SSMRC works to establish presence with state and local lawmakers throughout the Southern District

When the Southern States Millwright Regional Council was founded in 2010, there were only two state political committees – one in Arkansas and one in Florida – that our organization could utilize. As the need for union political committees has grown stronger during the past decade, the SSMRC has embarked on a journey to determine the best way to structure a non-partisan legislative-action arm that would benefit members through increased work opportunities and state- and local-level attention to vital labor issues such as prevailing wages and workers' compensation.

Read on to learn more about why union political committees are needed, what they do, and to see status updates on existing SSMRC political committees and progress reports on the establishment of new committees.

What do SSMRC's political committees do?

SSMRC political committees operate at the state, county, and city levels. Our parent organization, the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America, handles federal-level political matters. Our council's committees work to form political partnerships that will help pass labor-friendly laws and give council representatives access to the table to discuss how our members could be assets to major projects. Committees also promote political involvement and voting among our membership.

Just as large corporations have political pull, union political committees seek to provide similar influence for working people. Some of the labor issues we discuss with legislators include **right-to-work laws, health and welfare benefits, unemployment-insurance programs, prevailing wages, workers' compensation, workplace safety, tax fraud in relation to construction projects, and apprenticeship standards.**

Bipartisan support

Following the example of our UBC parent organization, **SSMRC political committees are bipartisan and open to working with all politicians who champion the goals of working people.**

When approached by candidates who have held office before, our political committee directors review voting records, and we monitor the voting records of politicians we have assisted previously. We hold those elected officials accountable to the promises they made.

Why union political committees are needed

The Southern States Millwright Regional Council's goal is to have a political committee or footprint in every state in our district. We need to do this because **every year, state-level bills and other legislation threaten the rights of working people**. Some of those bills have been successful in recent years. For example, Arkansas' prevailing-wage law was lost in 2017 – a defeat that hurt working families across the state.

On the other hand, we have won victories as well. For instance, many thousands of man-hours our members have worked in northeast Arkansas' burgeoning steel industry during the past six years are directly tied to SSMRC's Arkansas Political Committee.

Updates on SSMRC state political committees:

Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Louisiana

The Arkansas Political Action Committee was a combined carpenter and millwright committee. When the SSMRC was formed in 2010, it took over the millwright side of the committee. The Central South Carpenters Regional Council now operates the carpenter-focused aspects of the committee.

Arkansas' political committee can contribute to Oklahoma and Louisiana state candidates, too, but Louisiana has strict guidelines regarding out-of-state contributions. While Oklahoma does not need its own committee, Louisiana does. Although we currently partner with the Carpenter Political Fund in Louisiana, we have plans to establish a millwright political fund for Louisiana.

Florida

Once SSMRC was established, it began managing Florida's existing millwright political committee. The Florida fund underwent a name change and is now called the SSMRC Florida Political Committee.

Texas

After much time and effort by SSMRC staff, the Texas Political Committee became official in January of 2020. At first we thought we could mirror Florida's committee when setting up the Texas organization, but Florida's contribution system is not legal in Texas. We couldn't mimic Arkansas' system either, so we built the Texas committee from the ground up, strictly following the Texas Ethics Commission's rules. Currently, we are waiting for Texas members to get involved and begin authorizing the SSMRC to redirect a nickel from supplemental dues into the fund. If there is not viable funding, our influence will be minimal.

If you are an SSMRC member living in Texas, click here to give your support. There is NO COST to you.

Georgia

We are on the ground floor of founding a political committee in Georgia. We are exploring the requirements of the Georgia State Ethics Commission, scheduling meetings, and will likely seek legal guidance once we understand what paperwork needs to be filed. The COVID-19 pandemic slowed progress on our work in Georgia, but we remain focused and will get the Georgia fund up and running as soon as possible.

Tennessee

After the Georgia political committee is established, we will turn our eyes to Tennessee. We expect the Tennessee committee to be established in late 2020 or early 2021. As in every state, member participation will be crucial.