

Crews Battle Wildfires In North & South Carolina Amid Dry Conditions, Winds

(AP)—Crews battled wildfires in North and South Carolina on Sunday amid dry conditions and gusty winds as residents were forced to evacuate in some areas.

The National Weather Service warned of increased fire danger in the region due to a combination of critically dry fuels and very low relative humidity.

In South Carolina, where more than 175 fires burned 6.6 square miles (17 square kilometers), Gov. Henry McMaster declared a state of emergency on Sunday to support the wildfire response effort, and a statewide burning ban remained in effect.

Crews made progress containing



a fire in the Carolina Forest area west of the coastal resort city of Myrtle Beach, where residents had been ordered to evacuate several neighborhoods, according to Horry County Fire Rescue. Video showed some people running down the street as smoke filled the sky. But by late Sunday afternoon, the fire department announced that Carolina Forest evacuees could return home.

The South Carolina Forestry Commission estimated Sunday evening that the blaze had burned 2.5 square miles (6.5 square kilometers) with 30 percent of it contained. No structures had succumbed to the blaze and no injuries

had been reported as of Sunday morning, officials said.

In North Carolina, the U.S. Forest Service said fire crews were working to contain multiple wildfires burning in four forests across the state on Sunday. The largest, about 400 acres (162 hectares), was at Uwharrie National Forest, about 50 miles (80.47 kilometers) east of Charlotte. The Forest Service said Sunday afternoon that it had made progress on the fire, reaching about one-third containment.

The small southwestern town of Tryon in Polk County, North Carolina, urged some residents to evacuate Saturday as a fire spread rapidly there. The evacuations

remained in effect Sunday. A decision on whether to lift them was expected to be made Monday after intentional burns are set to try to stop the fire from spreading.

That fire has burned about 500 acres (202 hectares) as of late Sunday, with zero percent containment, according to the Polk County Emergency Management/Fire Marshal's office. The North Carolina Forest Service was conducting water drops and back-burning operations on the ground, and area residents should expect a lot of smoke during those operations, officials said.

Officials have not said what caused any of the fires.

Advance Auto Parts Store Closures: 700 Store Locations Are Set To Shutter

Another chain store announced it is closing locations.

A week after JoAnne Fabrics announced it was closing stores, Advance Auto Parts is continuing in its plan to shutter hundreds of stores and four distribution centers in 2025.

The company made the announcement in a midweek earnings call after initially announcing the closures in November 2024.

In releasing its fourth-quarter report Wednesday, the company reiterated its plans to close approximately 500 corporate stores, 200 independent locations and four distribution centers by mid-2025 as part of a "restructuring plan" initially laid out in 2024.

The company said it hopes to improve business performance by



focusing on "core retail improvements" with hopes of achieving "consistent profitable growth."

The plan includes the consolidation of distribution centers to op-

erate 12 large facilities by the end of 2026, the opening of 60 market hub locations by mid-2027, and speeding up the pace of new store openings, according to the news

release.

Advance Auto Parts' stock plummeted by roughly 18% Wednesday afternoon as investors reacted to the company's 2025 sales guidance, The Motley Fool reported.

Headquartered in Raleigh, North Carolina, Advance Auto Parts operates more than 4,700 stores in the United States, Canada, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. According to its website, the company also serves 1,125 independently owned Carquest-branded stores across these locations, in addition to Mexico and some Caribbean islands.

In a regulatory filing, the company reported it plans to close 523 corporate stores, leave 204 independent locations, and shut down four distribution centers.



LIFELONG NEW YORK CIVIL RIGHTS ADVOCATE AND NAACP LEADER HAZEL DUKES DIES AT 92

Hazel Dukes, the president of the New York State chapter of the NAACP and lifelong civil rights advocate, died Saturday at the age of 92.

Dukes peacefully passed away in her New York City home surrounded by family, her son, Ronald Dukes, said in a statement.

Dukes, who led the New York State NAACP for nearly five decades, fought tirelessly for voting rights, economic development, fair housing and education through her career. Even in her 90s, she spoke out against police brutality and for adequate health care in underserved neighborhoods, the NAACP's New York State chapter said in a statement.

U.S. Allies Lash Out, Suggests Zelenskyy Should Resign

PHOENIX (AP) — President Donald Trump's senior aides and allies lashed out at Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelenskyy from Washington as he attended a European summit Sunday in London to rally international support for his military's fight against the Russian invasion.

Following Trump's lead, White House officials and Republicans in Congress used news show appearances to demand that Zelenskyy display more gratitude for U.S. support and an openness to potential warring concessions to Russian President Vladimir Putin. Some suggested Zelenskyy should consider resigning even as Ukrainians rally around him.

