

Enough already

"This too shall pass," is a wise and comforting saying, but by no means does it imply simply waiting for a flood of trouble to recede. All floods recede in time, but you've got to do everything in your power to keep them from overwhelming you. Sometimes you win, sometimes not, but you never win if you don't try.

The folks in Fargo, N.D., gave us a heroic and literal example of this just last month, as they battled the 100-year flood of the Red River. They never gave up the fight.

The crisis that banks have been weathering since last September has produced a flood of very negative headlines, comments, testimony, sound bites, and blogs—even comic strips. The President of the United States himself in a televised address to Congress used highly critical language about banks.

Just as the people of Fargo worked shoulder to shoulder to fight the flood, bankers cannot stay quiet as their industry comes under attack.

At the national level, ABA's leadership—staff and bankers—have given countless interviews, and delivered hundreds of pages of testimony in Congress to try and correct the erroneous impressions left by so many negative headlines and statements. ABA CEO, Ed Yingling, even wrote President Obama after his speech pointing out that failing to distinguish between Wall Street and Main Street banking undermines confidence in the banking industry.

There have been some positive developments in recent weeks, which may help get credit markets functioning more normally. But even here, the notion comes through in most of the commentary and reporting that the measures are aiding a crippled banking industry unable and/or unwilling to lend.

Are you crippled?

Are you unable or unwilling to lend?

Of course not.

But us saying so here doesn't do much good. The ABA saying so does help a great deal, as did the gathering of about 800 of you in Washington late last month for ABA's Government Relations Summit.

The place where banks can do the most good is in their own markets. Not a one-shot campaign, but a permanent, day-after-day effort of commitment, training, and support.

As this month's cover story points out, speaking out to help counter the negative headlines is not just a CEO's job. It is his or her job to drive and support the effort to enlist all employees (and directors) to join the effort. Most will do so willingly, mainly because they know that they—bankers—are not ogres or shysters. Also because they know that the work they do helps businesses, individuals, and communities, not to mention the large amount of volunteer work they typically put in.

This is not altruism, it's what traditional banking is all about.

The cover story (p. 18) provides you with some ways to go about this, and we urge you to read it.

If it's true, as Federal Reserve Board Governor Elizabeth "Betsy" Duke says in the article on page 24, that "there will be more of a return to the basics of classic banking, and that's really a validation of the community bank franchise," then now is the time to reach out to your local media—not to brag, but to provide information.

And now is the time to make sure your people have the information they need to respond to the questions they get from customers and neighbors.

- By William W. Streeter
- Editor-in-Chief

- bstreeter@sblog.com