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Audio recording of the briefing will be available after 2 pm Central Time

Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative

Mississippi River Cities Nearing Projected Peak Demand on Resources from Pandemic, Call for Frontline Assistance

April 9, 2020, Baton Rouge, LA – Mayors of the Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative (MRCTI) called for access to more personal protective equipment (PPE) and supplies as cities from several states neared the projected peak demand on their healthcare resources this week with flood risks continuing to elevate.

Mayors Call for More Resources to Assist in Addressing Pandemic

Mayors from Louisiana, Mississippi, Arkansas, Illinois, and Tennessee gathered on a press teleconference today to emphasize that the need for PPE and supplies including testing.

“We are hoping this week will see the peak of the demand on our healthcare resources. The sooner we can get to the down-curve the better. We need as much time between peak COVID-19 demand and potential flood impacts as possible,” warned LaToya Cantrell, Mayor of New Orleans, LA. “Also, an expansion of the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s (FEMA) Individual Assistance program (IA) would allow residents access to financial assistance for rents and mortgages, groceries, child care expenses for essential workers, medical expenses.”

“There is a disproportionate impact of the pandemic on communities with less economic advantages as well as those facing other threats,” said Mayor Robert Eastern, Ill, Mayor of East St. Louis, IL. Our state is projected to reach peak demand this weekend, but the economic impacts are significant. The recently passed stimulus will help, but my residents are going to be hurting for a while. I hope additional packages can address the longer term drain of the pandemic.”

Economic Fall-out Continues for Cities from the 2019 Floods

Cash-strapped cities along the Mississippi River struggle to accumulate the supplies needed to address COVID-19 and add capacity for other looming disasters during the 2020 spring flood season. Cities are working to purchase additional PPE, but it is difficult while still carrying the debt from the 2019 record flooding.
“Many Delta communities are still reeling from the floods of 2019. I still have people displaced from last year’s flood to worry about. Plus, with our poverty rate, the acute nature of the pandemic’s economic downturn is felt more here than many other places. We have almost no capacity to weather furloughs and a sharp spike in unemployment,” explained Errick Simmons, Mayor of Greenville, MS.

Mayors are Working to Secure Additional Supplies and Testing
Mayors along the Mississippi River used their collective demand to secure additional resources to be made available to all cities throughout the Corridor.

“Right now here in Tennessee, and in the largest city along the Mississippi River, we’re projected to reach peak demand on our resources next week. We too pursued additional PPE supplies to prepare and did link to the resources connected by MRCTI and we are very thankful for that added capacity,” explained Jim Strickland, Mayor of Memphis, TN.

The Threat of Flooding Helped Mississippi River Cities Prepare Faster and Early
“It was not hard for my Co-Chair, Mayor Gallagher and I to see that the pandemic could hit us right at one of the most dangerous times of the year, thus we projected an urgency of rapid response and preparation for COVID-19 as early as possible. And, I’m happy to say that urgency was shared up river for many of our Mayors you will hear from in a moment,” state MRCTI Co-Mayor Sharon Weston Broome of Baton Rouge, LA.

“Helena just got its first confirmed case this week. We are the last county on the Mississippi River in my state and one of the last few along the entire waterway to confirm a case. However, we were among the first to issue a state of emergency and launch contagion controls,” iterated Kevin Smith, Mayor of Helena-West Helena, AR.

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Audio from this morning’s press conference will be available after 2PM Central Time today, please contact Jim Gwinner at jgwinner@LS2group.com for that file.

Mayors attending the MRCTI press call and available for media inquiries:
- Hon. Bob Gallagher – City of Bettendorf, IA & MRCTI Co-Chair
- Hon. Sharon Weston Broome – City of Baton Rouge, LA & MRCTI Co-Chair
- Hon. LaToya Cantrell – City of New Orleans, LA
- Hon. Jim Strickland – City of Memphis, TN
- Hon. Errick Simmons – City of Memphis, TN
- Hon. Kevin Smith – City of Helena, West Helena, AR
- Hon. Robert Eastern, III – City of East St. Louis, IL
Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative (MRCTI) is a coalition of 95 mayors from across the Mississippi River Corridor which spans along ten states from Minnesota to Louisiana. The Mississippi River provides drinking water to more than 20 million people and 50 cities. More than 40 percent of the nation’s agricultural commodity output moves on the Mississippi River. The River’s resources support 1.5 million jobs and create $496.7 billion in annual revenue.