

**WATER**  
RESOURCES  
OF  
UTILITY  
THE  
FUTURE



H<sub>2</sub>O

# 2020 VISION

---

## *Engagement, Collaboration, and the Next 50 Years of Clean Water Progress*

---

By Mark Sanchez  
NACWA President

**P**olitically, these are tumultuous and distracting times. But when distractions are at their height, integrity demands that we maintain an even greater focus on our core purpose, lest it get lost in all the noise.

NACWA's core purpose is to shape the clean water policy landscape and be the go-to resource for clean water executives across the country. If you are reading this article—whether you are with a small, medium, or large utility—I personally encourage you to focus

on becoming more involved in shaping our clean water future.

As clean water stewards and leaders, we are constantly striving to become better. I believe as we look to the future—collectively and individually—we should not only look to become better but also heed the call to become better together. There is something to be said about aligning our local mission—to become the best clean water providers possible—with the collective mission of elevating the clean water sector nationally. What would that look like?

This issue of the *Clean Water Advocate* is filled with real stories of member utilities that have faced daunting challenges—some of which may be all-too-familiar to you—and, through passion, innovation, creativity, and sheer hard work, have overcome those challenges and/or are presently transforming them into new opportunities. These inspiring examples can, and should, help uplift other utility members—even if just by taking note of the outcomes of others’ experiences. What more can we achieve if real connection and collaboration can occur? This is the kind of unity that “lifts all boats” and is at the heart of the clean water sector’s collective mission.

Now is the time to  
resolutely set our eyes  
forward, put our best  
ideas on the table, and  
join our voices together  
to shape the next 50  
years of achievement.

### EYES FORWARD, ARMS LOCKED

The year 2020 marks NACWA’s 50th anniversary. 2022 marks the 50th anniversary of the Clean Water Act. While we should all be proud of the enormous progress we as a sector have made over the past 50 years, now is not the time to look backward. Now is the time to resolutely set our eyes forward, put our best ideas on the table, and join our voices together to shape the next 50 years of achievement. This is NACWA’s “2020

Clean Water Vision,” and as inspiring as it is, its success depends on the following:

- Your direct engagement in sharing what is and is not working for your agency under the current regulatory and legislative regime governing clean water policy;
- Your help in finding ways to collaborate with key stakeholders in the water sector, including environmental, agricultural, citizen, industry, labor, public health groups as well as policymakers at the local, state, and national levels; and
- Your time in sharing your expertise, staff, and resources to ensure an unparalleled peer-to-peer network among utilities to take ideas from vision to reality.

Let the examples from small, medium and large utilities in this magazine inspire you. These utilities are just like yours, as are their missions and their stories. Furthermore, as members of the Association, they are your community and are most likely readily accessible and eager to support you—just as, hopefully, you are to them. This is the foundation of the 2020 Clean Water Vision...eyes forward, arms locked.

### POLICY OBSTACLES, ADVOCACY OPPORTUNITIES

There are undoubtedly those who will view this effort cynically. The naysayers will say nothing substantial can get done policy-wise in today’s dysfunctional Congress or at the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). But as President of NACWA, I am happy to provide convincing evidence to the contrary.

On the last day of Congressional action this past year, despite a looming government shutdown, Congress voted—on a bipartisan basis and almost unanimously—to amend the Clean Water Act in



the most significant way in decades: by inserting language into the Act that makes integrated planning a permanent statutory program at the EPA. The president signed the bill and now this language firmly places the force of law behind municipal clean water agencies' ability to develop prioritized regulatory plans—ones that need to be fairly reviewed and considered by the EPA and delegated states.

This is but one recent example of the effectiveness of national advocacy and what can happen when utility leaders get behind a plan of action. It also emphasizes that water—amid all the clamor and noise—continues to be an issue that garners bipartisan support.

## TAKE HEART, TAKE HEED

If NACWA and its partners can succeed in getting the Clean Water Act amended in this divided political atmosphere, then what can't we do? If we continue to work together, the next 50 years of progress will look bright indeed.

I invite you to join me in this collaboration, so we can continue to enjoy unmatched returns on our investment in clean water—returns that will benefit generations to come. 💧

.....

*Mark Sanchez is the Executive Director of the Albuquerque-Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority and serves as NACWA's President.*

