

"March has been celebrated as Red Cross Month in the United States since 1943, and the role of this humanitarian organization in our communities continues to grow.

Most of us hear about the Red Cross when disaster strikes. In the darkest hours of our communities, the American Red Cross is a swift source of relief. The organization provides food, water, shelter and aid in the wake of tornadoes, hurricanes, floods, earthquakes and any other disaster that can befall us.

Yet the mission of the American Red Cross is broader than just emergency relief. Red Cross volunteers also support the armed services, our veterans and their families. They teach lifesaving skills, like CPR, to people we hope will never have to use them. The Red Cross is an important partner in international disease prevention efforts. And, of course, the collection, testing and supply of blood donations across our country is a mainstay of the Red Cross mission.

For 130 years, the Red Cross has been one of the leading humanitarian organizations in our nation and around the world. It is a true partnership: our communities depend upon the Red Cross in their hour of greatest need, and the Red Cross depends upon the support of the public to be always ready to serve in a crisis.

Even in Southern Missouri, we have seen the quick response of the Red Cross in the wake of severe weather, and we would surely rely on their rapid response with essential supplies if a major earthquake should strike the communities within the New Madrid Seismic Zone. Without a doubt, the Red Cross will be on the scene in any American community where people need their assistance. The organization has over one million volunteers and more than 650 chapters in the U.S. Every year, the Red Cross responds to some 67,000 disasters where relief operations are needed.

So March is set aside as a time to recognize the unique work of the Red Cross whether or not there is a disaster in the news. As with any kind of preparedness, the hard work is accomplished before catastrophe strikes. The stockpiling of supplies, the readiness of volunteers, the plan – ready to implement at a moment's notice – are all constructed well in advance of the time when they are needed.

In Southern Missouri, countless community volunteers work to make this level of organization possible. Nationally, Americans combine to support the Red Cross with their time and talent for relief efforts around the world in addition to their daily work in training, emergency preparedness and prevention. Abroad, the Red Cross is an international symbol for the humanitarian efforts of an organization which boasts tremendous support from the American people.

For this important work to continue to benefit our region and our nation, we must recognize their efforts rain or shine, so to speak. And let's all hope for sunny days ahead."