
INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

TO: GOVERNOR RONNIE MUSGROVE
FROM: ARMERITA TELL
SUBJECT: DRA GRANT PROCESS MEETING SUMMARY (MARCH 13, 2003)
DATE: 3/18/2003
CC: BILL RENICK

The DRA Alternates, along with Hayes Dent, Bill Triplett, and two other federal DRA staff members, met in Memphis to discuss the grant process for the upcoming funding cycle. The state alternates (and presumably their Governor's) continue to be united in their opposition to an application process that flows to the DRA first and then back to the individual states. Hayes Dent continues to represent what he claims to be interests of Congress (and in turn the interests of the Federal Co-Chairman) – that the DRA must “touch the paper first” in order to receive funding for FY2004. Throughout the meeting, Dent was adamant about Congressional demands that the DRA receive and “certify” all pre-applications before forwarding them to the states for the Governor's to invite full applications and submit recommendations to the DRA. If this does not happen, Dent says that Congress has threatened/assured the DRA of “zero funding for FY2004.”

During the meeting, Dent went to great lengths to “assure” the Alternates that he does not represent only the interests of the Pete Johnson (he also claimed that “Pete had nothing to do with [him] getting hired at the DRA” – indicating that he was in line for a possible appointment to a position within a cabinet-level agency in Washington but chose to stay and work on “behalf of the people of the Delta”). Instead, Dent claims, he is only “giving the alternates the facts” about what Congress will do if they attempt to create a bottom-up application process (applicants/local organizations – states – DRA). Dent laid the opposition to a bottom-up process squarely at the feet of Congress – even naming and quoting several Congressmen and Congressional Aids (see attached email).

State alternates, however, continue to have a suspicion that the federally suggested process is originating and being pushed by the Federal Co-Chairman. Questions were repeatedly asked of Dent as to why “Congress” is so adamantly opposed to a bottom-up process at DRA when they accept such a process with other large grant programs – ARC, CDBG, etc. In response, Dent claims that Congress wants to have some political controls over this program rather than allowing the Governor's to have “all of the power” (at this point he cited Congressman Roger Wicker specifically and indicated that Wicker was displeased that some of “his” ARC projects were recently overlooked by “the state” for funding). In spite of this suggestion, state alternates continued to impress upon Dent that his argument “just does not make sense.” One alternate questioned Dent as to “what is the big deal with the \$10 million DRA?” To which Dent could only reply, “politics.”

Dent was careful to end almost every statement he made as “representing the directives and wishes” of Congressional Offices with the following disclaimer – “but I’m sure if you talk to them they will tell you something different... that is just how the game is played.” This constant disclaimer irritated the alternates to the point that they requested Dent to arrange a meeting of key Congressional staffers, PDD representatives, and all DRA alternates during the NADO Conference in Washington (April 14 and 15). This will allow a frank discussion of the “Congressional” opposition to a bottom-up process in front of DRA staff and state alternates (if there really is strong opposition within Congress).

Dent characterized the state’s position as a “petty argument over who gets to touch the paper first.” He claimed that the states were going to harm themselves and the DRA by pushing for a bottom-up process and would probably assure the DRA of zero funding from Congress. He also gave numerous assurances that if the states would just go along with the federally suggested process, he and Pete would make sure that projects of particular interest to Governors would “receive certification.” Dent made numerous remarks assuring cooperation by the Federal Co-Chairman, including: “There will never be a point where the Federal Co-Chairman will hold up a project that complies with the law... Alternates will always be able to call and the Federal Co-Chairman will listen and help them out... There will never be a point that the Governors will not have 100% control of the process... There will never a project that the state wants that won’t get funded.”

Dent faulted the states for not assisting the Federal Co-Chairman and DRA with their Congressional lobbying efforts – blaming them for the low funding proposal. Dent indicated that Pete Johnson has done all the work in gaining support for the DRA in Congress (he reminded the alternates of Governor Huckabee’s absence at the DRA’s committee hearing last year, characterizing it as an embarrassment for the DRA and reflecting very poorly on the Governors). Dent went on to say that the “lack of participation by the Governor’s has been astounding.” And now, he claims, the states are going to kill all chances of getting DRA funded adequately for their own political reasons.

In spite of Dent’s assertions that DRA will be “zeroed out,” the state alternates have put forth a suggestion for a bottom-up funding process (see attached). They have asked Dent to represent their interests to both Pete Johnson and the members of Congress. They have also requested that DRA staff look for a way to meld the two proposals. However, Dent seems unwilling to do this due to the fact that “97% of DRA funding comes from Congress” and the DRA “should do what [they] want us to do.”

I will be happy to discuss this meeting with you in greater detail. Please let me know if you have any questions regarding this matter. Thank you.