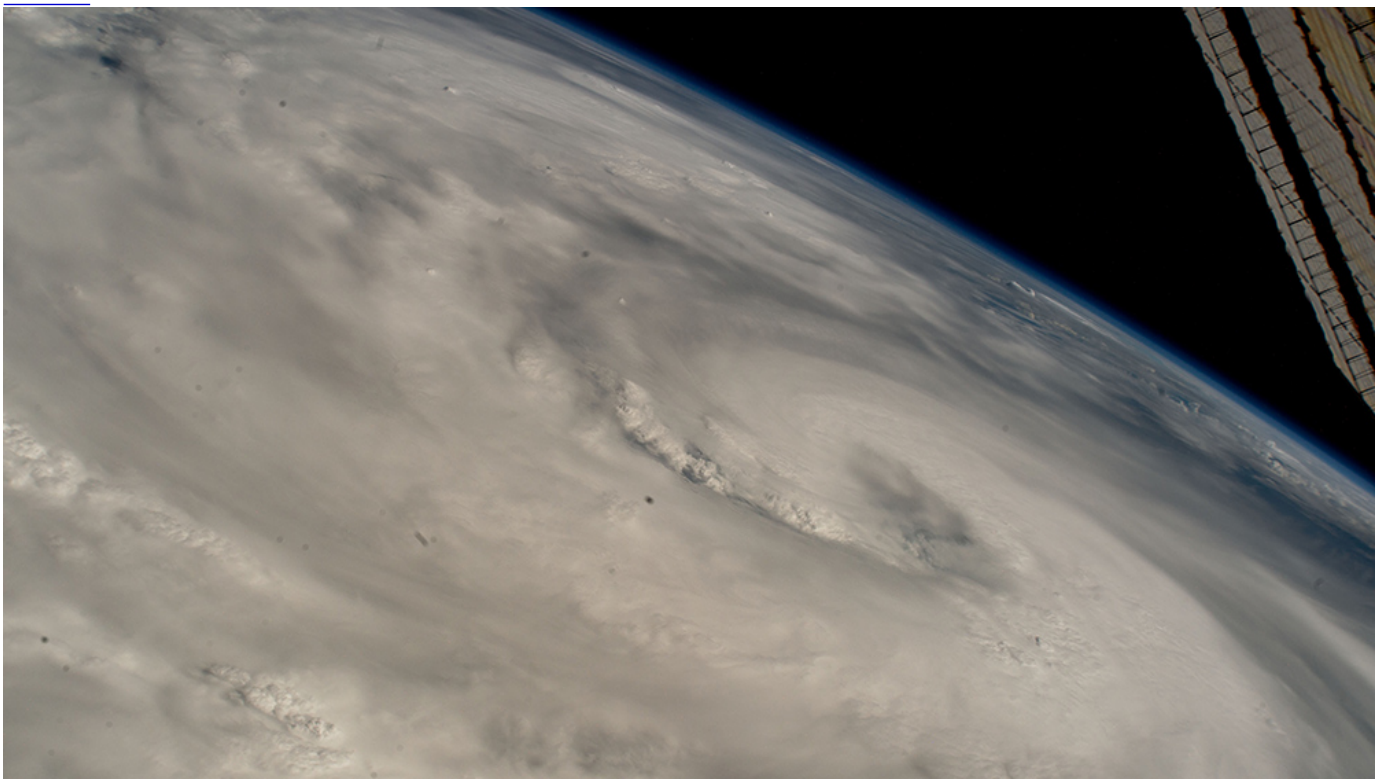
News



Hurricane Helene is seen above the Gulf of Mexico off the coast of Mississippi in a shot from the International Space Station Sept. 25. (Flickr/NASA Johnson)



by John Grosso

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Multiple prominent conservative Catholic social media personalities have joined their voices to online conspiracy theorists who believe that the United States government controls the weather.

The outlandish claims gained traction in the wake of the devastating impact of Hurricane Helene and picked up steam during the unprecedented strengthening of Hurricane Milton — but did not reach mainstream social media until Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-Georgia) proclaimed on X: "Yes, they can control the weather."

There is no evidence that the government or any other entity can control, manipulate or route a hurricane or storm in a specific direction. Officials warn that misinformation could obfuscate efforts to rescue and recover after both storms and blame social media for the rise in the unsubstantiated theory.

That has not stopped rampant social media speculation that the Biden-Harris administration either specifically directed the hurricanes to impact Republican areas, or had the ability to prevent their carnage and refused to act.

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Taylor Greene, who is not Catholic, has shared at least three posts related to the conspiracy. Though she was widely mocked in the comments to her initial post on X, her statement spread like wildfire on the platform and beyond, fueling rumors and speculation made worse by the emergence and strengthening of Hurricane Milton.

The conspiracy theories have gotten so pervasive that they prompted a response from various government officials and even the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

It didn't take long for some prominent social media Catholics to comment on the conspiracy theory. On Oct. 8, Eric Sammons, editor-in-chief of conservative-leaning Crisis Magazine said on X that while he did not believe that " 'they' can control the weather" he might be proven wrong, and thus wasn't able to condemn anyone else who believed "they" could. Sammons did not clarify who he meant by "they" and hasn't commented on it since.

The responses to his X post — 92 at the time of this article's publication — were rife with speculation about cloud seeding, alleged or out of context patents, and links to InfoWars. The post was viewed at least 17,000 times.

One day later, on Oct. 9, self proclaimed "professional controversialist" and host of the show "Avoiding Babylon," Anthony Abbate*, joined Patrick Coffin, formerly of Catholic Answers to ask the question, "Is our government manipulating the weather?"

On the program, Abbate opines that he doesn't "know what to believe," before asking what Coffin himself thinks of weather manipulation.

"I think it's a thing," says Coffin, who then clarifies that he believes the United States government has had the technology to "steer hurricanes for decades." After explaining the concept of cloud-seeding, a practice with practical but limited uses, Coffin speculates that coincidences are "piling up," and that the government is trying to use the hurricane as an excuse to seize lands in North Carolina that he says are "coincidentally Trump country."

Abbate has since spent time after the interview defending his beliefs and advancing further speculation on X related to the conspiracy theory.

Shortly thereafter on the same day, Taylor Greene tripled down on her accusations that the government can modify the weather, and that those who lost property or a loved one might be eligible for compensation.

"I don't think they start them, but I think they can intensify them and nudge them," Abbate hypothesized in his video interview with Coffin, concluding, "I know I sound like a complete loony talking about this."

**This article has been updated to correct the spelling of Anthony Abbate's last name.*

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