

Candidates impress at Politics after Dark

October 23, 2024 | Anson Record, The (Wadesboro, NC) Author: Lauren Monica Staff Writer | Section: developing-news news-main top-stories | 1429 Words OpenURL Link

ANSON — Always a highly anticipated event, the Anson County Chamber of Commerce hosted Politics after Dark Tuesday, giving community members a chance to hear where candidates for the Anson County Board of Commissioners and other offices stand on current issues in the county.

A familiar refrain throughout the evening for candidates involved seeking solutions to Anson County's struggling economy and infrastructure, its EMS, Fire and Rescue services and ways to strengthen the Wadesboro Police Department.

Not everyone running for office signed up to speak, but those that did were heard by an engaged and enthusiastic crowd.

"The Chamber of Commerce is a non-partisan organization whose mission is to promote community development and growth for Anson County. We recognize that state and local politics play a crucial role in how our community moves forward. We continue to sponsor this event each year to provide a platform for local candidates to campaign and share their thoughts and visions for the county," said Caty Edwards, who hosted the evening.

Taking the stage before commissioner hopefuls, State Representative Mark Brody reminded his constituents he has been representing Anson and Union Counties on the state level for the last 12 years and is very proud of his accomplishments over his tenure in the General Assembly. Brody praised the partnership county commissioners have forged with him, crediting their willingness to work on tightening the county budget, water, sewer and other infrastructure needs as a reason for his successes in Anson County.

"We did fully fund the sewer and water system for the new Gateway Industrial Park. Also, I was able to secure an \$8 million. I guess you could call it a revolving credit line that never has to be paid back for building buildings in that industrial park, basically what we call spec or shell buildings, and they are used to attract businesses to come into Anson County," Brody said.

Another accomplishment achieved under Brody is the construction of the new Anson Middle School, which is currently underway.

"Myself, along with Senator Tom McGinnis, were able to secure enough financing, funding, for Anson County to build their new middle school debt free," Brody said. Should he be re-elected, Brody said he hopes to make strides in encouraging Anson County students to pursue continuing education programs. He also shared the state currently has nearly \$5 million socked away in its "rainy day" fund, which he expects to aid neighbors in Western North Carolina as they continue to recover from the devastating damage caused by Hurricane Helene earlier this month.

Running for County Commissioner in District 3, Sylvester Bennett is a life-long resident of Anson County, who looks back fondly to the days when the county's economy was booming and everyone he knew could find gainful employment. A product of Bowman High School and Anson Technical Community College, Bennett wants to see a return to more promising days.

"The last data that I saw about Anson County, was that out of 100 counties in North Carolina, Anson County is one of the poorest counties. The school system is troubled and also you have higher taxes. Those are some of the concerns that I have for the county. I think we can do better," said Bennett, though he cautioned that just as Rome wasn't built in a day, the problems Anson County faces won't be fixed in a day. "I think that can happen, but it is going to be a process, and I hope to be a part of that process," he said.

Bennett said he believes by working together the county can fix its issues, which in turn will usher in an influx of new businesses and entice qualified educators to remain in the Anson County School District.

Lorrie Burns is running for District 1 Board of Commissioners. Burns has served Anson County, in both the public and private sectors, for over 20 years. Employed with the State of South Carolina Department of Corrections, Burns said she feels the county needs to offer competitive pay for teachers, consequently building a thriving education system.

Running against Burns for District 1, Kyle Leary grew up in Brown Creek before moving to Burnsville as an adult. As a member of the North Carolina National Guard, Leary said he found himself pulled away from Anson County, though he says he feels something has always called him back home. Currently, Leary is a paramedic, but has served the Burnsville Fire Department for 16 years. Concerned with both public safety and education, if elected, Leary states he will encourage EMS and Fire Department training in high school.

"What I see in the hearts and minds of a lot of citizens is they want growth in our county, they want business opportunities and that is what I want too ... I want the same thing with the infrastructure," Leary said.

Being involved with the community in his profession as a paramedic, Leary said he has learned residents want to see growth, a strong infrastructure and new businesses come to the county. He knows with the populations of Union and Richmond Counties busting at the seams, change is coming to Anson — whether Anson likes it or not.

"Let's take control of that change and make it what we want. Let's make our county better," Leary said.

Jarvis Woodburn, who currently serves as Anson County Commissioner for District 6, raised his children and grandchildren in Anson County. Woodburn said he believes in serving the residents of Anson County with honor, integrity, consistency and fairness. Continuing to believe in the potential and possibility of Anson County and its residents, Woodburn is hopeful he will be re-elected.

"I have been involved in county government for 20-plus years. I actually believe in learning to further my ability to be a good county commissioner and I attend classes at the UNC School of Government, which I have done for the last several years, and I have learned quite a bit. One thing I feel like commissioners should do is look out for what is in the best interest of citizens, and look out for the best interests of the county," said Woodburn, who added one way he accomplishes this is by not getting emotional over issues, instead believing commissioners should gather facts and figures before voting on an issue.

Don Jewell, who is not originally from Anson County, is running for Board of Commissioners District 7. Believing being an outsider could be an asset, Jewell says you don't have to be born and raised in Anson to love it and want to call it home. Overflowing with ideas for the county, if elected, Jewell said he will focus on building Anson's infrastructure and parks, work towards building a recreational center and find ways of increasing the county's tax base in an effort to lower taxes across the board for everyone. In addition to making high-speed internet access a priority, Jewell wants to see a fully staffed, qualified police force, fire and EMS.

"Every morning I wake up in District 7 of Anson County, I go to work in District 7, I come home to my wife in District 7 and I go to sleep every night in District 7 of Anson County. This is my home and I love Anson County," Jewell said.

Tara Eudy is running for Anson County Register of Deeds. A native, who raised her children in Anson, Eudy feels her profession has uniquely prepared her for the role of Register of Deeds.

"I have and continue to run Carolina Title, which is a business here in town on Morven Road and we do title insurance and title searches. Which is what gives me the experience that I need to be able to run this office. This office is a very important office. It is not just an administrative position. You need to have experience and know how this office runs," said Eudy.

Running for Brown Creek Soil and Water Conservation, Jeff Poplin said as the owner and operator of a cattle farm he is very big in to conservation, announcing to attendees he won the 2022 Conservation Family Farm of the Year. Poplin, who is locally known as the "cow man" of Brown Creek Creamery, said he opens his farm to the public for tours, giving Ansonians an opportunity to learn about cattle farming and methods of conservation.

James Shaver, a representative of Congressman Dan Bishop's office, attended in order to touch base with constituents, bringing back to Congressman Bishop an in-depth understanding of where Ansonians stand on the issues currently affecting them in the county.

Early voting begins October 17 in North Carolina, with all eligible voters heading to the polls on November 5. © 2024 Champion Media Carolinas.

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First Day of School Set for Oct. 25

October 23, 2024 | Biltmore Beacon, The (Asheville, NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: News | 247 Words OpenURL Link

Wednesday, Oct. 23, and Thursday, Oct. 24, will be return-to-work days for teachers and staff, including bus drivers, TSAs and nutrition team members. The first student day will be Friday, Oct. 25. That day, along with the school days of Oct. 28 to Nov. 1, will operate on a two-hour delay for students.

Transportation team members have been working with school administrators on new bus routes and community stops due to damaged roads and washed-out bridges. The two-hour delay schedule will allow bus drivers to get accustomed to the new routes after sunrise.

Because school will be operating on a two-hour delay schedule, Oct. 31 will no longer be an early dismissal day. At this time, the only other change to the school calendar will be the first semester being extended to Jan. 24, 2025.

Since Tropical Storm Helene hit, much work and thought has gone into a reopening plan. As of Oct. 28, non-potable water service, power and internet has been restored to all 45 schools. Drinking water is being delivered for staff and students to all schools. Maintenance crews are finishing repair and restoration work, and technology teams are reconnecting security and communication systems.

The Student Services team has been working equally hard to prepare for the emotional well-being of students and staff. In addition, extra counselors from neighboring school systems will join current teams to support Asheville's school family.

For questions regarding the reopening of city and county schools, parents are asked to reach out to school principals.

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Mayor's Reports Zero In on School Kids, RAD and SBA

October 23, 2024 | Biltmore Beacon, The (Asheville, NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: News | 426 Words OpenURL Link

"In the wake of Hurricane Helene, we've focused so much on recovery, rebuilding and supporting one another through this devastation," wrote Asheville Mayor Esther Manheimer in her Oct. 17 Daily Progress Report emailed to hundreds of subscribers.

"But in all of the adult responsibilities, we often forget to ask a critical guestion: "How are the children?" she asked.

The question, she explained, comes from an African tradition of the Maasai people of Kenya, who place great value on the well-being of their children as a measure of their society's health.

"Our children have been through a lot. They've experienced fear, anxiety and grief, just like us, but without the same coping mechanisms. For weeks, their lives have been upended — no school, no sports, and no sense of normalcy. We must remember to show up for them during this time, just as much as we show up for each other."

As Asheville administrators work to bring about the opening of school campuses in the next week, the focus remains on bringing about much-needed stability that will help school kids heal.

The next day, on Oct. 18, Manheimer met with U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper, local artist Patty Torno, and entrepreneur Russ Towers to tour the damaged River Arts District.

The RAD project, which was heavily funded through federal highway transportation funds, is in urgent need of repair. The rebuilding of this critical infrastructure will require strong collaboration with state and federal governments.

"The support and partnerships we have with leaders like Secretary Buttigieg and Governor Cooper give me hope that our recovery will be comprehensive and sustainable," wrote Manheimer. "I've been in constant conversations to ensure Asheville has the resources we need for the long term, and I'm inspired by how our community has come together during this unprecedented time."

The report continued with Manheimer explaining how she's also talked with the Asheville Downtown Association about the critical role small businesses play in recovery.

"Small businesses are the heartbeat of Asheville's economy, providing jobs and opportunities supporting so much of our community. The question isn't just how we help them get back on their feet — it's how much funding we can secure and how quickly we can get it into their hands," she added.

During the meeting with the AVL Downtown Association, Manheimer addressed concerns about debris removal in areas like the River Arts District.

"FEMA will cover 100 percent of the city's debris removal costs for the first six months, and we're actively working to get that process underway," she said.

To subscribe to Manheimer's Daily Progress Report, visit https://lp.constantcontactpages.com/

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Contest On for Best Ideas to Fix I-40

October 23, 2024 | Biltmore Beacon, The (Asheville, NC) Author: Becky Johnson bjohnson@themountaineer.com | Section: News | 826 Words OpenURL Link

All options are on the table for the monumental task of fixing collapsed portions of Interstate 40 along a four-mile stretch through the Pigeon River Gorge.

The N.C. Department of Transportation will use a novel approach to expedite the job and attract the best and brightest civil engineering minds.

Design firms and contractors are invited to pitch their own ideas — akin to a contest. And all bets are off.

"It is a blank sheet of paper. It could be that putting it back the way it was is the right thing to do, but this is a unique opportunity to really think outside of the box," said Wanda Payne, head of the 10-county westernmost division of DOT.

