

2026 National Water Policy Fly-In

Speaker Profiles



Kristen Atha
Executive Director
Columbus Water & Power
Columbus, OH
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Kristen Atha serves as Director of Columbus Water & Power, where she leads a dedicated workforce of 1,400 professionals managing one of Ohio's largest municipal water and wastewater utilities. Since her appointment in 2022, Ms. Atha has championed a team-oriented approach to treating over 120 billion gallons of water annually for more than 1.4 million customers. Under her leadership, the department rebranded to Columbus Water & Power, reflecting a unified mission to sustain the region's resources while supporting a rapidly diversifying industrial base.

As Central OH's population tracks toward 3 million by 2050, Ms. Atha and her team are executing a multi-billion-dollar capital improvement program. This includes the development of a \$1.6 billion water treatment plant—the city's first new water plant in 50 years—to ensure long-term resilience and support the region's rapid population growth. To meet growing industrial demands, she has empowered her staff to advance planning for water reuse, preparing the "Silicon Heartland" for a resource-secure future.

A 30-year veteran of environmental engineering, Ms. Atha's career includes senior leadership roles at global consulting firms where she specialized in water market strategy. She currently serves on the National Association of Clean Water Agencies Board of Directors and the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission Executive Committee.

Ms. Atha holds a degrees in Civil/Environmental Engineering from the University of Cincinnati and a Business Administration from Miami University. Recognized as a "*Woman of Influence*" by Columbus Business First, she is a collaborative voice at the intersection of federal policy, local utility management, and community sustainability.



Lauren Barbir
Associate Vice President
HDR, Inc.
Southampton, PA
[LinkedIn](#)

Lauren Barbir is an Associate Vice President and Business Development Director for HDR's Tech, Media, & Telecom sector - a role that allows her to lean into her past experiences in water, power, and sustainability. She leads data center client development and program leadership across HDR's entire portfolio of engineering, architecture, and environmental design and consulting services. With her 20 years of industry experience, she also provides executive oversight to water/wastewater related project development and delivery for tech clients.

Prior to joining HDR, Ms. Barbir held various roles for GE, SUEZ, and Veolia across water and power/energy portfolios including supply chain management, marketing and strategy, and key accounts management. Her experience meeting and exceeding global client needs extends across diverse industries including power generation, oil & gas, chemical processing, food & beverage, and mission critical.

As a board member for the 7x24 Exchange Greater Philadelphia Chapter, member of iMasons Climate Accord Water Working Group, and committee member for Women in Mission Critical Operations (WiMCO), Ms. Barbir is committed to supporting tech industry workforce development and collaboration with the water sector. She also serves on the boards of the United Way of Bucks County and Notre Dame Club of Philadelphia in her local community. Ms. Barbir resides in Bucks County, PA and holds a BS in Chemical Engineering from the University of Notre Dame and MBA from Pennsylvania State University.



Jean Block

Chief Executive Officer
Little Rock Water Reclamation Authority
Little Rock, AR
[LinkedIn](#)

In August 2023, **Jean Block** became the sixth Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and the first woman to lead the organization in the Utility's history. She is responsible for leading the largest wastewater system in Arkansas with 221 employees. Prior to her role as CEO, she served as Chief Legal Officer at the utility for seven and a half years. She was responsible for all legal and compliance issues, including contracts, personnel matters, the Freedom of Information Act, and the Utility's state and federal Government Relations efforts. She also had oversight responsibility for the Human Resources and Environmental Affairs departments. In 2020, she founded Little Rock Water Reclamation Authority's employee resource group, the "Women of Water."

Ms. Block is a board member for UA-Little Rock's College of Business, CHI St. Vincent Infirmary, and 1st Vice President of the Arkansas Water and Wastewater Manager's Association. She has been named to *Arkansas Business' 40 under 40*, recognized by the Museum of Discovery for innovation in STEM fields by receiving the "Spark! Star" award and was named a *Top 100 Women of Impact in Arkansas* in 2023.

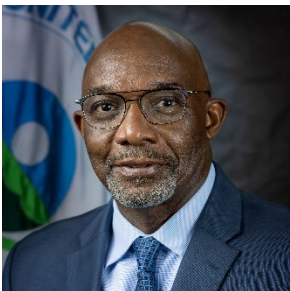
Ms. Block holds an undergraduate degree in Sociology from the University of California at Berkeley and a JD from the University of Kansas School of Law. She served on the Little Rock Water Reclamation Commission from August 2011 through August 2015. Ms. Block is originally from Mill Valley, CA.



