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The Authoritative Resource on Safe WaterSM

Washington D.C. Report

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110th Congress Convenes

Greetings from the new AWWA Washington D.C. Office. Although we have been busy with the move, life has gone on around us. In particular, the new 110th Congress convened under Democratic leadership, and there are indications of a busy year ahead on Capitol Hill. A number of important issues were in focus on January 4 as AWWA hosted the officers of the leading water and wastewater associations at the second Water Summit. Participating groups included the Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies, the National Association of Clean Water Agencies, the National Association of Water Companies, the National Rural Water Association, and the Water Environment Federation, as well as AWWA. The meeting provided an opportunity to discuss organizational priorities for the year ahead and to explore collaboration on a number of important issues.

Congress Convenes. Although the leaders of some subcommittees have not been determined yet, and important parts of the Congressional agenda remain to be filled in, it is already apparent that a number of issues of concern to water utilities will be in focus. These include:

Farm Bill. The chairs of the House and Senate Agriculture committees plan to report bills from their committees before the August recess to reauthorize the Farm Bill. This bill includes billions of dollars for conservation programs that should be better targeted toward protecting drinking water sources. AWWA expects to be active in the coming debate on how to structure these programs, in coalition with other water and environmental organizations.

Perchlorate. Sen. Barbara Boxer, incoming chair of the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works (EPW), has introduced legislation (S.24 and S.150) that would require EPA to finalize an MCL for perchlorate this year, set a health advisory for perchlorate this year, and require all public water systems serving more than 10,000 people to monitor for perchlorate. EPA would devise a targeted monitoring system for smaller water systems. A hearing is likely soon in EPW on these bills, and on EPA's decision, issued January 4, that utilities don't need to monitor for perchlorate because it now has sufficient occurrence data for that compound.

Infrastructure. The House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure expects to report a bill early this session to reauthorize and significantly expand the Clean Water State Revolving Fund (SRF). Staff of the Senate EPW Committee report that its leadership is interested in developing legislation to reauthorize and expand both the clean water and the drinking water SRFs, if there is water community support. Water utilities need to write their senators and representatives to urge congressional action to expand the SRF as the mechanism for delivering federal assistance for water and wastewater infrastructure. Utilities should also contact their governors on the same point and ask their governor to work with the state's congressional delegation to get this done. The upcoming Washington Fly In will also provide an opportunity to deliver this message to Capitol Hill.

Chemical Security. Some members of Congress are keenly interested in passing legislation to improve security at facilities that manufacture or store hazardous chemicals, such as chlorine. Some will want to force such facilities to use “inherently safer technologies.” With some of the advocates of chemical security legislation now chairing committees and subcommittees, such legislation will get new life in this Congress.

New Faces Take Subcommittee Chairs

As we thought might happen, party caucuses have shaken up some committee assignments for the 110th Congress. Key to drinking water community is the chair of the House Subcommittee on Environment and Hazardous Materials, a part of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce. The new subcommittee chair will be Rep. Albert Wynn, D-Md., who represents some of the northern suburbs of Washington, D.C. One of his areas of focus, he said this week, would be drinking water quality.

Rep. Hilda Solis, D-Calif., had been ranking member when the Democrats were the minority party, but party leaders gave the slot to Wynn based in part on his seniority. Wynn has said he plans to look at how the Bush Administration’s environmental policies have affected minorities. In connection with that, he wants to examine EPA’s handling of the Superfund program. The ranking Republican on that subcommittee will be Rep. John Shimkus of Illinois.

At the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, the chair of the subcommittee on water resources and environment will be Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson, D-Texas, as we expected. However, the ranking Republican will be Rep. Richard Baker of Louisiana. Rep. John Duncan of Tennessee had been chair of that subcommittee when the Republicans controlled the House.

In the Senate, the biggest shakeup, from a water and environment perspective, has been in the appropriations subcommittee for the Department of Interior and related agencies. The new chair will be Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., and the new ranking member will be Sen. Larry Craig, R-Idaho. As expected chair of the full Senate Committee on Appropriations will be Sen. Robert Byrd, D-W. Va., and ranking Republican will be Sen. Thad Cochran, R-Miss. That latter pair will also chair and hold the ranking position on the appropriations subcommittee for the Department of Homeland Security.

Additional shakeups may come in other committee leadership assignments, and we will keep you posted of those that are relevant to drinking water issues.

Regulatory/Security Update

This week has been busy from the security side, beginning with an initial meeting among utility and state volunteers on the development of metrics to feed into the Water Sector-Specific Plan (SSP), followed by a another meeting on the same issue with Department of Homeland Security staff (DHS). AWWA staff and a volunteer met with DHS staff on its Target Capability List (TCL), which is being developed as part of the National Preparedness Goal (Homeland Security Presidential Directive-8) to identify the types of capabilities needed to support response and recover to various incidents.

On the regulatory side, Washington staff is preparing for the kickoff webcast on the Total Coliform Rule/Distribution System, scheduled for January 17. This will be an informational precursor to the more detailed workshop in Washington January 30-February 1.

As always, please contact your AWWA Washington Office if you have questions or comments.

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