As a long-time student of political science and public administration, I am extremely interested in how our local, state, and federal governments work. As an employee of a public utility, I know very well how the laws and rules of regulation can, and do, impact our business.

One of my favorite quotes is, “Laws are like sausages—it’s better not to see them being made.” While this may be true, AWWA offers an excellent opportunity to observe and even participate in our lawmaking process. I’m pretty sure I don’t want to go to a sausage processing facility, but I’ve been to Washington, D.C., and Tallahassee, and it’s really not so bad. In fact, AWWA and the Florida Section have developed an approach that makes it both constructive and enjoyable.

Every spring, AWWA hosts its Water Matters! Fly-In, held in our nation’s capital. Hosted by the association’s Water Utility Council, the Fly-In is the focal point for the association’s grassroots lobbying efforts. It serves to not only advance the water community’s legislative goals, but it also further establishes AWWA members and staff as sources of information on water issues.

I recently returned from Washington after my third Fly-In, and I can tell you that the power and influence exhibited by the association membership is truly impressive. Typically, day one starts with a very informative briefing on the various issues that we are facing and helpful tips on the most effective way to articulate our message to those in Congress and their staffs. The positive power in this room would make you very proud to be a member of AWWA. This year, the Florida Section was very well represented by Lisa Wilson-Davis, Kevin Carter, Chris Pettit, Mike Bailey, Chuck and Hillary Weber, Tyler Tedcastle, Mark Kelly, myself, and our section executive director, Peggy Guingona.

After the briefing, we all headed to Capitol Hill to attend scheduled meetings with key senators and representatives. Many of us make it a point to stop by our local congressperson’s office to discuss timely issues and strengthen our relationship. Again, the association does a wonderful job by providing us with issue papers to provide clear and concise details on the issues we are advancing.

This year, our major issues regarded continued support for water infrastructure and source water protection. These initiatives are strengthened through legislative support for the Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA) finance program and the huge farm bill, which includes major impacts on water conservation and critical cooperation with the farming community.

In addition, we are also able to inform these lawmakers of the importance of our profession. For instance, every one dollar invested in water or wastewater infrastructure increases our long-term domestic product by 3.65 dollars. Each job in water or wastewater construction or rehabilitation creates 3.68 more jobs in the United States. Conversely, not reinvesting in our nation’s water infrastructure would cost manufacturers and other businesses more than $7.5 trillion (yes, trillion) in lost sales and $4.1 trillion in lost gross domestic product through 2040.

This year we also cohosted a joint briefing in the Senate building and a reception at the Library of Congress with other water associates. This spirit of cooperation and the “One Water” concept are alive and well!

I should also point out that your Florida Section has employed a similar advocacy model in Tallahassee as well, and undoubtedly, it has been every bit as successful as the national Fly-In. We can all be proud of these efforts and should remember to give a note of gratitude to Lisa and our Utility Council for making sure we are successful in Washington and in Tallahassee.

We are being heard, and we are making a difference!