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UNC Asheville celebrates Class of 2026



Graduates sit during UNC Asheville's spring commencement ceremony on May 9 at Kimmel Arena in Asheville. More than 400 students were recognized during the university's two commencement ceremonies.



Graduates walk to Kimmel Arena before UNC Asheville's spring commencement ceremony on May 9 in Asheville. More than 400 students were recognized during the university's two commencement ceremonies.



A UNC Asheville graduate smiles after receiving her diploma during the university's spring commencement ceremony on May 9 at Kimmel Arena in Asheville. PHOTOS BY JOSH BELL / ASHEVILLE CITIZEN TIMES

Higher energy bills, after NC's cold winter

Greg Childress
NC Newsline

After a multi-week cold snap this past winter, Carol Hardison, CEO of Crisis Assistance Ministry in Charlotte, braced for a surge in requests for help paying higher utility bills.

After seeing spikes in their own bills, longtime donors began calling the nonprofit to ask how they could help.

"The donors knew they could absorb the spike, but they started thinking about the people here," Hardison said.

The nonprofit that Hardison oversees provides emergency assistance to families facing financial crises. It and others across the state are seeing increasing demand for financial assistance in the wake of a widening affordability crisis.

Near-record gas prices, higher food costs, higher home energy costs and stagnant wages are stretching many household budgets to the breaking point.

A cold snap in January and February that brought freezing temperatures and higher heating bills didn't help.

"When the utility bill goes up and spikes, they come to us because there's not that kind of room in a budget that's paycheck-to-paycheck with the high cost of living here," Hardison said. "People think about having to pay rent, put food on the table, and sometimes utilities have to be sacrificed."

Gas and electric bills are generally higher in winter months, but the big surge in requests for assistance doesn't usually come until the spring, Hardison said.

"Sometimes it's late and then sometimes they're close to getting cut off,"

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American cruise passenger tests positive

Diagnosis brings number of hantavirus cases to 9

Nicole Fallert, Natalie Neysa Alund, Melina Khan, Thao Nguyen, Swapna Venugopal Ramaswamy and Daniel de Visé

USA TODAY

Two more people, including an American, have tested positive for hantavirus after being evacuated from a luxury cruise ship hit by a deadly outbreak, health authorities said, as Spain prepared on May 11 to evacuate and repatriate the last passengers remaining on the vessel.

A French passenger who was evacuated from the MV Hondius tested positive for the virus and her condition is de-

teriorating, French Health Minister Stephanie Rist said May 11.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services said May 10 that one of the 17 Americans being repatriated had tested "mildly positive" for the Andes strain of the virus, while a second had shown mild symptoms. The two people were transferred to Atlanta for further testing, officials said at a May 11 news briefing from the University of Nebraska, where the American passengers were flown for examination.

"Over the next several days, passengers will undergo an initial health assessment and receive guidance on next steps from the CDC experts," said John Knox, the principal deputy assistant secretary for the Administration for

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The Dutch-flagged cruise ship MV Hondius sails next to a tanker May 11 during a refueling operation on the island of Tenerife in Spain's Canary Islands.

JORGE GUERRERO/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

