



The following article was featured in the June 28th volume of the CSBS Examiner.



After the Storm: Oklahoma Banking Commissioner Reacts to Tornado Aftermath

At its core, the primary job of state bank supervisors is to regulate state-chartered and licensed institutions in order to ensure financial products are safe and sound, consumers are protected, and to encourage economic growth. But every so often, these regulators are called upon to do much more. This was the case with Oklahoma State Banking Commissioner Mick Thompson last month when two rare EF5 tornadoes and an EF4 tornado tore through Oklahoma, killing dozens of people. The day was Monday, May 20 and Thompson was in Nashville, Tenn. for the annual CSBS State-Federal Supervisory Forum (SFSF). A deadly EF4 tornado had already moved through central Oklahoma on May 19 and now a second storm system was threatening the Oklahoma City Metro Area. After learning that central Oklahoma was under a tornado warning, Thompson glued himself to his iPad, receiving constant updates from the National Weather Service, state media outlets, and his staff.

The SFSF continued on, but Thompson was focused on the affairs of his home state. As the devastating footage from the EF5 tornado rolled in, Thompson turned to his fellow banking commissioner, John Ducrest of Louisiana, and asked, "After Hurricane Katrina hit what was your biggest need or challenge?" The response was "Access to cash."

As recovery efforts started in Oklahoma, Thompson went into crisis management mode and began reaching out to state and national banks throughout the state to ask for their help. He contacted Bob Toler, Vice President of the Oklahoma City branch of the Kansas City Federal Reserve Bank, to request more cash be brought into the state. Thompson coordinated with State Insurance Commissioner John Doak to assist residents by immediately fulfilling insurance claims, providing access to banking accounts, and other needs.

"My first priority as banking commissioner was to get residents the access they needed to receive and deposit cash," Thompson said. "But this was a combined effort across state departments, with state and national banks, as well as with our federal counterparts at the Oklahoma City Fed."

By Tuesday afternoon, Commissioner Thompson issued a bulletin to Oklahoma financial institutions that recommended ways to cooperate with storm victims that needed expedited access to insurance proceeds. By Wednesday morning, mobile ATMs had been installed at the Operations Center and were ready for use. Additionally, if a storm victim was unbanked or did not have access to their account, banks in the area gave credit for their insurance check and issued them a debit card.

Thompson also helped the teachers and administrators of the Moore school system, who were deeply impacted by the storm, to receive uninterrupted pay despite the inability of the school system to process ACH payments the Friday following the storm.

"As Oklahoma Bank Commissioner, I am asking that if you have customers/depositors who are employees of the Moore, Oklahoma public school system and who would be receiving a payroll deposit tomorrow, that you consider providing provisional credit until their payroll deposit arrives," Thompson stated in a public letter to bank presidents on Thursday, May 23. And the response from state banks was overwhelmingly positive.

On Friday, May 31, another EF5 tornado hit the Oklahoma City area resulting in more loss of life and property, and once again elevating the role of the banking commissioner. Thompson works with banks every day and he has a responsibility to the consumers of those banks, but never is his role as bank commissioner more magnified and more important than in a crisis.

Since the Commissioner's initial response, his office continues to address the needs of banks and their customers as they navigate through the aftermath of the storms. The Commissioner's response to each issue that arises has to take into account the safety and soundness of the bank, the needs of the customer, and the urgency of the situation. "Fortunately, all Oklahoma state-chartered banks are community banks," said Thompson, "which makes devising a solution to storm victims' problems much easier because the president of the bank, the customer, and the regulator can work in tandem to solve the problem. I'm grateful to work with such a caring and hard working group of people especially during such a devastating time."



Oklahoma Commissioner Mick Thompson, center, watches live media reports on the May 20 tornado in Moore, Oklahoma. Ohio Superintendent Charles Dolezal and Pennsylvania Executive Deputy Secretary Victoria Reider look on.



A photo of the tornado taken from Westmoore High School in Moore, Oklahoma on May 20. Source: KFOR-TV Oklahoma City.

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