

# InfrastructureUSA

## Guest on THE INFRA BLOG

**Howard M. Neukrug, Senior Fellow, US Water Alliance**

**Conversation with Steve Anderson, Managing Director, InfrastructureUSA**

### **As Infra Ages it Does Not Become Stronger**

Infrastructure has obviously been an issue for the water industry since the time of the Romans. We put it in new and it ages and as it ages it needs to be repaired, and at some point it needs to be replaced. And so today we're looking at a system in the large cities—in the Northeast, at least—that were constructed and conceived in the 1850s, the 1880s, and now they're reaching the end of their useful lives, and as we do this we're finding that we may be more susceptible to emergency conditions that occur—like what happened in Flint, or Charleston, West Virginia, or Toledo, Ohio—where we need to look at the entire system and understand a little bit better how to manage our infrastructure and make it stronger and make it last longer. The important thing here is that as our infrastructure ages it does not become stronger, and with that we need more and more people, more and more experts, and more and more money to maintain the existing system.

### **The One Water Summit: June 8-10, 2016**

We're having a water summit. It's the U.S. Water Alliance, which is a group that's about eight years old, and we're looking to bring in non-traditional and traditional partners in the water business, bring them together and talk about what we can do to work together to balance our needs, to leverage resources, and to integrate our systems in a way that we can think a little bit differently about how we're going to take the infrastructure that we have today for water, wastewater, stormwater systems and agriculture systems, and our waterways and our watersheds, and work on them together and figure out how we balance public health and safety and ensure that we have resilient sustainable systems for the future.

### **Staying Ahead of the Game**

One of the factors that you're dealing with when you're making decisions about public health and safety is how do you balance these long-term chronic issues in water systems with short-term acute system loss, and how do you balance all this to make sure that every day, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week people are being provided drinking water that is safe and is *there*. At the same time, and probably just as critical, is making sure that there's sanitation and the ability to remove waste from people's homes and businesses, and be able to take care of that and without that our civilization ends pretty quickly. We need to get ahead of this in terms of infrastructure—whether it's water or telecom, streets, bridges, highways, airports—and move forward. What's more important to the future of our country and our children than the infrastructure that we leave them? The fact that the infrastructure that has been left to us, was remarkable and strong, and has served us well as a nation and helped us in our growth. And at

some point this investment is going to have to be increased into the future. We can take care of it; I feel really good about the industry that I'm in that we can maintain our systems into the near-term future but when you look into the future future with issues of climate change and aging infrastructure, we are going to have to spend more money. We're going to have to find more money, and when we find the money it will never be enough to do everything that we want to do. Because of that we're going to have to work together with our partners, leverage our resources, and identify what our priorities are.

### **We Can Handle It, but We Need Investment**

We've been having a campaign at the US Water Alliance called the "Value of Water Coalition," trying to explain and educate folks in Washington and politicians back home and everyone else about the importance of water and the idea of, "Can you imagine a day without water?" And you try to not use water for a day at your house, I think it comes pretty quickly that you realize how important it is. We are Americans; we're going to make it through this, but it is a tremendously important issue that at some point is going to be addressed and needs to be addressed with more money. That money can come from local governments, local utilities, which is where most of the money for the water industry comes from today. Maybe 2-5% of all the money to keep water moving in the United States comes from the federal or state governments. Most of it is local, unlike the highway industry where 85% of the money is coming from the federal government. And there is room for some additional federal spending. How we demonstrate how important federal funding is, is as easy as looking back to the Clean Water Act, the Construction Grants Program of the 1980s and looking at the \$60-70 billion that were spent to upgrade wastewater treatment plants throughout the United States and how it has totally, totally changed the environment of our rivers and streams and our reservoirs and our lakes in the U.S. and taken them up quite a few notches in terms of quality. The issues we have now are smaller than the ones that we had in the past, but are more expensive to address. And as we want to address and make our rivers and streams and provide high quality water for our fish and for recreation and for drinking, more money is going to be needed to be spent.

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