

Dennis hangs around, threatens to settle in off Cape Hatteras

by Kathleen Curry And Stephanie Gibbs
Knight-Ridder Newspapers

CHARLOTTE, N.C. - Wilmington finally caught a break. Topsail Beach residents couldn't believe their good fortune. Morehead City and Atlantic Beach folks brushed off a few flooded streets and cheered. Hurricane Dennis bounced off the North Carolina coast Monday, buffeting the southeastern beaches with gusty winds and high surf but keeping its powerful eye about 100 miles offshore. But like a nagging cold, Dennis hung around and threatened to settle in off Cape Hatteras, making the northern Outer Banks miserable and confounding hurricane forecasters yet again.

At 8 p.m. EST Monday, Dennis was centered about 80 miles east/southeast of Cape Hatteras, moving east/northeast at 17 mph. The National Hurricane Center in Miami, Fla., predicts the storm will continue in that direction, but slow - and possibly stall - by late Tuesday.

Driving sand and surf sheared the Outer Banks with a vengeance

Monday, clawing at the barrier islands with 30-foot waves and gusts over 100 mph. And it doesn't appear to be leaving the area anytime soon.

drift back toward the coast," Jarrell said. "It has to go somewhere." Dennis may have contributed to three deaths. Two people were killed Monday in a head-on collision in the

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-Gloria Dedmon, resident of Wilmington

Sustained winds weakened to 90 mph Monday, dropping Dennis to a Category 1 hurricane, the mildest type. But it is a vast storm, with tropical-storm winds blowing nearly 300 miles north of the eye. And by late Monday, Dennis had slowed its march east/northeast, bumping into a cold front that swooped across North Carolina and Geneva and it will be sitting there with a couple of days of really nasty weather. "It could even begin to

coastal Onslow County community of Richlands. Authorities said the two died about 7:30 a.m. as winds gusted up to 60 mph winds and heavy rain pounded the area. A surfer's death at St. Augustine Beach, Fla., on Saturday was believed due to heavy surf from Dennis.

The southern N.C. coast, meanwhile, reopened to relieved residents and vacationers Monday. Damage was minor, beach erosion mild and

morale high. "I've been surprised every time I've gone outside at how little damage there is," said Cecil Logan, Brunswick County emergency services director. "It's like all our hopes were answered."

By lunchtime Monday, residents of the barrier island beaches of Brunswick County and the Wilmington area were almost giddy with their triumph. Dennis was the fourth hurricane in as many years to threaten the southeastern N.C. coast, and the first to leave without heavy damage. "This was like a big dog, all bark and no bite," said Stephen Dedmon of Wilmington, who lives about a block away from the Intracoastal Waterway. Added his wife, Gloria: "I'm just shocked. From the sound of the wind last night, I expected our roof to be gone, trees in the road, water standing up to my car wheels - the whole deal," she said. "But this is easy."

On Carolina Beach, Glenda Hurley was surveying the small amount of ceiling damage in her bedroom. She expected much

worse: her roof has always leaked badly or collapsed when hurricanes arrive. "This one spared us," she said. New Hanover County officials estimated a total of about \$200,000 property damage in Wilmington and the county's barrier island beaches, including Carolina, Kure and Wrightsville beaches, said Bill Clontz of the New Hanover County Joint Information Center. Other damage estimates were unavailable Monday night.

The most dramatic damage in southeastern N.C. may have been on Holden Beach, where one house collapsed in eroding sands. "We're glad that everybody did well; there's not a lot of damage like Fran," said Sally Gill of Wilmington, who was watching the waves at Wrightsville Monday afternoon. "We have a lot to be thankful for." Things were more grim farther up the coast. By 3 p.m., Route 12 from Nags Head to Hatteras Island flooded and was closed. Electricity was out across Hatteras. Most stores and restaurants that had opened Monday morning closed by noon as the wind picked up and driving became difficult. Wind gusts of 75 to 98 miles per hour

were recorded at the Coast Guard station in Buxton. At 1:49 p.m., a gust of 102 miles per hour was reported by the Hatteras Island Rescue Squad.

Charlie Belik, a clerk at the Ocean's Drive Thru convenience store in Buxton on Hatteras Island, said he and a co-worker drove from the Comfort Inn to the store across the street after the doors were blown off the store. "It was blowing so hard we couldn't even walk over," he said. "The inventory was everywhere," he said. "There were chips, popcorn and beer all over the place." Beach erosion has Outer Banks officials and residents as worried as the winds. A stalled hurricane will act like a belt sander, trimming the dunes with each wave.

They know that only too well at Wrightsville Beach, where tons of sand had to be trucked in after hurricanes in 1996 and 1998. This time, the sand stayed. "It doesn't look like there's a whole lot of erosion," said Michael Stokes, director of Wrightsville Beach Parks and Recreation. "Actually, it's beautiful. It washed all the trash away."

