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## **Storm Response Elicits Strong Will of Residents, Relief Workers**

JEFFERSON CITY — Residents of the St. Louis metropolitan area have undergone significant hardship in past weeks due to severe thunderstorms that caused power outages, which exposed citizens to extreme heat. Although returning power to more than 400,000 citizens proved to be an arduous task, officials have responded to the crisis actively and efficiently, and area residents have shown remarkable resolve in the face of tragedy.

The morning after the storms struck on July 19, Gov. Blunt issued two executive orders to spur recovery efforts. Executive Order 06-25 declared a state of emergency and activated the Missouri State Emergency Operations Plan. It also directed state agencies to provide support in affected areas as needed. Executive Order 06-26 authorized the activation of the Missouri National Guard to provide assistance. Meanwhile, St. Louis city and county established a combined 52 cooling centers to help area residents cope with the overwhelming heat.

On July 21, Gov. Blunt requested from President Bush an Expedited Major Disaster Declaration and issued a third executive order allowing the director of the Missouri Department of Natural Resources to waive laws and rules pertaining to waste disposal to eliminate debris. He followed with another order authorizing the director of the Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT) to suspend certain commercial motor vehicle regulations for vehicles participating in emergency-relief efforts. The federal government then approved the Governor's request to extend the period for filing for replacement food stamps.

Throughout, more than 3,000 utility employees worked around the clock to restore power to area residents suffering from the heat. On one occasion, a worker paid the ultimate price. To learn from the experience, the Missouri Public Service Commission is investigating Ameren's response to the storms.

The thunderstorms that punished the St. Louis metro area were severe, but the resolve of area residents and those providing relief efforts displays a true sense of the pride, generosity and work ethic of the people of St. Louis and surrounding counties. For that, at least, we can be thankful.

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On a lighter note, I am pleased to serve as a member of the Senate Interim Committee on the Cost of a College Education during this interim period. The committee is charged with considering the role of the state in funding Missouri higher education, examining alternative funding structures, and studying how tuition rates are set. Committee members also study the utilization of college savings plans by Missouri families and examine public grant programs and student indebtedness.

The committee will hold its first meeting at 1 p.m. Wednesday, Aug. 30, at the University of Missouri–St. Louis Millennium Student Center, Century Room A, 8001 Natural Bridge Road, in St. Louis.

With the cost of higher education skyrocketing, Missouri needs to consider all its options in providing the best opportunities for students. I am happy to be able to take part in this process.

If you have comments or questions about this week’s column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by phone at (866) 271-2844.

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