



Campaign Statement on Lake Lure Helicopter Incident

Chris Melton, a dedicated firefighter and community leader, has proven himself to be an exceptional individual, both in his professional and personal life. His influence and leadership have significantly shaped the careers of many, including myself, and I am proud to call him a friend.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

10/07/2024 – If you take the time to get to know Chris, you will quickly realize he is one of the most genuine, dependable, and admirable individuals you could ever interact with, and I am proud to call him my friend. In 2012, Chris encouraged me to join the Chimney Rock Volunteer Fire Department, which eventually led me to also serve with Lake Lure Fire and Rescue. I had the honor of working under him when he served as Assistant Chief and later Chief at Chimney Rock, and he was also a Lieutenant at Lake Lure during my time there. The leadership skills, professionalism, and integrity Chris continuously exhibits has not only influenced my approach as a manager, but also through a lifetime of friendship with him it has deepened my walk as a Christian. His example of servant leadership, always prioritizing others, has guided me in making decisions that put people first.

Chris is an exceptional Christian, a proven firefighter, and a respected leader in the community. His decisions, particularly in high-stakes situations, are driven by a commitment to the safety of personnel and the public. The recent actions in question have been clouded by misinformation but let me be clear—Chris acted with the utmost professionalism. On an emergency scene the safety of the emergency personnel is the number one priority. His priority was, and always will be, the safety of those on the ground.

On Saturday, September 28th, during the aftermath of Hurricane Helene, a helicopter pilot landed on Main Street in Chimney Rock without prior coordination with Incident

Command. This unplanned landing posed significant risks, as emergency personnel were in the midst of evacuation efforts, and the pilot's actions interfered with critical rescue operations. Rutherford County Emergency Management confirmed that all air rescues since the storm were being coordinated by State Emergency Management, following established procedures. The helicopter in question, however, did not follow those protocols, potentially endangering both emergency personnel and civilians.

In most agencies, media interactions are handled by department heads or the designated Public Information Officer (PIO) to ensure that accurate and unified information is shared with the public. Within the framework of the Incident Command System (ICS), this remains true. Chris, adhered to this protocol, leaving the media responses to appropriate officials such as the Town Manager, the Mayor, or the Rutherford County Emergency Management PIO. Handling the media in a high-stakes situation requires a careful balance of transparency and responsibility, and Chris respected this process.

If I am elected mayor, transparency will be a cornerstone of my administration, and in this case, transparency has been upheld. The media is essential to our society, but navigating media relations, especially in emergency situations, is not as simple as just making a statement. This was not a "no comment" scenario. Chris left official statements left to those authorized to speak to the media. I also believe the mayor's remarks regarding this incident were unclear and, at times, contradicted Rutherford County's official statements.

I, too, would have thanked the pilot for his willingness to volunteer, but I would have reiterated the crucial point: all helicopter rescues in this operation were conducted by trained professionals equipped for such missions. These pilots have the necessary medical personnel on board and access to on-the-ground communication to coordinate their efforts effectively. Uncoordinated actions, such as this pilot's landing, could have had serious consequences. What if he landed in an unstable area, endangering those on the ground? What if he blocked an emergency evacuation route? Years ago, during a medical air evacuation, a helicopter nearly propelled gravel like bullets, unaware of the risk it was creating on the ground—this danger was avoided only by ground personnel radioing the pilot. The recent helicopter pilot had no such communication, making the situation even more precarious

The systems in place, particularly ICS, are designed for safety and efficiency in large-scale operations. The National Incident Management System is intended to facilitate coordination between all responders (including all levels of government with public, private, and nongovernmental organizations). Every piece of the operation must be coordinated, and Incident Command is critical in maintaining control over all moving parts. The system has been tested and proven in countless emergencies across the nation, ensuring that operations run smoothly and safely. In this case, Chris upheld those standards, ensuring that safety remained the top priority for everyone involved.

About Crawford for Mayor

As a candidate for mayor, I am committed to ensuring that Lake Lure thrives through sound financial management, supporting local businesses, cutting regulations and improving public safety. My focus will be on managing our town's budget efficiently to ensure that we can lower taxes and ease the financial burden on both residents and businesses.

I believe that by cutting unnecessary expenses and focusing on essential services, we can maintain a low tax rate without sacrificing the quality of life in our town. My goal is to create an environment where local businesses can flourish, and our community can grow, all while keeping our residents safe through enhanced emergency services.

Lake Lure deserves leadership that values transparency, economic development, and fiscal responsibility. I am ready to work hard for the future of our town.