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## INFRASTRUCTURE

### Water utilities, shippers line up for future pandemic aid

[Tamara Ward](#), E&E News reporter

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Water utilities expect Congress to provide relief from the impacts of the new coronavirus outbreak in future response bills, something missing from the legislation House lawmakers are voting on today.

Shipping interests say the country's inland waterway systems could also use an infusion of cash.

The Senate-passed package includes relief payments to most Americans, expanded unemployment benefits, and grants and loans to certain industries, but negotiators included nothing for water infrastructure nor ratepayers ([E&E Daily](#), March 25).

"It failed to offer support to one of the most fundamental services that everyday citizens need now more than ever — clean water," Adam Krantz, CEO for the National Association of Clean Water Agencies, said in a statement.

He estimates the public drinking water sector will lose 20% of its revenue because of commercial and industrial demand drops, and moratoriums on shutting off service to people who can't pay their bills.

Krantz said it was important to support the airline and cruise industries, but that Congress should be ensuring similar funding support — through grants and loans — to make sure water utility maintenance and construction projects proceed.

Tommy Holmes, legislative director for American Water Works Association, told E&E News the group expects lawmakers to act soon.

"We hope the Hill is aware of investing in water infrastructure to create jobs and perform public health," Holmes said.

Holmes said lawmakers have expressed interest in investing significant funding into water infrastructure through existing programs, like the clean water and drinking water state revolving funds and the Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act, because they would be faster than starting up new bureaucracies.

Holmes suggested Congress consider adding the lead service line replacement program to its repertoire of relief mechanisms.

## Ratepayer assistance

The National Association of Clean Water Agencies is also calling on Congress to aid low-income customers in keeping current with water utility payments.

The House Democrats' [alternative stimulus](#) unveiled this week, which was meant to rival the Senate one that is ultimately moving forward, included money to help people make utility payments and a mandate to prevent shut-offs.

House Natural Resources Chairman Raúl Grijalva (D-Ariz.) and Rep. Donald McEachin (D-Va.), along with 41 House Democrats, released a [letter](#) yesterday to House and Senate leaders requesting that future coronavirus deals include provisions for communities of color and indigenous and low-income areas.

The plea for environmental social justice provisions include moratoriums for water shut-offs, \$100 million to restore residential water services and \$30 billion in grant funding.

The 43 Democrats urged leaders to account for "underlying and already present health and economic disparities across the country."

## Inland waterways

Beyond utilities, inland waterway advocates point out that locks and dams have kept working through the outbreak and could use stimulus funds.

Deb Calhoun, interim president and CEO of Waterways Council Inc., said the shipping industry wants infrastructure to be part of the next package.

"Infrastructure has always been a bipartisan-supported issue," Calhoun said in an interview with E&E News.

That's what House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) said yesterday during an interview with Bloomberg Television.

"It's a public health issue for clean air, clean water," she said when pressed about infrastructure. "It's a business issue. It's an economic issue to move commerce and grow jobs."

Calhoun said there was an existing portfolio of authorized inland waterways projects estimated at \$7.5 billion and that any funding would boost the economy by putting workers back on the job when possible.

"We've got projects that could use the help right now," Calhoun said.

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