But they offered little clarity as to what Zelenskyy and Ukraine could do after Friday's Oval Office meeting in which Trump and Vice President JD Vance berated him before canceling the signature of an economic agreement between Washington and Kyiv. The dispute leaves the future of that relationship in question, as well as the prospects for ending a conflict that began when the Kremlin



invaded in February 2022.

White House national security adviser Mike Waltz, who while in Congress went to Ukraine during the first year of the war to meet Zelenskyy and once compared him to wartime British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, said Zelenskyy's behavior at the White House was "incredibly

disrespectful."

Asked about that Churchill-Zelenskyy comparison, Waltz noted that Churchill was voted out of office in the final months of World War II.

Churchill "was a man for a moment, but he did not then transition England into the next phase," Waltz said. "And it's unclear whether

President Zelenskyy, particularly after what we saw Friday, is ready to transition to Ukraine to an end to this war and to negotiate and have to compromise."

Waltz said a negotiated end to the war would involve territorial concessions from Ukraine as well as "Russian concessions on security guarantees," but he did not offer any more details about what Moscow would have to do.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., echoed the suggestion that Zelenskyy may need to step aside.

"Either he needs to come to his senses and come back to the table in gratitude, or someone else needs to lead the country to do that," Johnson said. "I mean, it's up to the Ukrainians to figure that out. But I can tell you that we are reexercising peace through strength."

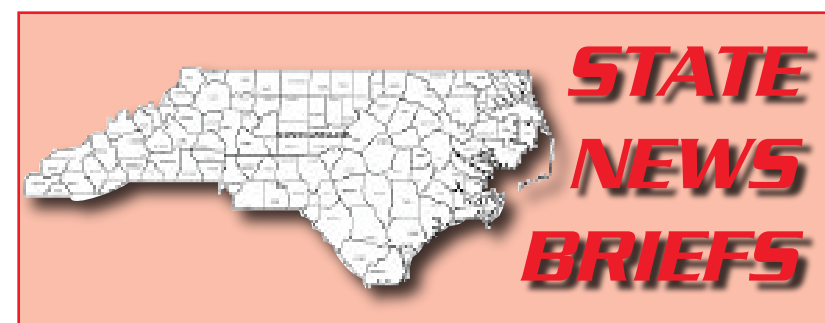
Trump's director of national intelligence, Tulsi Gabbard, said the contentious meeting has led to "a huge rift in the relationship" and she took issue with Zelenskyy telling Fox News afterward that he did not think

he did anything wrong.

"There's going to have to be a rebuilding of any kind of interest in good faith negotiations, I think, before President Trump is going to be willing to reengage on this," she said.

The coordinated campaign of pressure from Washington played

out as Zelenskyy and European leaders came to terms with Trump's overhaul of U.S. foreign policy. British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said the United Kingdom would use 1.6 billion pounds (\$2 billion) in export financing to supply 5,000 air defense missiles for Ukraine.



HOUSE BILL WOULD ALLOW BETTORS TO DEDUCT LOSSES ON NC TAXES

North Carolina gamblers would be able to deduct losses on their state taxes under a bill the state House Commerce and Economic Development Committee discussed Tuesday.

North Carolina taxes winnings, but gamblers are not able to deduct their losses, bill sponsors said.

Rep. Keith Kidwell (R-Beaufort) is a gambling opponent who cosponsored House Bill 14.

"This is not a gambling bill," he said. "This is a fairness in taxation bill."

The change would bring North Carolina in line with federal tax law, said Rep. Erin Pare, (R-Wake).

If a bettor won \$10,000 in a year but also lost \$10,000, the bettor would owe state income tax on the \$10,000 even though they just broke even, Pare said. The law leaves bettors with tax bills they may not be able to pay.

The bill would benefit people who bet big and itemize their deductions, Kidwell said.

Rev. Mark Creech, lobbyist for the conservative group Return America, opposed the bill.

It "reduces the immediate financial impact of losing money," he said, and "lowers the deterrent to risky behavior."

Online sports betting became legal in the state in March 2024.

James Joyce of Holly Springs said he and friends began betting on sports online last year, but stopped when they discovered they could not deduct their losses.

"Taxing winnings without allowing loss deductions is completely unjust," he said. "This punishes responsible bettors."

The committee heard discussion of the bill but did not vote..

GOP LAWMAKERS MOVE TO FUND FINAL STRETCH OF REBUILD NC, AFTER YEARS OF FINANCIAL WOES

Top House Republicans are moving to send a final bundle of money to the long struggling ReBuild NC program, as officials aim to finish post-hurricane homebuilding efforts in eastern North Carolina that have taken almost a decade.

