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Protesters gather on Halifax Mall for the May Day teacher's march and protest in Raleigh on Friday.

Teachers descend on Raleigh in battle for better pay

BY OBSERVER AND NEWS & OBSERVER STAFF REPORTS

Downtown Raleigh was filled Friday with thousands of teachers and public education supporters in what was promoted as one of the biggest labor actions in the state's history.

The North Carolina Association of Educators mobilized teachers from across the state to march on the Legislative Building to demand higher pay, more school funding and higher taxes on corporations.

The "Kids Over Corporations" march had statewide ramifications since at least 22 school districts canceled classes because so many of their employees requested the day off.

Friday's event was the first time NCAE has organized a mass march since it brought thousands of people to downtown Raleigh in May 2018 and May 2019.

The crowd roared as Tamika Walker Kelly, NCAE president, said more than 20 school districts were closed. "Thousands of you are here," Walker Kelly continued. "Educators and parents and students in these streets in Raleigh because we know where the power really lives. It is right here."

Three buses full of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools educators made the trip to Raleigh Friday morning, and for Demina Gaskin, participating was never a question. She works in instructional support at Briarwood Elementary School in Charlotte. She said the lack of a state budget is the most challenging part of her job right now.

"The budget not being passed impacts everything," Gaskin said. "It affects where we live, what we eat, if we can afford gas or not... If you're working a second or third job, you can't show up as your best for your students."

Anderson Clayton, chair of the N.C.

Democratic Party, donned a reflective neon yellow vest as she prepared to join the marchers.

"My sister is a seventh-grade science teacher, and I'm tired of a state legislature who is consistently telling my teacher — and also teachers across the state just like her — that they're not worth the raises that they deserve right now," Clayton said. "We've spent almost over 300 days with the state legislature not passing a budget and not doing their jobs, and somehow they've managed to come to Raleigh and do everything else but that."

State lawmakers didn't meet Friday during the protest. But the march was one of the flagship events for the nationwide May Day Strong Movement. A coalition of labor, immigration, civil rights and education groups held more 3,500 May Day Strong events on Fri-

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Duke Energy rate hike prompts fears of tough trade-offs

BY NORA O'NEILL
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For speaker after speaker inside a Mecklenburg County courtroom Wednesday night, Duke Energy's proposed rate hike wasn't about percentages or filings, it was about whether another jump in monthly bills could mean skipping meals, delaying medical care or sweating through a North Carolina summer without air conditioning.

Customers who testified before the North Carolina Utilities Commission described already rationing heat, keeping lights off, combining errands to save gas and watching paychecks disappear under the weight of groceries, prescriptions and utility bills. Some said they were already making painful tradeoffs long before Duke Energy Carolinas asked regulators to approve another increase.



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Former Charlotte mayor Jennifer Roberts speaks during a rally outside the Mecklenburg County Courthouse in Charlotte on Wednesday. Roberts joined others for a rally in response to Duke Energy's request to increase residential customer's bills. The rally preceded a North Carolina Utilities Commission hearing.

Now, with the utility seeking roughly an 18% residential rate hike, about \$20 to \$30 more per month for many households, several customers told regulators they are running out of room.

"Families across District 99 and across North Carolina are already managing rising costs for housing, groceries, transportation," Veleria Levy, representative-elect for NC House District 99 in northeast Charlotte, testified Wednesday. "Adding another recurring expense at this level will force real

tradeoffs for many households, including my own."

The Charlotte hearing was the latest stop in Duke Energy Carolinas' statewide rate case, a monthslong regulatory process that will help determine whether millions of customers across much of North Carolina will pay more for electricity. Duke has said the increase is needed to support grid reliability, infrastructure and future energy

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Charlotte bans home car washes, limits lawn watering

BY NICK SULLIVAN
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Charlotte Water will institute its steepest water restrictions since 2009 as drought conditions continue to worsen.

Beginning May 15, residents will face new limitations on when they can water their lawns and will no longer be allowed to wash their cars at home, according to the Charlotte Water website. Violators could face fines starting at \$100.

The measures are intended to reduce water use by at least 5-10% as Charlotte enters its ninth month of below-average rainfall. The 11 reservoirs in the Catawba-Watawbe Basin — and the streams that feed into them — have depleted below normal levels, according to the local Drought Management Advisory Group. Charlotte's tap water supply comes primarily from Mountain Island Lake and Lake Norman, both part of the Catawba-Watawbe Basin.

Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation will also implement a burn ban across its park system Monday to reduce wildfire risk. Flame-producing items prohibited until conditions improve include: charcoal, propane and gas grills; fire pits and open flames; candles; and any outdoor burning.

Parts of Mecklenburg, Cabarrus and Union counties are experiencing the worst drought conditions in the state, according to a U.S. Drought Monitor map released Thursday. All Charlotte-area counties are under extreme or exceptional drought, which are the worst of five classification levels.

"Utilities and large users are implementing the required protocol measures, and we need residents and businesses to immediately cut back on nonessential water use," Jimmy Bagley, deputy city manager for Rock Hill and chair of the Catawba-Watawbe Water Management Group, said in a news release. "Every day of conservation matters — and acting early can help prevent even tougher restrictions in the weeks ahead."

Charlotte and surrounding areas instituted voluntary water restrictions in April, the second of five drought response stages. The city moved to the third stage on Friday, which is no longer optional.

Under this stage, the following restrictions are in effect for Charlotte:

- No washing vehicles at home. Commercial car washes are allowed

- No filling residential swimming pools. Pool top-offs are only allowed on Thursdays and Sundays before 6 a.m. or after 6 p.m.

- No power washing surfaces for non-essential purposes

- No operating decorative water features that don't support aquatic animal life

- Lawn and landscape watering is limited to two days per week, before 6 a.m. or after 6 p.m.:

- Odd-numbered addresses: Tuesdays and Saturdays

- Even-numbered addresses: Wednesdays and Sundays

Hand watering and drip irrigation is still allowed for plants and gardens, according to Charlotte Water. Customers are asked to

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