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What Did the Midterm Election Results Mean for Water?

This year's midterm elections had the highest turnout in a half century, with 49 percent of the population voting for candidates at the national, state and local level.

In the U.S. House of Representatives, control flipped with Democrats poised to pick up nearly 40 seats. In the U.S. Senate, Democrats lost the seats they needed to defend in North Dakota, Florida, Missouri, and Indiana, but they did flip seats in Nevada and Arizona. Although the race in Mississippi headed to a runoff into late November, Republicans retained control of that seat, finishing the cycle with a net gain of two seats.

At the state level, Democrats flipped seven governor's mansions, while the GOP flipped the governor's seat in Alaska. That change in Alaska means Republicans control the governorship, the state house, and state senate. Democrats gained control of both houses and the governorship in six states: Maine, New York, Colorado, New Mexico, Nevada and Illinois. These changes at different levels of government will affect infrastructure and water policy, but some of the most significant support of those issues was demonstrated through ballot measures. Statewide ballot measures supporting investment in water infrastructure projects passed in Rhode Island and Maine, and a measure in Florida passed to ban offshore drilling beneath all state waters.

At the local level, there were even more ballot measures in support of water infrastructure investment. In Los Angeles, voters enacted a parcel tax to fund stormwater projects; in Denver, voters raised property taxes to fund flood warning systems and waterway clean-up; and in Houston, an amendment passed to establish a fund for flooding and drainage projects. These examples, as well as others in Philadelphia, Baltimore, Austin, and San Francisco, reinforce polling data that shows strong public, and bipartisan, support for water infrastructure investment.

According to research from the polling firms FM3 and Public Opinion Strategies, rebuilding America's infrastructure is increasingly important to constituents. In a poll of 1,600 individuals across the country earlier this year, 89 percent of Americans see rebuilding the nation's infrastructure as very or extremely important, up from the 67 percent who said the same last year. There are many variables for why support is growing, but it is worth noting the overall composition of the electorate is changing, with younger, more diverse generations voting in larger numbers – and we know those demographics support investment in infrastructure.

Their polling research shows that voters of color are more likely to place importance on rebuilding infrastructure, with 94 percent of African-Americans and 92 percent of Latinos ranking the issue as extremely or very important, compared to 74 percent of white voters. It is important for elected officials to recognize that water infrastructure is widely supported across party lines.

For organizations working with incumbents or newly elected officials joining Congress in January, be mindful to frame water infrastructure in a way that illustrates the benefits of investment, and there are no political ramifications to supporting this issue. According to Lori Weigel of Public Opinion Strategies, people best understand the value of water through the lens of public health. By framing messages in terms of water quality's effect on health and safety, groups educating new

Congressional members can help convey the urgency of rebuilding our aging infrastructure.

There are reasons to be optimistic for the chance of an infrastructure bill in the new Congress.

While politics may affect Democrats desire to work with Republicans and the President, many in the Democratic majority want to show that government can still be effective. Infrastructure would be a logical place to show the potential of bipartisanship.

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By Scott Berry

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