Rep. Brendan Jones (R-Columbus) filed a bill Tuesday to send \$217 million to the agency — fulfilling their request to help finish homes for those impacted by Hurricanes Florence and Matthew. Jones serves as the House Majority Leader and a co-chair of the committee investigating the agency.

"No more excuses," Jones wrote on social media. "Just results."

ReBuild NC (or NCORR), established by former Gov. Roy Cooper, has for

Singer Angie Stone Dies in Car Crash

By Stacy M. Brown

NNPA

The music and entertainment world reacted in shock and sorrow after the tragic death of Angie Stone, the pioneering singer-songwriter and hip-hop trailblazer who was killed in a car accident early Saturday morning in Montgomery, Alabama. She was 63.

Stone's publicist, Deborah R. Champagne, confirmed the devastating news, stating that her family is heartbroken. "A number of her loved ones had just spoken to her last night," Champagne told TMZ.

Born Angela Brown, Stone first rose to prominence as a member of The Sequence, hip-hop's first all-female rap group. Their 1979 hit Funk You Up became one of the earliest rap records to break into the mainstream, later sampled in Bruno Mars' Uptown Funk and Dr. Dre's Keep Their Heads Ringin'. After her years with The Sequence, Stone launched a solo career in the late 1990s, earning Grammy nominations and releasing celebrated R&B hits like Brotha, No More Rain, and



Wish I Didn't Miss You.

Stone's career spanned decades, seamlessly blending hip-hop, soul, and R&B. Her debut solo album, Black Diamond, achieved gold status. She earned multiple Grammy nominations, including Best Female R&B Vocal Performance for U-Haul and Best R&B Performance by a Duo or Group with Joe for More Than a Woman and with Betty Wright for

Baby.

Several of Stone's peers offered tributes following the devastating news.

Chuck D, the legendary Public Enemy frontman and Rock & Roll Hall of Fame inductee, called Stone a foundational figure. "Angie Stone [was] a powerful pioneer whenever I thought of her," he told Black Press USA. "A foundation of modern soul

and hip-hop and women empowerment that she's still uncredited for. A terrible loss."

Rocky Bucano, executive director of the Hip Hop Museum, described Stone as a groundbreaking force. "As a member of The Sequence, Angie B helped pave the way for generations of women in hip-hop," Bucano said in an email to Black Press USA. "Her impact on hip-hop culture is immeasurable, and her presence will be deeply missed. Rest in power, Angie Stone. Your voice and influence will never fade."

DJ Ralph McDaniels also told Black Press USA that Stone's artistry mainly was unmatched. "Peaceful journey to our sister Angie Stone," he said. "Her voice was unique and direct from hip-hop's female group Sequence to her solo soul songs."

Dr. Mario Dickens of Mario Dickens Ministries also offered condolences. "We are saddened to hear of the passing of one of this era's greatest memorable voices," he said. "We pray for her loved ones and fans," said Dickens, who extended his company's memorial printing services to Stone's family at no cost.

Black Graves Are Being Moved To Make Way For An Industrial Park And It's Drawing A Mix Of Emotions

DANVILLE, Va. (AP) — A decision to move the remains of hundreds African American tenant farmers from a former Virginia tobacco plantation to a dedicated burial ground has elicited a range of emotions among the sharecroppers' descendants.

Some worry about the implications of disturbing the graves of people who were exploited and enslaved. Others hope the remains can be identified and reburied with more respect than they were afforded in life.

The mostly unidentified remains are being moved from a site that had been part of one of the nation's largest slave-owning operations, to make way for an industrial park.

When they were buried they weren't considered fully human, but now they are "patriots who are coming out of their graves with equal rights in 2025," one descendant, Cedric Hairston, said.

Archaeologists have already started exhuming the approximately 275 plots, and some of the remains of tenant farmers and their families are already in a funeral home but will be moved to the new burial site about a mile away. Officials have been consulting with descendants about genetic testing on unidentified remains as well as designs for the new cemetery, including a memorial archway.

"I don't think anyone would want their ancestors exhumed or moved," said Jeff Bennett, whose great-great-grandfather was buried at the plantation. "But for them to give us a lot of say so in the new cemetery, down to the design details and the plaques and memorials that we put up, I feel like (they're) really doing it in a dignified way, in a respectful way."

African American cemeteries have suffered neglect, abandonment and destruction over the centuries. But efforts to preserve them are gaining momentum, with communities unearthing and rebuilding these crucial links to past generations.

