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CITIZEN TIMES

SATURDAY, AUGUST 23, 2025 | CITIZEN-TIMES.COM

PART OF THE USA TODAY NETWORK

Asheville mayor seeking a 4th term

Sarah Honosky  
Asheville Citizen Times  
USA TODAY NETWORK

ASHEVILLE – Mayor Esther Manheimer announced Aug. 20 that she will run for a fourth term as the city’s top elected official, hoping to ensure Asheville’s long-term recovery from Tropical Storm Helene.

“I’m committed to Asheville and I’m



Manheimer

committed to our rebuilding and recovery effort,” she told the Citizen Times. “I recognize, as most people do, that certain aspects of this recovery are going to take several years.”

This includes helping manage the more than \$225 million in federal recovery funding the city is slated to receive.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development approved the city’s action plan in May. Once funds are in hand, it will have six years to spend them.

Manheimer, 54, has served on Asheville City Council since 2009 and been mayor for more than a decade — first elected in 2013, then again in 2017 and 2022. A graduate of Asheville High School, with degrees from UNC Chapel Hill, she is a land litigation attorney at the

Van Winkle Law Firm.

Her priorities include rebuilding public infrastructure more resiliently along the French Broad and Swannanoa rivers; helping the city’s economy recover; and addressing the affordable housing crisis, which was also a challenge before the storm.

Manheimer noted the city will see an

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Dan Pittillo counts tree rings to determine the age of a freshly cut oak on the Henson Ridge Loop in May. PHOTO BY FIONA HOWELL/COURTESY OF THE BLUE RIDGE BARTRAM TRAIL CONSERVANCY

Plant biology research was a lifelong passion for Pittillo



Word from the Smokies  
Frances Figart  
Columnist

Avid botanist, dedicated environmentalist, and lifelong educator Dr. J. Dan Pittillo passed away peacefully on Sunday, August 10, surrounded by family and friends, at the age of 86. This story, originally published in June 2021, celebrates his decades of contributions to natural science and environmental education in the Great Smoky Mountains region.

I met and became friends with Dr. Dan Pittillo through this column. He writes me an email every time one of my articles is published here; in fact, that’s how I know what day they run.

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Pittillo introduces visitors to the plants at Nodding Trillium Garden on the garden’s opening day in 2019. PHOTO BY HOLLY KAYS/COURTESY OF SMOKY MOUNTAIN NEWS

ANALYSIS

Trump, GOP on verge of big win in Texas

All-out redistricting war could help Republicans

Erin Mansfield  
USA TODAY

A partisan battle in Texas over who holds power in Washington during the final two years of President Donald Trump’s second term has unfurled into a nationwide debate drawing in top political figures as voters brace for another divisive election in 2026.

The Lone Star State’s GOP lawmakers were working to send new congressional maps to Republican Gov. Greg Abbott on Aug. 22 that Trump and his allies hope will give them a strategic advantage in holding onto their majority in the U.S. House.

But the fight in Austin has spread beyond the state’s borders and created significant uncertainty about who will be in position to govern during the second half of the Trump administration and after 2028 election.

“Game on,” New York Gov. Kathy Hochul wrote Aug. 20 in a social media post. She is one of several state leaders considering their own steps like the Texas Republicans to redraw congressional district borders inside their states.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom is another, and in his state, Democratic lawmakers want voters to decide in a Nov. 4 special election whether to redraw their maps. The California Legislature on Aug. 21 approved Newsom’s proposal on a ballot measure to suspend the state’s current congressional districts, drawn by an independent commission, and replace them.

GOP has upper hand if redistricting war expands

States typically redo their congressional boundaries for voters every decade, specifically in the two years that follow a new census. But Trump has encouraged redistricting to happen

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# MOUNTAINS

## August polls reveal Trump’s approval rating

Iris Seaton  
Asheville Citizen Times  
USA TODAY NETWORK

As the nation enters mid-August of 2025, another round of approval polls around President Donald Trump’s performance have arrived.

August 2025 headlines around the president revolve around a wide number of subjects. His opinion that the Smithsonian is “woke,” his interactions with Vladimir Putin and Volodymyr Zelenskyy, the possibility of ending mail-in voting and more.