Laura Briefer
Director of Public Utilities
Salt Lake City Corporation
Salt Lake City, UT
[LinkedIn](#)

Laura Briefer is the Director of Salt Lake City Department of Public Utilities (SLCDPU). She has served as Director of SLCDPU since 2016. Ms. Briefer has worked at SLCDPU for 17 years in various areas of the organization and has devoted a 30-year career to natural resource, environmental, and public policy professions in the public, private, and non-profit sectors. She holds a bachelor's degree in Environmental Studies from the University of California at Santa Barbara, and a Master of Public Administration from the University of Utah. Ms. Briefer additionally serves as an Adjunct Instructor in the Division of Public Affairs at the University of Utah. Ms. Briefer was recognized with the Distinguished Service Award for an Appointed Official by the UT Chapter of the American Society for Public Administration in 2024.

Ms. Briefer is a co-author of several peer-reviewed published papers alongside UT's academic institutions, focused on water resources, climate change, and watershed management. She serves on local and national boards, including the Jordan River and Utah Watershed Councils, the Utah Water Task Force, the Provo River Water Users Association, the National Association of Clean Water Agencies, and the national Water Research Foundation.



Brian Frazer
Director, Office of Wetlands, Oceans, and Watersheds
US Environmental Protection Agency
Washington, DC
[LinkedIn](#)

Brian Frazer is the Director for the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)'s Office of Wetlands, Oceans, and Watersheds. In this capacity, Mr. Frazer oversees monitoring, assessment, nutrients, watershed restoration and protection, and non-point source pollution control efforts at the national, state, and local levels. Additionally, he manages a diverse portfolio of regulatory and non-regulatory programs focused on protecting and restoring the nation's waters. More specifically, Mr. Frazer leads critical regulatory efforts associated with the Clean Water Act sections 312, 401, and 404 and the Marine Protection, Research, and Sanctuaries Act. Mr. Frazer oversees several non-regulatory programs, including the National Estuary Program, Urban Waters, Coral Reefs, and Trash Free Waters. Mr. Frazer has over 35 years of environmental experience and has worked at EPA for 25 years.



David Gadis

Chief Executive Officer and General Manager

DC Water

Washington, DC

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David Gadis serves as Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and General Manager of DC Water, one of the largest and most highly regarded water utilities in the nation. Mr. Gadis oversees a one billion dollar annual budget and leads a workforce of approximately 1,200 employees. He joined DC Water in May 2018 and is implementing a new strategic plan with a redefined vision and focused priorities. That includes improving both customer satisfaction and employee engagement, and a commitment to performance planning and business process improvement.

In addition, Mr. Gadis has formed a Stakeholder Alliance of city residents, business owners, members of the faith community and others to help address the twin challenges of rising rates and aging infrastructure. Under his leadership, DC Water is delivering on its \$2.7 billion commitment to build a massive system of deep tunnels and other infrastructure to nearly eliminate combined sewer overflows to the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers and Rock Creek in the nation's capital.

Mr. Gadis brings 20 years of industry experience to his current role, having previously served as Executive Vice President of Veolia North America and as CEO and President of Veolia Water Indianapolis. He was that utility's first African American CEO/President and the first African American CEO to lead a major utility in Indianapolis.

Mr. Gadis has been a frequent presenter at utility and government services conferences, including the US Conference of Mayors, speaking on both Underground Infrastructure and Managing Utilities, as well with the National League of Cities and the National Association of Public Private Partnerships. His expertise in demonstrating how private firms can help municipalities as valued partners in securing significant cost savings, has earned him a reputation among city and municipal leadership as an innovative leader and a trusted partner who truly understands their challenges and desired goals.

Mr. Gadis is Chairman of the Board of Blue Drop, DC Water's nonprofit sales and marketing affiliate. He also currently serves on the boards of the National Association of Clean Water Association, the National Forum of Black Public Administrators and the DC Utility Infrastructure Advisory Council. Mr. Gadis has previously served on the boards of the Indianapolis Urban League, Fifth Third Bank, Central Indiana Corporate Partnership, Indianapolis Sports Corporation, Indiana Business Diversity Council, Greater Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce, the Indiana Chamber of Commerce, and Indianapolis Downtown Inc.

Mr. Gadis attended Pike High School in Indianapolis, where he was the school's first IN All Star basketball player. He earned a basketball scholarship to Southern Methodist

University (SMU) and was a four-year basketball player and team captain before graduating from SMU with a BA in Marketing Communications. Mr. Gadis was inducted to the IN Basketball Hall of Fame in 2014.



