

Briefing highlights need for investment in water infrastructure

May 19, 2016

The National League of Cities (NLC) and Value of Water Coalition (VWC) held a briefing on water infrastructure and security across the United States on May 19, 2016, with examples of solutions from multiple cities. The briefing began with introductory remarks from NLC Director and CEO Clarence E. Anthony, U.S. Representative Paul Tonko (D-NY), and the EPA's Acting Deputy Administrator A. Stanley Meiburg. A panel discussion moderated by Radhika Fox (CEO US Water Alliance) followed, with remarks from Ron Nirenberg (San Antonio, TX City Council); Matt Zone (Cleveland, OH City Council); Tyrone Jue (Senior Advisor on Environment to Mayor Ed Lee, San Francisco, CA); Heather Repenning (Commissioner and President Pro Tempore, Los Angeles, CA Board of Public Works); John LaMacchia II (Assistant Director of State Affairs, Michigan Municipal League); and Jonathan Trutt (Executive Director, West Coast Infrastructure Exchange).

Introductory remarks focused on the importance of clean water and reliable water delivery to communities and the need for additional funding to improve the nation's aging water infrastructure. Water and water infrastructure was recognized as a national issue, but one with mostly local solutions and impacts. All speakers argued for increased funding at all government levels to improve and replace aging water infrastructure across the country, and emphasized the need to maintain funding over time. Speakers talked about ongoing projects that their cities have undertaken to address adequate water supplies, infrastructure funding and maintenance, and related water issues. Nirenburg talked about local efforts to diversify water supplies in San Antonio, including the ongoing construction of the biggest inland desalination plant in the country. Zone described a recent ordinance in Cleveland that sought to reduce impervious surfaces in the city to reduce stormwater runoff and non-point source pollution. Jue talked about San Francisco's efforts to involve local communities in water infrastructure improvements, including requiring contractors to provide apprenticeship opportunities to local community members in areas undergoing infrastructure upgrades. Repenning described Los Angeles's water cabinet, a group that brings local agencies together to coordinate on water issues; efforts to reduce reliance on imported water; and plans to un-pave the Los Angeles River (which currently flows through a paved channel) to decrease stormwater runoff and revitalize local water supplies. LaMacchia described how water infrastructure has expanded in Michigan over the last 30 years while state investment has remained static, leading to a critical infrastructure funding gap. Trutt described the West Coast Infrastructure Exchange and various projects it has advised in CA, OR, and WA.