I-40 through the gorge in Haywood County has been landslide prone since the day it opened in 1968, due to the problematic topography of a steep-walled gorge.

But fixing I-40 this time is a different ballgame. The river scoured away the slope so severely in places that there's nothing left to build the interstate back on. The interstate tumbled into the river, and the ledge it once clung to sloughed off as well.

There's been talk of a viaduct model, similar to the suspended segment of the Blue Ridge Parkway around Grandfather Mountain. There's been talk of moving the river. And there's been talk of finding a new route for I-40 altogether.

"We are looking at all options. So whatever those options are," Payne said. "Everything is fixable, it just depends on how you fix it."

The blank slate is a once-in-a-lifetime challenge that is sparking interest from engineers across the nation.

"That is what I'm hoping," Payne said. "We've already been contacted by folks saying, 'We've seen this in Colorado,' or 'We've seen this in Canada, and this is what they did there.'"

The process solicits a construction manager on the front end, working in tandem with the DOT and a design firm to develop the project specs and then execute it.

It's quicker than the traditional process — which entails months of design and engineering and then going out to bid once a plan is in hand.

The DOT has moved at lightning speed to get the process underway. Less than two weeks after Helene hit, the DOT put out a request for proposals.

"We are looking to be under contract with a contractor and design firm by mid-November," Payne said.

Halting the Collapse

In the meantime, temporary repairs have been underway to prevent more of the interstate from sliding into the river.

Luckily, damage was contained to the eastbound lanes closest to the river — so westbound lanes can at least be used by emergency vehicles and construction crews.

But the slope below the interstate is so compromised in places that further collapse is possible, witnessed by long cracks along the edge of the remaining pavement.

"We were starting to notice the cracks were migrating into the westbound lanes," Payne said, noting data from crack monitors.

The worst-case scenario is that more sloughing could take westbound lanes with it. If that happened, it would be a disaster, as there would be nowhere for heavy equipment to work from once repairs begin.

"We have to save what we have," Payne said.

The DOT quickly contracted with Wright Brothers Construction for emergency stabilization to shore up four at-risk sections. The work entails soil nails to anchor the slope below the roadbed from more slipping. That work will be done by December, Payne said.

Crews performing the work are harnessed in while working close to the edge. A third-party safety team is on standby constantly — ready to perform a rescue if anyone goes over.

Lay of the Land

The Pigeon River's bed slices through a canyon of sorts, lying about 40-50 feet below the interstate. Given the steep walls, the river had nowhere to go but up when it flooded. At times, with much of the Pigeon's waters flowing through a tunnel from Walters Lake to the hydroelectric power plant at the state line, the only water flowing down that stretch of the gorge is that of Hurricane Creek. That was far from the case during Helene.

"The river was almost at pavement level in places," Payne said. "When you've got that much force, that's that deep, it just scoured away the slope."

Complicating matters, the river channel shifted closer to the toe of the slope — resulting in a near vertical drop in places.

"We are definitely going to have to do something with the river. It is not where it used to be," Payne said.

The DOT has also discovered the compromised stretch is more extensive than initially thought — not just the visible damage along the final four miles of I-40 before crossing into Tennessee.

"Surveys since then have shown the escarpment along the riverbank where it has sloughed off actually starts at Mile marker 7," Payne said.

Also of note, a service road that skirted the twin tunnels on the river side is mostly gone, as well.

(Becky Johnson is the news editor at The Mountaineer, a sister publication of The Biltmore Beacon.)

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High Country chefs raise money for storm relief

October 23, 2024 | Blowing Rocket, The (Blowing Rock, NC) Author: Nick Fogleman nick.fogleman@wataugademocrat.com| Section: Blowingrocket | 336 Words OpenURL Link

BLOWING ROCK — After Hurricane Helene, Burt Myers and Jessica Clearwater continued to do what they do best: cook food.

On Oct. 21 Clearwater and Myers hosted a High Country Boil to raise money for The North Carolina Community Foundation Disaster Relief Fund at Myers Kitchen & Pantry.

"We live here, and this area means a lot to both of us," Myers said.

Soon after the storm, Clearwater, who owns Moondance Catering, went to the Cove Creek area to serve hot meals to emergency personnel and those impacted by the storm.

"People were cleaning mud out of their houses and we stopped and asked if they wanted food," Clearwater said. "And they'd say, 'this neighbor had a mudslide, I'm sure they'd want some food.'"

Myers began serving first responders who came in looking for a hot meal.

"That's what we started doing first, so they didn't have to worry about food and could get out and do their jobs," Myers said.

The two High Country chefs came together to raise money for the North Carolina Community Foundation Disaster Relief Fund, which is a philanthropic grant organization that focuses on rural communities in North Carolina.

"So many people were coming to us asking how they could help. There was so much food already distributed we figured they needed money," Myers said.

The menu included butter poached tiger shrimp, chili rubbed salmon, corn on the cob, kielbasa sausage, new potatoes and garlic cheddar biscuits.

"It's comfort food, and people need a little bit of comfort," Myers said.

The team of chefs prepared around 200 meals and sold them for \$16 a meal.

"This is a way for us to get funds to people rather than another meal," Myers said.

Some customers went above and beyond, paying extra for meals and purchasing more meals than they wanted to receive.

"I had somebody contact me, and she wants two meals, and she's going to pay \$100," Clearwater said.

"Somebody came in and bought 10 meals and didn't want any of them," Myers said. "It gives the people who weren't affected a way to help."

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EDITORIAL: Western N.C. will rebound with help and determination

October 23, 2024 | Carteret County News-Times, The (Morehead City, NC) Author: Staff Writer | Section: Opinions | 1018 Words
OpenURL Link

"Visitors Needed" according to an outdoor billboard in western North Carolina which notes that 11 mountain towns are open and asking visitors to stop in. Although this message may seem out of place and out of touch with the tragic destruction left behind by Hurricane Helene, it is the right message for the time.

It does appear incongruous that, as 18 counties in the western regions of the state are shoveling mud and bailing out from the destruction left behind by Hurricane Helene, the state's tourism division is working to promote tourism for portions of the region that suffered little from the storm. One might to ask, where's the care, where's the concern for those homeowners and businesses that have lost everything from the unprecedented flooding caused by the hurricane?

The answer, counterintuitively, is that this message of resilience and rebound is important in helping the region recover and heal.

The North Carolina mountains and the unique communities and cultural facilities located in the foothills are a major tourist attraction, particularly in the fall season. Granted the ability to travel in the region has been diminished significantly, and in some case totally denied due to washed out roads and bridges. But there are still mountain counties that are operating at a hundred percent or nearly so. And it is these counties that are sustaining the region's vital economy, welcoming first time and long-time loyal guests while nearby towns and counties recover.

Hurricane Helene's aftermath not only has stressed the lives and communities it destroyed, it has also diminished the interest for tourism which is the lifeblood of the region. The decline in tourism in the state's mountain counties is already having an effect. There is serious concern that it can be long lasting.

The region needs support in every way. That assistance is on-going and according to reports, is progressing quickly. There is no question, the physical recovery for the region will take years -many, many years.

Whole towns, including the city of Asheville, were decimated and in some cases, literally wiped off the map. In Old Fort, a small town of approximately 1,300 souls, the entire water and sewer plant was covered by flood waters and sections of piping are nowhere to be found. This is no small repair job, making the town's recovery both physically and fiscally challenging.

Where will the town of 1,300 residents find the financial resources to pay for the construction of a multi-million-dollar water and sewer facility which will require laying new plumbing throughout the town's boundaries? Old Fort is not alone; there are the towns of Swannanoa, Green Mountain and Montreat as well.

Recovery will take money. State and federal funds will be available, most in the form of very convenient low interest loans, but still these communities will need to step up financially, and the only way that can happen is to get the region back on its feet economically.

Not only will the towns and communities have to rebuild, so too will the individuals and small business owners who have financial stresses. So it is imperative that the state begin the process of deflecting the growing perception that North Carolina is closed for business.

Tourism is the third largest economic engine in the state and easily a third or more of that economy is derived from the state's mountain regions. Not only do the mountains draw visitors, they are a calling card for industry that might locate elsewhere in the state knowing that the mountains are nearby for recreation and cultural

enhancement. There is no question the state's western counties are vital to North Carolina's economy.

"October is the best, busiest and most profitable month for the mountains in North Carolina, and much of that has been lost," Wit Tuttell, executive director for Visit North Carolina told Carolina Journal reporter Theresa Opeka. In the fourth quarter of last year, Tuttell noted that direct visitor spending in the region amounted to \$2 billion. That is \$2 billion that the region will need to capture and increase in the years ahead if recovery is to happen quickly, if at all.

The role of the state's division of tourism plays a critical role in enhancing economic recovery for situations such as mountain communities and businesses are experiencing. In 1987, right after the first Seafood Festival, Carteret County's ocean and sounds filled with a harmful "red tide" algal bloom. These massive blooms of red algae are normal for certain regions of the Florida coast, but that year its arrival along the North Carolina coast was both unprecedented and occurring at a critical tourism and commercial fishing juncture.

Just as the fall season for commercial and recreational fishing was cranking up, beachgoers were chased off the beach because the algae created breathing problems as well as fish kills and contaminated shellfish. The bad publicity created by the natural phenomenon resulted in a decline in fall tourism and a major decline in commercial and recreational fishing sector, resulting in well over \$25 million in lost revenue for the region.

N.C. Governor Jim Martin was quick to respond by directing the travel and tourism division of state's department of Economic Development to begin a campaign across the state and nation promoting North Carolina Seafood and coastal tourism. The governor recognized that the algal bloom was not permanent and by February it had receded, but the perceptual damage lasted well into the next year.

The mountain regions devastated by Hurricane Helene are doubly impacted by both the physical destruction that will impede rapid recovery, as well as the negative perception created by the very compelling and tragic stories of personal loss.

The tragedies cannot and should not be ignored. The need for emotional support along with financial and physical assistance will remain well into the future. But steps need to be taken immediately to reverse the growing perception that North Carolina's mountains are closed for business.

On the contrary the region is open for business and with the grit and determination that is as much a part of this region's psyche as are the indigenous flora and fauna that withstand harsh winters and other natural challenges, the region is resilient and will rebound.

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Actor Channing Tatum stuns Helene relief volunteers with surprise visit to Asheville

October 23, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The (NC) Author: Joe Marusak; Staff Writer | Section: News | 397 Words Page: 2A OpenURL Link

Actor Channing Tatum shocked Tropical Storm Helene relief volunteers with an unannounced visit to an Asheville food bank on Wednesday.

Tatum not only pulled into MANNA Food Bank with a truckload of supplies, he helped unload them and sort the items alongside food bank team members and volunteers, officials with the nonprofit hunger-relief organization said on Facebook.

"Despite everything our communities have gone through since Hurricane Helene, it's been truly amazing to see such incredible people showing up to support us - and that includes Channing and his team," MANNA Food Bank CEO Claire Neal said on Facebook.

"He jumped right in to work with our crew, handing out food and resources," Neal said. "It was wonderful to see all the smiles he brought to the families at the WNC Farmers Market distribution."

