

Bringing Home the Importance of Water Quantity/Quality:

By Nathan E. Vassar

As we approach the end of the calendar year and a season of Thanksgiving, it is fair to say that the value of water/wastewater services likely goes unmentioned for many as they count their blessings. In fact, it often takes the deprivation of available resources to drive home the true value of the products/services provided and the process behind such services. Every year there is a campaign that asks the public to “Imagine a Day Without Water,” pushed by industry leaders who focus on the criticality of resources that are often overlooked. As we approach the end of the year, and as events in Texas and more broadly raise public attention to water/wastewater issues, it is important to emphasize the real value of our industry to key stakeholders.

Among the most critical stakeholders are ratepayers and citizens who fund the infrastructure and projects that help transport and treat wastewater, deliver clean drinking water, and manage raw water supplies. Citizens have a reasonable expectation of functionality, and most will never have occasion to ask: “How does my utility make this work?” A well-framed public education campaign doesn’t need to identify all the technical details of wastewater treatment or chlorine residuals, but it should point to overall work that is done to maintain existing systems and what it takes to improve and expand resources for growing demands. Such information can inform these constituencies, who often directly (or indirectly) impact decisions that, in turn, impact utilities – through bond packages and elections, by way of example.

Just beyond the holidays, another critical group of stakeholders will meet for approximately six months, as the Texas Legislature convenes in January 2019. Leaders in the WEAT organization, along with members across the state, will be actively engaged in the tracking of legislative developments that may impact the organization and its membership. Part

of that process includes providing the same type of background and context that is so important for individual ratepayers. The value of water quality protections and those who support ongoing compliance cannot be overstated -- and to these critical policy-makers, the background and costs of providing ongoing and reliable services must be conveyed and understood.

Whether driven by natural events such as droughts or flooding, or by the legislative calendar (with the arrival of a new legislative session), those on the front lines of water/wastewater services can seize on opportunities to educate and improve awareness of the work that is done and the true value of the ultimate products. While one may turn heads with a Thanksgiving table discussion of clarifiers, CBOD, and cooperative federalism, there are many ongoing ways to have discussions about scarce resources and the important ways in which water/wastewater infrastructure fits into a broader understanding of public services.

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