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Mississippi River Mayors Urge President Biden to Include Middle America in Climate Agenda

Mayors Unveil 2021 Federal Policy Platform

Washington, DC – Mayors from along the Mississippi River gathered virtually in Washington this week as part of the Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative (MRCTI) Capitol Meeting. The conference has brought together 40 mayors from ten states as well as stakeholders nation-wide to move a pandemic recovery and climate performance platform forward.

“As this Capitol Meeting was planned, several repeating themes came to light that we have become urgent throughout our discussions this week: COVID-19 has laid bare vulnerabilities throughout our region we need to address; much of what we are discussing with federal leaders is a strategy to recover from the pandemic; and the renewed drive by the Administration to arrive at a climate solution is something we support in a broad sense but that drive cannot leave Middle America behind,” explained Mayor Bob Gallagher of Bettendorf, IA and MRCTI Co-Chair.

“The nation still reels from millions of jobs not recovered and the prospect of losing trillions in GDP over the next two years. Through the pandemic, we learned we relied on facilities like food banks and community centers. Further, broadband, connectivity, and interoperability have become some of the most essential tools to keeping our economy afloat through this crisis. Complacency is not success. There are programs that can help us prepare and be more resilient to the next pandemic if we keep them growing; programs like USDA’s ReConnect and EDA’s Public Works Grant,” urged Mayor Kevin Smith of Helena-West Helena, AR and MRCTI Arkansas State Chair.

Mayors also presented a plan to assist the Administration in building support for the climate work and making it more impactful on America’s mainstreets. Mayors recommend:

• fully funding the Resilience Revolving Loan Fund at $100 million for FY2022;

• creating the position of White House Chief Resilience Officer to ensure that the more than half-billion being spent on resilience is effective; and

• support the Mayors’ Safeguarding the Mississippi River Together or “SMaRT Act” proposal.
“Adapting to our changing climate presents unprecedented challenges for communities along our Mississippi River,” said Mayor Melvin Carter of Saint Paul, MN and MRCTI Minnesota Chair. “We urge the inclusion of our Mississippi River Corridor in the Administration’s bold climate action agenda which will help leverage our $164 billion global commodity supply-chain, Resilience Revolving Loan Fund and MRCTI partnerships to build a resilient and sustainable future for our children and grandchildren.”

However, Mayors are not relying completely on the federal government to bring all our solutions home – they are pursuing results our their own with their own partnerships to improve water quality and reduce carbon.

“During this Capitol Meeting, we are very pleased to launch our Plastic Pollution Initiative in partnership with the United Nations Environment Program North America, National Geographic, and the University of Georgia. Together, we will deploy a cell phone app that enables anyone to be a citizen scientist and take part in our effort to reduce plastic waste in the entire Mississippi River Corridor,” stated Mayor Sharon Weston Broome of Baton Rouge, LA and MRCTI Co-Chair.

“The signing of this innovative agreement with Ducks Unlimited will provide both habitat and disaster protection for our cities along the Mississippi,” said Mayor Jim Strickland of Memphis, TN and MRCTI Tennessee Chair. “We believe this aligns with President Biden’s 30x30 plan to conserve 30 percent of the nation’s land by 2030.”

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The Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative (MRCTI) is a coalition of 100 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 generate nearly $500 billion in annual revenue.