

HUNT
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spend their nights in cramped shelters. Tens of thousands of homes and businesses were submerged under the swirling floodwaters for two days to two weeks.

When the waters finally receded, flooding from Floyd had claimed 52 lives and left damage exceeding \$6 billion, prompting President Clinton to name the eastern two-thirds of the state a federal disaster area.

Floyd would be remembered as the worst natural disaster in the state's history - a catastrophe with which state officials are still wrestling.

Throughout this week, Gov. Jim Hunt has toured flood-damaged communities, businesses and farms in eastern North Carolina, discussing the state's emergency response during Floyd and what remains to be done for the region to recover fully.

But recovering from Floyd could take a decade, some state officials say.

Hunt and his executive cabinet gathered Monday at the Pitt County Agriculture Auditorium to meet and talk with flood volunteers and victims.

Most of the people participating in the forum praised the state's response, telling story after story about how state grants enabled them to rebuild or repair their homes or businesses.

N.C. officials say federal and state agencies have contributed more than \$4 billion to the recovery effort, \$800 million of which came from the state's cof-

fers - a national record. Nearly 67,000 donors gave a total \$19 million to the N.C. Hurricane Floyd Disaster Relief Fund.

But Judy Cromer, volunteer coordinator for Pender County and panelist at the discussion, said people contributed sweat and time as well as money.

"The most impressive aspect (of the recovery) doesn't come with dollar signs," Cromer said. "One church group served 960,000 meals to volunteers, gutted 200 homes and restored 100 others."

Factolus resident Sue Beachem and her family was one of 50,000 families whose homes were repaired thanks to a grant or low-interest loan.

She said the unifying effect Floyd had on the community made the recovery effort far easier.

"I've stood in line with people who made \$250,000 and people who made \$20,000 a year," she said. "We all worked together. We were a family."

But the feelings of accomplishment and goodwill from the forum participants did not take hold in some of the audience members.

Mary Williams of Greenville stood up and addressed Hunt, claiming state officials had neglected her.

"My family lost everything we had during the flood," she said. "Families like ours were forced to take the (Small Business Administration) loan to get in our homes and are now in debt and struggling to stay home."

Following the flood, the SBA offered low-interest loans to 8,888 N.C. families seeking to repair their homes.

Williams, who declined to put a dol-

lar amount on her loan, said she was forced to remortgage her home to pay for repairs and the loan.

"I don't expect to be back to 100 percent," she said. "But it seems to me that my family worked hard, paid taxes and were punished for it."

Hunt started to say, "I understand," but Williams interrupted him.

"Nobody don't understand," she said, her voice cracking with emotion.

Williams, seemingly admitting defeat, sat back down and then left the room a few minutes later.

Hunt then moved on to other testimonials, emphasizing the need for state officials to help every citizen who requires it.

"We've seen examples of frustration and heartache," he said. "I wish we could fix it all. We can't, but we've got to fix all we can."

After the meeting, a small crowd of state officials swooped down upon Williams, offering her phone numbers and promises of aid.

But Williams said she was not sure what would come from the meeting. "I've seen these meetings before," she said. "They talk about helping, but they only help certain groups, like farmers."

Williams, who e-mailed Clinton on Mothers' Day begging for aid and received a formulaic reply, said she did not know if Hunt would act differently. "Maybe he'll listen," she said. "Maybe he heard. I don't know; but I do know I need help."

The State & National Editor can be reached at stntdesk@unc.edu.

Bush, Gore Agree to Debates

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON - Republican George W. Bush, giving in after a two-week battle over debates, agreed Thursday to Democrat Al Gore's demand that they meet in three prime-time confrontations - including one at Wake Forest University - sponsored by a bipartisan panel. The running mates will debate once.

Americans will see Bush and Gore go head to head on television Oct. 3 in Boston, Oct. 11 in Winston-Salem, and Oct. 17 in St. Louis, with each debate lasting 90 minutes, according to the agreement reached Thursday. Format

details still must be worked out.

The deal marked Bush's acceptance of the schedule proposed by the Commission on Presidential Debates. He had previously balked at following the commission's recommendations, pushing for less formal debates on TV talk shows, but relented under pressure to put the distraction behind him.

The agreement was announced by Bush campaign Chairman Don Evans and his Democratic counterpart, Gore campaign Chairman William Daley, after their first joint meeting with the debate commission. "We've made great progress," said Daley. "The American people want to hear from these people."

The vice presidential candidates, Democrat Joe Lieberman and Republican Dick Cheney, will debate Oct. 5 in Danville, Ky.

The negotiations ended a standoff lasting several weeks in which Bush held out for doing only one debate sponsored by the commission and several less formal matchups in other venues, such as one on a special edition of NBC's "Meet the Press" and another on CNN's "Larry King Live."

The way the three presidential debates will be conducted was still unsettled but commission leaders said they expected the campaigns to resolve the details within two days.

VOLUNTEERS

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tially focused on "rip and strip" efforts of removing destroyed property and salvaging what they could. But he said reconstruction and rebuilding jobs are now a priority.

The center also served as a central coordinator for schools, departments and organizations that prepared projects according to areas of expertise. "The center did so much for so many communities," said Chapel Hill Mayor Rosemary Waldorf. "They are absolutely here for organization and pulling in manpower."

But students also channeled their volunteer efforts through other agencies.

Campus Y Assistant Director Chimi Boyd said many students viewed the situation as an opportunity to help, citing a trip by a Campus Y service committee in October and a book drive by the literacy committee as particular successes.

"The students were really enthusiastic, and it seemed to open their eyes about how bad the flood really was," she said.

Waldorf said UNC's work inspired the town of Chapel Hill to make its own attempts at helping those in need.

She said police officers and other emergency officials were sent to stricken parts of the state. Later, the town of Chapel Hill adopted the town of Speed and is still working to rebuild that community.

Public service center Director Nick Didow said efforts died down somewhat after the initial push, but several groups are still actively planning to lend a hand.

Faculty and staff participating in the annual Tar Heel Bus Tour program in May had the opportunity to visit the towns of Grifton and Tick Bite, which were devastated by flooding. A reunion is planned for Saturday, which Didow said will send about 30 volunteers back to those towns for a day of work.

"This is a purposeful return on behalf of the faculty and staff, purposeful to underscore the commitment of the University to the people of the state."

Waldorf said she thought volunteer efforts were inspired by people's personal senses of compassion and would ensure involvement until the towns were rebuilt.

"It's not OK for people in Chapel Hill to do nothing just because we were spared - we have to do something, and we have to do our best to make a difference."

The University Editor can be reached at udesk@unc.edu.

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