

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 in March 2024.

Members of the Meramec Region's Congressional Delegation:

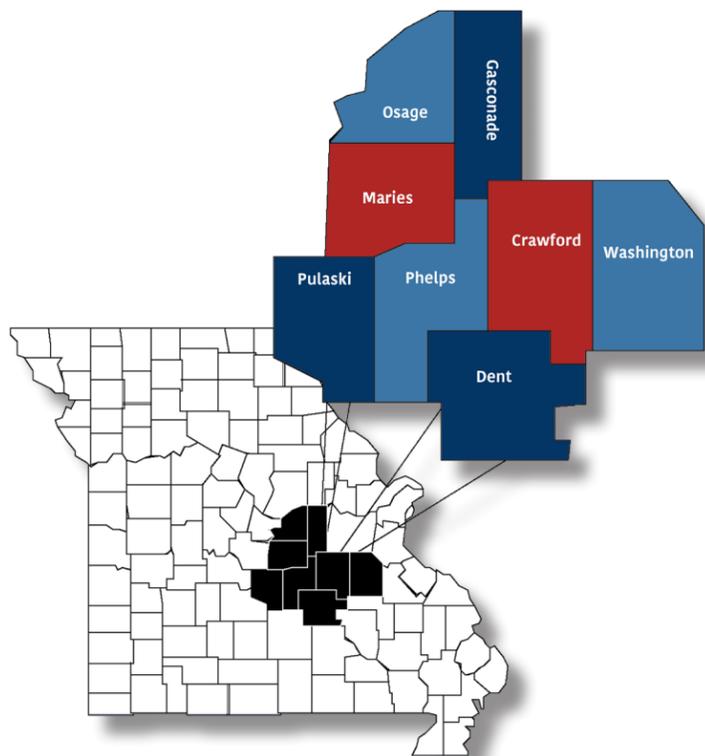
The Honorable Sens. Josh Hawley and Eric Schmitt
Reps. Blaine Luetkemeyer, Jason Smith and Mark Alford

The Meramec Regional Planning Commission, representing eight counties and their respective cities, is pleased to present its 2024 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 2024 Federal Priorities.

Sincerely,

Mary Heywood
MRPC Chairman

Bonnie J. Prigge
Executive Director



Federal Priorities in the Missouri Meramec Region

2024 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 2024 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:

- Reduce percent of match requirements for small communities for grants.
- Continue to provide equitable solutions and increased funding for deteriorating critical infrastructure in rural and impoverished communities to assure access to clean water and sanitary sewers; adequate roads and bridges; walkable sidewalks; and accessible recreational facilities.
- Continue to support and promote Fort Leonard Wood using the results of the FLW Joint Land Use Study and Missouri's Military Infrastructure Report. Fort Leonard Wood is an economic engine that puts over \$2 billion annually into the Missouri economy.

TRANSPORTATION:

- Increase funding for interstate road repairs and U.S. highways as well as bridges. Allocate more resources to public transportation, especially in rural areas. Provide additional federal funding for improvements to U.S. Highway 63 and 50 corridors.
- Provide additional funding for air and rail expansion and services as well as multimodal hubs to facilitate the delivery of goods and services. Increase, improve and expand ports to eliminate transportation bottlenecks and increase supply routes.
- Provide additional funding for rural transportation alternatives, such as Southeast Missouri Transportation Services (SMTS) and Ozark Area Transportation Services (OATS).

HEALTH CARE & SOCIAL SERVICES:

- Increase support for small hospitals and clinics in small communities. 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.
- Address critical healthcare workforce shortages in rural areas by establishing talent pipelines and training efforts, such as the Work Opportunities for Rural Communities (WORC) Grant in Washington County, funded by the Delta Regional Authority and the Department of Labor and coordinated through Meramec Regional Planning Commission, Washington County Ambulance District, Great Mines Health Center, and others. Continue to adequately fund and expand the State Loan Repayment Program (SLRP), the National Health Service Corps through the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), which provides loan forgiveness to those who agree to practice in rural areas and the J-1 Visa Program to address the critical shortage of doctors, dentists, nurses, and psychiatrists in rural areas. Promote workforce development to specifically address rural physician recruitment and retention, workplace violence and oppose minimum staffing ratios.

ENVIRONMENT:

- Sell no land to adversarial foreign interests, especially near military bases.
- 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 lower income communities. Allow for oil drilling in areas now prohibited with heavy fine incentives for abusers of the environment.

HOMELAND SECURITY & EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS:

- Improve/address border security. Implement jail time for criminals on the terrorist want list. Implement major jail time for drug smugglers. The U.S. should consider a better way to assist, and make it easier, for those who want to enter the country through the legal process and become productive citizens.
- 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.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ISSUES:

- 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.
- Provide unbiased solutions for addressing the basic needs of the growing homeless population in rural communities, including shelter, food and medical care. Work with HUD to provide and enhance programs to reduce rural homelessness and mental health support for the homeless.

EDUCATION:

- Expand vocational education opportunities and training through federal incentives. 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.
- Address critical teacher shortages, especially in rural areas; pay must be increased and/or incentives provided. This includes providing equitable funding for rural school districts, especially those in impoverished areas.

ENERGY:

- Continue to explore opportunities to decrease our dependence on foreign fuel consumption by incentivizing environmentally conscious American resources and focus on U.S. being energy independent by accessing our own oil production.
- Support the development of legislation that streamlines permitting, promotes cost effective regulatory policies and encourages utilizing the Nuclear Engineering programs in the University of Missouri system and other opportunities to develop recommendations for locating new generating facilities and forward-looking improvements to the grid.
- Proceed cautiously with electric vehicles until we have assurance that electric grid can support. Utilize the University system as an option to open opportunities for Federal funding to help offset the cost and expedite the program.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Encourage production in the U.S. and not overseas for items, especially computer chips, to become less dependent on foreign sources. Provide incentives to bring manufacturing back to the U.S.
- Improve the lack of cooperation between the legislators to work on issues affecting all citizens.
- Provide equitable solutions and funding for critical housing shortages in rural areas, especially for the low-income and ever increasing homeless population.



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