

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 8, 2024

General Gregory M. Guillot
Commander, North American Aerospace Defense
Command and U.S. Northern Command
250 Vandenberg Street
Peterson SFB, CO 80914

Dear General Guillot:

Western North Carolina is facing unprecedented devastation due to the high winds and flooding caused by Hurricane Helene. North Carolinians are grateful for the active-duty forces that have deployed from the XVIII Airborne Corps and others to provide search and rescue, route clearance, commodity distribution, and other vital support necessary to the recovery of our state. Understandably, there are questions about the speed that forces assigned to U.S. Northern Command (NORTHCOM) were deployed and operationalized in support of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and under the command and control (C2) of the North Carolina National Guard (NCNG) Dual Status Commander (DSC).

Hurricane Helene made landfall in Florida on Thursday, September 26th and dumped rain in North Carolina through Friday, September 27th, causing massive flooding. On Wednesday, October 2nd, President Biden approved a Major Disaster Declaration and “directed the Department of Defense [DoD] to deploy up to 1,000 active-duty soldiers to support the delivery of food, water, and other critical commodities to communities impacted by Hurricane Helene.”¹ My staff was made aware that units from XVIII Airborne Corps may have been issued “prepare to deploy orders” (PTDO) as early as the day prior, Tuesday, October 1st. By the evening of Friday, October 4th, however, less than half of the 1,000 troops were deployed to Western North Carolina and conducting operations. On Sunday, October 6th, the remainder of the 1,000 troops were finally operationalized and President Biden ordered an additional 500 active-duty troops to deploy to impacted areas.²

¹ Fact Sheet, The White House, UPDATE: Biden-Harris Continues Life-Saving Response Efforts in Response to Hurricane Helene (October 3, 2024), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2024/10/02/fact-sheet-update-biden-harris-continues-life-saving-response-efforts-in-response-to-hurricane-helene/>.

² Fact Sheet, The White House, UPDATE: Biden-Harris Administration Sparing No Resource to Support Communities Impacted by Hurricane Helene (October 6, 2024), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2024/10/06/fact-sheet-update-biden-harris-administration-sparing-no-resource-to-support-communities-impacted-by-hurricane-helene/>.

While these deployments are very much necessary and welcome, they were far too slow. That's why Senator Tillis and I made the difficult decision on the evening of Friday, October 4th to issue a joint statement calling for "an active-duty military leader who has extensive experience with operations of this magnitude to lead moving forward."³ Given the "unprecedented extent of the devastation and complexity of search and rescue operations,"⁴ we were concerned that the DSC required additional active-duty support including planning staff, information collection analysts, and advanced technological assets to provide greater situational awareness and improve C2 of operations. Many of these assets and resources are not normally available to the NCNG or other state Joint Force Headquarters day-to-day. Such resources have now been provided and the pace and scale of rescue and recovery operations seems to have drastically improved.

NORTHCOM's responsibility to provide C2 of DoD homeland defense efforts and to coordinate defense support of civil authorities (DSCA) will increasingly become important as severe weather events are becoming more frequent, and we can no longer assume the continental United States is safe from conventional attack from adversaries such as China.

As a member of the Armed Services Committee, it is my duty to conduct oversight and ensure that NORTHCOM has the authorities and resources necessary to respond to threats to the homeland—whether natural or manmade—and to capture lessons learned that may require congressional action, including passage of new policies or reporting requirements in the National Defense Authorization Act. To better assess NORTHCOM's ability to successfully fulfill its missions of homeland defense and DSCA moving forward, please provide detailed responses to the following questions not later than December 1, 2024:

1. What dates and times were requests for assistance (RFAs) made by FEMA, the Governor of North Carolina, and/or NCNG and what were the specific requests?
2. What dates and times were PTDOs issued to XVIII Airborne Corps, or any other active-duty units or personnel, assigned for Hurricane Helene response? Please provide a copy of such orders or official correspondence related to such PTDOs.
3. What military services have provided active-duty forces to NORTHCOM for Hurricane Helene response and what types of units or personnel were activated?
4. What dates and times were such forces assigned to NORTHCOM for Hurricane Helene response?
5. What time on October 2nd was Brigadier General Charles Morrison officially assigned as the DSC for North Carolina?
6. What dates and times were active-duty forces assigned by NORTHCOM to the DSC and/or in support of FEMA?

³ Press Release, Senators Thom Tillis and Ted Budd, Budd & Tillis Joint Statement on Helene Response Operations (October 4, 2024), <https://www.budd.senate.gov/2024/10/04/budd-tillis-joint-statement-on-helene-response-operations/>.

⁴ *Id.*

7. What date and time was the advanced echelon of ground forces ordered to initiate movement from Fort Liberty and conduct operations, by who, to where, and what for?

8. What date and time was Task Force Castle ordered to initiate movement from Fort Liberty and conduct operations, by who, to where, and what for?

9. What dates and times were the remainder of the previously authorized 1,000 active-duty forces ordered to initiate movement and conduct operations, by who, to where, and what for?

10. What dates and times were additional active-duty planning staff, information collection analysts, and advanced technological assets provided by NORTHCOM or assigned forces to improve the DSC's situational awareness and C2 capabilities? What specific advanced technological assets were provided?

11. Please provide a copy of all mission assignments issued for active-duty forces to support FEMA and/or the NCNG.

12. What authorities does NORTHCOM have to immediately provide disaster response when civilian authorities are unavailable or incapable of providing RFAs?

13. In the event a Governor or Dual Status Commander is unavailable, incapable, or slow to provide command and control (C2) of assigned active-duty forces following an RFA, what legal authorities does the NORTHCOM Commander have to deploy or provide C2 of active-duty forces in the continental United States for disaster response?

14. In the event of a conventional attack on the United States by a nation state, what legal authorities and capabilities does the NORTHCOM Commander have to deploy aerial and ground forces and provide C2 of those forces in homeland defense efforts, including the protection of military installations and critical infrastructure?

15. What legal, policy, or practical limitations exist on the assignment, mobilization, deployment, and/or employment of forces by NORTHCOM, whether for homeland defense or DSCA?

In the event any of your responses, particularly those that may implicate homeland defense, require classified responses, I request that those responses be sent separately so that as much information as possible can be made available for the public record.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this critical matter.

Sincerely,



Ted Budd
United States Senator

CC:

General Steven S. Nordhaus, Chief, National Guard Bureau

Major General M. Todd Hunt, Adjutant General, North Carolina National Guard