

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:

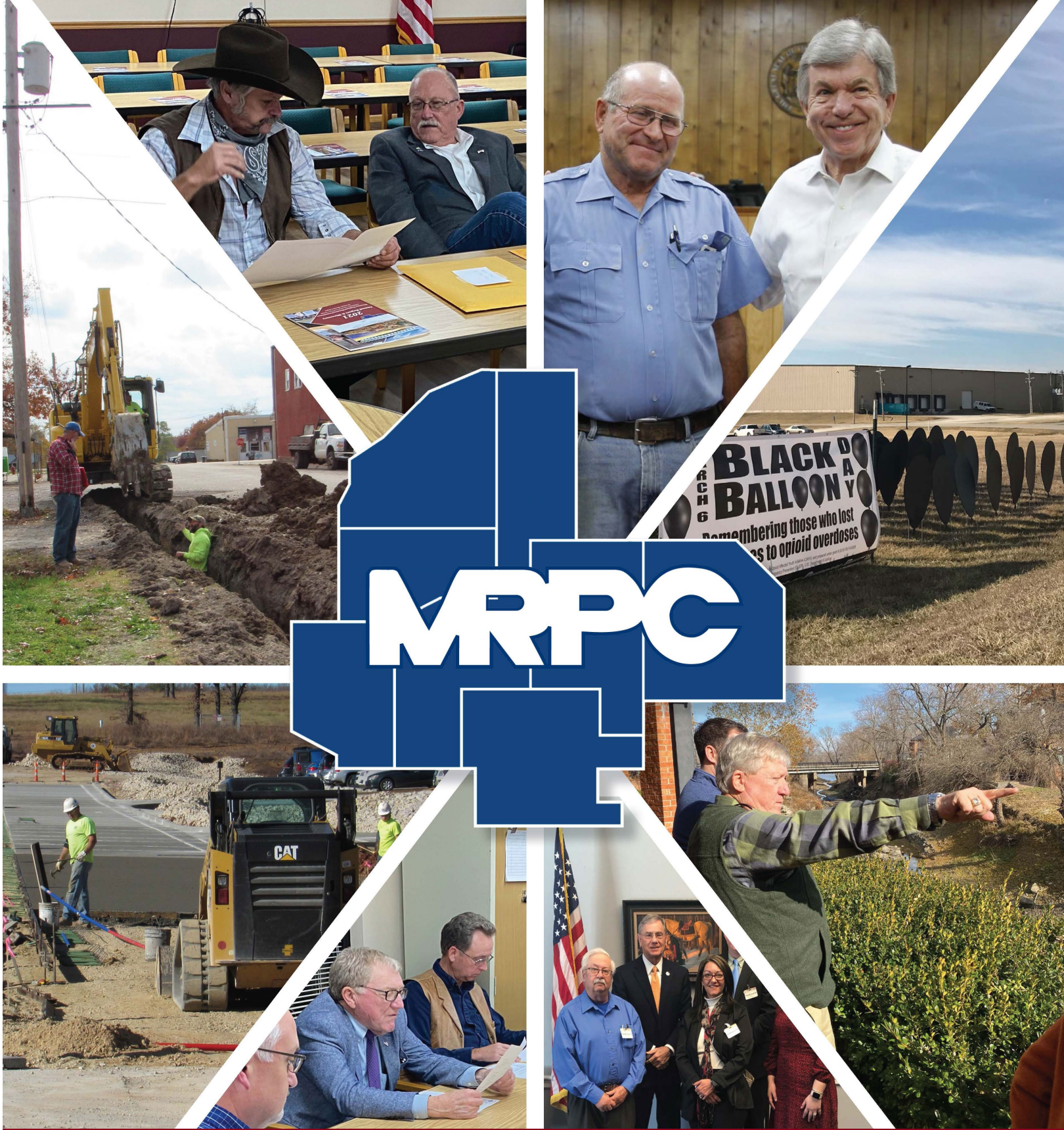
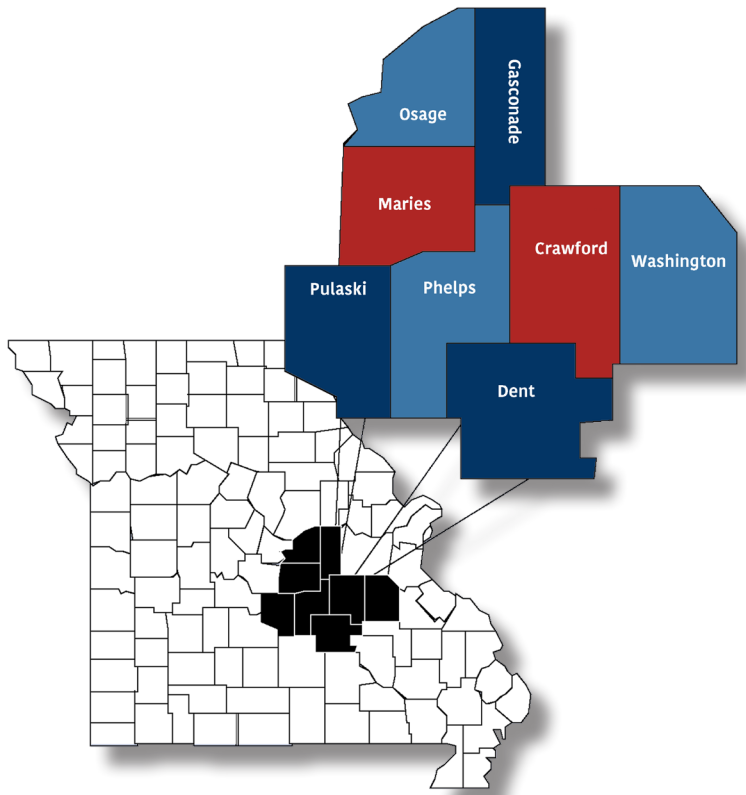
**The Honorable Sens. Josh Hawley and Eric Schmitt
Reps. Blaine Luetkemeyer, Jason Smith and Mark Alford**