While generally supportive of the project to move the graves, Hairston worries about the indignity of exhuming the graves of people who were brutalized as slaves and exploited as sharecroppers.

"It just seems that 100 or so odd years after their death, there's still no rest," he said.

Oak Hill was part of a family empire that enslaved thousands of people across 45 plantations and farms in four states, according to "The Hairstons," a 1999 book by Henry Wienczek that chronicles the Black and white Hairston families. Samuel Hairston, the plantation's owner, was reputedly the largest enslaver in the South, Wienczek wrote.

But the grand property has stood mostly empty and unused since sharecropping ended last century. The 1820s plantation house was destroyed by fire in 1988.

Many who were enslaved at Oak Hill left after emancipation, Wienczek wrote. Those who remained as tenant farmers were often cheated of wages and faced crushing poverty and sometimes violence in the Jim Crow South.

Some tenant farmers took the Hairston surname, in part because "we had no other name to identify with, as the government was collecting data for the census. We brought no last name with us from Africa," Cedric Hairston said, adding, "Many of our women carried and birthed a Hairston child, never with the support of the law to report that they were raped."

One of the sharecroppers was Fleming Adams Sr., Bennett's great-great-grandfather. Known as "Flem," he was born into slavery on another plantation in 1830. He later worked at Oak Hill, where he had to duck through doorways because he was so tall, Bennett said.

Adams and his wife Martha raised three sons — George, Daniel and Flem Jr. — before he died in 1916.

His death certificate lists his burial place as Oak Hill.

"My hope is that we can discover where Flem is," Bennett said. "He was 7 feet tall, so they'd be looking for a bigger coffin. And hopefully there'd be enough of his remains where they could do a DNA sample."

Most of the graves in the two secluded sharecropper cemeteries were marked only by moss-covered stones without inscriptions. Rows of depressions in the earth showed where the wooden coffins had collapsed below. Needles from loblolly pines covered many of the plots.

A public entity, the Pittsylvania-Danville Regional Industrial Facility Authority, acquired 3,500 acres (1,400 hectares) of land that included the former Oak Hill plantation, and Tennessee-based Microporous announced in November it would build a \$1.3 billion battery production facility there. It expects to create 2,000 jobs.

Virginia's Department of Historical Resources granted a permit in late November to move the graves, noting that relocation is consistent with the desires of the descendant families. Bennett and others visited the sites in December.

Silence fell as they walked into the first cemetery. J.D. Adams, an Oak Hill descendant, said a historical marker must be placed there.

"We need some time in order to determine what it is we want and how we want it," Adams told Matt Rowe, Pittsylvania County's economic development director.



Descendants of Oak Hill sharecroppers stand outside the ruins of the property's once-grand plantation house near Danville, Va., Dec. 10, 2024. (AP Photo/Ben Finley)



STATE BRIEFS

Continued from page 1

years faced mismanagement and financial troubles, as previously reported by NC Newsline and Inside Climate News.

In November, officials revealed the agency had run up a \$221 million deficit. And in late January, its leader told lawmakers that unless they provided permanent funding to finish work, they would likely lose key contractors.

The agency has become a top source of frustration for Republicans, who continue to scrutinize the agency. Further scrutiny is built into Jones' bill: the agency must regularly submit reports detailing all expenses and documentation. And officials must keep must State Auditor Dave Boliek, a Republican, apprised of spending.

Jones' bill is titled "an act to enact the Close Out Operations Provide Emergency Relief Act" — or the C.O.O.P.E.R. Act, in reference to the former governor.

"I anticipate us sending some additional funds for NCORR to complete its work," House Speaker Destin Hall (R-Caldwell) told reporters Tuesday evening. "We know the problem's got to be solved there."

ICE AWARDS \$1B CONTRACT TO PRIVATE PRISON FIRM FOR MAJOR IMMIGRANT DETENTION CENTER

WASHINGTON — U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement has awarded a private prison company a 15-year contract worth \$1 billion to detain up to 1,000 immigrants in New Jersey, the first expansion of an immigrant detention center amid the Trump administration's plans for mass deportations.

"This detention center is the first to open under the new administration," ICE Acting Director Caleb Vitello said in a late Wednesday statement. "The location near an international airport streamlines logistics, and helps facilitate the timely processing of individuals in our custody as we pursue President (Donald) Trump's mandate to arrest, detain and remove illegal aliens from our communities."

On a Thursday earnings call, executives for one of the largest private prisons, GEO Group Inc., told investors they expect "unprecedented opportunities" under the Trump administration's immigration crackdown by providing detention bed capacity and increasing electronic monitoring services of immigrants.

