

On April 1, the Western Governors' Association (WGA) sent a letter to U.S. Department of the Interior Secretary David Bernhardt, U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue, and Federal Emergency Management Agency Administrator Pete Gaynor asking for the agencies to "offer coordinated support for rural counties and municipalities as they respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)." The letter highlights the "thousands of civil servants with relevant experience to assist with emergency response" the agencies have access to, many of whom are trained in Incident Command System and "have experience rapidly responding to forest fires, mobilizing critical resources, and managing information flow in times of crisis." WGA encourages these agencies to deploy their expert resources to assist rural communities in their public health response during this difficult time, and identify any regulatory impediments that could hinder cooperation with local and state governments. The Western Governors are ready to address any such restrictions with their own congressional delegations if need be. The WGA letter was signed by Governor Doug Burgum (R-ND), Chair, and Governor Kate Brown (D-OR), Vice Chair. It follows a similar letter sent to Bernhardt, Perdue and Gaynor on March 16 from Senator Michael Bennet (D-CO) and 23 other senators.

On March 26, 43 House Democrats, including House Natural Resources Chairman Raul Grijalva (AZ) and House Transportation and Infrastructure Chairman Peter DeFazio (OR), sent a letter to House and Senate leadership requesting that the next stimulus package in response to the coronavirus pandemic include "robust assistance" for environmental justice communities - low-income, tribal and indigenous communities, and communities of color. The letter specifically suggested it must "provide quality water and ensure drinking water services" to every household, including an immediate moratorium on residential water shut-offs and \$100M to help utilities restore water services; \$25M to distribute potable water and provide sanitation systems to homes and communities who lack access to these resources; \$45M in grants and technical assistance to replace internal household plumbing and lead service lines; and \$30B for the Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds.

The signed letter includes western Democrat Representatives: Ruben Gallego (AZ); Nanette Diaz Barragán (CA); Antonio Cárdenas (CA); Jared Huffman (CA); Barbara Lee (CA); Alan Lowenthal (CA); Gerald McNeerney (CA); Grace Napolitano (CA); Joe Neguse (CO); Deb Haaland (NM) Suzanne Bonamici (OR); Earl Blumenauer (OR); and Pramila Jayapal (WA).

Water utilities are also hoping that assistance will be provided in the next stimulus package. On March 23, eleven water groups and allied organizations sent a letter to Senate and House leaders requesting assistance to address drops in demand from industrial and commercial customers and moratoriums on shutting off water service to customers who do not pay. These organizations include: the Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies; American Water Works Association (AWWA); National Association of Clean Water Agencies (NACWA); National Rural Water Association (NRWA); Water Environment Federation; WaterReuse Association; American Council of Engineering Companies; American Society of Civil Engineers; American Public Works Association; Council of Infrastructure Financing Authorities; National Association of Water Companies; US Water Alliance; and The Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP).

NACWA estimates that the public drinking water sector will lose 20% (\$12.5B) of its revenue due to the COVID-19 response, and that it will cost \$336M for water utilities to forgive outstanding customer debt and reinstate service to households that have been shutoff. Without federal assistance, this will result in rate increases in subsequent years to offset the losses incurred. NACWA highlights these costs are in addition to emergency operational costs that utilities will undoubtedly incur throughout the duration of the pandemic.

EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler recently held teleconferences with water sector stakeholders, including small and rural operators, to acknowledge the importance of their work and identify ways that EPA and its partners can support the sector during the COVID-19 pandemic. As part of these meetings, Wheeler discussed the importance of the steps he outlined in his letter to Governors (WSW #2393) to ensure that state and local communities consider the water workforce as essential in the process of granting access and credentials to restricted areas in order to sustain critical water and wastewater services. He also discussed the importance of supply chain businesses, including chemical manufacturers and distributors, which support the daily operations of the nation's water and wastewater facilities and, according to Wheeler, should be

designated as essential. The Association of State Drinking Water Administrators, RCAP, NRWA, and AWWA all were appreciative of the outreach and highlighted the importance of local water professionals in responding to the pandemic.

EPA supports states and cities taking proactive measures to ensure continued access to clean water during the COVID-19 pandemic. EPA also recommends drinking water systems discontinue shut-offs, restore service to customers whose service was previously cut-off, and refrain from imposing penalties for nonpayment during this time.