

## Morganton textile organization gets \$800,000

### U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

The Industrial Commons in Morganton was awarded a large grant to help advance its mission of supporting manufacturing businesses.

The U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration awarded an \$800,000 grant to The Industrial Commons to support textile manufacturing in the region, according to a press release from the U.S. Department of Commerce.

This grant will help pay for personnel and equipment in support of expanding the local textile production industry.

This investment will be matched with \$500,000 in local funds, the release said.

"The Industrial Commons is a nationwide leader in promoting local textile production through circularity, and they are a key partner in western North Carolina's textile economy," Sen. Thom Tillis said in the release.

"I am proud to support this \$800,000 grant, which is another important federal investment in their work and in textile manufacturing in western North Carolina."

# 1,000 employees back at McDowell plant

RICHARD CRAVER  
Winston-Salem Journal

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



WALT UNKS PHOTOS, WINSTON-SALEM JOURNAL

An aerial view of Baxter Manufacturing in Marion on Wednesday, Oct. 2.



Part of Pitts Station Road in Marion that leads from U.S. Highway 221 to Baxter Manufacturing was severely damaged by floodwaters during Hurricane Helene as seen on Wednesday, Oct. 2.

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 em-

ployees," 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."

## Repairing roads, water, sewer top priorities

RICHARD CRAVER  
Winston-Salem Journal

Paying for repairing roads, highways and water and sewer infrastructure are the top priorities for the bulk of the \$273 million "rainy-day" funds approved Oct. 10 for Hurricane Helene relief efforts in western North Carolina.

Gov. Roy Cooper signed into law House Bill 149, titled "Disaster Recovery Act of 2024" which represents the first round of disaster relief funding. The state House and Senate voted unanimously for HB149.

Those priorities represent the realities of helping affected western N.C. communities to return to normal life, according to legislators and Cooper administration officials.

The rainy-day fund exceeded \$4.75 billion before Helene. Legislators have established a limit on how much rainy-day funds can be spent at any one time.

"Recovery for western North Carolina will require unprecedented help from state and federal sources, and this legislation is a strong first step," Cooper said in a statement.

"Hurricane Helene caused catastrophic damage, but also showed the resiliency of North Carolina's people and its communities, and we must continue the bipartisan work to help them build back strong."

About \$250 million is going to state agencies and local governments toward relief and recovery operations in the 25 affected counties that include Alleghany, Ashe, Watauga and Wilkes.

Essentially, funds appropriated to the N.C. Emergency Management Agency will serve as upfront cash flows that are expected to be reimbursed at up to 100% from the federal government, primarily the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

About \$100 million in state funding already has been designated toward disaster relief efforts, including N.C. Department of Transportation efforts toward repairing or new construction of private roads and bridges.

Cooper said that "significant progress is already being made to reopen roads, restore electricity and repair water and communications systems"

Most of the energy and communications repairs are

being done by private companies, such as Duke Energy, Pike Electric and mobile and internet providers.

"This initial investment is helpful in satisfying federal matching funds requirements and cash flow to help ensure maximum impact," Cooper said.

"In coming weeks and months, damage assessments will continue and the governor will work with state and federal appropriators to identify the significant funding that will be required to rebuild communities devastated by this storm."

### Next legislative session

A second one-day session focused on disaster relief efforts is scheduled for Oct. 24.

State Emergency Management officials are expected to provide before that session the results of an accelerated preliminary damage-and-needs assessment so legislators can determine the next amount to withdraw from the rainy-day fund.

The typical damage-and-needs assessment takes between six to eight weeks to conduct and present to the legislature. A more thorough assessment likely will be presented to the legislature after the Nov. 5 general election.

However, the availability of drones and other technological advancements has helped to speed up the assessments.

The assessment is designed in part to determine what damages FEMA will pay for and what disaster relief expenses the state will have to pick up. State officials, both with the Cooper administration and the administration of the next governor, will negotiate with FEMA officials on those expenses.

Funding also will be dedicated to "unmet basic needs" for affected communities, such as providing shelter and warmth as the cooler nights of fall arrive.

"There is not a specific earmark of any of these dollars for a specific program," said Senate leader Phil Berger, R-Rockingham.

When asked about why the legislature is not providing more from the rainy-day fund, Berger said, "This is not all of it, not by a long shot"

"We don't want to get too far ahead of the federal gov-

ernment on that because we don't want to supplant those federal dollars with state dollars if we're not required to."

House speaker Tim Moore, R-Cleveland, said legislators know "this is just a drop in the bucket to what's going to be the total cost."

"We're well over \$10 billion, and it's going to be higher than that. This will (be) multiple years that this (recovery) process has to be dealt with at the state level and the federal level."

### Non-financial details

A legislative staff analysis of HB149 shows how legislators are providing guidance to board of elections in the 25 affected counties for handling the upcoming Nov. 5 general election.

Most of the affected counties are conservative leaning outside Buncombe, Mecklenburg and Watauga.

About \$5 million will be provided to county boards of elections for voter outreach and communication efforts.

Absentee ballots for voters in the 25 counties can be returned to any county board of elections, early voting sites or precincts, as well as establishing a hotline for displaced voters from the 25 counties.

Berger said there will be "additional flexibilities for appointing election judges

and poll workers, including from outside a particular county," such as state employees without taking leave from their jobs.

HB149 contains language providing direction for how school systems in the 25 affected counties can adjust their 2024-25 calendars.

HB149 allows public schools to excuse days missed for schools that closed during September and October related to Hurricane Helene damages.

Other elements include:

- Expands the amount of authorized remove instruction time for schools in the 25 affected counties for the remainder of the school year.

- Treats employees and contractors of public school units as having worked on days deemed completed and provide funding to replaced lost compensation of school nutrition employees.

- Requires the state Department of Public Instruction to report on calendar flexibility and compensation provided.

- Waives requirements for students enrolled in educator preparation program to complete clinical internships over a certain amount of time if they were scheduled to complete the internships in December.

- Extends the deadline for bonuses to be paid out to



GARY D. ROBERTSON, ASSOCIATED PRESS

North Carolina House Speaker Tim Moore, R-Cleveland, speaks while Senate leader Phil Berger, R-Rockingham, left, and other legislators listen in the Legislative Building in Raleigh as Berger and Moore unveiled details of an initial Hurricane Helene package considered at the General Assembly.

qualifying principals in affected counties.

Berger said HB149 will suspend into at least March 1 the post-COVID-19 pandemic law that requires the Council of State to renew every 30 days a governor's executive orders on declared emergencies.

The bill will waive temporarily driver's license renewals in those counties, along with certain environmental regulations, such as burning, road construction and wastewater, to accelerate the recovery process.

There will be small business loans made in conjunction with Golden Leaf Foundation that will be reimbursed through FEMA.

"There are thousands of businesses in this region that

have been severely damaged or destroyed," said Sen. Warren Daniel, R-Burke.

"They're struggling to figure out whether they will ever be able to rebuild and reopen. Local residents and the state economy depend heavily on the businesses in western North Carolina, especially small businesses.

"It's the General Assembly's duty to provide them help during their darkest hour and we are intent on doing just that."

The law also includes the Potential Tropical Cyclone #8 Fund for Brunswick and New Hanover counties, as well as language to fund the relief needs for the Nash County tornado that caused damage in Rocky Mount.

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