

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

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What a Storm!

Friday night's drenching downpour tested our roofs and made rivers of water that covered both sidewalk and street. And Saturday morning showed the results of all that falling water on our town and throughout our region. My legislative district includes five communities, and it wasn't long before I heard from constituents in distress.

The phone calls came from Monson, from two families that have homes in a small lakeside community. Two bridges on the road provided the only connection between those homes and the outside world, and both bridges were swept away by the storm. They needed help. And they could not get it from the town's highway department. Their road and the bridges are *private*, so they are not maintained by the town.

It wasn't that bridges were damaged; they were gone. And the surrounding ground was washed away in the rushing water.

Fortunately, the town selectmen saw beyond the ownership issue to address the public safety crisis. By the time I got through to MEMA (Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency), contractors were already hard at work. By the end of the day a new road had been created and small secondary bridge erected, granting access to most of the 50 families on the lake. When I toured the scene on Sunday, the primary bridge was well on the way to functional completion, providing the other families access to the outside world.

MassHighway worked perfectly in the emergency. Questions of financial responsibility will be worked out later, but for now a crisis is over.

A Monson house that sat beside a quiet pond last week was pulled from its foundation shortly after midnight Friday, when its feeding stream turned into a raging river that now runs where the house once stood. Another was inundated when Hampden's Laughing Brook overflowed. And roads throughout Western Massachusetts washed away because of the rushing water.

Longmeadow often sustains water damage to the low points on Longmeadow Street, and that came. But the intensity of the rain also caused a massive washout on Captain Road. On Saturday morning, the only sign of a previous road was the catch basin reaching up from a deep pit. Construction crews stayed on the job all weekend to fill the hole and re-construct the road.

Springfield Mayor Charlie Ryan had sounded the first disaster warning on Friday afternoon, declaring an emergency because of flooding at Forest Park. That early flooding was doubled when the rain continued to fall through the night. By Monday, when I checked on the low-lying ponds, the damage had grown. Millions of dollars will be needed to restore last week's park. City workers and work crews from the Sheriff Michael Ashe were beginning the long cleanup.

Last week's storm can be considered a test of the state's ability to respond to a natural disaster. Throughout the district, emergency response from our towns and state passed with flying colors. Both MEMA and the Red Cross are on the job in Monson. Highway departments in all towns responded quickly to local needs. And utility companies quickly repaired the damage to their wires and pipes.

The price tag remains, and the strapped municipal budgets need relief from the extraordinary costs of putting our towns back together. Providing that relief is the next challenge, and I'll continue to work to see that emergency assistance extends beyond physical help to include the financial assistance to ease the burden on town finances.

It's great to see the sun shining again.