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Mayor of Vidalia, LA to represent Mississippi River Mayors at  
White House Arrival Ceremony for Pope Francis  
Mayors eager to hear Pope’s message on climate risk

Washington, DC. (September 16, 2015)—The Mississippi River Mayors announced that revenue generated by the Mississippi River is $405 billion, supporting 1.3 million jobs—significantly higher than anticipated. More than two dozen River Mayors were in Dubuque attending a three-day meeting for the Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative (MRCTI), a mayoral-led effort comprised of 68 River Mayors committed to creating a coordinated voice for the Mississippi River.

“The Mississippi is much mightier than even we realized. The River’s importance to our region and nation is indisputable. We must now move forward strategically and purposefully to protect this national resource and economic force,” explained MRCTI Co-Chair Roy Buol, Mayor of Dubuque, IA.

Coordinated by the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the Upper Mississippi River Profile revealed revenue generated by the upper river to be $253.2 billion, supporting 755,000 jobs. For the first time ever, the Upper River Profile was produced within a year of the Lower River Profile, enabling a more accurate comparison of the River’s overall economic impact. The lower river directly supports 585,000 jobs and generates $151.7 billion. Original estimates put the River’s overall impact at $200 billion and only 1 million jobs.

The profiles also showed that the top three economies on the entire Mississippi are manufacturing, tourism, and agriculture, responsible for $366 billion in annual revenue and supporting over 1.15 million jobs. The profiles only count counties along the Upper River directly adjacent to the waterway.

To protect these jobs and way of life, the Mayors stressed the need for clean water and announced steps to develop a clean water program. Through this program, the Mayors will work with states to implement clean water goals and support efforts to incentivize sustainable agriculture practices that reduce nutrient loading into the water column.

Related to the Mayors’ efforts to protect the River, MRCTI selected seven mayors to be part of a Mayoral delegation to attend the UN’s COP21 meeting—the 21st session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change—in Paris this December. The delegation includes Mayor Chris Coleman of St. Paul, MN; Mayor Hyram Copeland of Vidalia, LA; Mayor Dave Kleis of St. Cloud, MN; Mayor Tim Kabat of La Crosse, WI; Mayor Roy Buol of Dubuque, IA; Mayor AC Wharton of Memphis, TN; and Mayor Larry Brown of Natchez, MS.
“The Mississippi Mayors have direct experience with climate disruption, surviving floods, droughts, and hurricanes. That’s why we must be part of the global discussion on climate change. Together, we will be a voice for the Mississippi and other river basins at the UN meeting this fall and beyond to help secure the world’s food supply,” said Mayor Coleman, who is one of the co-leaders of the delegation.

The Kingdom of Netherlands—long considered a global leader in climate mitigation, is a partner in helping the River Mayors navigate the meeting. The Netherlands is a world leader in developing and implementing climate adaptation practices. In addition, the Rhine Basin of the Netherlands and the Mississippi River share key similarities.

The Mayors also announced two new partners for the COP 21 meeting: the International Society of River Scientists, which is working with the Mayors to understand the climate challenges facing fellow river valleys, and the United Nations Environment Programme, which is helping connect the Mayors with critical stakeholders of the other food producing river valleys.

Participating Mayors in the Dubuque meeting included: Bill Luckett, Mayor of Clarksdale, MS; Rita Albrecht, Mayor of Bemidji, MN; Dan Bender, Mayor of Red Wing, MN; Chris Coleman, Mayor of St. Paul, MN; Dave Kleis, Mayor of St. Cloud, MN; John Dickert, Mayor of Racine, WI; Tim Kabat, Mayor of La Crosse, WI; Joseph Chilsen, Mayor of Onalaska, WI; Roy Buol, Mayor of Dubuque, IA; Bob Gallagher, Mayor of Bettendorf, IA; Russell Loven, Mayor of Guttenberg, IA; Sonya Paddock, Mayor of Riverdale, IA; John Thodos, Mayor of East Moline, IL; Mark Vulich, Mayor of Clinton, IA; DeWayne Hopkins, Mayor of Muscatine, IA; Tony McCombie, Mayor of Savanna, IL; Tom Thompson, Mayor of Grafton, IL; James Spann, Mayor of Hartford, IL; David Lattus, Mayor of Hickman, KY; Mike Lowe, Mayor of LaGrange, MO; Francis Slay, Mayor of St. Louis, MO; Harry Rediger, Mayor of Cape Girardeau, MO; Donnie Brown, Mayor of New Madrid, MO; Dickie Kennemore, Mayor of Osceola, AR; Larry ‘Butch’ Brown, Mayor of Natchez, MS; Paxton Branch, Mayor of Tallulah, LA; Hyram Copeland, Mayor of Vidalia, LA; and Belinda Constant, Mayor of Gretna, LA.

MRCTI is an effort to bring national attention back to the Mississippi River—America’s most critical natural asset—and spearhead a new level of regional cooperation to make it more sustainable. As the ecological linchpin to the 37-state Mississippi River Basin, the River is responsible for creating $400 billion worth of U.S. GDP; providing drinking water for more than 18 million; transporting 62 percent of our nation’s agricultural output; delivering nearly 400 tons of coal and petroleum products; and directly supporting one million jobs and millions more indirectly.


Colin Wellenkamp, Executive Director

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