Infrastructure Challenges Addressed in White Paper and on Capitol Hill

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AWWA White Paper

Last month, AWWA issued a white paper, *Buried No Longer: Confronting America’s Water Infrastructure Challenge*. The paper highlights the need, over the next 25 years, to restore existing water and wastewater systems as they reach the end of their lives and for the expansions to serve a growing population, at a cost of at least $1 trillion. The funding will come from increased water bills, impact fees, and investment funds. The report breaks out the water systems throughout the United States in the following categories: 1) very small systems (less than 3,300 population) representing 84.5 percent of community water systems; 2) small systems (3,300 – 9,999 population) representing 8.5 percent of community water systems; 3) medium size systems (10,000 – 49,999 population) constituting 5.5 percent of communities; and 4) large systems serving more than 50,000 people, representing 1.5 million community water systems. The report also stated that the South and the West will face the steepest investment challenges because of the rapid population growth in these regions.

In conjunction with the release of the white paper, AWWA leaders testified in front of a U.S. congressional subcommittee last month and endorsed draft legislation that would create a Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Authority (WIFIA) to reduce the cost of water infrastructure projects for utility customers. The WIFIA would fund local water infrastructure projects, with little or no long-term cost to the federal taxpayer. The mechanism would borrow U.S. Treasury funds to provide low-interest loans, loan guarantees, or other credit support to local communities. Loan payments, with interest and guarantee funds fees, would flow back to WIFIA and into the Treasury—again, with interest. Eligible water infrastructure projects would include water, wastewater, and wet weather-related projects.

Washington, DC Fly-In

The annual Fly-In to Washington, D.C., also occurred in March. This event is held once a year on Capitol Hill with congressional leaders to highlight and discuss legislative issues of interest to the water industry. The meeting helps to boost name recognition of water professionals, who come from all across the country, among members of Congress and their staffs, and helps to establish them as authorities and sources of knowledge and expertise on water issues. As you can probably tell, this year’s main topic was infrastructure, with a big push for Congress to endorse draft legislation that would create the new Authority.

The Fly-In included members of the Florida AWWA Section, who discussed current water-related topics with their elected officials. We had eighteen meetings over a day and a half with the senators and congresspeople from our state. Everyone to a person was interested in the topics and wanted additional information from our section. I would like to say thank you to Suzanne Goss, Paula Dye, and Edgar Fernandez for working so hard behind the scenes to set up these appointments for our group. Let’s hope that in the not-to-distant future, the draft legislation becomes law and we can start to improve and upgrade Florida’s infrastructure for all of our residents.

Awards and Grants

I would like to congratulate Greg Taylor, chair of the Public Affair Council, and his committee on winning the 2012 Community Education Grant (CEG) from the Southwest Florida Water Management District for its project, “Fertilizer Use Impacts on Tampa Bay Drinking Water Supplies.” Once again, congratulations for a job well done.

Congratulations are also in order for the City of Dania, which had a dedication this past month at its new nanofiltration facility and celebrated its recognition as the first water plant in the world to receive LEED Gold-level certification.

I want to remind everyone that, at our fall conference in November, we will give out an award for an historical landmark building that is still in service. The building must be at least 50 years old. Please get your nominations into Robert Cushing, chair of the Administrative Council, at rcushing@carollo.com, so he and his committee can review them.

FSAWWA SPEAKING OUT

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