On Aug. 7, the White House website published a news release on Trump’s 200th day in office for his second term. Here’s what polls show about American opinions on his work.

### What is Donald Trump’s approval rating?

- Here are the latest approval ratings released on Trump’s administration:
- Most recent Reuters/Ipsos polls surveyed 4,446 adults and showed 40% approval and 54% disapproval, a +14 net increase in disapproval.
  - Most recent Pew Research Center polls surveyed 3,505 adults and showed 38% approval and 60% disapproval, a +22 net increase in disapproval.
  - Most recent Hart Research Associates polls surveyed 1,000 adults and showed 46% and 51% disapproval, a +5 net increase in disapproval.
  - Most recent Emerson College polls surveyed 1,400 adults and showed 46% approval and 47% disapproval, a +1 net increase in disapproval.
  - Most recent Gallup polls surveyed 1,002 adults and showed 37% approval and 58% disapproval, a +21 net increase in disapproval.
  - Most recent Beacon Reasearch/Fox News polls surveyed 1,000 adults and showed 46% approval and 54% disapproval, a +8 net increase in disapproval.

### What is Trump’s approval rating in North Carolina?



President Donald Trump at the Oval Office of the White House on Aug. 18. KEVIN LAMARQUE/REUTERS

A study from Catawba College and YouGov published July 1 and conducted between June 10-26 found a **53% disapproval** rate for Trump among 1,000 N.C. respondents, and a **46% approval** rating.

These ratings included 45% of respondents who strongly disapproved and 8% who somewhat disapproved, as well as 30% who strongly approved and 16% who somewhat approved. In a previous study from Catawba conducted three months before the July 1 study, polls found Trump at 48% approval and 47% disapproval in the state.

### What is Gov. Josh Stein’s approval rating?

The Catawba/YouGov poll showed a

**53% approval** rating for Stein among N.C. residents and a **26% disapproval** rating.

### What is Sen. Thom Tillis’s approval rating?

The Catawba/YouGov poll showed a **30% approval** rating for Tillis among NC residents and a **44% disapproval** rating.

### How does Trump’s approval rating compare with his 1st term?

According to results from now-defunct polling website FiveThirtyEight, Trump had a final approval rating of **34%** when he left office in 2021. His approval average during his first term was **41%**.

### How does Trump’s approval rating compare with past presidents?

- Data compiled by USA TODAY found the following:
- Joe Biden - 40%
  - Donald Trump (first term) - 34%
  - Barack Obama - 59%
  - George W. Bush - 34%
  - Bill Clinton - 66%
  - George H.W. Bush - 56%
  - Ronald Reagan - 63%
  - Jimmy Carter - 34%
  - Gerald Ford - 53%
  - Richard Nixon - 24%
- Iris Seaton is the trending news reporter for the Asheville Citizen Times, part of the USA TODAY Network. Reach her at [iseaton@citizentimes.com](mailto:iseaton@citizentimes.com).*

## Pittillo

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He always tells me something I didn’t know about my topic, and he shows the kind of appreciation upon which interpretive writers and researchers thrive.

Dan’s own story is one worth telling. Countless conservation projects have succeeded thanks to Dan’s tenacity, including ones in the Joyce Kilmer–Slickrock Wilderness and Panthertown Valley Backcountry Area, along the Mountains-to-Sea and Bartram trails, and even in his own backyard—in 2019 he placed the Nodding Trillium Garden adjacent to his home under a conservation easement and opened its flowery paths to the public. He is responsible for conducting important plant surveys at the North Carolina Arboretum, Biltmore Estate, Blue Ridge Parkway, Balsam Mountain Preserve, and Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

After 40 years as a professor of biology at Western Carolina University in Cullowhee, North Carolina, Dan retired in 2004. But since then, he’s embarked on a whole new career. In 2007 he joined the board of Discover Life in America (DLiA), an official partner of Great Smoky Mountains National Park focused on cataloging biodiversity in the Smokies. That led to him becoming a part of a group of researchers that refers to itself as GRISLD—which stands for Gang of Researchers in Search of Life’s

Diversity.

