Senate Fails to Pass Initial Procedural Vote on $1.6 Trillion Economic Stimulus Legislation: After Sunday evening’s debate of the legislation, Senators will try to craft a deal before Monday morning to avoid further adverse impact to the U.S. economy. Among the sticking points remaining are provisions for corporations getting federal assistance, including policy on stock buybacks and executive pay, and protections for individuals facing eviction. The legislation (text) included $500 billion for “liquidity to eligible businesses, States, and municipalities related to losses incurred as a result of coronavirus.” The bill allows the U.S. Treasury to make “loans, loan guarantees, and other investments in support of eligible businesses, States, and municipalities... and provide the subsidy amounts necessary for such loans, loan guarantees, and other investments…” It is very likely some version of this provision will be in the next version of the legislation.

State Rural Water Associations Coordinating Temporary Water Operator Resources for Communities Experiencing Personal Shortages and Coordinating Mutual Aid Agreements with Neighboring Communities: The system was put into action in Alabama last week. A community with 174 customers contacted Alabama Rural Water Association (ARWA) after their water and sewer operator was forced into quarantine for possible COVID-19 exposure. ARWA was able to refer a certified operator the same day who will manage the water and wastewater operations of that community for the next 3 months if necessary. Wisconsin Rural Water Association (WRWA) also reported some operators had been quarantined and that the system is working well. WRWA reported over 50 operators have volunteers to help where needed.

Federalism’s Limits Tested During the National Emergency: The tension between local and state authority versus the federal government can be exacerbated in an emergency. Examples from last week included a contentious television debate between a former FEMA Administrator and former Acting Administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (MSNBC). Maryland Governor Larry Hogan and New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio also discussed the roles of local versus the federal government on NBC’s Meet the Press (NBC). Local Authority: Dare County (NC) prohibits non-resident property owners from entering the county with checkpoints. The decision, made by the Dare County Control Group, is being made as an effort to stop the spread of coronavirus into the area (news).

Americans Coping With the Coronavirus Are Clogging Sewage Systems (NYTimes).

Kansas Rural Water Association Asked About Coronavirus in Wastewater of Infected Individuals - References CDC (KRWA). Also, KRWA tells member communities that “the power of presence is an unmatched force in times of turmoil and despair. Kansas Rural Water Association has a long history of showing up and responding to systems' needs during tough situations. KRWA has been at the forefront of assistance during many emergencies for decades and as everyone faces the impacts on systems from COVID-19, KRWA will be there to be of whatever assistance any system needs (KRWA).” KRWA will continue focusing on its mission to provide its water and wastewater membership as well as those who are not members with the highest quality support services possible.

Missouri Rural Water Association (MRWA Wastewater Technician, Gary Webber, to Wastewater Operators: “Be very careful while working in wastewater collection systems. This has always been the case in preventing staff from compromising their health. The collection system is more dangerous than treatment facilities because, in many cases, viruses, bacteria, and parasites have not been compromised, altered or destroyed until they reach the treatment facility. Any routine maintenance on collection system components could likely wait for when we are more equipped to manage those in a healthier, safer manner (MRWA e-News).”
In-Home Total Coliform Samples Proving Problematic in Many Communities: In reaction to homeowners’ resistance to allowing utility personal access to the home and in the interests of protecting critical water utility workers, some water utilities have moved bacteriological sampling locations, stopped all in-home collection, installed separate sampling stations outside of homes, etc. One state rural water association was told by their regional EPA office that they are “continuing with requiring monitoring.” The Governor of Missouri signed an emergency Executive Order that includes the following provision: The Governor is authorized to “waive or suspend the operation of any statutory requirement or administrative rule prescribing procedures for conducting state business, where strict compliance with such requirements and rules would prevent, hinder, or delay necessary action by the department of health and senior services to respond to a declared emergency or increased health threat to the population...” We are researching to determine whether this could cover state drinking water regulations approved by the federal government.

Across the U.S., Governors, Lawmakers, Mayors and Counties Keeping the Public Away from Previously Open Meetings: All U.S. states require open government meetings. Some mandate that a majority of government officials be physically present to meet. Others already allow officials to meet by video or phone, with accommodations for the public to watch or listen from a designated room. Those mandates for in-person access have been suspended or ignored as an increasing number of governments have instructed people to stay home and avoid public gatherings to help prevent the spread of the virus that causes the COVID-19 disease (AP News).

The National Rural Water Association is the country’s largest public drinking water and sanitation supply organization with over 30,000 members. Safe drinking water and sanitation are generally recognized as the most essential public health, public welfare, and civic necessities.

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