

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.*

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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.

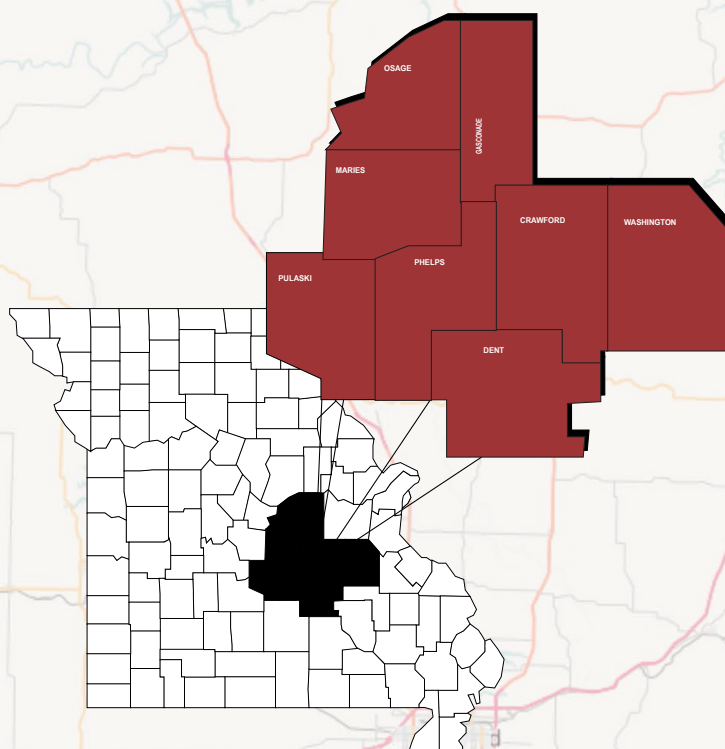
*The Honorable Sens. Claire McCaskill and
Roy Blunt
Reps. Blaine Luetkemeyer, Vicki Hartzler
and Jason Smith*

The Meramec Regional Planning Commission, representing eight counties and their respective cities, is pleased to present its 2017 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 2017 Federal Priorities.

