



2008 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

REGIONAL COMMISSIONS

ISSUE

The National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) supports the reauthorization of and sustained funding for the Appalachian Regional Commission, as well as the creation and funding of new U.S. Regional Commissions (HR 3246), including, Delta Regional Commissions, Northern Great Plains Regional Commission, Southeast Crescent Regional Commission, Southwest Border Regional Commission and Northern Border Regional Commission, which will bolster economic and community development.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO CONGRESS

- Support the reauthorization of the Appalachian Regional Commission to, at minimum, the \$88 million funding level, with incremental increases, as authorized in P. L. 107-149.
- Pass and adequately fund HR 3246, the Regional Economic and Infrastructure Development Act, which will authorize the aforementioned five regional commissions.
- Retain the strong federal/state/local partnerships as perfected by the Appalachian Regional Commission and mimic this within newly formed Commissions.
- Provide flexibility for all commissions to respond to the unique needs of their particular regions.

BACKGROUND

The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) was formed in 1965 to address the long-term, chronic economic and social distress and isolation of a particular part of the United States. Its mission over the years has been to retain a strong federal/state/local partnership that is focused on the problems that are endemic to the 13-state Appalachian region. ARC has done this through a “bottoms up” approach together with flexible programming that has emphasized basic community development, entrepreneurship, education, health care and elimination of the region’s isolation through the Appalachian Development Highway System and through efforts to bring telecommunications benefits to communities. The program approach of ARC has allowed many communities to reach the point in recovery where they can actually compete successfully for economic development. Through a very comprehensive approach of assuring funding goes to the areas of highest distress, the ARC has assured a steady transition of a traditionally needy area of the country.

The value of ARC has been its response to a specific region, with particular problems that differ greatly from other parts of the country. Funding from ARC has often been critical to keeping a project in tact. As a result, ARC has been a complimentary funding mechanism to HUD’s Community Development Block Grant Program, rural development programs and the Economic Development Administration’s programs. ARC neither replaces nor competes with any of these federal grant initiatives. ARC also has become a model for new and proposed regional commissions that focus on endemic problems in identified multi-state regions of the country.

The Delta Regional Authority (DRA) was formed to mirror the highly successful ARC. As such, the DRA’s mission is to focus on the chronic distress of the Mississippi Delta Region. The region includes eight states and 240 distressed counties or parishes. Despite other efforts, the Delta region remains a critically distressed area that Regional Commissions requires the special attention that can only be provided by a regional commission, working full time to resolve economic and social problems. The Northern Great Plains Commission (NGPC) was authorized in 2002 after an extensive area service study. The NGPC will focus on areas of particular concern to the mostly farming states that make up the region, including out-migration that has plagued the region for several years.

By transforming and providing dedicated funding to DRA and NGPC into Commissions and creating three additional regional commissions – the Southeast Crescent, the Southwest Border Authority, and the Northern Border – there is opportunity to expand economic development and strengthen the nation’s regions to better compete and grow globally.