Helene, a former Category 5 hurricane, killed at least 95 people in the state and caused record flooding and damage in Western North Carolina after arriving in the state on Sept. 28. Entire mountain communities vanished in swollen, raging rivers. At least 90 people remain missing, emergency officials said.

Tatum was already in North Carolina for filming the movie "Roofman," in the Charlotte area, The Charlotte Observer previously reported.

The film is based on the true story of serial robber Jeffrey Manchester, known as "Roofman" or the "Rooftop Robber." He broke into dozens of McDonald's restaurants across the U.S., including in the Charlotte area, and was arrested in Gaston County in 2000.

Tatum is best known for starring in the "Magic Mike" movies.

Making a difference

On Instagram Oct. 7, days after the deadly hurricane had struck, Tatum urged his 17.5 million followers to donate to the 2Baby2 nonprofit. 2Baby2 has provided at least 200 million diapers to U.S. families in need and at least 60 million critical items to children devastated by natural disasters and other emergencies.

"Together, we can make a difference in the lives of these families during this challenging time," Tatum said on Instagram.

People on social media praised Tatum after his Asheville appearance.

"Sooo very sweet!!!" a woman posted on Facebook. "You can see his heart!"

"Thank you beautiful soul to help during this difficult time," another woman posted on Facebook. "May God Bless You Always."

Joe Marusak: 704-358-5067, @jmarusak

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Trump urges NC voters to back him to 'save America'

October 23, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The (NC)

Author: Mary Ramsey, Nora O'Neill, Kyle Ingram and Josh Bergeron; Staff Writer Section: News 3795 Words

Page: 1A OpenURL Link

Former President Donald Trump spent nearly all of Monday in battleground North Carolina as he surveyed Hurricane Helene destruction, spoke with faith leaders and urged people to vote as election day looms just two weeks away.

The Republican nominee began in Swannanoa in Western North Carolina to see the destruction caused by Hurricane Helene before holding a rally across the state at East Carolina University's campus in Greenville. He ended the day by heading back west, addressing faith leaders at an invite-only meeting in Concord. At each stop, he reiterated similar claims and urged people to vote for him to "save America."

"With your vote this November, we are going to fire Kamala Harris, we are going to save America and we're going to restore the greatness of our nation," Trump said in Greenville.

Trump was accompanied by U.S. Rep. Chuck Edwards, N.C. House Speaker Tim Moore and other officials in Western North Carolina, where he said he wished FEMA was doing more for victims of the storm. He repeated the same conspiracy theory in Swannanoa, Concord and Greenville that FEMA allocated funds to migrant services rather than Helene aid, a claim FEMA has called false.

"Our hearts are with you and we are praying for you, and we will come back, and we will be here on Jan. 20," he said in Greenville of those affected by the storm. "You didn't get the proper support from this administration - they spent their money on illegal migrants."

In Greenville, at the Williams Arena at Minges Coliseum, Trump spoke to rally attendees about his plans for a mass deportation of immigrants if elected, as well as his belief that Vice President Harris taking President Joe Biden's place as the Democratic nominee for president was akin to overthrowing a U.S. president.

The coliseum is the same venue where Harris held a rally a week ago. Trump was joined by Laurie Buckhout, the Republican candidate for Congress in northeastern North Carolina, and Rep. Dan Bishop, the GOP candidate for state attorney general.

His last visit of the day took place at the Concord Convention Center where he, along with his son Eric Trump and Ben Carson, the former U.S. secretary for Housing and Urban Development, addressed religious leaders. Trump spoke about his commitment to keeping discussions of race, gender and sexuality out of schools while fighting to protect religious freedom in education.

As one of the battleground states likely to determine the outcome of this year's presidential election, North Carolina has won significant attention from both the Trump and Harris campaigns.

Last week, Trump's running mate, U.S. Sen. JD Vance, campaigned in Wilmington and Harris' running mate, Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz, visited Durham and Winston-Salem alongside former President Bill Clinton.

Clinton continued on a bus tour of Eastern North Carolina, making stops in Wilmington, Fayetteville, Wilson, Greenville and Rocky Mount.

Below are updates from Trump's North Carolina visit:

Trump closes by urging people to vote

8:05 p.m. Trump said he will work to keep discussions of sexuality and race out of schools.

"On day one I will sign an executive order banning schools from promoting critical race theory," Trump said. "I will take historic action to defeat the toxic poison of gender ideology and reaffirm that God created two genders, male and female. I will keep men out of women's sports. I will sign a law banning child sexual mutilation... and we will proudly say 'Merry Christmas' again."

Trump closed his remarks by urging Christians to vote early and "take back the nation that we love."

'What I've done in terms of religion'

7:52 p.m. Trump reiterated his support for Israel and spoke about his 2017 decision to move the U.S. embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. It was a move long-desired by pro-Israel politicians in Washington, D.C., Reuters reported in 2018.

Trump also said he has worked toward ending religious persecution worldwide.

"Nobody's done what I've done in terms of religion, in terms of Christianity," he said. "I will keep on fighting for our cherished American values."

'We don't tell Christians to get lost'

7:43 p.m. Trump was interrupted multiple times with chants of "Jesus." And he called the crowd "lively."

"At Trump rallies, we don't tell Christians to get lost. We tell Christians to get out and vote," he said in a reference to an interaction at a Harris rally in Wisconsin last week.

At that rally, Harris reportedly told student protesters that they were at the wrong rally when they yelled "Jesus is lord" at those around them.

"I'm here to deliver a simple message to Christians across America," Trump said. "It's time to stand up and save your country."

After detouring to other topics, Trump then delivered a familiar line: "Kamala, you're fired."

Trump on religion, assassination attempt

7:33 p.m. Trump spoke about growing up going to a Presbyterian church in the New York City neighborhood of Jamaica, Queens. Trump said his faith "took on a new meaning" when he survived the assassination attempt in July.

"I now recognize it's been the hand of God leading me to where I am today," Trump said. "I like to think God saved me for a purpose and that's to make our country greater than ever before."

He was told after the attempt how lucky he was to avoid the bullet. The event strengthened his and his sons' faith, Trump said.

Trump repeats false FEMA claims

7:18 p.m. Trump began his speech by speaking about the devastation left by Helene after his visit to Western North Carolina earlier Monday. He reiterated false claims for the third time Monday that FEMA allocated disaster funds to migrant services rather than Helene victims.

Trump also said voters in areas hard-hit by Helene have been turning out to vote for him.

"These are Trump people," he said. "Those are great, great people."

Ben Carson says using word 'disinformation' is like censorship

7:08 p.m. Ben Carson, the former U.S. secretary for Housing and Urban Development, said the election is not about Republicans and Democrats, but about whether the nation is secular or "one nation under God."

Carson referenced Bible verses often while on stage, saying the country is built by people of faith. Carson said labeling things as "disinformation" is akin to censorship and is as an attempt to attack Trump.

Carson urged attendees to vote, and criticized people who say the election is a choice between two evils.

"Unless Jesus Christ is on the ballot you're always choosing between the lesser of two evils," Carson said.

Franklin Graham prays for Donald Trump

6:48 p.m. Evangelical leader Franklin Graham took the stage after Eric Trump and said God is the most important factor in the election.

He asked attendees to stand and pray out loud for Trump for two minutes. Attendees created a clatter of prayer across the venue. Some asked God to protect and listen to Trump's prayers and help save America. As Graham walked off, the crowd chanted "Jesus."

"Rallies and positive poll numbers are not going to win this election," he said. "It's going to be God. There is a spiritual element at work here."

Eric Trump speaks in Concord

6:44 p.m. Eric Trump, the Republican presidential nominee's second son, said he was confident his father would win the election and spoke about the importance of religion and God in the country and in education.

"We need God in our life, we need God in our society... we need God in our schools," he said. "We will always be a nation of faith."

Eric Trump said his father was behind a curtain just off stage as he spoke.

"He's an inspiration to our entire family," Eric Trump said. "I have never been more proud to stand on the stage with anyone, and I will stand on the stage with him until I literally die."

Congressional nominee Mark Harris leads crowd in chant

5:22 p.m. After a prayer, the pledge of allegiance and a performance of the national anthem, former NFL player Scott Turner took the stage to greet attendees and spoke about the Bible and religious rights in America. Turner previously served as the executive director of the White House Opportunity and Revitalization Council under Trump.

"We have the freedom to assemble together, the freedom to worship together, the freedom to pray together," Turner said.

He was followed by Mark Harris, Republican nominee for the 8th Congressional District near Charlotte. Harris led the crowd in a chant of "fight, fight," the words Trump mouthed after an assassination attempt in Butler, Pennsylvania.

"We have before us a gentleman who was actually shot and by the grace of God his life spared," Harris said. "The

times are serious, the moment is now."

Crowd gathering in Concord

5 p.m. Lively crowds lined up outside and danced to music inside the Concord Convention Center near Charlotte as they awaited Trump's remarks at an 11th Hour Faith Leaders Meeting with his son, Eric Trump, Ben Carson and faith leaders.

A news release by the Trump campaign ahead of the event said Trump is a defender of religious freedom and supporter of Jewish people.

"Under President Trump's leadership, the government reaffirmed its commitment to ensuring that religious freedom remains a cornerstone of the nation," the release states. "He has consistently prioritized the protection of faith communities, whether through combating antisemitism or defending the rights on Christians."

But a spokesperson from the Democratic National Committee criticized comments previously made by Trump and faith leaders in attendance.

"Donald Trump is relying on anti-choice extremists and conspiracy theorists to make his closing pitch to voters while he goes on unhinged rants threatening our freedoms and our democracy," spokesperson Aida Ross said in a statement to The Charlotte Observer. "Trump's surrogates today include far-right MAGA allies who, like Trump, have pushed reckless lies about the response to Hurricane Helene and railed against our reproductive freedoms, even calling abortion 'the greatest evil in our country.'"

The event was organized by Clay Clark, who wrote a false claim on social media that the government manipulated weather to cause Hurricane Helene to access lithium deposits in North Carolina, Media Matters first reported.

Trump leaves stage, promising to 'save America'

4:20 p.m. Trump wrapped up his Greenville rally by making a variety of promises for his second term in office, including to end the war in Ukraine and to get "critical race theory and transgender insanity" out of schools.

"With your vote this November, we are going to fire Kamala Harris, we are going to save America and we're going to restore the greatness of our nation," he said.

Trump on deportation

4 p.m.: Much of Trump's remarks centered on stopping illegal immigration and sending migrants to other countries.

"When I win on Nov. 5, the migrant invasion ends and the restoration of our country begins," Trump said.

"The United States is now an occupied country, but on Nov. 5, 2024, we will be a liberated country."

"I will launch the largest deportation program in American history," Trump said later. "I will rescue every town across America that has been invaded and conquered."

Trump also called for the death penalty "for any illegal immigrant that kills an American citizen."

Trump on the election

3:35 p.m.: Trump called Harris' replacement of Biden at the top of the Democratic ticket "the overthrow of a president of the United States."

Later, he spoke about how North Carolina is setting records for early voting.

And after noting that California always votes Democrat, he said: "I'd love to have God to come down and be the vote counter, just for one day, and see how well we'd do in California."