Jessica Kramer

Assistant Administrator, Office of Water
US Environmental Protection Agency
Washington, DC

Jessica Kramer has been nominated by President Trump to serve as Assistant Administrator for Water at the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The Office of Water implements foundational environmental statutes passed by Congress, such as the Safe Drinking Water Act and Clean Water Act to support clean and safe water that is vital to healthy Americans, vibrant ecosystems, a thriving economy, energy independence, and outdoor recreation.

Ms. Kramer is currently serving as a Senior Advisor to EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin. Most recently, she served as Deputy Secretary of Regulatory Programs at the Florida Department of Environmental Protection where she managed statewide environmental programs. Ms. Kramer also briefly served as a senior policy advisor and counsel for Government Relations at Brownstein Hyatt Farber Schreck. She has extensive experience developing and implementing water policy, including serving as water counsel under Ranking Member (now Chair) Shelley Moore-Capito for the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee. She served in EPA's Office of Water previously, as Senior Policy Counsel to the Assistant Administrator under the first Trump Administration. Ms. Kramer also worked for roughly six years in the State of Wisconsin, as an Assistant Attorney General for the Department of Justice in the Environmental Protection Unit and in the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources as an environmental enforcement specialist and attorney. Jessica earned her bachelor's degree from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point and her law degree from Marquette University Law School.



Pouya Lavian

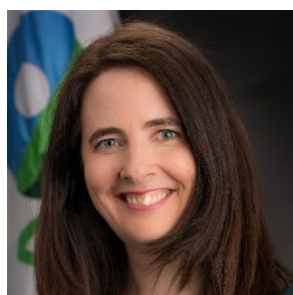
Deputy Chief of Staff for Policy
US Environmental Protection Agency
Washington, DC

[LinkedIn](#)

Pouya Lavian has been appointed Deputy Chief of Staff for Policy and Strategy at the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Mr. Lavian's remit at EPA is to lead and manage the agency's efforts on Artificial Intelligence (AI) infrastructure and data center development and deployment, permitting efficiency/acceleration and AI integration into internal agency processes. Working with

partners within the Executive Branch, state governments, local communities and private sector stakeholders, Mr. Lavian assists the Administrator in delivering mission-critical items necessary to advance American dominance in technological innovation, ensure national security and fulfill EPA's core mandate to protect human health and the environment.

Mr. Lavian brings significant experience to government service. He has operated within the spheres of law, finance, technology and international affairs as an attorney, banker and technologist and is a trusted advisor to policy makers and industry leaders. Immediately prior to his role at EPA, Mr. Lavian was a Managing Director within Wells Fargo's Wealth and Investment Management division and previously held positions at Credit Suisse and JPMorgan. As an attorney, Mr. Lavian practiced law at Mayer Brown and Carter Ledyard & Milburn. Mr. Lavian holds a MSc in Cyber Security Risk & Strategy from NYU Tandon School of Engineering/NYU School of Law, a JD from Fordham University School of Law and completed his undergraduate study (Cognitive Neuroscience/Political Science) at George Washington University.



Jennifer McLain

Director, Office of Ground Water & Drinking Water
US Environmental Protection Agency
Washington, DC

Jennifer McLain is the Director of the Office of Ground Water and Drinking Water and has 20 years of experience at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) both in the Office of Water and in the Office of Pesticide Programs. Dr. McLain joined EPA after earning a BS from the University of Notre Dame and a PhD in Chemistry from Princeton University.



The Honorable Jeff Merkley

Member of Environment and Public Works Committee
US Senate
Washington, DC

As OR's US Senator, **The Honorable Jeff Merkley's** goal is to make DC work for working Americans. He is fighting to create good jobs for working Oregonians, protect consumers from predatory practices, and ensure that all Oregonians have access to high-quality, affordable education. The Honorable Merkley is the son of a millwright and the first in his family to attend college. Born in the timber town of Myrtle Creek, OR, The Honorable Merkley has spent his career fighting to increase opportunities for working families. After earning an undergraduate degree from Stanford and graduate degree in Public Policy at Princeton's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, he Honorable Merkley worked as a national security analyst at the Pentagon and at the Congressional Budget Office.

In 1991, he returned to OR to lead Portland's Habitat for Humanity, a non-profit that empowers low-income families through homeownership. The Honorable Merkley went on to serve as president of the World Affairs Council in Portland before entering the OR House of Representatives in 1998. He became Speaker of the House in 2007. As OR's House Speaker, the Honorable Merkley led the most productive legislative session in decades. The legislature increased education funding, expanded access to affordable prescription drugs, passed landmark environmental and energy legislation, established domestic partnerships, cracked down on predatory payday and title lending, and created OR's first ever Rainy Day fund.

