

MINUTES
SENATE COMMITTEE ON STATE AGENCIES & GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
AND
CHARITABLE, PENAL & CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTIONS SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE
ARKANSAS LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
Meeting Jointly

Saturday, October 12, 2013

The Senate State Agencies and Governmental Affairs Committee and the Charitable, Penal, and Correctional Institutions Subcommittee of the Arkansas Legislative Council met jointly on Saturday, October 12, 2013, at 10:00 AM, at the Delta Cultural Center in Helena, Arkansas.

Legislators in Attendance

The following legislators attended: Senator Eddie Joe Williams, Committee Chair, and Representative Chris Richey.

Senator Williams called the meeting to order.

Delta Regional Authority (DRA)

(Attachment 1, Exhibits C1, C2, and C3)

Chris Masengill, Federal Chairman, DRA, presented a PowerPoint entitled “DRA 101” and explained, DRA is a state and federal partnership organization that focuses on creating jobs, building communities and improving lives for citizens in the impoverished Delta Region. DRA assists nearly ten million residents in 252 distressed counties and parishes throughout eight states in the Southern U.S. The Authority’s primary purpose is serving as a regional focal point for coordinating resources, planning projects, and promulgating ideas.

Mr. Masengill stated, Congress modeled the DRA after the Appalachian Regional Commission and implemented the DRA Act of 2000 for its creation. The President of the United States appoints DRA’s highest-level leader, the federal co-chairman; and the governors of Alabama, Arkansas, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, Mississippi and Tennessee confirm the appointment.

When addressing economic development projects and issues, DRA relies on the States’ Economic Development Assistance Program (SEDAP). The program requires DRA to invest at least 75% of funding into economically distressed counties and parishes; and at least 50% into transportation and infrastructure projects. DRA does not base operation on retaining grants; and identifies priorities for investments on four fundamentals: public infrastructure, transportation, business development, and job training. Since 2002, when DRA had initial access to funding, it has invested \$119 million into 799 projects; helped create and retain more than 41,000 jobs in the Delta Region; and trained nearly 30,000 individuals for specific job skills needed in the area.

Public Health is a major issue facing residents in the Delta Region, where the life expectancy for men and women in every county and parish is well below the national average. DRA implements Healthy Delta Initiative programs such as the Healthy Workforce Challenge, Rural Health IT Loan Fund, Affordable Care Act Outreach, Delta Doctors and SHARE Connectivity Program to create and retain a more healthy population within the Delta.

DRA also considers small business and entrepreneurship initiatives a primary mission. During the past four funding cycles, DRA has invested \$3.7 million and leveraged more than \$12 million in projects focused on increasing resources and support for small businesses and entrepreneurs in the Delta.

DRA is an active member of the White House Rural Council, helping them develop productive partnerships with various federal agencies. These relationships helped DRA retain more than \$21 million in award funding, capacity building, technical assistance, and medical and engineering assistance to the Delta.

Mr. Massengil explained the most important issues facing economic development in impoverished regions like the Delta are relevant education systems and providing adequate workforce training. As a result, DRA invests more than \$3 million annually in programs such as the Arkansas Delta Training and Education Consortium (ADTEC). DRA supports a holistic approach towards job skill training and addressing area workforce deficiencies. He noted DRA's joint efforts with the Southern Growth Policy Board create productive ways to identify models and trends for businesses the Delta region might attract.

Overview and Tour of the Delta Cultural Center (DCC) (Attachment 2)

Thomas Jacks, Assistant Director, DCC, Department of Arkansas Heritage (DAH), welcomed the group to Helena and explained Arkansas created DCC in 1990 as one of the Department of Arkansas Heritage's seven divisions. The Center's primary charge is researching, documenting, interpreting, and presenting the people of the Arkansas Delta's heritage.

Paula Oliver, Public Information Officer, DCC, DAH, presented a PowerPoint entitled "DCC 101" and stated, DCC is the only division of DAH not located in Little Rock. The Center operates with eleven full time and four part time employees, and has a normal annual operating budget of around \$2 million. The Center's headquarters in Helena serves citizens in 27 counties in Arkansas's Delta Region. Ms. Oliver noted DCC focuses on effective outreach and programming to ensure they include every area of the Delta Region in its scope.

A primary responsibility of DCC is overseeing operation of several historic buildings in the region, specifically the Train Depot, Visitor's Center, Miller Annex, Horner House, Jewish Temple Beth El Heritage Hall, Fort Curtis and Freedom Park. These properties are available for public meetings, concerts, multi-use facilities, seminars, etc. DCC maintains 15 total acres of manicured lawn and 45,000 square feet of performance, exhibit and office space.

With no further business, the Committees adjourned at 11:45 AM and toured the Delta Cultural Center.