

## ABOUT MRPC

MRPC is a voluntary council of local governments serving the Meramec area of Missouri since 1969. 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 distributed by MRPC to the Meramec Region's federal delegation.

## Members of the Meramec Region's Congressional Delegation:

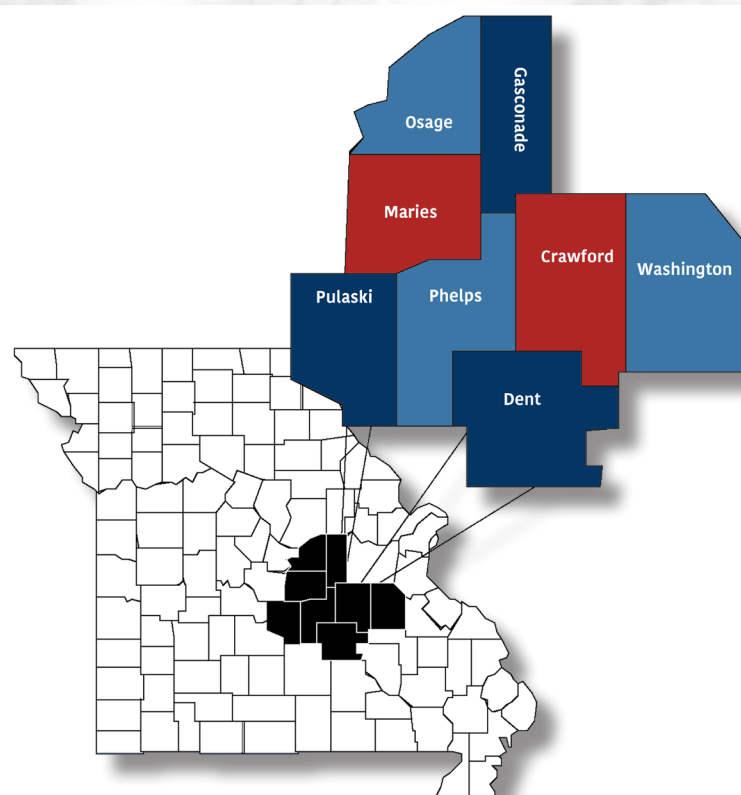
The Honorable Sens. Roy Blunt and  
Josh Hawley  
Reps. Blaine Luetkemeyer, Vicky  
Hartzler and Jason Smith

The Meramec Regional Planning Commission, representing eight counties and their respective cities, is pleased to present its 2020 Federal Priorities agenda to you. We regret that we could not travel to Washington, D.C. this year, to deliver and discuss due to the pandemic. 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 2020 Federal Priorities.

Sincerely,

Larry Miskel  
MRPC Chairman

Bonnie J. Prigge  
Executive Director



# Federal Priorities in the Missouri Meramec Region

## 2020 Congressional Issues



Prepared by:  
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**GENERAL ISSUES:**

- Continue to protect Medicare and Social Security. These are not entitlement programs — working Americans paid into these programs and entrusted the federal government to administer them properly. Relabeling them as entitlement programs and branding them as a government “handout” is a falsehood that the majority of citizens will not believe. Current federal deficits are based on over spending and providing tax cuts.
- Continue to work toward providing rural broadband, which is a critical need for business and agriculture.
- 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.

**HEALTH CARE & SOCIAL SERVICES:**

- Equalize Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement rates for rural and urban hospitals.
- 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. The Housing Choice Voucher administrative fee has been reduced for over a decade and is currently at 80 percent of the original funding. This funding reduction has been initiated with no reduction in the administrative burden. Underfunding of administration is resulting in public housing agencies struggling to effectively meet the needs of their respective communities and efficiently meet the regulatory requirements of the programs they coordinate. In order to continue to provide these much-needed services, full administrative funding must be restored.
- 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 2022 tax year.

**ENVIRONMENT:**

- Continue to support and protect our national parks, monuments, wildlife reserves and public lands — which are held in trust for the American people — not for the purpose of corporate profits, but for the enjoyment and economic benefit of future generations. There must be a balance maintained in the appropriate use and maintenance of these lands (through grazing and timber harvest) that benefits local communities as well as the general public without inflicting environmental damage.
- Continue support of the Chemical Safety Board (CSB). The Trump administration has expressed interest in eliminating this agency. The CSB is an independent federal agency charged with investigating industrial chemical accidents. The CSB conducts investigations of chemical accidents at fixed facilities and provides recommendations for improving safety and avoiding accidents in the future leading to safer plants, workers and communities. This agency is modeled on the National Transportation Safety Board. Congress directed the CSB’s investigative function be completely independent of the rulemaking, inspection and enforcement authorities of EPA and OSHA. Congress recognized that the CSB’s investigations would identify chemical hazards that were not addressed by those agencies.

**ENERGY:**

- Pass the RURAL Act. The legislation fixes the law so that electric cooperatives will not lose their not-for-profit status if they accept local, state or federal grant funds to expand broadband, help restore power after a natural disaster, invest in local economic development or create energy efficiency or renewable 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 biomass conversion energy, hydro-electric, co-generation energy and expand nuclear energy production.

**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).

**TRANSPORTATION:**

- Encourage federal funding for improvements to Highways 50 & 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 through a long-term transportation reauthorization funding legislation and find a means to fund the Federal Highway Trust Fund.
- Work with Federal Highway Administration to include low water crossings as eligible for funding or change the definition of a “bridge” to include low water crossings.

**HOMELAND SECURITY & EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS:**

- 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.
- 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 on equipment and programming.
- 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.

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ISSUES:**

- 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.
- Recalibrate EPA wastewater standards to reduce the fiscal impact to the local governments/communities. Clean Water Act requirements for wastewater treatment facilities are extremely difficult for small, rural communities to meet. If changes cannot be made in the regulations, these communities need additional assistance in meeting those requirements through technical assistance and grants to upgrade facilities.
- 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.

**ECONOMIC & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT:**

- 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. We need more grant funding and federal and state support in this area. The increased economic development resulting from new infrastructure would provide additional money to improve other infrastructure.
- Advocate for and fully fund the existing portfolio of federal community and economic development programs, most notably the Economic Development Administration’s (EDA’s) infrastructure, economic adjustment assistance and district planning grant programs and HUD’s Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. Delta Regional Authority (DRA) and Small Business Administration (SBA) business lending programs. Rural areas depend heavily on these programs for infrastructure improvements. Specifically:
  - Reauthorize and fully fund EDA, and include (1) A provision that planning grants will be increased if appropriations are increased, (2) A provision that would lower the local government cost share on grants, and (3) A provision that would allow local control and ownership of RLFs, once fully funded.
  - Fully fund USDA rural development grant programs for infrastructure improvements, businesses development, community facilities, housing and broadband services.
- Support efforts to 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 final mile of distributing fiber optic cable. Phone companies are not required to distribute, so they only put the infrastructure in place if the population is large enough to make it profitable. This leaves out large portions of rural America. There is no incentive to build out high-speed internet infrastructure in these areas. Businesses, industry and entrepreneurs will not locate in rural areas if they cannot get high-speed internet services. Modern agriculture practices cannot be implemented without high-speed internet. Residents cannot access on-line educational opportunities. Rural America will continue to fall behind economically if broadband is not made available to everyone.