

A MESSAGE FROM NACWA'S PRESIDENT

NACWA to Build on a Tough, But Successful Year

BY TERRY LEEDS | KANSAS CITY, MO

The nation and our clean water community have been through unprecedented times over this past year. I have had the unique opportunity to be NACWA's first (and I hope only!) fully "Virtual President". We have navigated an incredibly challenging year that has been marked by an ongoing pandemic that we now are emerging from, racial divides that continue to plague our nation (but that the water sector is coming together to help address), and a Capitol Hill riot that has underscored the bitter and partisan political environment we have been in and hopefully from which we will begin to emerge.

Despite these and other enormous challenges, NACWA has remained focused on its role, its vision and its mission. NACWA has played an even more vibrant role in connecting us to share best practices and shape a policy landscape that seems to grow more complex each day.



We have done so by catering to our strengths of public service and an unmatched commitment to our diverse communities and the water workforce. As a utility leader, I have known that the water workforce is made up of heroes. But it has been a highpoint of my year thus far as President to work on policies and best practices that have elevated our sector's "H2O Heroes" and will ensure — as a legacy matter! — that the policy landscape will permanently prioritize our needs and the needs of our communities as an essential services sector.

Again, I would like to thank my fellow Executive Committee members as well as the NACWA Board of Directors for their amazing leadership during this very challenging time. If you look at the progress that has been made since NACWA temporarily closed its offices last year in March to keep its staff safe, it is truly remarkable what we have accomplished together. Over the past year, NACWA has:

- Ensured that there were no dues increases this past fiscal year and reduced the cost of sponsorship to reflect the difficult economic times. In line with these moves, NACWA is having one of its strongest membership retention years and, halfway through the year, has already added 16 new members;
- Successfully rescheduled in-person conferences and meetings to virtual meetings in a manner that has exponentially increased registrations and participation. NACWA has also held more regular and timely Utility Executive Zoom strategy calls to help navigate complex pandemic-related and other policy issues for utility executives across the country;
- Ensured that the water/wastewater workforce is now deemed "essential" by key federal and state decision-making bodies;
- Obtained nearly \$1.2 billion in funding for the first-ever federal low-income water customer assistance program housed at the Department of Health and Human Services;
- Gathered vital information on the billions of dollars of revenue loss to utilities resulting from the pandemic and the related business shutdown and unemployment crisis to maximize opportunities for federal funding eligibility for water/wastewater utilities through

Covid-19 relief legislation and ongoing stimulus package and annual water program funding negotiations on Capitol Hill;

- Developed a new affordability campaign with the Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies (AMWA) called *Affordable Water, Resilient Communities* (I encourage you to visit AffordableH2O.org and get involved, if you have not already!) that has framed the affordability issue in both the legislative and regulatory arenas.

The above are but a few examples of how NACWA is helping frame water issues for the Biden-Harris Administration and the 117th Congress, with tangible results already visible via the \$111 Billion for water included in the Administration's recent infrastructure proposal. But the full pace and scope of issues NACWA has been addressing are truly unprecedented.

I have learned, however, that NACWA's ability to influence this broad array of issues is only as strong as the commitment of our member agencies and our private sector partners. Members in every Congressional District must weigh in through NACWA and we need all NACWA members to weigh in on behalf of water infrastructure funding as an infrastructure package and annual program funding become the focus of national attention.

In my last *Clean Water Advocate* message, I pledged to all NACWA members that I would build on what has made NACWA successful to date – more aggressive and influential advocacy coupled with stepped up sharing among an unparalleled utility leaders network capable of lifting us to a new level of public service and environmental sustainability. I sincerely hope you feel we have delivered on this pledge.

Although I will not be President when we next get together in person at a NACWA conference, please know how grateful I and the NACWA team are for all you do. I look forward to raising a glass and toasting to these accomplishments soon!

Sincerely,

Terry Leeds
NACWA President
Director, KC Water
Kansas City, MO