

2009 Washington, D.C. Visit

Fifteen delegates from MCAG's One Voice program sprinted through a tight schedule of 28 meetings in three days in Washington, D.C. to learn about new federal funding programs.



Delegates split up into smaller groups to cover meetings at the Departments of Justice, Education, Federal Aviation Administration, and Housing and Urban Development. Meetings covered a variety of topics in transportation, economic development, education, law enforcement, healthcare, and water.

“The message was the same: Visit the federal department’s web site frequently to get details on competitive grants,” says Joe Oliveira, Gustine City Council Member and Chair

of the MCAG Governing Board. “New programs and guidelines were being developed even while we were there.”

From the first meeting to the last, a common message heard was to get ready for the increased amount of reporting that will be required by any group that accepts federal stimulus dollars. Legislators want to know that the stimulus money is being spent as agreed and they are especially interested in how many jobs will be created.

In addition to meetings with agencies and Senators’ and Representatives’ staff, the One Voice group heard overviews on transportation and economic development. Fred Abouselman, Executive Director of the National Association of Regional Councils (NARC), told the group that his agency’s mission this year was to prod the federal government to simplify. “We have 65 separate transit programs spread over a number of agencies. We have 90 separate surface transportation programs. Let’s consolidate.”

One unusual moment occurred during the trip after President Obama issued a memorandum on Monday advising that lobbyists would no longer be able to meet with federal agencies regarding stimulus funds. Tuesday morning, when the One Voice delegation arrived at the Department of Housing and Urban Development, they were met by a department representative asking if there were any lobbyists with the group. After being assured that there were not, the delegation was then escorted to their meeting.

Elected officials among the One Voice delegates were Bill Spriggs, Merced City Council Member; Joe Sousa, Los Banos City Council Member; Johnny Mays, Dos Palos City Council Member; and Tommy Jones, Los Banos Mayor; Ida Johnson, Board of Trustees, Merced Union High School District and Andree Soares, Board of Trustees, Los Banos Unified School District. Other delegates included John Alexander, Executive Director of the Merced County Healthcare Consortium and Scott Galbraith, Executive Director, MCEDCO.

One Voice is a group of business people, elected officials, agency staff, and other community leaders who get together in four workshops to recommend top projects and issues that would benefit the region. Those recommendations then go for approval to the MCAG Governing Board, whose members are the five county supervisors and one elected official from each of the six cities.