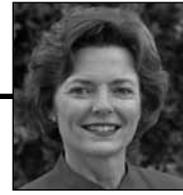


A Message from the Executive Director

By Carol Batterton, Executive Director



HB 965 Passes Texas House, Sen. Hegar Sponsors in Senate

House Bill 965 by Rep. Bill Callegari, related to continuing education hours for renewal of A and B water and wastewater treatment operator licenses, passed the Texas House on April 8th and was sent to the Texas Senate. Senator Glenn Hegar will sponsor the bill in the Senate. Many thanks go to **Curtis Smalley**, Veolia Water, and **Dana White**, Austin Water Utility, for their testimony at the public hearing on this bill in the House Government Efficiency and Reform Committee on March 17. Curtis and Dana both testified about the importance of being able to renew their operator licenses through webinars and thus save travel expense for their employers. As of this writing, HB 965 has not been set for hearing in Senate Committee.

Chairman Ritter Files HB 3273 and HJRs 137 and 138 to Fund State Water Plan

Rep. Allan Ritter, Chair of the House Natural Resources Committee, has filed HB 3273 and HJRs 137 and 138 which were heard in committee on April 12. HJR 137 reauthorizes bonding authority for the TWDB which is essential for the implementation of water plan projects. The H204Texas Coalition, of which WEAT is a member, has identified this piece of legislation as its highest priority for this legislative session.

House Joint Resolution 138 creates a constitutionally dedicated fund called the State Water Implementation Fund for Texas (SWIFT), which would provide funding for implementation of projects identified in the state water plan. House Bill 3273 creates the statutory structure for SWIFT's yet-to-be-identified revenue source that would be dedicated solely for the purpose of funding the state water plan. WEAT supports the creation of this fund.

Chairman Ritter took testimony on three fee options for funding SWIFT at the hearing. These options included a sales tax on bottled water, a tap fee of \$1.50 per month on all public water supply connections, and a fee of 14 cents per 1,000 gallons of water sold by utilities to retail utility customers. WEAT registered in favor of the sales tax on bottled water and in opposition to the other two proposals.

Update on WEF/AWWA Washington Briefing

Over 150 people attended the Water Environment Federation (WEF) and the American Water Works Association (AWWA) joint "Water Matters" Fly-In on April 4-5, 2011, in Washington, D.C. Representatives from Texas included **Glenn Clingenpeel**, TRA, **Betty Jordan**, Alan Plummer and Associates, **Susan Turrieta**, LNV, **Charlie Maddox**, Austin Water Utility, **John Burke** of John Burke Consulting, **Greg Flores**, SAWS, and myself.

Our Texas group promoted the need for a sustainable water infrastructure funding mechanism which would lower the cost of infrastructure investments and increase

the availability of lower-cost capital. WEF and AWWA are promoting WIFIA or "Water Infrastructure Finance Innovations Authority" which would be modeled after the successful Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovations Authority (commonly called TIFIA). Such a mechanism could lower the cost of capital for water utilities while having no or little effect on the federal budget deficit. WIFIA would access funds from the U.S. Treasury at Treasury rates and use those funds to support loans and other credit mechanisms for water projects. Such loans would be repaid to the Authority - and thence to the Treasury - with interest. As yet, no bills have been filed to advance this concept, but we are hoping our efforts to educate members of Congress will result in legislation being filed later this year.

Our Texas group also informed the Texas members of Congress about the issues with implementation of sublethal WET limits in permits that we have been working on with TCEQ and EPA Region 6. There was considerable interest in this issue and follow up visits to congressional members are being scheduled for early May in conjunction with the Environmental Policy Forum sponsored by the National Association of Clean Water Agencies (NACWA).

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