov or the DUA Hotline at 919-629-3857.

Individuals must first apply for state unemployment benefits. For those determined to be ineligible for or have exhausted regular state benefits, they may be eligible to make a federal disaster unemployment assistance claim.

Eligibility is determined weekly, and individuals must continue to be out of work as a direct result of the disaster each week to get unemployment benefits.

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• Citation (aglc Style)

RICHARD CRAVER; Staff Reporter, 'Cooper approves more money for hard-hit Helene victims Up to \$600 approved in weekly state unemployment benefits for Helene disaster victims; Forsyth residents now included', *Winston-Salem Journal* (online), 18 Oct 2024 1 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C48B3D04049850



MOUNTAINEERS RETURN TO BOONE - Appalachian State will play Georgia State in Boone

October 18, 2024 | Winston-Salem Journal (NC)

Author: TOM FOREMAN JR. Staff Reporter | Section: B | 504 Words

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Appalachian State will host Georgia State in Boone on Oct. 26, its first game at Kidd Brewer Stadium since Hurricane Helene tore through western North Carolina three weeks ago and led to flooding that inundated the town.

The game is scheduled for a 1 p.m. kickoff and is a sellout. It will be live-streamed on ESPN+.

For a time, officials had considered moving the game to either Allegacy Stadium, home of Wake Forest, or Jerry Richardson Stadium, the home of UNC Charlotte.

App State reopened on Oct. 11 and classes resumed on Oct. 16. During that time, the App State Disaster Relief Fund was created, and more than \$2 million has been distributed to members of the university community who are facing hardships because of Helene.

"We're working to thoughtfully, responsibly and respectfully bring university events back to Boone that are supported by students, faculty and staff, as well as a passionate base of alumni and others who love Appalachian State University and Western North Carolina. We're committed to ensuring that the university continues to support and sustain our community in meaningful and lasting ways," interim chancellor Heather Norris said in a news release.

"We worked together with the Town and County to respond to the immediate needs of our community during and after Hurricane Helene, and we are committed to sustaining this partnership as we continue to move forward with recovery efforts and build a sense of hope for the future to our broader community," Norris said.

Athletics Director Doug Gillin called App State "an important part of the culture and economy of our university community, the High Country, and the western North Carolina region."

"We are thankful to university, town and county leadership, and are committed to provide a safe and responsible return to home competition," Gillin said. "We hope this event will further rally our community and help support all those who are recovering."

App State is on a three-game losing streak, having fallen to South Alabama, Marshall and Louisiana. The South Alabama game, which was on Sept. 19, was the last home game the Mountaineers played before Helene forced the cancellation of the Liberty game on Sept. 28.

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• Citation (aglc Style)

TOM FOREMAN JR.; Staff Reporter, 'MOUNTAINEERS RETURN TO BOONE Appalachian State will play Georgia State in Boone', *Winston-Salem Journal* (online), 18 Oct 2024 1 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C48B3D1625B168>



Shoveling muck - Our view: Lies about Helene could have violent consequences

October 18, 2024 | Winston-Salem Journal (NC) Section: A 654 Words Page: 9 OpenURL Link

OUR VIEW

In the aftermath of Hurricane Helene, Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene lobbed late-night comedians an easy punch line with her ominous pronouncement that "they" (presumably Democrats?) can control the weather.

Only, Greene wasn't joking when she posted her fractured fairytale on social media.

Same difference with another chestnut from Greene's growing annals of ridiculousness: Jewish space lasers.

It's enough to make you want to laugh ... and then cry.

Because lies have consequences. You wouldn't believe what some people will believe.

A man was arrested Saturday in western North Carolina for allegedly threatening FEMA relief workers.

Authorities say William Jacob Parsons was armed with an AR-style rifle and a handgun and said he was going to "go mess up some FEMA personnel."

Rutherford County Sheriff's Office Capt. Jamie Keever described those words as a "vague threat."

They don't sound so vague to us.

Neither did they sound vague to FEMA, which temporarily reduced door-to-to visits by relief workers.

Nor are they unexpected.

Like the muck, debris and destruction that massive flooding dumped on the high country, misinformation has swept the state and the country, breeding fear, ignorance and mistrust. And hindering relief efforts.

Those false allegations range from the absurd to the incendiary and their progenitors include the Republican nominee for president.

Early on, Donald Trump blurted - and has repeated - that the government was withholding recovery aid from Republican areas even as Republican governors and other elected officials were contradicting him. Trump also falsely said that FEMA was running low on storm-relief funds because the money was going instead to immigrants.

Then there's Mark Robinson, the scandal-ridden Republican nominee for governor, who criticized the state's relief efforts based on fact-free allegations.

Among the other toxic falsehoods was a viral lie that the federal government was plotting to seize storm-ravaged local land and confiscating relief supplies.

