



Column For Week of: April 14, 2008

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Assistance for Flood Victims in our Community

In March, communities throughout the 16th District struggled as heavy rains hit the area. As the weather became more severe, flooding began, and it was clear that these areas were facing a disaster. The state's first reaction to any disaster is to initialize a coordinated emergency response, employing state and local agencies in order to make sure that residents are safe and have shelter.

After the water receded, another concern became clear. Business owners and families returned to damage and destruction created by the floods. I have received many calls from individuals, businesses, local governments, and non-profit organizations asking about assistance, so I want to clarify how this process works and let you know what I am doing to secure help for those who need it. I am so proud of our communities for banding together to help each other, and it is important for these individuals to know that their work is appreciated. Over the past several weeks, I have been pushing to get federal and state resources to help in these efforts.

After a disaster, the State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) works with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in order to conduct damage assessments in affected areas. Assistance to individuals, small businesses, and local governments or non-profit organizations are available in the form of grants and low interest loans. A federal disaster declaration was signed by the president on March 19. Many counties in the district were awarded assistance to help rebuild.

In Crawford County, however, the process of receiving aid has not gone as smoothly. The flooding caused damage to businesses along the Meramec River and its tributaries. These businesses were looking forward to a productive summer, expecting visitors from throughout the state and nation to participate in canoe and float trips. These businesses are now struggling to get back on their feet in time for the vacation season. While many of the counties surrounding Crawford County received assistance, Crawford has not received adequate support. The Small Business Administration is soon expected to announce that small business economic

impact loans will be available for businesses in the counties of Crawford, Dent and Montgomery. These will be helpful to some, but they come in the form of economic assistance that would reimburse the businesses for their losses after the season is over. The mom and pop operations that are currently struggling to rebuild need low-interest loans to fix their facilities now, not funds after the season to make up their losses. These are hard-working owners that only want to continue doing business as they always have, and I am frustrated that this situation has continued without getting the right help to these members of the community.

While discussions continued to try and deliver the needed federal dollars to these businesses, other agencies and organizations pulled together to help. The Department of Conservation allowed the county to participate in the County Aid Road Trust (CART). This program provided maintenance for many of the secondary and gravel roads in Crawford County that would have otherwise remained damaged and covered in debris. In addition, I came up with a way for the Department of Corrections to send offenders to help with the clean-up efforts throughout the county. I appreciate this offer from the department — businesses in the areas are expected to utilize the extra help soon. Both of these programs and the dedication of local residents made a huge difference in the recovery effort, and I only wish that FEMA could pull through for the area the same way.

I know the communities in the 16th District have banded together to help those in need. Perhaps the situation included neighbors who opened their doors to others who could no longer return to their home; a friend who spent a late night helping clean-up debris; or a group that donated blankets, supplies, and other necessities to those staying in shelters. Regardless of the particular situation, these actions were valued by the flood victims, and I extend my deepest appreciation as well. I understand all the hard work involved in these dedicated efforts, and I will put forth the same effort here in Jefferson City by continuing to push for the necessary assistance.

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