Trump claimed Harris' recent "60 Minutes" interview was election interference, calling it "the biggest scandal in the history of broadcasting." The show has denied Trump's claim that it selectively edited an answer from Harris. At the rally, Trump asked: "Can you imagine if that happened with me? It would be over - the electric chair."

Trump on Helene devastation

3:25 p.m.: Trump noted in Greenville that he saw the damage from Hurricane Helene earlier in the day in Western North Carolina.

"Our hearts are with you and we are praying for you, and we will come back, and we will be here on Jan. 20," he said of those affected by the storm. "You didn't get the proper support from this administration - they spent their money on illegal migrants."

FEMA has refuted the false claims that the agency diverted disaster relief funds to immigrants in order to conflate FEMA's disaster fund with other pots of money.

Trump also thanked billionaire Elon Musk for providing Starlink internet access to Western North Carolina.

Trump takes the stage in Greenville

3:15 p.m.: Former President Trump appeared shortly after 3 p.m. as "God Bless the USA" played, walking around the stage for the full length of the song.

The crowd chanted, "USA," and Trump asked: "Are you better off now than you were four years ago?" The crowd yelled: "No."

Later, Trump got big cheers when he said: "Kamala, you're fired."

Trump said if he returns to the White House America will be "bigger, better, bolder and safer than ever before."

Trump said illegal immigration is the biggest problem the country faces, even bigger than inflation. "We want people to come into our country but they have to come in legally," he said.

Dan Bishop, candidate for AG, campaigns on 'law and order'

2 p.m. U.S. Rep. Dan Bishop told the crowd he aimed to become the first Republican elected attorney general in North Carolina in over 100 years.

"To replace woke lawfare with common sense, to restore law and order and to back the men and women of law enforcement," he said.

He's running against U.S. Rep. Jeff Jackson, a Democrat recently drawn out of his congressional seat.

Bishop went on to encourage Republicans to vote early, part of the GOP's new embrace of early and mail-in voting. In 2020, Trump and other Republicans cast doubt about the security of these voting methods and spread false conspiracy theories about fraud.

He noted that, compared to 2020, Republicans have shown up in higher numbers to vote early and by mail. As of Monday morning, nearly 342,000 registered Republicans had cast their ballot, accounting for about 33% of all votes.

Democrats have a slightly higher turnout so far, with 35% of the votes at this point.

While still slightly behind, Republicans have substantially narrowed the early voting turnout gap with Democrats, compared to 2020. At this time in that election, Democrats accounted for over 46% of all ballots cast.

"You must build a victory that is too big to rig," Bishop said.

Candidate Laurie Buckhout speaks at ECU

1:55 p.m.: Republican congressional candidate Laurie Buckhout was one of the first speakers to take the stage in Greenville, beginning with a story about the day Trump was shot in Pennsylvania.

"I did 26 years in the Army and a year in combat and I've never seen courage like that," she said. "... You're gonna see a fighter in me too."

Buckhout's opponent, U.S. Rep. Don Davis, campaigned with Harris last week at the same arena.

Buckout and Davis' race is the only competitive congressional contest in the state and could be crucial in determining which party takes control of the U.S. House.

In Greenville, attendees fill arena

1 p.m. Attendees eagerly awaited Trump's arrival at the Minges Coliseum in Greenville, filling the arena with several hours until the former president's expected remarks.

John Heath, a Goldsboro resident, said he considered himself socially liberal, but agreed with Trump on the economy and military.

"He can only do so much to change that kind of thing," Heath said when asked about potential changes to social policy under Trump. "He's gonna be so busy fixing other stuff that he's not even gonna worry about it."

He said his concern with Vice President Kamala Harris is that she doesn't seem prepared for the presidency, pointing to her performance in TV interviews.

"She sounds like me trying to give a book report in sixth grade," Heath said. "If she doesn't prepare for this, why would she prepare for something bigger?"

Trump leaves Western NC

12:30 p.m. Trump departed in his motorcade after less than an hour at the news conference in Swannanoa.

Trump shook hands with his fellow speakers before getting back in his car. He's scheduled to head east for an event in Greenville before returning to the Charlotte area for an event in Concord.

After a reporter shouted a question asking if he still supports Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson for governor, Trump said he hasn't been keeping up with the state's gubernatorial election.

Robinson's campaign was rocked last month after CNN reported on racist and sexually explicit comments he allegedly made years ago on a pornography website's message board.

Congress, FEMA storm response

12:18 p.m. Trump said in response to a reporter's question he's in favor of Congress reconvening to allocate more

federal aid for Helene victims. Congress isn't scheduled to be back in session until after the election.

He said FEMA has mismanaged its storm response.

"It's a shame ... I think it's a disgrace," he said.

Trump said FEMA spent "hundreds of millions" on things it wasn't supposed to, including undocumented immigrants. He didn't provide any additional detail during Monday's news conference about the claim, but he's made the allegation at rallies and online before. FEMA says it has not diverted disaster relief money to people living in the country without authorization.

Asked whether his continued negative comments about FEMA could be contributing to threats against the agency in North Carolina, Trump said honest people in the region are saying the agency's response has been poor.

"I think you have to let people know how they're doing," he said.

Trump talks about NC elections after Helene

12:13 p.m. Trump encouraged those impacted by the storm to still find ways to vote, including using early voting or mail-in ballots. North Carolina set records on its first day of early voting and already topped 1 million ballots cast over the weekend.

Trump expressed optimism about his chances in North Carolina.

"The early returns are phenomenal," he said.

No votes have been tabulated yet.

Michael Bitzer, a politics professor at Catawba College in Salisbury, said in a post on X that Democrats represent the largest portion of votes, with 366,580 votes. A total of 343,501 Republicans cast ballots before Monday.

Party affiliation, though, doesn't indicate who the person voted for.

Asked about his message to undecided voters, Trump said he's confident in his polling numbers.

He accused Harris of being "unfit" to be president and said he's campaigning on "full blast."

Trump claims he was 'first'

12:05 p.m. Trump claimed that he was "first" in North Carolina after Helene and that he didn't come to tour earlier because of the scale of damage.

President Joe Biden took an aerial tour of Western North Carolina and visited the emergency operations center in Raleigh days after the storm. Vice President Kamala Harris visited North Carolina in early October. Her visit was to Charlotte rather than the hardest-hit mountain counties.

U.S. Rep. Edwards, a Republican whose district covers Western North Carolina, thanked Trump for visiting, saying he did more than a "flyover" - an apparent reference to Biden's flight in the days after the storm. N.C. House Speaker Moore said he hasn't heard from the Biden administration since the storm but has heard from Trump.

Trump said he's dispersed \$7 million of \$8 million raised via a GoFundMe he started after the storm. He said charities that received money include Samaritan's Purse. He asked for local input on where the rest of the money should go.

Trump thanks NC veteran for creating airbase

11:57 a.m. Trump thanked military veteran Adam Smith for his work to set-up a makeshift airbase where helicopters bringing aid could land.

Smith presented Trump with a small wooden cross and said communities like his are afraid they'll be forgotten. He thanked Trump for visiting Swannanoa to highlight the impacts of the storm.

"We're grateful for that," Smith said.

Trump also introduced two local business owners whose properties were damaged by the storm. One said a prayer for Trump.

"It's incredible, and I appreciate it," Trump said.

Trump arrives in Western NC

11:47 a.m. The former president exited a black SUV and was greeted by officials, including state House Speaker Moore and Rep. Edwards.

Trump said he was struck by the storm damage he saw as he arrived in Swannanoa.

"I'm with you, and the American people will continue to be with you all the way," he said.

Trump said the Biden administration's response to the storm was "not good" and said he would handle disaster relief better if reelected. He thanked first responders and nonprofits who took action in the wake of Helene.

"We have seen the extraordinary love that binds us as Americans," he said.

He repeated his claims that the federal government's response was slow, saying other groups had to step in.

Trump visiting Swannanoa

10:47 a.m. In Swannanoa, where Trump is scheduled to speak about noon, the damage from Helene is still evident almost a month after the storm hit.

Debris, including washed-out cars and an uprooted red shed, were strewn near behind where Trump will speak, in front of an auto body shop on U.S. 70.

A little ways down the road, broken pews sat in piles outside the Swannanoa Free Will Baptist Church.

Democrats target Trump Helene conspiracies, Mark Robinson support

Democrats preempted Trump's visit Monday by saying he's "spread disinformation and lies that put recovery workers at risk."

Among the Trump claims: that Democrats in Washington and Gov. Roy Cooper are blocking people and money from helping Helene victims. Cooper called that "a flat out lie." Canton Mayor Zeb Smathers also called that "a 100% false statement" in a post on X, formerly Twitter. Canton is a town west of Asheville in Haywood County.

Trump and billionaire businessman Elon Musk, who's supporting Trump in the 2024 election, also claimed FEMA diverted disaster relief funds to people who are living in the country without legal authorization. But those claims conflate FEMA's disaster fund with other pots of money the agency has.

In 2019, Trump pulled money from FEMA's Disaster Relief Fund to pay for immigration detention space and temporary hearing locations for asylum seekers, NBC News reported.

"Donald Trump gutted FEMA and blocked disaster relief funding as president and continues to put politics over getting people the help they need," said Dory MacMillan, communications director for Democrat Kamala Harris' North Carolina campaign. "As North Carolinians work to recover in the aftermath of Helene, a second Trump term would be even worse - his Project 2025 agenda would further slash disaster funding and make it harder for the government to respond to disasters."

Separately, the Democratic National Convention said it purchased billboard space near the Interstate 85 interchange with Interstate 77 in Charlotte. The billboards point out Trump's support for Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson.

"Donald Trump and Mark Robinson are two MAGA extremists in a pod. Both are anti-choice radicals, election deniers, and have a long and disturbing history of violent and dangerous rhetoric," said DNC spokesperson Stephanie Justice. "North Carolinians deserve better. Make no mistake: Trump has repeatedly embraced and tied himself to Robinson."

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Biltmore Estate sets reopening date, even as parts remain closed due to Helene damage

October 23, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The (NC) Author: Joe Marusak; Staff Writer | Section: News | 341 Words Page: 4A OpenURL Link

Biltmore Estate is set to reopen after damage from Tropical Storm Helene closed America's largest home, estate officials said Saturday.

Crews are still clearing debris from woods on the property, and some roads remain under repair, officials said. Trails and the Outdoor Adventure Center are closed until further notice. Still, the estate is back in shape enough to welcome guests again beginning Saturday, Nov. 2, the start of its holiday season, Christmas at Biltmore.

The estate is one of the most popular tourist attractions in North Carolina.

Helene, a former Category 5 hurricane, killed at least 95 people in the state and caused record flooding and damage in Western North Carolina after arriving in the state on Sept. 28. Entire mountain communities vanished in swollen, raging rivers. At least 90 people remain missing, emergency officials said.

"For over 125 years, Biltmore has witnessed the resilience and community spirit of the Asheville area," according to an estate news release. "The response to Helene has resulted in signs that recovery is underway across the region."