The Newark detention center, Delaney Hall, will be the largest ICE processing facility and detention center on the East Coast, said George Zoley, the founder and executive chairman of GEO.

GEO has pushed for a contract with ICE to reopen that facility as a detention center and even sued New Jersey over its state law that bars private and public companies from contracting with ICE to detain immigrants.

Israel Blocks Aid Into Gaza As Standoff Escalates

JERUSALEM/CAIRO, March 2 (Reuters) - Israel blocked the entry of aid trucks into Gaza on Sunday as a standoff over the truce that has halted fighting for the past six weeks escalated, with Hamas calling on Egyptian and Qatari mediators to intervene.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said earlier that it had adopted a proposal by U.S. President Donald Trump's envoy, Steve Witkoff, for a temporary ceasefire in Gaza for the Ramadan and Passover periods, hours after the first phase of the previously agreed ceasefire expired.

If agreed, the truce would halt fighting until the end of the Ramadan fasting period around March 31 and the Jewish Passover holiday around April 20.

The truce would be conditional on Hamas releasing half of the living and dead hostages on the first day, with the remainder released at the conclusion, if an agreement is reached on a permanent ceasefire.

Hamas says it is committed to the originally agreed ceasefire that had been scheduled to move into a second phase, with negotiations aimed at a permanent end to the war, and it has rejected the idea of a temporary extension to the 42-day truce.

A senior Hamas official, Mahmoud Mardawi, told Al Jazeera the group would only release the remaining Israeli hostages under the terms of the already agreed-upon phased deal.

Reflecting the fragility of the ceasefire deal, local health officials said Israeli gunfire had killed four Palestinians in separate attacks in the northern and southern Gaza Strip.

The Israeli military said that "suspects" were identified close to its troops in northern Gaza and that they had planted a bomb. It added that an airstrike was carried out to "eliminate the threat."

Egyptian sources said on Friday that the Israeli delegation in Cairo had sought to extend the first phase by 42 days, while Hamas wanted to move to the second phase of the ceasefire deal. Spokesman Hazem Qassem said on Saturday that the group rejected Israel's "formulation" of extending the first phase.

In the first phase of the ceasefire, Hamas handed over 33 Israeli hostages as well as five Thais returned in an unscheduled release, in exchange for around 2,000 Palestinian prisoners and detainees from Israeli jails and the withdrawal of Israeli troops from some of their positions in Gaza.

Under the original agreement, the second phase was intended to see the start of negotiations over the release of the remaining 59 hostages, the full withdrawal of Israeli troops from Gaza, and a final end to the war.

However the talks never began and Israel says all its hostages must be returned for fighting to stop.

"Israel will not allow a ceasefire without the release of our hostages," Netanyahu's office said, announcing that the entry of all goods and supplies into the Gaza Strip would be halted.

"If Hamas persists in its refusal, there will be additional consequences," Hamas has denounced Israel's move as "blackmail" and a "blatant coup against the agreement."

"We call on mediators to pressure the occupation to fulfill its obligations under the agreement, in all its phases," it said, adding that the only way to get the hostages back would be to adhere to the agreement and start talks for the second phase.

Commenting on the goods suspension, senior Hamas official Sami Abu Zuhri told Reuters the decision would impact the ceasefire talks, adding his group "doesn't respond to pressures."

Later on Sunday, Israeli officials said a delegation would arrive in Cairo in an apparent move to discuss ways to defuse tensions and ensure the ceasefire remains in effect.



Jamaican Government Urged To 'Fully Decolonise'

(Reuters) - Many Jamaicans want their country to ditch King Charles as head of state but a bill presented by the government to do just that has frustrated some critics of the monarchy who believe the change should go further to slash colonial ties.

Jamaica gained independence in 1962 but - like 13 other former British colonies - it still retains the British monarch as its head of state.

Public opinion on the Caribbean island of nearly 3 million people has been shifting for years, and in December the government of Prime Minister Andrew Holness presented a bill to remove King Charles.

Hundreds of thousands of enslaved Africans were shipped to Jamaica during transatlantic slavery, and many scholars and advocates say the legacy of slavery and colonialism has resulted in or played a role in enduring inequities. Growing calls by African and Caribbean nations for reparations to address past wrongs have added to a shift in sentiment across the region.

Britain has so far rejected calls for reparations. On the issue of removing the monarchy as head of state, Buckingham Palace usually says such matters are for the local people and politicians to decide. On a visit to the Bahamas in 2022, Prince William - who is now heir to the throne - said he supports and respects any decision Caribbean nations make about their future.