The White House Powers that be: two Clintons and a Gore

by Edwin Chen
Los Angeles Times

WASHINGTON - They were competitors from Day One. Vice President Al Gore won the West Wing office just 18 paces from the Oval Office. But first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton got to redesign health care, with a task force of 500. Gore's assignment? He got to reinvent government, beginning with a staff of two. Back then, at least Al and Hillary shared a common goal: advancing a rookie president's "New Democrat" agenda. But 6 years later, with Gore running for president, Mrs. Clinton eyeing a Senate bid in New York and a lame-duck Bill Clinton minding his legacy, three distinct and increasingly independent-minded power centers are cohabitating in the White House. And each side of the power triangle is staffed by loyalists doggedly representing the often competing interests of their high-octane bosses. "It's getting very interesting," an aide to Mrs. Clinton said with practiced understatement. Such tensions - now under the surface - could bubble up even more by autumn.

The three-way competition at 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. is unprecedented in American history, and it is complicating the relationships among the principals, with their every word and deed examined in microscopic detail for its possible impact on the other two. Although the elections of 2000 are 14 months off, the first lady and the vice president have begun staking out positions on issues that differ markedly from the president's.

Mrs. Clinton wants greater Medicare reimbursements for New York's teaching hospitals, which take a disproportionate share of the poor and the elderly. Her husband wants to use his muscle to get structural Medicare reform out of Congress, not better reimbursement levels for individual hospitals. Gore has proposed mandatory gun registration. Ever the pragmatist, Clinton is willing to settle for security checks on gun show purchases, figuring that's the most he can get out of Congress.

For his part, Gore is juggling his role as Clinton's loyal vice president with his political need to show independence. And sometimes they clash over emphasis: at a joint appearance in McAllen, Texas, in May, the topic was the economy. Clinton wanted to highlight those left behind in poverty. Gore wanted to highlight the administration's progress. After sev-

eral meetings and calls, Gore's aides prevailed. But Gore's speech was so rambling it was remembered largely as another example of his awkwardness at the podium. For her part, Hillary Clinton is clearly enjoying a chance, after 25 years as a loyal spouse, to step out on her own. She has not flinched at distancing herself from her husband's White House policies. Broaching the thicket of Middle East politics, she recently said she favors moving the American Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, the "eternal and indivisible capital of Israel." And she backed federal legislation to assure dairy farmers higher prices - a winning political issue in upstate New York that could drive up the price of milk for consumers nationally.

As for the president, he is doing all he can to explain both his vice president and his wife - confident their success will validate his policies. But he also has some policy goals of his own. Chief among them: He wants to make the long-term stability of Medicare and Social Security the crown jewel of his legacy. Gore might prefer a legislative stalemate that ensures him use of a potent issue - Medicare reform - against his Republican opponent in 2000. The three are competing behind the scenes for staff talent, campaign donations and even media attention.

In mid-June, Mrs. Clinton traveled to upstate New York to launch her "listening tour" as a prelude to a possible run for the Senate. At the same time, the president was conducting a cross-country poverty tour. The president got plenty of ink in the local markets he visited. But it was the first lady who drew the national cameras, including live coverage of her remarks by CNN. Hillary Clinton's camera magnetism is taking some attention from Gore. Aides say he doesn't begrudge her the spotlight. Others think he must resent the competition.

"After all his loyal service as vice president, Gore might have expected complete and total devotion (of the White House apparatus) to his candidacy for president," said Larry Sabato, a University of Virginia political scientist. Mrs. Clinton, a star fund-raiser for the Democrats, especially among women, has tried to soften the blow by appearing at Gore's side and hailing his record among female voters, who polls show do not flock to Gore's candidacy.

A senior Gore adviser said that a

Hillary Clinton candidacy does not "take away from the vice president's candidacy," but, heeded, "except to the extent that she's not going to be out there campaigning for him."

As the divergence inevitably grows, it also might serve to debunk the myth that the Clintons and the Gores are bosom buddies - an image that stems from their hofbo bus trips together during the 1992 campaign.

In fact, theirs was never much more than a marriage of convenience - as suggested by Gore's changing comments on Clinton's sex scandal and impeachment. On the day that

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-a top White House aide

the Republican-dominated House impeached the president, Gore described Clinton as "a man I believe will be regarded in the history books as one of our greatest presidents." But six months later, as Gore declared his own candidacy for the Oval Office, he repeatedly denounced Clinton's conduct in interviews as "awful" and "inexcusable." Those remarks (made while Clinton was attending a summit in Europe) reportedly angered and hurt the president, although Clinton later insisted that he took "no offense" at Gore's remarks, noting that the vice president's words were no harsher than those he himself had used during self-criticism.

In any case, the flap pointed up the delicate balancing act confronting Gore. With much of the public expressing what analysts call "Clinton fatigue," the vice president must distance himself from the man he hopes to succeed. Yet Gore can ill-afford much daylight between himself and Clinton on policies that have proven highly popular, especially those credited with producing the booming economy. Gore is facing a particu-

larly tough balancing act in light of recent allegations that some Russian politicians and mobsters are laundering money, including international aid funds, through the United States.