Biltmore will be fully decorated for the Christmas season, and estate attractions and restaurants will be open. Estate lodging properties will welcome overnight guests.

Many businesses and roads in the Asheville area have reopened, estate officials said, while some areas are still working to recover. So visitors might have to take alternate routes to Biltmore.

Restoring 'the vibrancy' of Asheville

Biltmore Estate launched a \$2 million "Biltmore Relief Fund for WNC" to support employees in crisis and area non-profits.

"We are incredibly grateful for the outpouring of support for our community and the determination of our first responders, utility workers and community volunteers," Biltmore President and CEO Bill Cecil Jr. said in a statement.

"As recovery unfolds, welcoming guests back to Biltmore not only means we can open, but also brings critical support to our region's economy to aid area employees, local businesses and friends," he said. "Together, we can help restore the vibrancy of Asheville and its surrounding areas."

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p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C6687A772B61F0>



Are Russia and China behind Helene misinformation in WNC? 3 in Congress want answers

October 23, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The (NC)

Author: Virginia Bridges; Staff Writer | Section: Production | 1601 Words

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Three United States representatives from North Carolina requested a national intelligence briefing on the spread of online misinformation hindering efforts to support and rebuild parts of Western North Carolina washed away by Hurricane Helene.

"This information is dangerous to saving life and property right now, and we need to get to the bottom of whoever might be disseminating it, manipulating it and manipulating our citizens," U.S. Rep. Deborah Ross, a Wake Democrat, told The News & Observer Saturday.

In the Friday, Oct. 18, letter, Democratic U.S. Reps. Ross, Wiley Nickel and Kathy Manning, wrote to Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines they are concerned about foreign governments involvement in spreading and promoting misinformation to undermine the public trust in government and hamper response efforts.

"Given the significant impact that such disinformation can have on public safety, morale, and the overall effectiveness of recovery initiatives, it is critical to address these threats in a timely and transparent manner," the letter states.

The letter is the latest sign of frustration among federal officials, elected leaders and some members of the public about what is turning into a troubling trend of misinformation spreading online after natural and other disasters. They are particularly concerned about the amount of false and misleading information following recent hurricanes Helene and Milton.

President Joe Biden, Gov. Roy Cooper, American Red Cross officials and leaders from federal, state, county and local governments have criticized and debunked the circulating misinformation, emphasizing people should only rely on trusted sources.

"It's absolutely the worst that I have seen," FEMA administrator Deanne Criswell told reporters Oct. 8, The New York Times reported.

But the rumors continue to spread and recently forced federal officials to temporarily suspend canvassing door-to-door in North Carolina after reports of a militia targeting workers, The Washington Post and Associated Press reported.

The militia never materialized, but a Polk County man was linked to the threat and charged with going armed to the terror of the public after he was found armed with a handgun and a rifle. News & Observer and Charlotte Observer journalists have been reporting on misinformation related to Helene's devastation in Western North Carolina.

Helene made landfall in Florida Sept. 26 as a Category 4 hurricane before drenching Western North Carolina in the days that followed. The storm claimed the lives of at least 95 people, ages 4 to 89, in North Carolina.

Many died from drowning and landslides, and it took rescuers more than a week to recover some of their bodies.

Are foreign adversaries sowing distrust?

Ross said there could be a mix of motivations for the steady deluge of misinformation, from politicians and influencers seeking support to foreign adversaries using this opportunity to be disruptive.

Ross pointed to a recent article in the Tampa Bay Times quoting research from social research media analytics company Graphika and misinformation tracking company NewsGuard. They said there is evidence that China and Russia amplified misinformation, just as foreign countries did after wildfires consumed Maui, Hawaii, in 2023 and a container ship destroyed a Baltimore bridge in March.

Foreign adversaries succeed when they sow discontent, but they also collect personal information when individuals click on their links, Ross said.

"Since it's happened in the past, we need to find out if it's happening now. We need to protect the public," said Ross, who is running for re-election to represent Congressional District 2. Lawmakers hope the intelligence office will respond next week and plan to follow up if there isn't one.

Nickel wants answers before the election

Nickel, of Cary, said he's concerned foreign influence from countries like China, Russia and Iran are trying to sow chaos with an ultimate goal to interfere with the upcoming elections in favor of Republican candidate Donald Trump.

"That's a big part of the goals," said Nickel, who isn't seeking re-election in his recently redrawn congressional district, but plans to run for a U.S. Senate seat in 2026.

Nickel said he hopes the national intelligence director will share a "candid assessment" about any work Russia, Iran and China are doing to undermine the election.

"This is information that the American people should know before election day," Nickel said, adding that such reports have been historically shared after the election.

Misinformation: A new consequence of disasters

Misinformation seems to be finding its way into key American events, Ross said, but the ongoing effort targeting recovery after hurricanes is the most pressing and dangerous at the moment.

The spread of misinformation during contentious or vulnerable events are becoming constants in U.S. culture. But evolving technology, shifting algorithms and the sharpening of artificial intelligence tools have fueled the spread, Ross said.

Western North Carolina residents, many of whom turned to local and hurricane-entered social media groups for information and advice before, during and after the hurricanes, pay the price, elected officials said.

"We are seeing the dark side of social media, and I wish that people were more disconcerting in how they consume not just social media, but all media," Ross said.

Republican U.S. Rep. Chuck Edwards also spoke out about the misinformation, while debunking rumors such as Helene was geo-engineered to seize lithium deposits in Chimney Rock and that FEMA might run out of money or diverted disaster response to the border or foreign aid.

"I encourage you to remember that everything you see on Facebook, X, or any other social media platform is not always fact," wrote Edwards, who represents far Western North Carolina.

Letter to Facebook, X, TikTok, YouTube and more

A week ago, Ross, Nickel, U.S. Rep. Kathy Castor of Florida and Rep. Nikema Williams of Georgia sent a letter to executives at Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, X, Discord and Snap.

"In the aftermath of Helene, we have witnessed a troubling surge in misinformation, disinformation, conspiracy theories, and scams that are hindering recovery efforts and exploiting vulnerable individuals and families," states the letter.

Misinformation also followed Hurricane Milton, which made landfall on Oct. 9 on Florida's central west coast, elected leaders said. The misinformation trend is becoming "a troubling fixture," of social media after natural disasters, states the Oct. 11 letter to social media sites.

"Misinformation about Hurricane Helene recovery efforts is making it harder for those impacted by the storm to get the help they need," U.S. House Rep. Kathy Manning of Florida posted on X Friday.

The information, which sometimes includesAI-generated images or recirculated images, covers a range of topics, putting experts and assistance organizations at risk and scamming storm victims of their time, money and effort to find shelter and resources, North Carolina and other leaders have warned.

Meteorologists threatened

The lies, scams and conspiracy theories circulating on social media compromise climate scientists and rescue organizations work, and put Americans at risk, the U.S. representatives said.

Some of the posts encouraged hurricane victims to seek fake Federal Emergency Management Administration relief programs and shared misleading information about where to find shelter and resources, the letter states.

A series of posts on Facebook and X took advantage of families in distress by falsely claiming FEMA offered a new grant for immediate cash assistance, sowing more mistrust and delaying efforts to seek help from legitimate programs, the letter said.

Posts on Instagram, TikTok and Discord spread conspiracy theories that government actions created Helene and Milton.

"It was particularly disturbing to see that, prior to Hurricane Milton's landfall, meteorologists experienced harassment and even received death threats from users on X," the letter states.

Nickel said he was particularly worried about X as the company is now owned by Elon Musk, who has given \$75 million to support Trump, NPR reported.

Trump and his allies have also made and amplified misinformation. Trump said Cooper and Washington Democrats blocked help and aid for those impacted by Helene.

Copper called the claim "a flat-out lie," The News & Observer reported.

Social media companies respond

The News & Observer reached out to the social media companies on Friday evening and Saturday morning.

An X spokesperson wrote in an email that they are looking forward to responding to the letter. The company, which has been the target of some of the misinformation criticism, contends the site's system does not promote the spread of misinformation.

On Oct. 9, X's profile for Community Notes, which allows users to write and rate notes on posts, shared that Community Notes "related to recent weather events are showing on hundreds of posts and have already been seen well over 44 million times."

Posts with notes are reshared less and more likely to be deleted, another X update states. Poynter, a nonprofit media institute, recently reported on a rise of misinformation since Musk purchased the platform nearly two years ago.

YouTube's approach to Hurricane Milton included "focusing on helping people access timely and credible news and information," according to the companyowned by Google.

"As with many breaking news events, we are prominently surfacing content about Hurricane Milton from authoritative sources, like local and national news outlets, at the top of search results with our Top News panels," according to the social media company.

To address climate information, generally, the company also raises up content from "authoritative sources," in search results and recommendations, and includes information panels under relevant videos to provide viewers with more information.

YouTube prohibits scams and deceptive practices and "rigorously enforce" policies through human review and technology.

Recommended changes for social media companies

The representatives' letter urged the companies to:

Increase monitoring and rapid removal of misinformation related to discovery efforts.

Enhance fact-checking partnerships with local and disaster relief organizations.

Strengthen algorithms to prevent the spread of conspiracy theories.

Increase safeguards against scams that prey on natural disaster victims.

Ross said Saturdaythey haven't heard from the social media companies yet.

The letter urged quick and decisive action. "You have the power and the responsibility to improve the digital spaces where millions of Americans both seek and promote information during crises, including natural disasters," the letter states.

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Protesters tell NC Gov. Roy Cooper, Chief Justice: Protect Western NC renters after Helene

October 23, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The (NC) Author: Ryan Oehrli; Staff Writer | Section: News | 265 Words Page: 6A OpenURL Link

Protesters from across the mountains are demanding that Gov. Roy Cooper and other North Carolina officials put in place an eviction and foreclosure moratorium.

The demands came after Helene destroyed much of the region last month, tore apart infrastructure and left many without homes.

News outlets on the ground first reported a protest Oct. 16, where about 70 people met outside the Buncombe County courthouse in Asheville.

A news release said they want Cooper, state Supreme Court Chief Justice Paul Newby and local leaders to act.

"With the local economy in ruins, many face imminent eviction and foreclosure, putting them at risk of displacement when they can least afford it," the protesters' release said.

Asheville Food & Beverage United, the Western North Carolina Tenants Network, BeLoved Asheville and other local groups signed a letter calling for a moratorium.

Asked if the governor wants a moratorium on evictions, a spokesperson for Cooper didn't directly answer.

"As with our Executive Order requiring increased unemployment compensation payments, we continue to explore ways to work with state and federal partners as well as legislative and local leaders to help the people of western North Carolina recover," Jordan Monaghan said in an email. "We will constantly review the need for additional executive action as well as legislation by the General Assembly to support families in western North Carolina."

Newby's office did not immediately respond to a request for comment Thursday afternoon.

Ryan Oehrli covers criminal justice in the Charlotte region for The Charlotte Observer. His work is produced with financial support from the nonprofit The Just Trust. The Observer maintains full editorial control of its journalism.

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Helene's hidden debris lurks in Charlotte-area waterways. Volunteer cleanup to begin.