The Jamaica bill - which could be debated in parliament as early as this month or next - would have to be ratified in a referendum if passed. Before that, some critics - including the opposition People's National Party (PNP) - are raising objections to how a future president would be selected, what his or her role would be, and which court should be Jamaica's final court of appeal.

Steven Golding, head of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, founded more than a century ago by Jamaican civil rights leader Marcus Garvey, said the group and others had long advocated for the removal of "the last vestiges of the colonial umbilical cord".

But he added: "We must make sure that it's not a cosmetic surgery being done... we don't want to swap having a British monarch... to having a titular president. I would like to see an executive president, directly elected by the people."

Longstanding calls by some Jamaicans to abolish the monarchy picked up steam after Barbados, another former colony in the Caribbean, removed the late Queen Elizabeth as head of state in 2021. Holness told Prince William during a visit by the royal in 2022 that his country wanted to be "independent".

A survey by pollster Don Anderson in 2022 showed 56% of people in Jamaica wanted the monarch removed, up from 40% a decade earlier.

According to the government's bill, Charles' representative in Jamaica - the governor general - would be replaced by a president nominated by the prime minister in consultation with the opposition leader.

Classifieds

PUBLIC HEARING

WAKE COUNTY PUBLIC HEARING FOR DRAFT U.S. HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT (HUD) PLANS

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN THAT Wake County will hold a public hearing on Monday, March 17, 2025 at 2:00 PM in the Wake County Justice Center, 300 S. Salisbury Street, Raleigh, 2nd Floor, Room 2700. To sign up to speak, submit a comment, or livestream the meeting, please visit: <https://www.wakegov.com/departments-government/board-commissioners/meetings-schedules-materials/meeting-schedule>

The purpose of the public hearing is to gather feedback on the draft plans for submission to HUD for federal entitlement funding. The plans include the 2025-2030 Consolidated Plan, 2025 Action Plan, and 2025-2030 Analysis of Impediments (AI) to Fair Housing.

The 2025-2030 Consolidated Plan outlines the goals and programs to address the housing, homelessness, and community development needs in Wake County, outside of Raleigh. The 2025 Action Plan details the activities to be carried out from July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2026, in the same geographic area. The AI is a required study that examines barriers to fair housing choice and offers recommended actions.

For more information, please contact Wake County Department of Housing Affordability & Community Revitalization at (919) 856-5689 or at housing.info@wake.gov. Speech or hearing-impaired persons may contact 1-800-735-2962 (TT) or 1-800-735-8262 (voice).

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Business & Finance

Echoing DOGE, Republicans Begin To Probe NC Government Agencies

NC Newsline—Republicans in the North Carolina legislature have begun summoning government leaders to answer a series of questions: What do you do? How do you do it? And how does it benefit the state?

The House Oversight Committee began its inquiries Thursday, hearing testimony from three new appointees of Gov. Josh Stein, two appointees of former Gov. Roy Cooper, and the state's newly elected Republican treasurer.

House Majority Leader Brendan Jones (R-Columbus), a chair for the committee, said it was the first in a "series of hearings" to evaluate if agencies are "effective and efficient."

"That's why we're here, to oversee, to ask what's working and what's not working," Jones said. "We want to know if North Carolinians are getting what they pay for."

The new scrutiny from state lawmakers echoes Elon Musk's "DOGE" office, which has over the past months sought to identify and cut swaths of the federal government. And though North Carolina lawmakers have not indicated that they want major cuts of their own, they have promised stricter oversight under a new governor's administration.

House Speaker Destin Hall (R-Caldwell) has formed a "government efficiency" committee of his own — tasked with identifying "potential waste" and examining "excess" state property. That panel, distinct from the House Oversight Committee, has yet to formally meet.

And lawmakers overseeing hurricane recovery continue to probe ReBuild NC, the homebuilding program that has racked up a major deficit and struggled with mismanagement. Any money sent to the ongoing recovery efforts for Hurricane Helene will be closely tracked, law-



North Carolina Rep. Brian Echevarria (R-Cabarrus) looks on as McKinley Wooten, Jr., secretary-designate of the Department of Revenue, testifies for a House committee on Feb. 27, 2025. (Photo: Galen Bacharier/NC Newsline)

makers have said.

Other Republican-led states have sought to mirror Musk's efforts in their own states. Iowa launched a task force earlier this month; Florida's committee will dive into university operations and spending.

"Everyone's excited about DOGE," said Rep. Brian Echevarria (R-Cabarrus).

Multiple Democrats on the panel were more dubious.

"I don't know anyone that's excited about DOGE," responded Rep. Zack Hawkins (D-Durham). "Maybe him [Echevarria]."

