

Legislature to offer hurricane relief funds

Aid to cover \$300M in unmet needs

BY MEGAN MCSWAIN
ASSISTANT STATE & NATIONAL EDITOR

When the N.C. General Assembly convenes next week, one of the first items on its agenda will be allocating funds to areas where massive floods from last fall's hurricanes created a need for more than \$300 million in aid.

Gov. Mike Easley proposed last week that the state use its rainy day fund to provide the necessary relief.

The legislature will not be called in for a special session, since the start of the normal session is Jan. 26.

"There is absolutely a need in western North Carolina for additional assistance," said Mark Owen, director of communication and research for AdvantageWest, a state-sponsored alliance between local governments and businesses to promote economic growth in western North Carolina.

Although hurricanes Ivan and Frances had been downgraded to tropical storms when they reached the state, the September storms still washed out roads, flooded

homes and farms, left many residents without power and killed eight North Carolinians.

The state's mountains received needed aid immediately after the floods from nonprofit agencies, such as the United Way and the Red Cross, Owens said.

After back-to-back floods, Buncombe County alone needs more than \$66 million to finish the cleanup.

"That's frankly what the rainy day fund is set aside for," Owen said. "We certainly had a number of rainy days in western North Carolina this year."

Until last week, damage totals for the entire area were not ready. AdvantageWest is now estimating that unmet needs total more than \$300 million.

"It's time to go forward and get the money allocated ... and start helping the people," said Rep. Wilma Sherrill, R-Buncombe.

But the governor will leave the final decision of where the money should come from up to legislators.

"We certainly hope that whether it's the rainy day fund or funds from other sources, western North

Carolina will get some additional help," Owens said.

The rainy day fund is money the state puts away for emergencies it could not foresee.

The floods are that type of emergency, but legislators are concerned about depleting the fund.

"When you use those reserves, you're out," said Jim Black, Democratic co-speaker of the N.C. House.

"The magnitude of the problem in the western part of the state might require some other revenue; frankly, the budget as short as it is," he said.

One of those revenue options is temporary tax relief for victims.

Black also stressed that there should be concern about depleting the emergency funds and therefore taking away money that could go to areas, such as education, in the future.

"Let's hold on to the money that we have so that we can balance the budget," Black said.

"If we need some revenue to cover the damage in the western part of the state, we'll come up with that the best we can."

Contact the State & National Editor at stntdesk@unc.edu.

Rights groups honor King in marches, rallies

Promote variety of social causes

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ATLANTA — Americans inspired by Martin Luther King Jr. took part in marches and rallies around the country Monday, drawing from the late civil rights leader's message to call for an end to the Iraq war, advocate affirmative action and speak out for gay rights.

In King's hometown, parade spectators lined the streets dancing to Stevie Wonder's "Happy Birthday" and listening to King's speeches blaring over the loudspeakers. Despite Monday's chilly temperatures, thousands of marchers then walked through the Atlanta district where King grew up and preached.

Joining high school marching bands, union workers and civil rights activists, a group of several hundred people came in support of gay rights, saying King's message was one of inclusion.

"Dr. King's dream is for everyone, not just one specific group of individuals," said Michelle Bruce, a Riverdale city councilwoman who marched with a transgender group called TransAction. "If you hate discrimination and racism, this is the place to come and march."

In a commemorative service

marking the holiday at the historic Ebenezer Baptist Church, Martin Luther King III asked the congregation to remember his father's legacy of peace as America wages war in Iraq, and to remember his message of compassion in light of the tsunami disaster.

"Let us respond to this challenge by reaching out to help our sisters and brothers who are suffering because of the tsunami," he said.

King preached at Ebenezer from 1960 until his assassination in 1968 at age 39. He would have turned 76 on Saturday.

At a King day breakfast in Boston, Sen. John Kerry made some of his strongest comments since Election Day about problems with voting in some states.

While reiterating that he did not contest the presidential election, Kerry said: "I nevertheless make it clear that thousands of people were suppressed in the effort to vote. Voting machines were distributed in uneven ways. In Democratic districts, it took people four, five, 11 hours to vote, while Republicans (went) through in 10 minutes — same voting machines, same process, our America."

"Martin Luther King reminded us that yes, we have to accept finite disappointment, and I know how to do that," Kerry said to chuckles from listeners. "But he said we must ... never give up on infinite hope."

In Montgomery, Ala., the city where King led the famous bus boycott, a crowd gathered at the steps of the state Capitol near where King spoke at the end of the Selma-to-Montgomery voting rights march almost 40 years ago.

Speakers included Public Service Commissioner George Wallace Jr., whose father, former four-time Gov. George Wallace, once promised to preserve segregation in a fiery inauguration speech from the same steps.

Wallace said his father changed his views after he was left paralyzed by an assassination attempt and later visited the Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church, where King once served as pastor, to ask for forgiveness.

"His journey from the Old South to Dr. King's church was one that we all took. The pain my father suffered allowed him to understand the suffering of others," Wallace said. "We have a unique opportunity in Alabama to demonstrate to the world that Dr. King's dream is still alive."

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Police enhance law enforcement precision

BY MEGHAN DAVIS
STAFF WRITER

Later this year, Chapel Hill police will get the chance to take a cue from the annals of TV cop shows like "Magnum, P.I." and "Dragnet," as a wealth of technology is about to reach their fingertips.

Officers will have access to an

electronic mapping system, which will allow them to search for a variety of information, said Chapel Hill police spokeswoman Jane Cousins, who is in charge of implementing the program. "Officers will be able to access maps, do searches and pull up orthophotos," Cousins said.

The program will let police fol-

low crime patterns in certain areas and help predict the likelihood of possible criminal activity.

The system will include building footprints, town maps and maps of the University. Officers will be able to follow the types of crimes that have occurred in a given area, Cousins said. Officers will have access to the system from the department's internal network. Patrol cars equipped with laptops also will be able to use the system while on duty.

Funded in part by the town of Chapel Hill, the mapping program will be helpful to officers, Cousins said. "This will help them plan about patrolling and plan emergency responses," she said.

Cousins said she expects the system to be available in about two months, after she finishes editing maps and compiling data.

"We're just doing behind-the-scenes work right now," she said. Also this year, the police department changed the way it handles reports of stolen cell phones.

On Jan. 1, the department issued a new form for reporting

lost cell phones, which officer John Wagner said will help keep emergency phone lines free.

"One of the initiatives behind the form was to cut down on the volume of calls to patrol officers," Wagner said.

In 2003 the police received more than 250 calls about lost phones, he said.

Claimants can take the form to their service providers as proof of a claim.

"A lot of our calls were generated when people would go to their providers and the providers would tell them to call 911," Wagner said.

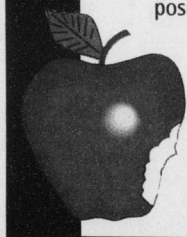
The form is available on the police department Web site — <http://townhall.townofchapelhill.org/police> — and through cell phone providers.

Wagner, an officer with the community services unit, said police will collect the forms from providers once a month and file the information.

Contact the City Editor at citydesk@unc.edu.

Teaching Positions

The Educational Resources Group (www.ergteach.com) will be interviewing in Chapel Hill on February 9th for teaching positions at 675 independent (private) schools nationwide. Certification is not a requirement and there are no fees to candidates. Please send resume by January 28th to chris@ergteach.com.



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