October 23, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The (NC) Author: Joe Marusak; Staff Writer | Section: News | 501 Words Page: 6A OpenURL Link

Hazards from Tropical Storm Helene both visible and hidden lurk in and on Lake Norman, Lake Wylie and Mountain Island Lake, and volunteers are launching a cleanup of those and other Charlotte-area waterways.

Helene ripped apart boats, docks and trees and cast them adrift with other debris, according to the Catawba Riverkeeper environmental non-profit.

Nearly four million people depend on those and other waterways in the Catawba-Wateree River Basin for drinking, electricity and recreation, according to the organization, which is spearheading the upcoming effort.

The cleanups are critical to "restoring the health and safety of these waterways," according to a Catawba Riverkeeper statement on Friday. Cleanups also are planned on the Catawba and South Fork rivers, organizers said.

From 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 26, Lake Norman Wildlife Conservationists, a chapter of N.C. Wildlife Federation, will host a cleanup on Lake Norman.

From 9 a.m. to noon Saturday, Nov. 2, Catawba Riverkeeper will host nearly a dozen cleanup sites on Lake Wylie and Mountain Island Lake.

"Hurricane Helene cleanup efforts such as these will only be possible with the support of community volunteers," according to the statement.

Volunteers can sign up for the cleanups on the Catawba Riverkeeper website.

On Mountain Island Lake, the effort will complement Mecklenburg County's ongoing use of heavy equipment to remove debris near the lake - more than 100 tons as of Wednesday, Oct. 16, according to a county Facebook post.

Volunteer boaters especially needed

Boaters who can take volunteers out to cleanup sites on the water are especially needed, Kaity D'Angelo, Catawba Riverkeeper volunteer and community science manager, told The Charlotte Observer.

Sites on the water will be up to three miles from the various boat launch areas, she said.

The Catawba-Wateree River Basin extends 225 miles, from near Old Fort in the North Carolina mountains through 26 counties and 11 lakes to Columbia, South Carolina.

"Floods, mudslides, strong winds and downed trees (from Helene) have devastated communities throughout the river basin and have inundated lakes, rivers and streams with natural and human-made debris," according to the Catawba Riverkeeper statement.

Catawba Riverkeeper will organize cleanups on the northern and southern ends of the basin "once water levels lower and it is safe to go out on the water," leaders said.

Are Charlotte-area waterways safe after Helene?

It's still uncertain whether Lake Wylie and Lake Norman, North Carolina's largest manmade lake, can be deemed safe for leisure boaters in the wake of Helene, D'Angelo said.

"That's a loaded question," she said, meaning some areas may be safe and others dangerous.

The deeper main channel is likely safer than shallower coves where debris may have collected, she said. A boat with a depth finder is likelier to spot hidden dangers than one without.

A boater could suddenly encounter a sandbar formed by Helene or a cluster of downed trees, D'Angelo said. The extent of such hazards is still unknown, she said.

Catawba Riverkeeper has been assessing the lakes and rivers since the storm and will continue doing so, D'Angelo said.

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Our choices for NC treasurer, labor and agriculture

October 23, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The (NC)

Author: the Editorial Board | Section: Editorial/Opinion | 638 Words

Page: 18A OpenURL Link

Voters have strong candidates to consider in the race to replace North Carolina treasurer Dale Folwell, who ran unsuccessfully for governor. Democrat Wesley Harris has a Ph.D in economics and has worked in international tax accounting, and he's a three-term member of the NC House. Republican Brad Briner is a member of the UNC Board of Trustees and a retired financial investor with a quarter-century of financial and investment experience.

Both candidates have run refreshingly non-partisan campaigns, and both believe North Carolina's pension fund has underperformed under Folwell. Briner's vision for the office is more narrowly focused on growing investments without taking on unnecessary risk, and he offers a meticulous blueprint on how he would get there. Harris wants the treasurer to take on a more active role advocating for state employees and laying out an economic vision for the state.

We share Briner's vision for the office, and we believe he brings a deeper experience and a more sophisticated knowledge in the financial and investment sector. We recommend Brad Briner for NC Treasurer.

Labor commissioner

Voters are choosing between two Commissioner of Labor candidates who would bring distinctly different backgrounds and approaches to the job.

Republican Luke Farley is a Wake County lawyer who works with companies cited by the state labor department for workplace safety violations. "I'm going to always approach this job with balance," he told the editorial board.

Democrat Braxton Winston, a former Charlotte City Council member and mayor pro tem, is a union member and a stagehand and grip by trade. "I think it's high time we had an actual worker be an advocate for workers across the state," he told the editorial board.

Farley touts the endorsement of former labor commissioner Cherie Berry, and like Berry, he would approach the job with a more business-centric focus. He told the Editorial Board that what's good for businesses is also good for the workers they employ.

Winston wants the department to perform more inspections and hold businesses accountable for workplace safety. He also wants to expand the reach of the office with a "whole worker approach" that calls for collaborating with other agencies on issues such as affordable housing and transportation.

This board appreciates Winston's intent with his whole worker approach, but we believe the commissioner and his staffing-challenged department should instead concentrate on its core, constitutional responsibilities. We also believe that North Carolina's labor department, particularly under Berry, was too aligned with businesses on workplace issues and unfair wage practices. We were disappointed that Farley, in his conversation with the editorial board, so fully embraced Berry's tenure and her endorsement.

Winston's experience as a worker would be transformative to an office that needs change. We endorse Braxton Winston for labor commissioner.

Agriculture commissioner

The Democratic and Republican candidates for agriculture commissioner would bring vastly different experience to an office that maintains and protects the state's agribusiness industry and regulates food, animal health, the state fair and other areas.

Republican Steve Troxler is hoping for a sixth term as agriculture commissioner. He's long had a strong rapport with farmers and success in promoting North Carolina's diverse agriculture industry, which is contributing more than \$100 billion to the state's economy in 2024. His experience and relationship-building also is valuable in challenging times, as he's shown with his leadership in marshaling resources to help farmers and others in the wake of Hurricane Helene.

Democrat Sarah Taber has worked with family farm holdings and helped launch a series of vegetable greenhouses and indoor farms that are now worth over \$4 billion. She told the editorial board that the agriculture commissioner should more actively advocate for diversifying what we grow in North Carolina.

We believe Troxler should be open to new ideas that might help slow the farmland loss our state is experiencing. But Troxler is a capable leader and advocate for North Carolina agriculture. We recommend Steve Troxler for another term.

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the Editorial Board, 'Our choices for NC treasurer, labor and agriculture', *Charlotte Observer, The* (online), 23 Oct 2024 18A https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C6687B13155870



How the Charlotte Hornets' co-owners are developing a 'premier franchise'

October 23, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (NC) Author: Roderick Boone, The Charlotte Observer | Section: charlotte_hornets | 2924 Words OpenURL Link

Arms comfortably folded and resting on a bank of chairs, along a wall where screened windows provide privacy from pedestrians scurrying about on Fifth Street, a familiar face shifts into observation mode.

Rick Schnall is dressed in everyday casual attire, making the Charlotte Hornets' co-owner stand out in a gym where everyone else blends in with their purple-and-teal team-issued apparel. The cell phone in Schnall's hand might as well be a paper weight, because he isn't interested in business dealings or anything else until the practice session is complete and players disperse.

And all this isn't unfolding on some random weekday — it's well past lunchtime and there are only a few hours of daylight remaining before the sun sets on the weekend. This is the new norm for the Hornets, a repetitive scene that illustrates the many differences in how things operate with Charlotte's NBA team these days.

Since taking controlling interest of the franchise from now-minority owner Michael Jordan last August, Schnall and Gabe Plotkin, the Hornets' other co-owner, have almost been as visible as the guys in uniform. The duo is ever present by design.

CLT_DSC7981.JPGCharlotte Hornets owners Rick Schnall, left, and Gabe Plotkin pose for a photo Saturday, Oct. 19, 2024, in Charlotte, N.C. (Charlotte Observer /Matt Kelley)

"It's a huge part, a really important part of our culture because we want to show the players that we care, that we see them and we are aware of everything that's going on here and it matters to us," Schnall told The Observer in an interview alongside Plotkin. "We love the game, we are passionate about the game. And so in many respects there's a direct line of reporting and we are not in that direct line. We play a support role. We want to support our players.

"We want them to understand that we care about them as players and as people because as an organization, we want them to feel the sense that, 'Hey, this is a special place, the owners are visible, they love the game.' And that's extremely important to us as owners, and I think we have the ability to do that. That's pretty unique because we are around."

Their big brother-like presence is welcomed, too.

"They're more engaged, they're around more and that's good for us, just to see that ownership cares," Hornets forward Miles Bridges said. "I'm not saying that the old ownership didn't care, but they are just around more. And it's good to see them and they are participating in what they've got going on."

'Premier franchise'

Schnall and Plotkin are injecting a breath of fresh air into an organization that's been stale by league standards, considering the team has never advanced past the second round of the playoffs in its 36 years of existence and holds the NBA's longest current postseason drought, which is approaching a decade.

It's why some are skeptical they can completely reverse course and the reason an eyebrow or two got raised when they mentioned how they wanted to make the Hornets a 'premier franchise' and a preferred destination. Those words were repeated in April during the introductory press for Jeff Peterson, the Hornets' president of basketball operations

But what does that really mean and just how do Plotkin and Schnall make it happen?

"Yeah, I think there's a lot of components to that," Plotkin said. "First, is you are committed to long-term sustainable success. So, you have to set the culture expectation that that's what you are trying to achieve, and then you have to bring in the people. At the end of the day, this is a people business. There's no competitive moats beyond the people you have in place.

"I think when you look at organizations in sport that have been successful over time, it's been anchored in culture, it's been anchored in people that have been there for a long time. And we hope the hires we've made — and we truly believe that — they're going to be with us a long time. And so they've set the agenda, they've brought in a lot of talent."

During their short tenure running the show, Schnall and Plotkin have completely transformed the bulk of the team's staff directory. In basketball operations alone, a department headed by their first real notable organizational hire in Peterson, only three people were retained.

In May, they hired a new head coach in Charles Lee and brought Shelly Cayette-Weston in from Cleveland as the new team president. In July, they added a 10-person health and performance department led by Trent Salo. The first of two phases of renovations to Spectrum Center was just completed and the Hornets will soon break ground on their multi-million dollar training center at the corner of Caldwell and 5th streets in uptown.

media day_2.jpgCharlotte Hornets head coach Charles Lee speaks to the press during media day on September 30th, 2024.

That's quite a seven-month stretch.

"To be good on the court, you need great players, you have to invest in your facilities, you have to have trust in the organization," Plotkin said. "We are investing a lot obviously across the organization. In sports, in performance, in the practice facility. And so there are many elements. Obviously, the arena renovation. And so it's not just one thing. I think it's kind of everything.

"So, every aspect of the business we are analyzing, every aspect of basketball we want to be premiere at. And the aggregation of all that makes you a premier franchise."

Blink and another change might pop up overnight.

"That is one of the competitive advantages throughout the league — these new facilities and arenas and just amenities," Peterson said. "They know that in order not just to attract but to retain talent you've got to be able to provide these guys with the best care possible.

