



MISSOURI SENATE

JEFFERSON CITY

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A Weekly Column for the
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Planning for the Next Flood

JEFFERSON CITY – I had a chance to meet with representatives of levee districts and communities along the Mississippi River this week to talk about what went right and what went wrong during the flood – the good, the bad and the ugly. The good was definitely the way folks came together to help build sandbag walls to protect towns and farms threatened by the rising river. The bad was probably the lack of coordination we occasionally saw between state and local agencies responding to the flood. The ugly is what’s left behind - the debris, the old sandbags, and all of the muck the river deposited on everything.

The best time to prepare for a flood is long before it ever comes, and that’s what I’ve been talking to state and local officials about during the past few weeks. We really need better planning and coordination among all of the emergency response agencies so services go where they are needed. I also think sandbags are the worst way to try to protect farms, businesses and homes from flooding. We need to raise levees along the river to withstand a 500-year flood like they have done in West Quincy, Illinois. If we had the infrastructure in place to protect businesses, it would be amazing how much economic development we would see in northeast Missouri. Many businesses never came back after the Flood of '93 because of the lack of protective levees. I also plan to review what state lawmakers did during the Special Session in 1993 in response to the Great Flood to see if there is anything we as state officials can do to better prepare for the next flood.

I do want to thank the governor for extending the state’s response to the flooding until August 11. The governor’s executive order allows state agencies and the Missouri National Guard to continue helping local communities recover from this latest natural disaster. The Missouri Department of Natural Resources has extended its suspension of certain waste regulations to allow

more time for communities to clean up from the flood. DNR's waiver allows any brush and yard waste generated by the flooding and any major appliances destroyed in the flood to be dumped in a sanitary or demolition landfill until July 31. Those items are usually excluded from our landfills. Finally, I want to remind folks who live in Clark, Lewis, Lincoln, Marion, Pike, Ralls and St. Charles counties who are unemployed due to flooding that they have until July 30 to apply for Disaster Unemployment Assistance. This is geared toward people who are not eligible for benefits under the state's regular unemployment insurance program. Farmers, self-employed Missourians and others who can't get regular unemployment insurance may now be eligible for disaster unemployment assistance. Call (800) 788-4002 for information on how to file a claim.

This week I attended a meeting to discuss physician reimbursements under the MO HealthNet program. Right now those reimbursements are determined by the legislative appropriations process and can change from year to year. Many of us in rural Missouri have a tough time finding doctors who will treat us at these low reimbursement rates. I think we need to develop a formula to determine physician reimbursement rates so doctors know what to expect each year. Doctors have to budget for the year ahead just like the rest of us, but they can't do that with any certainty if the legislature keeps changing the reimbursement rate each year. The reimbursement rate also needs to be high enough to ensure doctors will be willing to provide services where they are needed most – in our rural areas where access to health care is a real problem.

Finally, I want to thank the 150 or more people who attended our seed summit at Mark Twain State Park July 12. I appreciate members of the Organization for Competitive Markets coming to northeast Missouri to discuss competition in the seed industry. I believe farmers should have the right to retain their own seed – it's something I have fought for in the past and something I will continue to fight for in the future.

If you have any questions or comments about this or any other issue, give my Capitol office a call at (573) 751-7852, send me an email at wes.shoemyer@senate.mo.gov, or drop a line to Room 434, State Capitol, 201 West Capitol Ave., Jefferson City, MO 65101.