The Meramec Regional Planning Commission, representing eight counties and their respective cities, is pleased to present its 2023 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 2023 Federal Priorities.

Sincerely,

Steve Vogt
MRPC Chairman

Bonnie J. Prigge
Executive Director



Federal Priorities in the Missouri Meramec Region
2023 Congressional Issues

Prepared by: Meramec Regional Planning Commission
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The Meramec Regional Planning Commission Board hereby shares its identified, prioritized and approved 2023 Federal Legislative Issues. While the categories are in no particular order, the priorities beneath each category head are listed in priority order.

ECONOMIC & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT:

- Increase funding for workforce training to address critical shortages in key areas such as healthcare, advanced manufacturing, technology and skilled trades, including carpenters, plumbers, electricians, HVAC workers, mechanics, etc.
- 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 and (2) A provision that would lower the local government cost share on grants;
 - Fully fund USDA rural development grant programs for infrastructure improvements, businesses development, community facilities, housing and broadband services.
- Continue to support Fort Leonard Wood using the results of the FLW Joint Land Use Study and Missouri’s Military Infrastructure Report. This base is an economic engine that puts over \$2 billion annually into the Missouri economy.

TRANSPORTATION:

- Provide additional funding for air and rail expansion and services as well as multimodal hubs to facilitate the delivery of goods and services.
- Provide additional federal funding for improvements to the US Highway 63 and 50 corridors, which are identified as freight routes in the Missouri State Freight Plan, in the Meramec Region.
- Improve public transportation opportunities by providing additional funding for rural transporation alternatives.

HEALTH CARE & SOCIAL SERVICES:

- Improve access to telehealth services and allow competitive reimbursement rates for telehealth services so they may become a viable alternative to care, especially in rural areas as well as critical healthcare workforce shortage areas.
- Assure adequate funding for Critical Access Rural Hospitals and more fully understand their importance to not only regional health needs but also local economic factors. Continued support for 340(b) Pharmacy Program.
- Improve access to and provide adequate funding for behavioral health services, especially in the areas of substance abuse and mental health resources; establish crisis centers and treatment facilities on a regional basis to address these issues.
- Ensure that HUD pays full administrative funding to housing agencies and authorities. 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 benefits 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 approved funding. This funding reduction has been initiated with no reduction in the administrative burden. Underfunding of administration is resulting in housing authorities 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.

ENVIRONMENT:

- Address the ever growing issue of landfill shortages by incentivizing recycling and reuse opportunities.
- Strike a balance between climate change initiatives, renewable and clean energy opportunities as opposed to fossil fuels by more fully realizing their devastating effects on rural economies and low-income communities.
- Continue to support and protect our national parks, monuments, wildlife reserves and public lands - 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.

HOMELAND SECURITY & EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS:

- 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.
- Increased funding for School Resource Officers; community policing; emergency vehicles and related communication technology as well as equitable pay parity for emergency responders in rural areas.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ISSUES:

- Increased funding and equitable solutions for critical deteriorating infrastructure projects in rural and impoverished communities to assure access to clean water and sanitary sewers; adequate roads and bridges; walkable sidewalks; and accessible recreational facilities.
- 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.
- Eliminate unfunded federal mandates to states such as federal elections and wastewater/stormwater regulations or provide funding options/opportunities to states and/or local governments to fully fund them.

EDUCATION:

- Address critical teacher shortages, especially in rural areas; pay must be increased and/or incentives provided.
- Provide equal access to post-secondary education and technical training in critical workforce shortage areas, such as advanced technology, healthcare and skilled trades.

ENERGY:

- Continue to explore opportunities to decrease our dependence on foreign fuel consumption by incentivizing environmentally conscious American resources.
- Strike a balance between renewable and clean energy resources as opposed to fossil fuels.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Pass campaign finance reform that would restrict money being donated from outside the state where the candidate is running for office.



A Voluntary Council of Local Governments Since 1969