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MISSOURI SENATE JEFFERSON CITY

**A Weekly Column for the
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More Flood Woes

JEFFERSON CITY – Just about the time we were starting to make some progress cleaning up from the Mississippi River flooding, Mother Nature steps in and gives us several more inches of rain over northeast Missouri. This week the state was forced to close Mark Twain Lake after lake levels set new records. The Missouri Water Patrol is removing any boats found operating on the lake to protect the safety of the public.

A lot of roads, homes and farms in Monroe and Ralls counties have been inundated with water again this week, and I know folks appreciate all of the help they're getting from their friends and neighbors to get through this. This summer has been a test of the strength of our communities, and they have all risen to the challenge. We've also had some rural bridges damaged in this latest round of flooding, which will put the squeeze on county budgets as officials try to come up with the money to repair or replace them. I've been working with local government officials to see what the state can do to help.

I want to thank the people who volunteered this week to sandbag around the power plant at Mark Twain Lake. A lot of people would be in a world of hurt if the power plant had to close. The good news is that it looks like we're going to have a dry spell for a week or so, which will speed the cleanup process and let folks get back into their homes.

I also want to mention the recent audit of the state Agriculture Department by the Missouri State Auditor. Her report found the department failed to comply with a lot of the rules it is supposed to follow. For example, the audit found the department tried to hide the settlement it had reached in a sexual harassment claim brought by a former employee against a former director, and it passed out federal odor abatement grants without following the rules.

In response, Ag Department officials said they agreed with some of the auditor's findings and blamed budget issues for other problems.

I don't bring this up to pass judgment or to make life difficult for the people who work for the state Ag Department. I just want folks to know that I am aware of what the state auditor had to say about a very important state agency. I'm also willing to give our new state Agriculture Department Director, Don Steen, time to correct some of the problems highlighted in the audit.

Steen recently toured flooded farms in northeast Missouri and said the department understands the economic challenges many farmers will be up against this year. He says the Ag Department will continue to work with the Missouri Farm Service Agency to do everything possible to help farmers in need.

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.