The vice president long has prided himself as a foreign policy maven - for instance, serving as head of a U.S.-Russian commission on bilateral relations. But amid new questions over whether it is wise for the Clinton administration so ardently to back a regime that might be rife with corruption, Gore's aides are energetically distancing him from any blame in the emerging scandal. The first lady also has faced a similar dilemma, according to White House aides.

Among the philosophical questions that Mrs. Clinton posed, said a senior administration official who has worked in the White House for both Mr. Clinton and Gore, were: "Where does everyone fit in? Am I a wife or an independent thinker?" The upshot is a logistical challenge of uncommon proportions, with aides working overtime to minimize conflicts among the president, the first lady and the vice president, ever-vigilant for opportunities to "amplify" the administration message by having them all articulate a common message simultaneously, if not at the same location, according to Ann Lewis, counselor to the president. "It's always been difficult trying to incorporate and schedule active people like the Clintons and the Gores. This just presents an additional challenge," said a top White House aide. "It's largely a question of figuring out our logistics and communicating our long-range plans that already have been set," said another White House staffer. But such synchronization is likely to become increasingly difficult. When the president appeared on the South Lawn recently to tout the comeback of the bald eagle - a premier environmental event - the country's best-known environmentalist, Gore, was not there, instead courting New Hampshire visitors at the National Folklife Festival on the Smithsonian Mall. "The vice president has his own campaign to run," explained a top West Wing staffer. Schedulers had more luck last month, arranging the visit of Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak so that Hillary Clinton could attend.

System Chancellor never asked Florida president to resign

by Joni James And Linda Kleindienst
The Orlando Sentinel

GAINESVILLE, Fla. - State University System Chancellor Adam Herbert said Wednesday he never asked University of Florida President John Lombardi to resign - nor did he ask him to stay. Herbert's comments, at an afternoon news conference in Tallahassee, came a day after Lombardi said he would step down Nov. 1 from the job he's held 9 1/2 years. Lombardi will become a UF history professor and lead a research institute. Herbert said he is searching for an experienced, out-of-state educator to serve as UF's interim president. Choosing Lombardi's permanent replacement could take close to a year. "It would be helpful to have someone coming on campus ... who has no prior involvement with the university," Herbert said. "I don't want any personality issues involved." Herbert previously picked interim presidents from other states. When he left the presidency at the University of North Florida in January 1998 to become chancellor, he brought in E.K. Fretwell, president-emeritus of the University of North Carolina-Charlotte, as interim president. And he is searching out-of-state for an interim president at the University of South Florida.

On Wednesday, Herbert echoed Lombardi in characterizing their negotiations the past week as cordial and positive. He said Lombardi - not him - first talked about leaving months ago. He said no recent incidents - including allegations just made public that Lombardi may have misused university resources for his daughter's wedding at the President's House in 1997 - played a role in the resignation. "The bottom line is, he was the first one to talk about other options," Herber said. The university system's inspector general is looking into questions about the wedding. "I have no evidence there has been a misuse of funds by the UF president, but there has been a question raised ... and we take our fiduciary duty very seriously," Herbert said. Herbert would not say where the allegations came from.

Lombardi said he paid for all expenses related to the wedding. When university personnel built a platform to cover the pool, they did so on their own time and were paid by him, he said. He also wrote the check for the materials used, he said. "I hiccup and somebody wants to audit me," said Lombardi, who spent much of his

first day as an outgoing president giving interviews. "That's fine. ... We knew at the time that everything the president does will be scrutinized."

While Lombardi offered to stay through the academic year, Herbert said that he didn't want that. "My feeling was, if it was to occur, it would be better for the university to do it sooner rather than later," Herbert said. Herbert's and Lombardi's remarks conflict with accounts from others - including the Board of Regents chairman. They said the chancellor, looking at producing an unflattering annual review for Lombardi next month, had sought Lombardi's resignation after he had stepped out of line one time too many. The final straw, several regents and others said, was

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- Adam Herber, a State University System Chancellor

when Herbert discovered Lombardi had given \$25,000 to \$39,000 in raises to four top administrators without consulting him. Those raises were in April, about the time some lawmakers were complaining to Herbert that university administrators' pay was too high. Dennis Ross, the regents' chairman, said Wednesday that he now understands Lombardi brought up the idea of leaving as Herbert started on Lombardi's annual evaluation process. "I think Adam (Herbert) affirmed that the timing made sense to him. ... But he did not initiate the discussion of leaving," Ross said. "It was a joint collaboration."

He said his concern over the salary raises did not play a role in Lombardi's departure. "Only two people ... know what we discussed," Herbert said. "There has been mischaracterizations across the state relative to our discussion." Lombardi said his successor won't have to worry about having a former president on campus. "The first rule of being a president is, when you're no longer a president, you never offer unsolicited advice," he said.