

ABOUT MRPC

MRPC is a voluntary council of local governments serving the Meramec area of Missouri. The area includes the eight counties of Crawford, Dent, Gasconade, Maries, Osage, Phelps, Pulaski and Washington and their respective cities.

The mission of MRPC is to enhance the quality of life for residents of the Meramec Region. In pursuit of this mission, MRPC will bring about results in these areas:

- Cleaner, healthier and safer communities,
- Greater socio-economic and cultural wealth through community and economic development, and
- A stronger, unified voice in the legislative process.

Meramec Regional Planning Commission
4 Industrial Drive
St. James, Mo 65559
Phone: (573) 265-2993
Fax: (573) 265-3550
Executive Director: Bonnie Prigge
meramecregion.org
www.facebook.com/meramecregion

This report was hand-delivered by: MRPC Chairman Ray Schwartze, Maries County, Mo, Presiding Commissioner, MRPC Executive Director Bonnie Prigge and MRPC Assistant Director Tammy Snodgrass.

Members of the Meramec Region's Congressional Delegation:

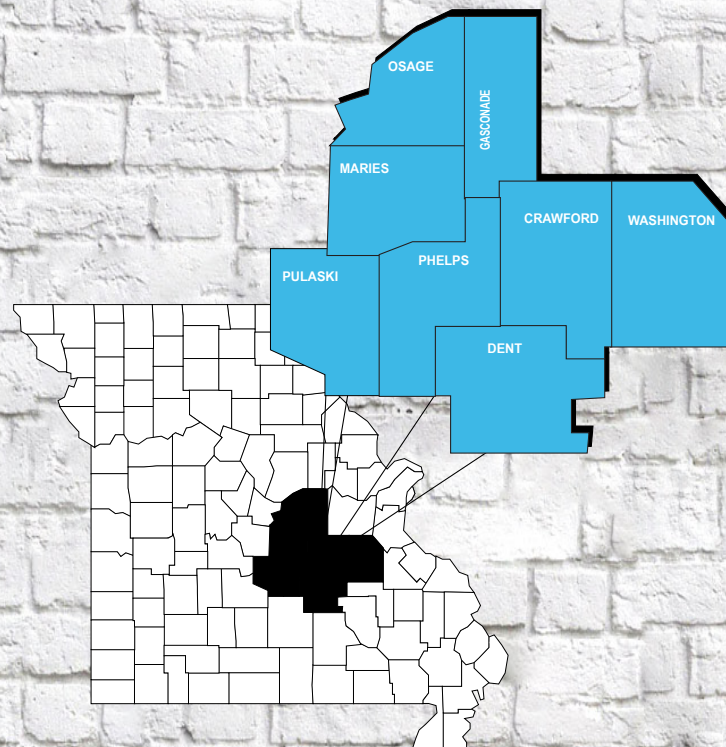
The Honorable Sens. Claire McCaskill and Roy Blunt
Reps. Blaine Luetkemeyer, Vicky Hartzler and Jason Smith

The Meramec Regional Planning Commission, representing eight counties and their respective cities, is pleased to present its 2018 Federal Priorities agenda to you. In addition to our specific priorities, our board encourages fiscal responsibility and asks that Congress achieve a balanced budget. We encourage efforts that create jobs and offer grant funding for rural areas, like ours. We look forward to working with you, and we thank you in advance for your consideration of our 2018 Federal Priorities.

Sincerely,

Ray Schwartze
MRPC Chairman

Bonnie J. Prigge
Executive Director



Federal Priorities in the Missouri Meramec Region

2018 Congressional Issues

Prepared by:
Meramec Regional Planning Commission
4 Industrial Drive • St. James, MO 65559

MRPC

2018





2018 FEDERAL PRIORITIES

MERAMEC REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

TRANSPORTATION:

- Increase federal funding for improvements to Highways 50 and 63, which are identified as freight routes in the Missouri State Freight Plan, in the Meramec Region.
- Provide enhanced and sustainable funding for the nation's highway, aviation and transit needs and find a means to fund the Federal Highway Trust Fund.
- Continue to encourage the Federal Highway Administration to be more flexible in allowing federal highways to become toll roads to finance improvements.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:

- Continue to promote Fort Leonard Wood (FLW) using the results of the Joint Land Use Study and Missouri's Military Infrastructure Report. FLW is an economic engine that puts over \$2 billion annually into the Missouri economy.
- Provide more federal assistance for public infrastructure: highways, bridges, locks, dams, sewer/water systems, WPA-type projects, etc. Many Missouri cities need to upgrade their infrastructure to meet ever changing requirements for their constituents and local businesses, but do not have the needed tax dollars. The increased economic development resulting from new infrastructure would provide additional money to improve other infrastructure.
- Provide high speed internet to all residents. This issue needs to be addressed in the same way that electric cooperatives provided electricity to all rural residents. The issue is the last mile of distributing fiber optic cable. Providers tend to install infrastructure where the population is large enough to make it profitable, leaving rural areas without adequate internet.
- Fully fund the existing portfolio of federal community and economic development programs - SBA, EDA, CDBG, DRA - which are successful in the region and which are vital to rural economic development efforts.