"So, very excited they are living up to their side of the bargain with that. It's been great. I think the common denominator amongst the really good owners is they are very committed and passionate, resourceful at the same time they know how and when to stay out the way and not be too involved. That, to me, makes a great owner."

Prior to their controlling purchase of the team, Schnall and Plotkin agreed they weren't going to be OK with status quo and simply allow things to continue in the previous trajectory.

If they were joining the ownership ranks, it was full speed ahead. No excuses.

CLT_DSC8057.JPGCharlotte Hornets owner Rick Schnall smiles during an interview Saturday, Oct. 19, 2024, in Charlotte, N.C. (Charlotte Observer /Matt Kelley)

"We came up with a great mission here is to be the premier franchise of the NBA, and what does that mean?" Schnall said. "It means, as Gabe just described, we have the best culture, we have the best people, we can win consistently on and off the court, be a partner to our fans, our sponsors. I think when you have a great organization, everybody in the organization knows that and they are all proud to work in the organization.

"Everybody works for the name on the front of our jersey, not the back of our jersey. That's not just players. That's every employee we have in the organization. They're working for the greater good of the organization and they are proud to tell people that they work for the Hornets and what we are trying to achieve."

Which, in turn, they hope pushes the Hornets to higher heights.

"Ultimately, we think it's also about the realization that people outside our organization point to us as the best at what we do," Schnall said. And we'll know we've succeeded when we are consistently winning, and people outside of the organization are pointing and going, 'Wow, these guys have done something different there.'

"And that's what we set out to do. I think we both have enormous passion for the game. We love basketball, we are passionate about the game."

Building in multiple ways

Schall and Plotkin, a pair of avid hoopers, will have a world-class facility to play their pick up games in prior to the start of the 2026-27 season. It will feature more than 100,000 square feet to be utilized for practice, training and recovery, plus another 35,000 square for the team's business operations thanks to an adjustment from the original architectural design.

They wanted to add a third floor to better have everyone in one place, something that happened this past summer when the Hornets had to lease office space in uptown while the arena was being renovated.

"You can't be the best or elite if you don't have elite facilities and if so we have to have an arena that's on par with the rest of the arenas around the league," Schnall said. "The practice facility is essential. We're one of less than a handful of teams that don't have a separate practice facility, so as we want to be both retaining and attracting the best players, we've got to have a setup that is ...

"We think it will be the best in the league or among the best in the league. It's a beautiful building. We are investing a lot of our own money in it. The city is contributing \$30 million, the building is going to cost a lot more. But it's really important that is state of-the-art, that players come in and it's a really exciting experience for them and our whole staff."

Hornets Performance Center - E. 5th and N. Caldwell St Rendering.jpgA rendering of the exterior of the Hornets' practice facility, which will stand at East 5th and North Caldwell streets.

The multi-million project is just the latest in a string of steady organizational movement that began with Peterson's arrival as the initial member of the new hierarchy. Peterson then tabbed Lee as the person to be at the end of the Hornets' bench since they share a mirroring vision, partially from previous experiences together in Atlanta when both were employed by the Hawks.

It's another piece of the puzzle Schnall and Plotkin are methodically putting together.

"Most businesses you look at, even if they hire a new CEO, changing the culture of business is a really long process," said Plotkin, the founder and chief investment officer of Tallwoods Capital, a wealth management firm. "For us, it was making the right hires at the top and that can filter it's way through you. When Jeff came in, a lot of people based on his relationships and how much they thought of Jeff, they wanted to come work for him.

"And when Jeff went to hire a head coach, he also wanted to hire a head coach that had the same values as him. Once Charles was here, Charles had multiple stops along the way, people were clamoring to work with Charles. Same with our sports performance department with Trent. So, it started with hiring Jeff. We went through a pretty rigorous search.

"With Jeff, I think there was an underlying belief that while this guy is really special, he's young, he's built great relationships. people connect to him, he understands the value of hard work, the value of collaboration, communication, not a big ego, someone who's easy to work with. He wants to be in an organization where everyone is connected together. Bringing him in really set off a chain effect, and that's kind of led us to where we are today."

IMG_HornetsGM_4.jpg_3_1_TROS8APE_L824307859.JPGCharlotte Hornets executive vice president of basketball operations Jeff Peterson greets Grant Williams and others after a press conference announcing his role with the organization at Spectrum Center on Wednesday, March 6, 2024. In this role, Peterson becomes the organization's chief basketball decision-maker while also being responsible for leading the team's day-to-day basketball operations.

Peterson has already displayed why Plotkin and Schnall have such a strong belief in him. The Hornets, typically on the outside looking in during most NBA transactions, have acquired draft capital, cash and players — such as Josh Green — during the past five months. They've assisted in facilitating two multi-team deals, using their cap space wisely in the process.

That wasn't happening under any of the previous regimes.

"You're exactly right," said Schnall, who's also co-president of Clayton, Dubilier & Rice, a private equity investment firm. "Historically, we weren't in those conversations and obviously it's really important that we are. Jeff has great relationships around the league and we are also thinking very strategically about how to build the organization. So, we went from an organization that was void of assets, a little bit void of draft picks — had traded away a first-round draft pick and number of second-round draft picks and hadn't acquired any — and depth.

"And we are now up in the top five or six teams with assets. Now that Jeff came in we gathered a lot of secondround picks and we have an abundance. Maybe not an overabundance. You never can have an overabundance, But assets that can allow us to build something great."

That, again, is where Peterson comes in.

"There will be a time where it's going to be go time and it's time to use those assets to convert them into a team that can be a championship-caliber team. And we are looking forward to that time period because, of course, you don't do this if you are not trying to win. We think Jeff gives us a great opportunity to build that over time, build this franchise into a winning team.

"We are now in the middle of a lots of conversations with other teams and other organizations about how we can continue to build our franchise. And that's what you need to be in this business to build it."

Peterson is witnessing things first-hand, fully immersed in the process.

"For us, it's all about just being opportunistic and strategic, in terms of we certainly want to show improvement in the short term, but we also want to be flexible and ultimately create sustained success long term," he said. "It's hard in this league to just sit back and hope things come your way. There's times when you've got to be aggressive and assertive to do what's best for the franchise.

"So they have been nothing but supportive in that manner as well. So, yeah, really excited about that, too."

'It's just going to be fun'

The commitment of Schnall and Plotkin goes beyond the outer reaches of the arena and the team's offices. Understanding the significance of extending their footprint into the community as well, they've pledged to be dedicated in assisting the city and the Carolinas.

In establishing the Chairman's Legacy Fund, a new annual financial program to help strengthen the Charlotte region, they've set their initial sights on revitalizing gymnasiums in nine area schools to create inclusive and state-of-the-art spaces. Over the summer, \$500,000 worth of basketball-centric improvements such as new courts, goals, bleachers and scoreboards were finalized.

"We made a substantial investment to renovate nine gymnasiums and so the kids can really have pride," Schnall said. "And it connected with us because we played basketball. We understand what it means to have an awesome gym and it's a great place for kids to go and they're doing athletic activities instead of being on devices or getting into trouble, who knows what?

"And so it's a huge win for us, it's huge win for the community which surrounds us, those are the kinds of things that really appeal to us to do with our foundation."

Just recently, the Hornets donated 1 million dollars to the relief efforts for those affected by Hurricane Helene in Western Carolina. Along with team employees packing 10,000 emergency food kits for Second Harvest of Metrolina, the team is selling t-shirts with "Carolina Strong" emblazoned on it with the net proceeds going directly to hurricane relief.

"Basketball is what we do, but absolutely leading with them and following their vision," Cayette-Weston, the Hornets' president, said of Plotkin and Schnall, "we have a responsibility in the city and in this region to create impact. Whether that's jobs — part-time jobs, full-time jobs — action in the community and taking action immediately when things happen, devastation happens like Hurricane Helene.

IMG_0153.jpgCharlotte Hornets team president Shelly Cayette-Weston speaks to the media at an introductory luncheon.

"Or focusing on the things that are consistent needs, like the local schools and their facilities and bringing them to the level the students there deserve. Rick and Gabe are thinking constantly about these things. It's really about the impact this franchise can have on this market and they are very, very committed to that."

On and off the court. They yearn for the yesteryear, too, pondering what it would be like to turn Charlotte back into a hotbed for NBA basketball.

"We understand how special the fan base was here when the team was good in the old arena," Schnall said, "and we think the environment that will be created here when we are competitive will be among the best in the league. We have fans that are just waiting for a winning team to cheer for. And this is a community that has brought into their local sports teams. It matters to them, and basketball matters to this city and state a lot.

"We think when we get really, really good here, it's going to be explosive and fun. And we can't wait. What's better than a basketball game, when you play a good team and beat them? It's just going to be fun. We are going to have a lot of those this year, but as we go through time we are really going to have a lot."

CLT_DSC8043.JPGCharlotte Observer reporter Roderick Boone, left, interviews Charlotte Hornets owners Rick Schnall and Gabe Plotkin Saturday, Oct. 19, 2024, in Charlotte, N.C. (Charlotte Observer /Matt Kelley)

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Charlotte Catholic suspends high school football players following bullying investigation

October 23, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (NC) Author: Langston Wertz Jr., The Charlotte Observer | Section: high_school | 401 Words OpenURL Link

Charlotte Catholic president Kurt Telford said the school has begun to discipline members of its football team who were involved in at least three incidents of bullying at the school.

Telford informed parents last week that the school was investigating three bullying incidents that occurred in the boys' locker room and involved members of the Cougars' powerhouse football team.

Telford said the school found out about the incidents after students reported it. The discipline for the players, he said, includes expulsion from school, suspension and removal from the football team.

"Charlotte Catholic High School has a strict policy that prohibits bullying and intimidation of any kind and includes consequences for anyone involved in such behavior," Telford said in a statement sent to The Observer on Wednesday. "While our investigation is ongoing, we have already begun to discipline those involved, imposing consequences that have included expulsion, suspension, removal from the football team and other penalties. We appreciate the support we have received from parents and students, who are partnering with us to help ensure incidents like this don't happen again and that students feel empowered to report concerning behavior, as they did in this matter."

On Oct. 16, Catholic football coach Keith Emery told The Observer about the investigation.

"I really can't discuss an ongoing investigation," Emery said then, "but what I can tell you is that we're taking this seriously and will take whatever disciplinary and other action is necessary to make sure this doesn't happen again."

Catholic beat Butler, 34-14, on Oct. 18, winning its fifth straight game. The win secured the No. 1 playoff seed in the Southwestern 4A conference and at least a share of the league title.

It is not clear if any players involved in the disciplinary actions played in that game or if they were removed from the team this week.

Catholic (6-2, 5-0), which has won five straight games, finishes regular-season play Friday, playing at East Mecklenburg (1-7, 1-3). East Mecklenburg has lost two consecutive games.

After Friday, the Cougars will likely not play again until the playoffs begin Nov. 15, though the N.C. High School Athletic Association has allowed teams, under certain circumstances, to add an extra game to the regular-season schedule after the season was extended by a week to help accommodate Western North Carolina teams dealing with damage caused by Hurricane Helene.

