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In times of crisis, heroes abound

By Richard Eckstrom, S.C. Comptroller

While our state was largely spared the kind of Category 5 destruction that Hurricane Florence once threatened to bring our way, many people in the Pee Dee region are still reeling from the storm's impact.

As I write this, at least nine South Carolina lives have been lost and countless others upended by the storm and its aftereffects, with losses from catastrophic flooding a looming reality.

Our prayers and best wishes—as well as the material support of many—go out to those affected by loss.

For those spared the full wrath of a storm that once churned toward us with 140-mph winds, it's a good time to count our blessings. Those communities that were hit hardest have some very long, rough months ahead.

It's also a good time to take stock of the efforts of so many who prepare and work hard to keep us safe in times of emergency.

Disaster-preparedness officials work around-the-clock for days, monitoring forecasts and bracing for worst-case scenarios. After we've been hit, public safety officers, firefighters, EMS workers, and members of the State and National Guard protect neighborhoods, clear debris, and undertake treacherous rescue operations to save people stranded by flooding.

The men and women of the Highway Patrol and local sheriff's and police departments routinely put themselves in harm's way to protect us. During emergencies, not only do their hours increase but so do the risks they face. Their stepped-up patrols keep motorists safe and roads passable.

Countless city, county, and state workers are unrecognized heroes, putting in extra long hours to ensure that emergency plans are in place and vital services are kept running as smoothly as possible even as demands for those services soar. Utility workers labor feverishly, often with little or no rest, to restore our electricity and get our water running again. Churches, food pantries, and other charities shift into high gear and put out calls for donations, knowing each disaster leaves behind hurting people newly in need of help.

And enough can't be said about members of the local media, including our meteorologists, who dedicate themselves to making sure we have up-to-date information needed to stay safe.

Finally, we can take pride in the individual responses of ordinary South Carolinians who step up to play a role in recovery efforts. It's said that times of trial bring out the best in people, and we consistently prove that that's the case. We open our homes to evacuees, volunteer at shelters, organize charity drives, and contribute financially. Some of us climb over downed trees and trudge through floodwaters to personally assist in rescues. We clean up debris and help rebuild.

We give of ourselves for people we don't know, without expecting anything in return.

Natural disasters have a way of revealing aspects of our state that we don't always notice. They highlight the important work of men and women who on an average day we'd take for granted. They show us how people of differing backgrounds and professions can come together to overcome adversities. Natural disasters remind us of our state's true character: when the chips are down, we pull together and help each other. These are all things worth remembering in calmer weather as well.

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