

**Reading #1: Basnight Lobbies for Coast (This article is reprinted with permission of *The News & Observer* of Raleigh, North Carolina, 2003)**

By Jerry Allegood, Staff Writer

COINJOCK --As Marc Basnight approaches the high-rise bridge over the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway in Currituck County, he reaches for his cell phone. "It'll be better reception up here," he explains as his Ford Explorer rises over the lowlands and backwaters that spread out for miles. He checks with his office in Raleigh, returns a call and snaps the phone back in its holder before heading to meet local officials. A call from Basnight..... can get things done.

After 19 years in the [state] Senate, he knows government terrain like he knows the flatlands of Eastern North Carolina where he was born and raised. Officially, he's leader of the Senate; unofficially, he's one of the state's most powerful politicians. The past few days, Basnight, 56, has been in fine form, unabashedly using his political and persuasive powers to speed government aid to northeastern North Carolina after its mugging by Hurricane Isabel. He's not reluctant to call Gov. Mike Easley or top officials of the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

His lobbying has helped focus state and federal assistance to repair N.C. Hwy. 12, the only highway down the Outer Banks, after it was battered by ocean overwash and severed on Hatteras Island. A fleet of yellow state Department of Transportation road graders and trucks hauled sand off the highway soon after the winds died down last week. He had his assistants working with federal agencies on a way to quickly fill in the new inlet near Hatteras Village.

Basnight said he gets personally involved because the beaches and the barrier islands are crucial to the local economy. Not only do tourists spend money, he said, but local residents build, paint, clean and staff beach houses and businesses. "This is a common man's beach," he says of the Outer Banks. "It's not a black-tie beach."

Over the years, Basnight has worn out a few vehicles traveling around to keep tabs on his domain. After Hurricane Dennis washed out a section of N.C. Hwy. 12 north of Buxton in 1999, Basnight drove his Chevy Suburban over the washout to reach the village. He was there before the NC National Guard came in with Humvees. *Business North Carolina* magazine dubbed him "Boss Basnight." The walls of his restaurant, the Lone Cedar Cafe, are adorned with photos of him posing with the powerful and famous: Billy Graham, Dean Smith, Andy Griffith, President Bush and former President Clinton. Still, Basnight is disarmingly folksy at home in the northeastern corner of the state.

During a tour of hurricane-damaged areas Thursday, he started the day by walking through Henry's Beef and Seafood Restaurant in Kill Devil Hills, shaking hands and asking people how they fared in the storm. "Is he a senator?" asked Richard Boyd of Dante, Va. Boyd didn't know the guy in casual shirt, white jeans and sneakers, but he gladly told him about the damage to his beach house in Kill Devil Hills. Others knew.

Restaurant operator Linda Ezzell snapped a photo of Basnight with Kitty Hawk Mayor Bill Harris and David Stick, a local historian and writer. On the way out of Dare County, Basnight noticed floodwater still standing around homes and businesses. He got on the phone to an aide in his office. "Get in touch with DOT," he said. "Tell them please get more pumps in here."

In Elizabeth City, Basnight met with local officials. He put his chief of staff, Rolf Blizzard, on a speaker phone to take down questions. Pasquotank County Manager Randy Keaton was upset with a FEMA decision not to pay for removing storm debris in subdivisions where roads are not part of state or local road systems. "If they (FEMA) cleaned up the Triangle during the ice storm, they sure better clean up this area from this storm," he said. Basnight agreed to look into the policy, which could add millions to the state and local bill for the Isabel cleanup.

In Colerain, a small Bertie County town on the Chowan River, he toured what was left of the Perry-Wynns fish company after it was hit by a wall of water pushed up the river. Nine of 11 buildings on the shoreline were destroyed, and the other two were left in shambles. A week after the hurricane, the shoreline was still littered with a massive pile of barrels that were used for salting fish. The 50-year-old company, which had about 10 employees, was once a major processor for herring caught in the Chowan and nearby waters but in recent years mainly packed herring, jumping mullet and mackerel caught elsewhere. "It's a family business," said co-owner and manager Lee Wynns. "We've just got to sit down and see what everyone feels about it. You derved well know I'd like to put it back."

On the way back to his Manteo home, Basnight said the nine-hour tour through nine counties had helped him better understand what the state needs to do to weather future storms. "The decisions we make will not affect just what it looks like," he said, "but how people feel about it."

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