Rep. Amber Baker (D-Forsyth) said she would stay away from using "national terminology," and instead focus on the state specifically.

"I don't think anybody doesn't want us to look at how to be more

efficient in things we do," Baker said. "I won't disrespect the people sitting here, to somehow imply you guys aren't doing all you can to be efficient."

Among those topics probed by lawmakers Thursday was diversity, equity and inclusion programming within government.

DEI, which in the past has referred to hiring practices, internal training or specific programming, has emerged as a flashpoint for conservative criticism. President Donald Trump has called for the "elimination" of DEI across the federal government.

North Carolina Republicans are also taking aim at it — as multiple state departments take steps to distance themselves from the term.

After Echevarria read from the

Department of Revenue's mission statement, which included a section about "diversity and inclusion," the agency's director said it was from the previous administration and would "not be included" in their new strategic plan.

There were "DEI practices that were encouraged" from the state's HR office, director McKinley Wooten, Jr. said. The department did not have a specific DEI program, he added, and would be unaffected by legislation removing DEI from government.

Asked a similar question, budget director Kristin Walker said she had her team "strive to create a welcoming environment in our office."

"We absolutely do have to have the best and brightest."

Two newly elected Republicans have also pledged to get rid of any traces of DEI within their departments — State Treasurer Brad Briner and Auditor Dave Boliek.

Wooten, Briner and Walker all testified in front of the House panel Thursday. They were joined by State Controller Nels Rosland — a Cooper appointee, like Walker — as well as Joey Hopkins, the transportation secretary, and Wayne Goodwin, the soon-to-depart DMV commissioner.

The state's budget director also signaled Thursday that use of artificial intelligence could become more commonplace soon.

Asked whether artificial intelligence could play a role in detecting government waste, Walker said the state's Department of Information Technology was "soon going to allow state agencies access to Microsoft Copilot." Copilot is an AI tool used increasingly in workplace to automate some tasks — particularly connected to Microsoft's suite of other apps.



Target Corporation's stock plummeted by approximately \$27.27 per share by the end of February, erasing about \$12.4 billion in market value. The drop came on February 28, the designated economic blackout day, and coincided with mounting backlash over the retailer's decision to abandon its diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) commitments.

The National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA) has taken action through its Public Education and Selective Buying Campaign. NNPA President and CEO Dr. Benjamin F. Chavis Jr. said, "Black consumers helped build Target into a retail giant, and now they are making their voices heard. If corporations believe they can roll back diversity commitments without consequence, they are mistaken."

Reverend Jamal Bryant, pastor of New Birth Missionary Baptist Church in Georgia, has led calls for a "40-Day Target Fast," urging Black consumers to withhold their spending at the retailer. "Black people spend \$12 million a day at Target," Bryant said. "If we withhold our dollars, we can make a statement that cannot be ignored."

The NAACP also issued a Black Consumer Advisory in response to Target's DEI rollback, warning Black consumers about corporate retreat from diversity initiatives. The advisory urges them to support businesses that remain committed to investing in Black communities.

Target is also facing legal battles. Shareholders have filed lawsuits challenging the company's DEI policies, arguing that the commitments hurt financial performance. Meanwhile, conservative groups have sued over Target's diversity efforts, claiming they discriminated against white employees and other groups.

"Consumers have the power to demand change, and Target is learning that lesson the hard way," Chavis said.

Classifieds



NOTICE TO SUBCONTRACTOR BIDDER PRE-QUALIFICATION REQUEST FOR THE RALEIGH-DURHAM AIRPORT AUTHORITY TERMINAL 2 EXPANSION - PKG 1B - NORTH STRUCTURE & ENABLING WORK

Balfour Beatty / Metcon is seeking to pre-qualify trade contractors to submit bids for the furnishing of labor, material, and equipment for the following project: **RDU Terminal 2 Expansion - PKG 1B - North Structure & Enabling Work**. Balfour Beatty / Metcon has been selected as the Construction Manager at Risk (CMR) for the project and will receive bids from and contract with the principal contractors for the execution of the work. The preliminary budget for this project is approximately \$32,320,000. **Minority Owned Small Business (MSB) participation and Women Owned Small Business (WSB) participation goals will be set for each individual bid package. Refer to the bid manual documents once issued for information on your specific package.**

Similar project experience will be considered during prequalification. **Anticipated Bid Date will be March 18, 2025.** This is not a request for bid, however, only subcontractors who have completed a prequalification package, and been deemed prequalified for this project, will be considered for a bid on this project. Submittals for prequalification forms may be hand delivered mailed, or submitted electronically. **Deadline for prequalification submission is 14 days prior to Bid Date.** The CMR and Authority reserve the right to reject any and all Pre-qualifications. Contracting method will be through Competitive Bid in accordance with Chapter 143 of the NC General Statutes. For further information or questions, please contact **Bobby DelVecchio at 860-965-0813, or by email at: RDUprequal@balfourbeattyus.com.**

