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NC Health Plan moves some Atrium hospitals to mid-tier for 2027

BY LUCIANA PEREZ URIBE GUINASSI
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Patients at some Atrium hospitals and associated clinics no longer will see higher out-of-pocket and deductible costs when North Carolina State Health Plan's new tiered hospital network takes effect next year.

A dozen of Atrium's hospitals and associated clinics will now

be included in the "Access" tier under the Plan's new tiered hospital network, taking effect Jan. 1, 2027, according to a news release from the treasurer's office and Atrium. "Access" is a mid-level tier in which members' costs will largely remain the same in 2027 as they were in 2026 when receiving care at those locations.

The decision comes after pushback from an earlier announcement that designated

the facilities as "non-preferred."

The revised designation represents an improvement for members who use those locations, who would have faced higher costs under Atrium's previous non-preferred designation.

The SHP serves nearly 750,000 teachers, state employees, retirees and their dependents across North Carolina.

"Our objective has always been clear and consistent — we must offer our members high-quality care for affordable prices," said state Treasurer Brad Briner, a Republican who oversees the State Health Plan, in a news release.

"For the Plan, that must include reduced prices from providers as compared to what they are charging today," Briner said. "This agreement includes meaningful affordability com-

mitments from Atrium Health that help us improve access for members while supporting the long-term sustainability of the Plan.

"This new provider tier system, which has now forged partnerships with all of the state's leading hospital systems, is putting us on the right path."

In an effort to reduce health-care costs and improve the

SEE HEALTH PLAN, 14A



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A view of an old house and chimney in the rural Person County countryside with the stacks of the Roxboro Steam Plant in the background. Duke Energy is now building new hydrogen-capable, combined-cycle natural gas units at the Roxboro Plant on Hyco Lake in Person County, North Carolina.

EPA repeals climate pollution limits for power plants

BY LILY CAREY
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Most coal- and natural gas-fired power plants in North Carolina no longer will face federal limits on their greenhouse gas emissions, drawing pushback

from state leaders and environmental groups.

The Environmental Protection Agency announced on Monday the repeal of a 2024 rule put in place by the Biden administration, which limited greenhouse gas emissions from most existing fossil fuel-fired power

plants.

The limits were seen as a key way to curb the United States' contributions to climate change. Currently, the nation's power plants emit over 1.5 billion metric tons of greenhouse gases each year. Scientists agree that these gases trap heat in the Earth's

atmosphere, causing rising global temperatures and more frequent extreme weather events.

Under President Donald Trump, the EPA has attempted to shift away from renewable energy and toward fossil fuels, argu-

SEE POLLUTION, 4A

NC Democrats pull support for candidate over social posts

BY ESTHER FRANCES
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RALEIGH

After North Carolina House Democrats pulled its support for a candidate over controversial social media posts, the caucus said it still has "serious concerns" about the Republican incumbent candidate in the race.

Democrat Shelly Headen, who is running for a seat in the state legislature, is facing backlash and diminishing support over 2025 social media



Shelly Headen

posts that reference calls to violence. The Assembly first reported the controversy.

The NC House Democratic Caucus has released a statement calling Headen's post "unacceptable" and said they no longer would support Headen's candidacy.

Headen is challenging Rep. John Blust, a Guilford County Republican, in House District 62, which is in Guilford County.

Since the statement last week, Sam Lozier, the communications director for the House Democrats, told The News & Observer that Headen still remains a candidate and "any decision about continuing her

SEE CANDIDATE, 5A

City Council to discuss Raleigh's drought response plan

BY NOLAN WILKINSON
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Raleigh lifted its water restrictions last month after rebounding from the state's current drought, but how will it handle future droughts?

As the city grows, Raleigh leaders will have to decide how to meet increasing water demand. They could build another reservoir — an expensive proposition — or find another option.

But one NC State professor says the city does not need a new reservoir if it can be more

efficient with the resources it already has.

The City Council will meet at the municipal building on West Hargett Street in an 11:30 a.m. work session Tuesday to discuss the city's drought response plan and long-term water resources.

WHY DOES THE CITY NEED MORE WATER?

This year's drought originated in August 2025, when the state started seeing below-expected rainfall. By March 31, all of North Carolina's counties were in some stage of drought.

Raleigh implemented its stage

1 restrictions in April, which required residents to water their lawns only on certain days, alongside other restrictions.

The city made that decision, according to Assistant Raleigh Water Director Ed Buchan, because Falls Lake — its primary reservoir — was at 85% capacity.

The city's water restriction system is triggered based on the reservoir's water level, and Buchan said the lake had always been full in April, to his knowledge.

The restrictions proved in-

SEE WATER, 2A



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Shallow water surrounds part of a pedestrian bridge on the Mountains-to-Sea Trail at Falls Lake in Durham on Thursday, June 25, 2026. Raleigh was 18.59 inches below its average rainfall at the time, and Falls Lake, Raleigh's primary water source, was 5 feet below its target level.

