



THE METROPOLITAN WATER DISTRICT
OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Board Report

External Affairs Group

• Report on Activities from Washington, D.C.

Summary

This letter provides an update on activities in Washington, D.C.

Purpose

Informational

Attachments

None

Detailed Report

Federal Advocacy Trip

Chair Ortega, Director McCoy, Director Erdman, GM Hagekhalil, and AGM Zinke traveled to Washington D.C. to meet with members of Congress and Biden Administration officials (Jan. 30-31). They discussed Metropolitan's legislative priorities including the need for water conservation rebates to be tax free, liability protection for water agencies if per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are designated as hazardous substances, creating a permanent federal low-income homeowner water assistance program, and extending the Bureau of Reclamations large-scale water recycling program beyond 2026. They also updated lawmakers on status of negotiations on the Colorado River. Meetings were held with Senators Padilla and Butler, Representatives Peters, Napolitano, Kamlager-Dove, Agular, Huffman, Levin, Calvert, Barigan, Schiff, Porter, and Ruiz, EPA Office of Water, and the Bureau of Reclamation.

Appropriations

The federal fiscal year (FY) 2023 ended on September 30, 2024, and the federal government has been funded by a series of short duration continuing resolutions, or CRs, since then. CRs maintain federal government spending at the previous fiscal year's level for a set period of time. They are extremely common as Congress has not passed appropriation bills on time since 1996.

Currently the federal government is funded by what is referred to as a laddered CR. Funding for some federal agencies, including the Bureau of Reclamation and Army Corps of Engineers, will expire on March 1 and the funding for other federal agencies, including the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, will expire on March 8. This staggered deadline for federal agency funding is unprecedented.

After months of negotiations, on January 27, lawmakers reached a topline deal for what total spending will be in each of the 12 appropriations bills that fund the government. This is one step in the process for crafting the FY24 bills. Each of the 12 appropriations bills fund multiple federal agencies and lawmakers have not reached a deal on agency specific numbers. Statements from members of the Appropriations Committee indicate federal agencies have been spared from the steep cuts in the House-drafted FY24 appropriations bills, but top-line levels will likely be lower in FY24 than FY23. The hope is to reach a deal on all 12 appropriations bills before March 1. If not, the federal government will need to be funded by another CR.

Board Report

Legislation

Congress provided \$1.1 billion through the American Rescue Plan and Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 to help low-income households pay their water and wastewater bills, prevent shutoffs, and restore services. This temporary assistance program was established at the height of the COVID-19 emergency and expired at the end of FY23. Senator Padilla plans to introduce a bill this month to make the program permanent and Metropolitan provided a support letter to his office.

National Monument Designation

As part of its legislative and environmental planning processes, Metropolitan regularly monitors federal legislative efforts that propose to overlay national monuments, parks, or other federal uses on Metropolitan rights-of-way or infrastructure that could potentially impact operations. Supporters of a campaign to designate a new Chuckwalla National Monument in Riverside and Imperial Counties contacted Metropolitan staff to discuss the creation of this monument. If created, the monument would span around 660,000 acres and be the largest protected area of the Colorado Desert bioregion, a unique climate and biological community in the California Desert.

A group of Metropolitan staff, including employees in the Office of the General Counsel, land management, and geodetics, analyzed the proposal impacts to Metropolitan's operation. Staff worked with supporters to exclude certain Colorado River Aqueduct and other Metropolitan facilities from the proposed Chuckwalla National Monument boundaries and ensure the proposed presidential proclamation includes provisions, consistently used by previous Presidents, to allow the continued operation of water facilities and other utilities in the national monument. Supporters of the monument designation agreed to the language and boundary changes requested by Metropolitan. As a result of this agreement and consistent with our 2024 Legislative Policies and Principles, Metropolitan supports the designation of the Chuckwalla National Monument.

Cybersecurity Hearing

The House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Environment, Manufacturing, and Critical Materials held a hearing entitled "Ensuring the Cybersecurity of America's Drinking Water Systems" on January 31.

Representatives from the Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies, American Water Works Association, National Rural Water Association, and Association of Safe Drinking Water Administrators all testified at the hearing.

The hearing focused on potential opportunities to enhance the cybersecurity of water systems. The EPA is the primary federal agency responsible for drinking water security in coordination with the Department of Homeland Security. Beginning in 2002, Congress mandated that community water systems conduct vulnerability assessments of, and prepare emergency response plans for, their facilities to "terrorist attacks or other intentional acts." Congress amended this mandate in 2018 to include risk and resilience assessments for these facilities. The Committee is exploring if EPA needs additional direction or funding resources to improve existing programs or create new ones. No legislation was considered at the hearing but may be introduced in the future.