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WORD FROM THE SMOKIES

UNCOVERING THE OBSCURITY OF OWLS



Owls are primarily nocturnal because their unique physical and sensory adaptations allow them to hunt effectively at night. The eastern screech-owl, shown here in its gray morph form, is common and breeds in all habitats except the higher elevations. PROVIDED BY JOE MCGOWAN

Frances Figart

Special to the Asheville Citizen Times
USA TODAY NETWORK

If you have day-hiked in the Smokies, you have undoubtedly been monitored, unawares, from a tree cavity. The unseen watcher? A winged super-predator resting with one eye open, waiting for dusk or nightfall. Though vultures, hawks, eagles, and ospreys rule park skies by day, after the sun goes down, the forest belongs to the owls.

“Rodents and roosting birds are owls’ most frequent meals,” said Tom Howe, who has studied birds at Cornell University’s Lab of Ornithology and is an active member of the Knoxville Chapter of the Tennessee Ornithological Society. “They are well adapted for hunting with their great nocturnal eyesight and special positioning of their ears that enables them to judge the precise direction of sounds.”

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The Great Horned Owl, (*Bubo virginianus*), also known as the Tiger Owl, is a large owl native to the Americas. It is know as the second heaviest owl, second to the Snowy Owl. PROVIDED BY JOYE ARDYN DURHAM



Sen. Thom Tillis tells the audience to hold up their hand if they have a question after he finishes speaking at the Greater Fayetteville Chamber’s 2025 State of the Community event at the Crown Expo Center on Aug. 26.
ANDREW CRAFT/FAYETTEVILLE OBSERVER

Who is running for Tillis’ Senate seat?

Iris Seaton

Asheville Citizen Times
USA TODAY NETWORK

North Carolina voters will have a choice to make during the 2026 United States Senate election.

Republican Senator Thom Tillis announced in late June 2025 that he would not seek reelection. The announcement came one day after he voted against advancing President Donald Trump’s “big, beautiful bill,” Republicans’ massive domestic policy bill.

“It takes what was already going to be arguably the most watched U.S. Senate race in the country and removes the word ‘arguably,’” said Chris Cooper, a professor of political science and public affairs at Western Carolina University, on the announcement in a report from the Citizen Times.

Tillis’s term in office, which began Jan. 3, 2015, will end Jan. 3, 2027. During the November election, North Carolina voters will elect a new senator. Here’s what residents should know about the candidates.

Who is running for Senate in North Carolina?

Democrat Roy Cooper and Republican Michael Whatley are running for the U.S. Senate in 2026.

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FCC Chairman Brendan Carr said a broadcast license comes with “an obligation to operate in the public interest.”
JOHN MCDONNELL/GETTY IMAGES FILE

Kimmel’s suspension worries advocates

Taylor Seely and Angele Latham
USA TODAY NETWORK

ABC pulled comedian Jimmy Kimmel’s late-night show following veiled threats from the Federal Communications Commission and now President Donald Trump has called on the FCC to

revoke the broadcast licenses of stations that criticize him. Both moves mark escalations by government officials in stifling free speech since the killing of conservative activist Charlie Kirk, First Amendment advocates warn. Before Trump’s remarks Sept. 18, free

speech advocates had already criticized Kimmel’s suspension and, in particular, FCC Chair Brendan Carr’s role. ABC announced the “indefinite” suspension of Kimmel and his show hours after Carr called for it on a right-wing podcast.

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