Sincerely,

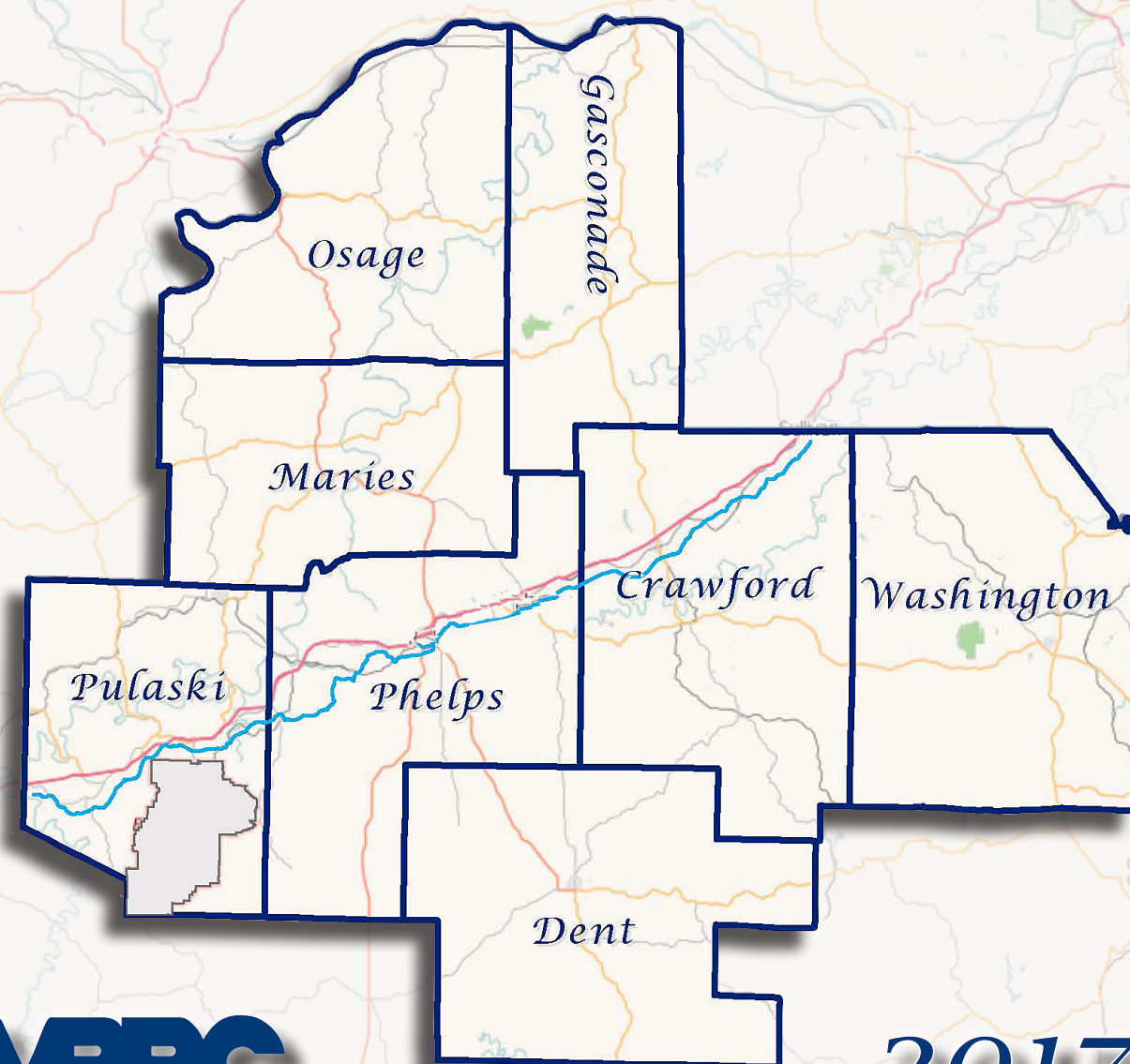
Ray Schwartze
MRPC Chairman

Bonnie J. Prigge
Executive Director



2017 Congressional Issues

Prepared by:
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2017



2017 FEDERAL PRIORITIES

MERAMEC REGIONAL PLANNING COMISSION

TRANSPORTATION:

- Provide enhanced, sustainable funding for the nation’s highway, aviation, prioritized freight routes and transit needs and find a means to fund the Federal Highway Trust Fund.
- Encourage 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.
- Establish federal funding mechanism for freight corridors identified in the Missouri State Freight Plan.

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.
- Invest in 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. Federal Highways Administration, Economic Development Administration, Delta Regional Authority, Community Development Block Grant are all infrastructure programs that should be supported and expanded.
- 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. Phone companies are not required to distribute, so they only put the infrastructure where the population is large enough to make it profitable.
- Make adjustments to the Davis/Bacon Act that allow small, rural communities to waive prevailing wage requirements for all projects costing less than \$250,000.

HEALTH CARE & SOCIAL SERVICES:

- 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.
- Continue to fund quality health care for the uninsured, underinsured and the underserved population in the region.
- Maintain and upgrade General Leonard Wood Army Hospital, ensuring healthcare services for military retirees and the region as a whole. (Establishing a universal healthcare information exchange for patient health records/information to follow the patient, and address HIPPA responsibility for sharing of that information, would vastly improve the ability of multiple hospitals, clinics and physicians to provide healthcare to residents.) This includes fostering partnerships between the military hospital and private hospitals and medical providers in the region to provide better healthcare options. Pulaski County is the only county in Missouri with a population of over 50,000 that does not have a hospital.

Energy:

- 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 bio-mass conversion energy, hydro-electric, co-generation energy and expand nuclear energy production.
- Encourage construction and use of nuclear power with safe, economical disposal of spent fuel. Continue to support research and development of small modular nuclear reactors.
- Continue to oppose Cap and Trade legislation because of the burden of increased energy costs it would place on local governments and Missouri businesses and oppose 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.

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.
- Ensure rural regions receive adequate resources and equitable access to homeland security and emergency preparedness programs, including first responders, pre-disaster mitigation and all hazards mitigation resources. In addition, fully fund FEMA’s flood map modernization and pre-disaster programs.
- 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.

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 additional funding to assist students with federal grants and loans.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ISSUES:

- Eliminate unfunded federal mandates to states or provide funding options/ opportunities to states and/or local governments to fully fund them.
- Develop and implement a plan to collect sales tax on internet sales and redistribute to state and local governments similar to the Marketplace Fairness Act supported by Senator Blunt.
- 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. Currently the senate finance committee is considering eliminating the tax exemption for municipal bonds as part of tax reform.

GENERAL ISSUES:

- Encourage all parties to work together for the betterment of our country. Congress should work together 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: Lower the salary threshold for exempt employees. The new threshold of \$47,476 annual salary is 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.
- Overturn the 2010 “Citizens United” supreme court ruling that says political spending by corporations cannot be prohibited by the government and is protected by the First Amendment. Some legal scholars believe it will require an amendment to the constitution to overturn this ruling.