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# Jason Smith's Capitol Report - January 1, 2016

JANUARY 01ST 2016 BY DEE LOFLIN

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## A Week to Remember

With record rainfall and historic water levels on the Mississippi and surrounding rivers, we closed 2015 with the very real and scary reminder of the power of mother nature.

When Christmas approached, constant rainfall and a quickly rising Mississippi River replaced holiday cheer and laughter amongst friends and family with concerns for safety and well-being of those same individuals we love. A relentless rain left many worried about the potential for historic river crests and topping of levee systems stretching across hundreds of miles of the Mississippi River. The levee system in southeast Missouri and the hard work of the people who serve on our levee and drainage districts are integral in protecting homes, businesses and hundreds of thousands of acres of farm land along the Mississippi River.

On Monday, I rode the Bois Brule Levee near McBride in eastern Perry County to survey the rising river. That levee alone protects 16 houses, numerous businesses and 26,000 acres of farm land. From there I attended a public meeting in St Genevieve to discuss rising waters and safety concerns. There, city officials asked residents to move belongings and prepare as though an evacuation would be needed.

I spent Wednesday with the Army Corps of Engineers, county officials and emergency personnel down in the Bootheel touring the Birds Point & Commerce Levees and the 1500 foot New Madrid gap. We also stopped in Van Buren to speak with emergency officials about the status of the Current River that was rising quickly and threatening a

portion of the town. I stressed with the Army Corps the importance of participating in a public meeting so that residents could hear from them directly about the status of the river and levees and so that they could hear from those same folks about any questions or concerns they have. I was glad the Army Corps agreed and we were able to organize this important meeting on Thursday at the Clara Drinkwater Library in Charleston.

When river levels rise, safety should and will always remain the number one concern. I also want to make sure everything is being done by the Army Corps to protect the very businesses and farmland in the floodways which support thousands of families throughout southeast Missouri and the homes they live in.

Christmas teaches us about the birth of Christ and the spirit of giving, compassion, and kindheartedness. This Christmas, beyond just giving gifts we learned those lessons in a very real way. I saw firsthand those values in the hundreds of county officials, levee board officers, emergency personnel, volunteers and residents I met with along the Mississippi River. Watching students over their Christmas break sandbag to protect their communities is something I will never forget and I am grateful for the honor to represent such people before the U.S. Congress. There is nowhere else on earth you can find such hardworking and genuine people who truly represent the meaning of Christmas.

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