

# POLL POSITION



**Water Sector Priorities  
Elevated in Congress Due to  
Strong, Sustained Advocacy**



**By Kristina Surfus & Jason Isakovic**





**T**hroughout all the partisan fighting and policy divisions between Congress and the White House over the past two years, water has proven to be an issue of common ground and one of the few legislative bright spots where the US House of Representatives, the US Senate, and the Trump

Administration have been able to coalesce around bipartisan bills.

Significant water legislation, including the America's Water Infrastructure Act and the Water Infrastructure Improvement Act, was advanced in 2018 after broad bipartisan support was secured following many months of Congressional attention and negotiation. These bills may be seen as just the first stages of a long campaign to address the full range of water infrastructure needs and to modernize the Clean Water Act (CWA), but they set crucial precedents upon which to build and are a considerable achievement after years of hard work elevating clean water as a national priority. They also show the strong bipartisan voice that water as an issue inspires and the positive impact that the advocacy efforts of NACWA, the communities it represents, and the water sector as a whole are having on Congress and the Administration.

**In a political era that provides little room for bipartisanship...the water sector has the potential to buck the trends.**

## OPENING WINDOWS OF OPPORTUNITY

As work gets underway in the 116th Congress, we find ourselves operating in a new political environment. November's midterm elections ushered in a takeover of the House by Democrats, counterweighted by the strengthening of Republican control in the Senate.

This dynamic could heighten the partisan obstacles to achieving legislative consensus, especially with the 2020 presidential election season already looming. Partisan policy fights ranging from immigration to the federal deficit may grow more acute, and significant House attention could become tied up in oversight and investigative hearings of the Trump Administration.

Perhaps surprisingly to many, however, is that this unique dynamic could also help to advance the next phase of clean water priorities. The groundwork has already been laid both in terms of demonstrating bipartisan opportunities surrounding water issues and through preliminary and ongoing discussions around top water sector priorities. Assuming Congress looks for one or two areas in which to make meaningful progress, the ever-popular issue of modernizing America's infrastructure will remain a top prospect.

Additionally, the incoming Democratic House has raised the profile of other issues impacting the sector, including disaster resiliency, climate

change mitigation, and tax reforms. As far as any of these issues are considered, NACWA will look to play an active role in protecting the interests of the sector and addressing common concerns.

## POSITIONED FOR SUCCESS

These unique circumstances put the water sector in a relatively strong position to advocate for its most pressing priorities, which include reauthorizing the Clean Water State Revolving Fund, securing strong funding for federal programs that impact the sector, and modernizing the CWA to better reflect the modern challenges and innovation opportunities that utilities are facing.

NACWA will be busy over the next year advocating for continued increases in federal dollars for water infrastructure, meaningful action on affordability issues, innovation and the utility of the future concept, and a net environmental benefit approach. Our utility members will be critical in helping advance this agenda.

Since his 2016 election campaign, President Trump has spoken about the need to improve America's infrastructure through comprehensive legislation. In his remarks, water has remained a key component. Senate leaders from both sides of the aisle have maintained attention to the issue. Furthermore, the new House Speaker, Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), has also outlined goals for





infrastructure—including water infrastructure—as a priority for House Democrats this Congress.

Speaker Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) have already met with President Trump regarding bipartisan collaboration on infrastructure. While challenges remain—including how to pay for infrastructure investments and just how comprehensive any legislative package should be—both Republican and Democrat Congressional Leadership clearly understand that infrastructure is one of the few areas where new bipartisan policy can be achieved during what may be two of the most politically contentious years in recent memory.

Whether through a comprehensive infrastructure package or via stand-alone legislation, NACWA will be diligently proposing and analyzing policies and supporting those that promote and strengthen the clean water sector.

#### **STRIKING WHILE THE IRON IS HOT**

A unified advocacy push by the clean water community will be imperative to building and nurturing the political willpower needed to carry sound clean water policy across the finish line. *Water Week*—the water sector’s annual public policy showcase event in Washington, DC—is scheduled to take place from March 31 to April 6, 2019. *Water Week*, along with its signature event, the *National Water Policy Fly-In*,

provides an important platform for hundreds of water professionals and leaders from across the country to speak directly to members of Congress about the impact of existing federal policy on water sector stakeholders and their hundreds of millions of constituents, as well as the opportunities that exist to enact sound, sustainable policies moving forward. Senators and representatives need to hear directly from those they represent in their home states and communities about what they can do policy-wise to help promote the long-term viability of the public water utilities in their critical services.

The opportunity to raise a strong, unified voice as a water sector is here. We must capitalize on the progress we have made with Congress and policymakers and ensure that our message is louder than ever.

In a political era that provides little room for bipartisanship and major legislative achievements, the water sector has the potential to buck the trends and lead from the front as this Congress goes through its legislative agenda.

Let’s seize the moment and make it count! 💧

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