Energy:

- Continue to ensure that Cap and Trade legislation is not enacted because of the burden of increased energy costs it would place on local governments and Missouri businesses and continue to prevent the EPA being allowed to administer and set regulations for carbon dioxide. MRPC opposes EPA rule-making that will result in billions of dollars of added costs for citizens who depend on coal fired power plants for electricity. Much of the energy needs in the Midwest are met by coal fired plants and affordable power is a cornerstone of our economic development strategy in rural areas.
- Continue to work toward energy independence. Encourage research of other crops to develop new sources of energy rather than using food products like corn and soybeans. Explore environmentally friendly ways of drilling for oil and use them. Pursue oil shale while exploring solar, wind and biomass conversion energy, hydro-electric, co-generation energy and expand nuclear energy production.
- Encourage the development of the Keystone Pipeline and other pipelines.

EDUCATION:

- Support technical training initiatives such as the MO Wins and MO Health Wins programs for our labor force. This could be in the form of more incentives for schools to provide access to more intensive technical classes or assistance for people to attend a two-year program, including satellite classes.
- Encourage greater emphasis on reading, writing, math and science competency. Also encourage the emphasis of reading and writing as they relate to STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics.)
- Encourage and allow other loan options for higher education students not qualified for restructuring debt relief for college loan programs.

HEALTH CARE & SOCIAL SERVICES:

- Equalize Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement rates for rural and urban hospitals and continue to fund quality health care for the uninsured, underinsured, and the underserved population in the region. MRPC supports the continuation of funding at the same level Disproportionate Share Hospital (DSH) Payments funded at the Federal level. In addition, MRPC supports the continuation of 340B funding, which provides drugs at reduced prices to health centers, clinics and eligible hospitals.
- Repeal or correct nonworking components of the Health Care Reform Act and keep the provisions that work. As employers and local governments, we have concerns about:
 - The creation of the Patient Centered Outcomes Research Institute and related fees (\$2.08 per person per year), which will play a major role in determining what health care procedures are necessary;
 - The Modified Community Rating, where rates will be based on age, tobacco usage, geographical location and family tier with no consideration allowed for health status when pricing; and
 - The 40 percent Excise Tax that will be accessed on "Cadillac" plans in the 2018 tax year.
- Encourage Medicare and private providers (BCBS, etc.) to increase preventative services, which in turn would address the gap to reduce the impact on hospitals and ERs. In addition, if Medicare posted/set pricing on services, others would follow suit.
- Support full administrative funding for public housing agencies. Housing assistance programs provide safe, modest, affordable housing for veterans, the disabled and the elderly. These programs help maintain the quality of housing in communities by establishing and enforcing housing quality standards, which benefit not only the families served, but the communities as well. In order to continue to provide these much needed services, full administrative funding must be restored. The pay-out from HUD on the administration fee has remained stagnant for several years between 75 and 77 percent of the approved rate.

HOMELAND SECURITY & EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS:

- Support for continued funding and expanded missions for Fort Leonard Wood. This base is strategically located with no encroachment issues and is a leader in Interservice Training.
- Build upon the experience, capacity and skills of regional planning commissions to coordinate, plan and implement homeland security and emergency preparedness activities on a regional basis and allow local decision-making.
- Ensure rural regions receive adequate resources and equitable access to homeland security and emergency preparedness programs, including first responders, pre-disaster mitigation and all hazard mitigation resources. In addition, fully fund FEMA's flood map modernization and pre-disaster programs.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ISSUES:

- Pass legislation to collect sales tax on internet sales and redistribute to state and local governments as outlined in the Marketplace Fairness Act.
- Eliminate unfunded federal mandates, such as federal expectations and wastewater/stormwater regulations, to states or provide funding options/opportunities to states and/or local governments to fully fund them.
- Preserve the current tax exemption for municipal bonds. Tax-exempt financing, used by both state and local governments to raise funds to finance public capital improvements, is critical to sustain economic growth.
- Continue mandatory funding for Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) program and reauthorize the Secure Rural Schools Act and make the use of these funds more flexible.

GENERAL ISSUES:

- Continue to oppose and prevent implementation of the Waters of the United States (WOTUS) by EPA and US Corps of Engineers.
- Encourage all parties to work together for the betterment of our country. Our expectation is that congress will work together and with other office holders to move the country forward and not allow another session of gridlock. There must be more compromise and statesmanship and less politics.
- Overtime rule: Ensure the salary threshold for exempt employees is reasonable for rural areas. The proposed threshold of \$47,476 annual salary would be a significant increase from the previous level and places undue hardship on many employers who have employees who meet the exempt definition but make much less than the threshold.