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Congressman Jason Smith's Capitol Report - Friday, May 19, 2017

MAY 23RD 2017 BY DEE LOFLIN

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The Frontlines of a Flood May 19, 2017

On Saturday, April 29, waters began rising in southeast and south central Missouri. As quickly as the waters rose, first responders and volunteers sprang into action.

Ozark County was in one of the hardest hit areas. Their Emergency Management Director told me they realized how bad it was getting Saturday night around midnight. About this time, the James Bridge over the White River disappeared. With the bridge washed out, the Tecumseh Volunteer Fire Department had to split their territory in half and deploy two teams of firefighters. Even as some of their own homes filled with water, between Saturday night and Sunday morning, the teams conducted ten swift water rescues. When it was time for search and rescue, volunteer fire departments from across Ozark County pitched in to check house by house for people who may be stranded or hurt and help man the emergency operations center.

In Thomasville, one man had to rescue his elderly relatives by boat. Before the rain started, he moved his relatives to a house where he thought they would be safe. After all, the ground floor of the home was six feet higher than the 100-year flood stage. But as the night wore on, water was rising quickly in the home. The man's family was trapped in the second floor of the house. So, he tried to reach the house by tractor, but the water was too

deep. Then he tried to reach the house by road grader, but the water was still too deep. Finally, the man's nephew arrived with his bass boat and they pulled their family to safety just in the nick of time.

For every story of heroism and selflessness over the past few weeks, there have been a hundred more just like it. Everyone I've talked with has told me that the way the water came up was simply unbelievable. What's more unbelievable is how even with homes destroyed, businesses flooded, farms that lost fence lines, fields that were washed out and livestock scattered everywhere, first responders and volunteers took care of their communities before they took care of themselves. Two firefighters from Ozark County lost their houses, but they were still out on the frontlines of the flood, helping everyone else.

In Reynolds County, Town & Country is the only grocery store. The flood put the store under three feet of water. When local members of the community heard that the Town & Country manager could use help clearing mud off the shelves and emptying the store of water-soaked food, they got right to work. With their help, the store would be up and running again sooner rather than later. Today, I got the good news that their hard work paid off. As of this morning, Town & Country has re-opened!

These are just some of the many stories I've heard in the aftermath of flooding I hope we will never see the likes of again in our lifetimes. Whether it was the nurses from the VA hospital in Poplar Bluff who helped out at their local shelter or the students from Malden Beta Club collecting donations for folks down in Doniphan, I am grateful to every Missourian who helped their neighbors. As I've said, we are Missouri Strong and we will work together to come back from this disaster even stronger than we were before.

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