Read letter from the principal

Here is a letter that Charlotte Catholic sent to school families regarding the investigation.

catholic-letter.png

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Idol weathers storms 4 Fab 5 finale

October 23, 2024 | Cherokee Scout (NC)

Author: Nicole Wright Staff Correspondent | Section: News | 317 Words

Page: 12A OpenURL Link

Andrews - The Blue Stage's third season of Andrews Idol weathered storms of varying degrees from technical difficulties to rescheduling finale nights because of contestants literally being unable to attend because of the recent impacts of Hurricane Helene. Gray Todd of Asheville sang her way to the winning title with a prize of \$1,000 and studio recording time from 460 Sound Studio in Cleveland, Ga. Todd was an early round one favorite but was unable to leave her hometown of Asheville due to roads being impassable. She regaled the crowd with her velvety voice. For her finale, she chose the solid combination of both pop covers such as a low-key version of Britney Spears' "Toxic" to "Something in the Orange" from Zach Bryan. In an interesting twist this season, and although the contest drew fewer entrants overall, the finale was rebranded as The Fabulous Five instead of the usual four. Taking second place is Stone Chauncey, who has already begun playing local venues since his debut in this season. Hailing from Hiawassee, Ga., Chauncey takes the \$500 prize and wowed the crowd with his rendition of 49 Winchester's "Everlasting Lover" along with the slow-burning turn of covering Percy Sledge's "When A Man Loves A Woman." In the three-way tie for third through fifth places, and winning \$250 each, were Sam Kephart of Murphy, who solidly brought down the house with each performance; Logan Neffof Candler, who also performed several original songs throughout the season; and Korben Towe of Blue Ridge, who gave both originals and many an obscure country cover throughout the many weeks of competition. Details: Visit thebluestage.com.

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Nicole Wright Staff Correspondent, 'Idol weathers storms 4 Fab 5 finale', *Cherokee Scout* (online), 23 Oct 2024 12A https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C622A50C131850



Threats are dam shame - My View

October 23, 2024 | Cherokee Scout (NC)

Section: News | 625 Words

Page: 4A OpenURL Link

There are 28 dams in Cherokee County, according to the National Inventory of Dams website, 11 of them are considered highly hazardous and lack a plan of action to improve that status. Considering the deaths and damages we've all just witnessed caused by excessive water from Hurricane Helene in western North Carolina, that is not a comforting statistic.

In North Carolina, there are a total of 1, 533 high-hazard dams. Up to 24.3% of them could pose a threat to nearby residents, according to a national analysis by GetMyBoat.com using October 2023 data from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The public database allows Americans to look up the conditions of more than 90, 000 dams.

Unfortunately, there are a growing number of dams in poor and unsatisfactory condition, some of which even have the potential to be life-threatening should they fail. Those dams are considered "high-hazard" in the analysis. If Helene had hit here, those dams could have burst, putting thousands of people and their homes in peril.

Of the 11 high-hazard dams in Cherokee County, eight (72.7%) are marked as potentially dangerous, with five in poor condition, two having the condition withheld and one posing an immediate threat. That's enough to rank Cherokee as the fourth-worst county for dams in North Carolina. Our neighbors aren't in much better shape, with Clay County being ranked even worse at No. 3, Swain County coming in at No. 10 and Graham County falling to No. 12.

The local dams labeled with a hazard potential classification that lack an emergency action plan are the Andrews Water Supply Dam, Pied Piper Dam Lower, Upper Tanglewood Dam, Tanglewood Forest Dam Lower, Skomp Dam, Hamby Dam, Mcgarry Dam, Hideaway Mountain Lake Dam, Greenbriar Development LLC Dam, Senecal Dam and Dills Dam. The federally operated Hiwassee Dam and Apalachia Dam could also be in trouble, according to the analysis.

Before we go into a dam panic, remember that about 1 in 10 of the inventory's dam listings have no condition reported by state agencies. For example, four of the five high-hazard dams in Clay County did not have the condition reported.

"It is likely most of these dams should be listed at not rated, but we will work with the appropriate agencies to verify the information and update the NID accordingly," Army Corps of Engineers spokesperson Gene Pawlik said.

Also remember that North Carolina agencies have often come to Cherokee County and scared the bejesus out of people, only to leave without much of anything happening. Such was the case in January 2020, when state officials sent a letter to Cherokee County seeking help with draining Tanglewood Lake.

The letter obtained by the Cherokee Scout from the N.C. Division of Energy, Mineral & Land Resources said, "DEMLR considers the unsatisfactory condition of this dam to represent an imminent threat to public safety at this time." Tanglewood Lake is a manmade reservoir about 30 feet in height with about 100 acre-feet of storage.

At the time, Cherokee County commissioners rightly voted to deny the request to help drain the lake because the county would also have been accepting liability for any issues if government officials were involved. And since state officials split town and haven't been back since then, it's seems like they were exaggerating the seriousness of the situation. Then again, the best time to repair a dam is before it breaks. That means the state and county need to develop a plan to address the concerns at each dam as soon as possible. Protecting our local infrastructure should

be of primary importance in the General Assembly.

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Volunteers assemble cleaning kits for disaster relief

October 23, 2024 | Cherokee Scout (NC) Author: Jacqueline Gottlieb Contributing Writer | Section: News | 554 Words Page: 4B OpenURL Link

Hayesville - Last weekend, more than 60 volunteers of all ages from Oak Forest United Methodist Church, Murphy First UMC, Hayesville First UMC, Fort Hembree Baptist Church, Good Shepherd Episcopal, Sharp Memorial UMC and the community at large gathered at Hinton Center's Educational Tool Barn to participate in the assembly of cleaning kits, also known as flood buckets, to be distributed to western North Carolina neighbors impacted by Hurricane Helene Thanks to their dedicated efforts, 60 cleaning kits were completed and are ready for distribution to disasterstricken areas Additionally, 24 more buckets were partially filled, with plans to complete them as soon as additional supplies are received The Hinton Center is calling on the community to continue supporting this vital relief effort Donations of supplies are urgently needed to complete the remaining buckets and reach our initial goal of 200 bucket by the end of the month Items can be dropped offat Hinton's Educational Tool Barn, located at the intersection of Hinton Center Road and Retreat Drive, across from the Clay County Food Pantry The supply list includes the following: u One 32-64 ounce bottle of liquid laundry detergent u One 16-40 ounce bottle of liquid concentrate household cleaner, no spray cleaners u One 16-34 ounce bottle of liquid dish soap u

One 4-8 ounce pump spray air freshener u One 6-14 ounce pump spray insect repellant (or pack of 10-20 wipes) if bottle have cap on u One scrub brush, with or without handle u 18 reusable cleaning wipes, no terrycloth, microfiber or paper towels, removed from packaging u Five scouring pads, no stainless steel or pads with soap in them, removed from packaging u 36-50 clothespins u One 50-100 feet clothesline, cotton or plastic line u 24 heavyduty trash bags, 33-45 gallon sizes, removed from packaging u Five N95 particulate respirator dust masks, 1-3 mm thickness, no surgical masks u Two pairs of durable kitchen gloves, for multiple uses, removed from the packaging u One pair leather palm gloves For those who prefer online shopping, an Amazon Wish List is available at https://aco/iJJrmcP, and many of the items can be found locally In addition to donations on the list, Hinton Center is accepting financial contributions to support hurricane relief efforts Donations can be made online at HintonCenterorg or dropped offat Hinton Center, with funds being used to purchase needed supplies and support future assembly days Make a note of hurricane relief with donations We are incredibly grateful for the support of our local churches and other community volunteers, especially the youth from Good Shepherd Episcopal and Oak Forest UMC as well as other young people from the community Together, the work of these volunteers and the donations for this initiative is making a direct impact on those affected by the hurricane However, the need is ongoing, and we encourage everyone who can to donate supplies or contribute financially Once enough supplies are collected, the Hinton Center will schedule additional Flood Bucket Assembly Days Details: Follow Hinton Center on social media and/or visit HintonCenterorg The writer is president and chief executive officer at Hinton Rural Life Center in Hayesville

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Hanging Dog Fall Festival for WNC hurricane relief

October 23, 2024 \mid Cherokee Scout (NC) Author: Aiden McCoy Williams Staff Correspondent \mid Section: News \mid 390 Words

Page: 11A OpenURL Link

Hanging Dog - A Fall Festival was held Saturday complete with food, friends and music. Hanging Dog General Store planned to hold a Fall Festival, but after the devastation of Hurricane Helene owner Tim Lescalleet wanted to do something to help, so they switched gears and made the festival a relief event. They decided to donate all barbecue proceeds and a portion of other sales to groups providing relief to those in western North Carolina affected by Hurricane Helene. Starting at 3 p.m., the store began selling plates of smoked ribs, turkey legs and pulled pork sandwiches with baked beans and apples. By the end of the evening, they old 140 plates total, raising nearly \$3,000 to be donated. The evening featured music by Woolybooger, a well-known local blues and bluegrass musician. "We feel blessed that it didn't hit here. It's horrible for them, and we felt we needed to do something," Lescalleet said. Companies donated items such as drinks and bread to aid the store's efforts. He said they're working with a couple of teams to find the best way to donate the money raised by the community. This isn't the first time Hanging Dog General Store has been involved with hurricane relief.

A few weeks ago, they took lunch over to Western Regional Airport in Andrews to feed volunteers and members of Cherokee Clay Food Alliance, pilots, airport crew and local teams driving in supplies. Lescalleet's son, Noah Lescalleet, has been working closely with this group. They helped unload supplies from airplanes and reload the supplies onto the trucks they've been using to deliver to areas that need them the most. Hanging Dog General Store also hosts an annual chili cook-off, with all proceeds donated to the Hanging Dog Fire Department. This event invites members of the community to come out and cook their best chili for the chance to win cash prizes; the event has featured raffles, music and activities for kids. Lescalleet said needs will continue for months and years to come in western North Carolina. Monetary donations allow the most flexibility for groups that have boots on the ground and can see the needs changing for these communities by the hour.

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Trunk, treat and dungeon - ANDREWS

October 23, 2024 | Cherokee Scout (NC)

Section: News | 167 Words

Page: 3A OpenURL Link

The annual Trunk or Treat will be held Saturday downtown from 3-5 p.m. Andrews Chamber of Commerce Director Nola Cooper is pleased to announce a collaboration with President Tim Comstock and the Valleytown Cultural Arts Center Board of Directors to provide The Dungeon of Doom following the event from 5-8 p.m. Admission to The Dungeon of Doom will be for those ages 12 and up. There will also be a Happy Halloween Fun Zone for children ages 11 and under. Prices are \$10 per person for The Dungeon and \$5 for the Happy Halloween Fun Zone, with kids 3 ages and under free to the Fun Zone. Cooper said the chamber and center have been working together to offer more events following the cancellation of Oktoberfest due to inclement weather caused by Hurricane Helene. All proceeds will benefit the center. Main Street will be closed from 2:30-5:30 p.m. Saturday from Cherry to Walnut streets. The cultural arts center is at 125 Chestnut St. Details: Visit andrewsnc. com/annual-trunk-or-treat.

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