"This is happening in the middle of an election, where candidates are using people's misery to sow chaos for their own political objectives and it's wrong," said Gov. Roy Cooper, a Democrat.

Some Republicans have expressed similar frustrations.

"It's been harmful," Chuck Edwards, who represents the Asheville region in Congress, told The Hill earlier this week.
"Not just unhelpful, it's been harmful.

"Just by the delay in our response in dealing with folks that really needed help, while we were having to fill all the calls and quash the rumor that was out there," he added. "In addition to the fact that there were people out there that believed that if they were to send goods to western North Carolina, that they might not make it to their intended point." Edwards would not mention any names, probably out of a reluctance of offending fellow Republicans, but we already know who's muddying the truth.

Which brings us back to Parsons, who was arrested while sitting in a vehicle outside of a storm-relief site in the hard-hit Chimney Rock area. He was freed on a \$10,000 secured bond.

His wasn't the only threat they've received, a FEMA spokesperson said, noting several days of intimidation and harassment.

Thankfully, by Monday, FEMA said a statement that the potential danger "was more limited than initially reported and mitigated by law enforcement."

Relief teams resumed normal operations.

Of course, any delay in relief efforts only makes the task harder and more challenging as colder weather approaches, but threats must be taken seriously.

You may remember Edgar Madisson Welch, the 28-year-old father of two from Salisbury, who in 2016 walked into a pizzeria in northwest Washington and fired an AR-15-style rifle.

Welch had driven for six hours to the nation's capital because he had read on Facebook and Twitter that the restaurant, called Comet Ping Pong, was a front for a child sex-slave ring led by Hillary Clinton.

Welch was charged with four counts, including felony assault with a deadly weapon and carrying a gun without a license outside a home or business.

He was sentenced to four years in prison by a U.S. District Court judge named Ketanji Brown Jackson.

Suddenly, space lasers and weather-controlling Democrats aren't so funny anymore, are they?

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• Citation (aglc Style)

'Shoveling muck Our view: Lies about Helene could have violent consequences', *Winston-Salem Journal* (online), 18 Oct 2024 9 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C48B3C84AEC2D0



Wall Street drifts around its records - Stock market today: Wall Street drifts around its records following latest encouraging economic data

October 18, 2024 | Winston-Salem Journal (NC) Author: STAN CHOE Associated Press| Section: B| 427 Words Page: 4 OpenURL Link

NEW YORK - U.S. stocks drifted around their record heights Thursday after the latest signals that the U.S. economy continues to hum.

The S&P 500 finished virtually unchanged - slipping 1 point, or less than 0.1%, to 5,841.47 - after flirting with its all-time high for much of the day.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average added 161.35 points, or 0.4%, to its own record set the day before, climbing to to 43,239.05. The Nasdag composite was close to flat, climbing 6.53 points, or less than 0.1%, to 18,373.61.

Nvidia and other companies in the chip industry were some of the market's strongest after global heavyweight Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co. reported bigger profit for the latest quarter than analysts expected. TSMC credited strong demand related to smartphones and artificial intelligence, and its stock that trades in the U.S. jumped 9.8%.

Nvidia's gain of 0.9% was Thursday's strongest single force pushing upward on the S&P 500.

Still, a 1.4% slide for Google's parent company, Alphabet, and a 10.6% tumble for Elevance Health helped keep indexes in check.

In the bond market, the 10-year Treasury yield rose to 4.09% from 4.02% late Wednesday, and the two-year Treasury yield rose to 3.98% from 3.94%, after encouraging reports on the U.S. economy.

U.S. retailers made more in sales in September than in August, and underlying growth trends within the data were better than economists expected. A separate report said fewer U.S. workers applied for unemployment benefits last week, a signal that layoffs are relatively low and aren't damaging the job market.

The European Central Bank cut its main interest rate by a quarter of a percentage point Thursday. That helped send stock indexes higher by 1.2% in France and 0.8% in Germany. They halted a run of losses that started the day in Asian stock markets, where Japan's Nikkei 225 fell 0.7% and Hong Kong's Hang Seng dropped 1%.

On Wall Street, insurer Travelers was the biggest reason for the Dow's setting another record. It jumped 9% after reporting stronger profit and revenue for the latest quarter than analysts expected. Higher income from its investments and elsewhere helped cover greater losses due to Hurricane Helene and severe storms in multiple states.

Blackstone also pushed upward on indexes after the investor in real estate, hedge funds and other alternative investments reported stronger profit than expected. It climbed 6.3% after CEO Stephen Schwarzman said it's seeing acceleration across its businesses.

CSX fell 6.7% after falling short of analysts' profit expectations for the latest quarter. The railroad expects only modest volume growth the rest of the year as the Southeast rebuilds after two major hurricanes.

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October 18, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The (NC) Charlotte, North Carolina Page: 1 OpenURL Link

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