Updated prequalification documents can be accessed through the Balfour Beatty plan room under "RDU Terminal 2 Expansion - PKG 1B - North Structure & Enabling Work -

PREQUALIFICATION at the below link: <https://app.buildingconnected.com/public/5430e7a75cdc2e0300dd757d>

Mailed or hand delivered submittals shall go to the following address:

Daisy Vargas
1001 Cemetery Road
Balfour Beatty Office Trailer
Morrisville, NC 27560



NOTICE TO SUBCONTRACTOR BIDDER PRE-QUALIFICATION REQUEST FOR THE RALEIGH-DURHAM AIRPORT AUTHORITY TERMINAL 2 EXPANSION - PKG 1C - NORTH UTILITIES & EARLY PROCUREMENT

Balfour Beatty / Metcon is seeking to pre-qualify trade contractors to submit bids for the furnishing of labor, material, and equipment for the following project: **RDU Terminal 2 Expansion - PKG 1C - North Utilities & Early Procurement**. Balfour Beatty / Metcon has been selected as the Construction Manager at Risk (CMR) for the project and will receive bids from and contract with the principal contractors for the execution of the work. The preliminary budget for this project is approximately \$9,550,000. **Minority Owned Small Business (MSB) participation and Women Owned Small Business (WSB) participation goals will be set for each individual bid package. Refer to the bid manual documents once issued for information on your specific package.**

Similar project experience will be considered during prequalification. **Anticipated Bid Date will be March 25, 2025.** This is not a request for bid, however, only subcontractors who have completed a prequalification package, and been deemed prequalified for this project, will be considered for a bid on this project. Submittals for prequalification forms may be hand delivered mailed, or submitted electronically. **Deadline for prequalification submission is 14 days prior to Bid Date.** The CMR and Authority reserve the right to reject any and all Pre-qualifications. Contracting method will be through Competitive Bid in accordance with Chapter 43 of the NC General Statutes. For further information or questions, please contact **Bobby DelVecchio at 860-965-0813, or by email at: RDUprequal@balfourbeattyus.com**

Updated prequalification documents can be accessed through the Balfour Beatty plan room under "RDU Terminal 2 Expansion - PKG 1C - North Utilities & Early Procurement -

PREQUALIFICATION" at the below link: <https://app.buildingconnected.com/public/5430e7a75cdc2e0300dd757d>

Mailed or hand delivered submittals shall go to the following address:

Bobby DelVecchio
1001 Cemetery Road
Balfour Beatty Office Trailer
Morrisville, NC 27560



NOTICE TO SUBCONTRACTOR BIDDER PRE-QUALIFICATION REQUEST FOR RALEIGH-DURHAM AIRPORT AUTHORITY LUMLEY ROAD RELOCATION

Balfour Beatty Construction is seeking to pre-qualify heavy civil roadway, electrical, and utility contractors to submit bids for the furnishing of labor, material, and equipment for the following project: **RDU Lumley Road Relocation**. Balfour Beatty Construction has been selected as the Construction Manager at Risk (CMR) for the project and will receive bids from and contract with the principal contractors for the execution of the work. The preliminary budget for this project is approximately \$54,000,000. **The goal for this project is 20% for Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) participation.**

Similar project experience will be considered during prequalification. **Anticipated Bid Date will be April 22, 2025.** This is not a request for bid, however, only subcontractors who have completed a prequalification package, and been deemed prequalified for this project, will be considered for a bid on this project. Submittals for prequalification forms may be hand delivered, mailed, or submitted electronically.

Deadline for prequalification submission is 14 days prior to Bid Date. The CMR and Authority reserve the right to reject any and all Pre-qualifications. The contracting method will be through Competitive Bid in accordance with Chapter 143 of the NC General Statutes. For further information or questions, please contact **Jose Hinojosa at 919-602-4610, or by email at: RDUprequal@balfourbeattyus.com.**

Updated prequalification documents can be accessed through the Balfour Beatty plan room under "RDU LUMLEY ROAD RELOCATION - PREQUALIFICATION" at the below link: <https://app.buildingconnected.com/public/5430e7a75cdc2e0300dd757d>

Mailed or hand delivered submittals shall go to the following address:

Jose Hinojosa
1001 Cemetery Road
Balfour Beatty Office Trailer
Morrisville, NC 27560