In the US Senate, the Honorable Merkley continues to stand up for working families. He fights to create living wage jobs and to push back on unfair trade policies that ship Oregon's jobs overseas. He has worked to make college more affordable and make retirement more secure for seniors. A true reformer, he led an historic coalition to fix the broken Senate by breaking up the gridlock, making it more responsive to the concerns of working families. The Honorable Merkley serves on the Senate Committees on Appropriations; Environment and Public Works; Budget; and Foreign Relations.



Kishia Powell

General Manager/Chief Executive Officer

WSSC Water

Laurel, MD

[LinkedIn](#)

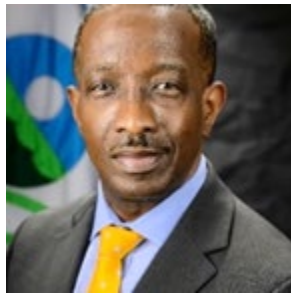
Kishia Powell is a dynamic force in the global water sector with 27 years of experience in both the public and private sectors across the US and London. She leads a team of 1789 strong and manages the day-to-day operations of the largest water utility in MD – the 8th largest in the country – and ensures water and water resource recovery services are safely provided to 1.9 million customers throughout a 1,000-square-mile service area. WSSC Water has a combined operating and capital budget of \$1.8 billion, and a six-year capital program of 4.8 billion. Ms. Powell served on President Biden's National Infrastructure Advisory Council's Subcommittee for Expanding Workforce Development. She currently serves on the board of the National Association of Clean Water Agencies, (formerly as President), representing over 400 clean water agencies across the country; the Water Research Foundation's Board of Directors; and the Baltimore Water Task Force. In May 2023, the Maryland Society of Professional Engineers honored her with the *Industry Icon Award*.



Pete Ricketts

Member of Environment and Public Works Committee
US Senate
Washington, DC

The **Honorable Pete Ricketts** is a Senator from NE. He was born in Nebraska City, NE. He has a BA in biology and an MBA in marketing and finance from University of Chicago. He was an online brokerage firm president and chief operating officer. He is a co-owner of Chicago Cubs baseball team. He was the Governor of NE from 2015-2023 and appointed as a Republican to the US Senate on January 12, 2023, to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of Benjamin Sasse. He took the oath of office on January 23, 2023; subsequently elected in the November 5, 2024 special election to fill the unexpired term ending January 3, 2027.



Andrew Sawyers

Director, Office of Wastewater Management
US Environmental Protection Agency
Washington, DC

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Andrew Sawyers is the Director of the Office of Wastewater Management (OWM) at US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Prior to joining OWM, Mr. Sawyers was the Deputy Director of the EPA's Office of Ground Water and Drinking Water. Prior to joining EPA, Mr. Sawyers was the Program Administrator for the MD Water Quality Financing Administration, managing MD's Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds and MD's Chesapeake Bay Restoration Fund. Mr. Sawyers has a PhD from Johns Hopkins University in Geography and Environmental Engineering.



Beau Schilz

Principal, Water Technology and Strategic Partnerships
Amazon Web Services
Seattle, WA



The Honorable Eric Sorensen

Congressman, Illinois-17
US House of Representative
Washington, DC

Congressman Eric Sorensen was born and raised in Rockford, IL.

He served communities across Central and Northwestern IL as a local TV meteorologist for over two decades, communicating life-saving information that impacted Illinoisans' jobs, schools, farms, and safety. To Congressman Sorensen, being a meteorologist was about building trust and protecting his community.

In Congress, the Honorable Sorensen still values being a trusted neighbor to the residents of IL's 17th Congressional District. He is focused on lowering costs for working families, creating sustainable jobs in Central and Northwestern IL, and supporting the family farms and rural communities that keep our economy moving forward.

The Honorable Sorensen proudly represents IL farmers on the House Agriculture Committee. He was also appointed to the House Armed Services Committee for the 119th Congress, along with assignments to two critical subcommittees: the Subcommittee on Readiness and the Subcommittee on Tactical Air and Land Forces.

These roles enhance the Honorable Sorensen's ability to advocate for the Rock Island Arsenal and Peoria Air National Guard Base—two cornerstones of IL's 17th District.

He currently resides in Moline with his partner Shawn and his dog Petey.



David Travers

Director, Office of Water Emergency Response and Cybersecurity
US Environmental Protection Agency
Washington, DC

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