“To get to a better estimate of the total number of species in the Smokies, we decided to jointly work on groups [of species] where we each have some field experience,” Dan explained, crediting his collaborator, retired National Park Service biologist Keith Langdon, with instigating the volunteer taskforce. “Yearly we report on our field activities and submit reports of rare, new-to-park, and new-to-science species we locate during the year.”

NPS officials check these GRISLD reports and add any new species recorded to the official species list. DLiA then reports the list to the public.

“The Smokies has had hundreds of scientists involved with assisting the park over its decades of existence, but few match up to the broad contributions of Dan Pittillo,” said Langdon. “Not only has he been an accomplished field ecologist who has worked in the park and throughout the Southern Appalachians, but he has been a professor who helped students get careers in field biology and ecology. It is often difficult to get scientists to share their knowledge in the many strategic plans, action plans, and environmental analyses that characterize how a national park makes decisions, but Dan has always made it a point to actively participate in these requests for involvement—and not just with the park, but with land management agencies and organizations throughout the Southern Appalachians. This is how needed changes get accom-

plished.”

Dan’s main research goals are discovering new species in the park as well as new range extensions—the maximum reaches—for plants.

“Most of my current focus is looking for special geology, searching for confined distributions,” Dan said. “Much of my recent effort is in the North Carolina portion of the park, where the latest geology map gives us a clue for more basic soil types.”

Dan has earned acclaim not only as a scientist, but also as an educator.

“Dan Pittillo is—wait for it—legendary!” said Geoff Cantrell, public communications specialist for WCU (at the time of this story’s original publication) and current chair of the Smokies Life Board of Directors. “The Western Carolina University professor emeritus of biology, author, former director of WCU’s Herbarium, and recipient of ‘state environmental educator of the year’ honors knows the region. And not just natural history and botany, but the terrain, key figures, and popular and unknown places alike. To have been on a field trip with Dan as the guide, in class with him when he was the instructor, in a program that he led, or a polite conversation across the table—are all times not likely to be forgotten.”

Something I find really fascinating about Dan is that he’s lived on the same property—which he and his late wife Jean named Nodding Trillium Garden—in Cullowhee since 1968. He loves to tell visitors about the native plants growing

there and what he has learned about them in more than half a century of observation.

“Let me tell you a little story about trilliums,” he said on a YouTube video about his place. “I found when I was in the process of collecting plants that one of the things I could do if I had a rhizome that was left over and I didn’t want it, instead of throwing it in the trash I just stuck it in the ground here on this ridge and I didn’t think much about it, and I thought if it grows it grows, and if it doesn’t it doesn’t.”

For some plants, the shaded soils of Nodding Trillium Garden were just what they needed to thrive.

“Sure enough, the Sweet Betsy went wild,” Dan said. “It was going up the hill, around the hill, up the fence, all the way up to the hill above and continuing along the fence above, all the way around behind the barn. It got all the way down to the bottom of the hill too. I was rather surprised—how in the world was it getting around so well?”

What was the mystery Dan uncovered? To find out, you’ll have to watch “Stories from Nodding Trillium Garden” by the Highlands-Cashiers Land Trust on YouTube.

*Frances Figart is the creative services director for the 29,000-member Smokies Life, a partner supporting Great Smoky Mountains National Park by providing educational products and services such as this column. Learn more at [SmokiesLife.org](http://SmokiesLife.org) and reach the author at [frances@smokieslife.org](mailto:frances@smokieslife.org).*

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Postal information

The Citizen Times (USPS# 236-000, ISSN 0336-0000) is published daily excluding Saturday, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving (observed), Christmas Day (observed) and New Year’s Day (observed) by Gannett Media Corp., 14 O. Henry Ave., Asheville, NC 28802. Periodicals postage paid at Asheville, NC and additional mailing offices. **Postmaster:** Send all UAA to CFS. (See DMM 507.1.5.2); **NON-POSTAL ONE AND MILITARY FACILITIES:** Please send address corrections to Customer Service, 525 West Broadway, Louisville, KY 40202.