

NEHA NEWS

Government Affairs 2019: What's in Store for Environmental Health

By Joanne Zurcher (jzurcher@neha.org)

Happy New Year! The new year holds a lot of promise in Washington, DC, for environmental health professionals and the National Environmental Health Association's (NEHA) Government Affairs. The last 3 years of building a presence in Washington, DC, has made this work easier and more challenging at the same time. Our success has made influencers, members of Congress, and Administration staff expect excellence from NEHA, and we are working hard to ensure your voice is heard by all.

There's a new Congress in 2019 with Democrats in control of the House of Representatives and Republicans solidly in charge of the Senate. President Donald Trump and his Administration will be busy trying to work with a divided Congress.

The first order of business is welcoming the new members of Congress to Washington, DC, for the opening day of the 116th Congress on January 3. It is an exciting time when the new members of Congress are sworn in. The only vote that day is for the Speaker of the House, which as of this writing, is expected to be Representative Nancy Pelosi (D-California). This day is one of my favorites on Capitol Hill, as many of the freshman class personally welcome you to their offices. It is also move-in day for them and they have no idea where anything is in the buildings.

What an interesting group of new members of Congress—the largest class of women to be elected to Congress, the first two Muslim women to be elected (Representatives Ihan Omar and Rashida Tlaib), the first two Native American women to be elected (Representatives Sharice Davids and Debra Haaland), and the youngest woman to ever be elected (Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez). Additionally, the first sibling (Representative Greg Pence) of a sitting vice president rounds out this interesting group.

On the Senate side, there are new Senators from Arizona (Kyrsten Sinema), Florida (Rick Scott), Indiana (Mike Braun), Mississippi (Cindy Hyde-Smith), Missouri (Josh Hawley), Nevada (Jacky Rosen), North Dakota (Kevin Cramer), Tennessee (Marsha Blackburn), and Utah (Mitt Romney).

Once opening day has come and gone, NEHA Government Affairs begins to educate the new members of Congress and their staff about NEHA. We work to remind them of the importance of having a credentialed environmental health workforce, investing in environmental health work, and making sure they know what a resource NEHA and our membership are to them.

The first major hurdle for the year will be working with our champions—Representative Brenda Lawrence (D-Michigan) and newly reelected Senator Debbie Stabenow (D-Michigan) to reintroduce the Environmental Health Workforce Act in both chambers. As you might know, at the start of every Congress, all the legislation that didn't become law in the previous Congress needs to be reintroduced for it to be considered by either chamber. This legislation is critical to ensuring that there is a credentialed environmental health

workforce in every state. The new Democrat Majority brings along opportunities for increased movement on this legislation. NEHA Government Affairs is extremely hopeful that we can find a legislative vehicle to help pass this critical legislation.

President Trump's State of Union Address will follow in late January and then it's off to the races for the fiscal year (FY) 2020 appropriations process. As of writing, all of FY 2019 has not been signed into law and there could be work to still do on FY 2019. NEHA Government Affairs will work diligently to increase funding for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), specifically for CDC's National Center for Environmental Health/Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, and the Food and Drug Administration.

While all this work is going on, NEHA's Government Affairs will be pressing Congress to pass a hurricane and disaster supplemental appropriations bill in an effort to pay for the environmental health crisis due to the 2018 California wildfires and Hurricanes Florence and Michael.

Then it will be time to plan NEHA's 3rd Annual Hill Day. This exciting day brings NEHA's board of directors to Washington, DC, to meet with members of Congress and their staff to elevate the voice of environmental health professionals. Republicans and Democrats get to hear personal stories from NEHA's board about why they do the work they do every single day. We will keep you posted on this fun day as it gets closer.

Before you know it, it will be time to join us in Nashville for the 2019 Annual Educational Conference & Exhibition! NEHA's Government Affairs will do a recap of this exciting year and answer all your political questions.

In the meantime, please don't be a stranger to NEHA's Government Affairs. If something is going on in your state legislature that you like or don't like, let us know. If there is an issue that we need to take to the Hill, I would love to hear from you, our members.

The last 3 years have been quite a roller coaster. NEHA's Government Affairs will continue to represent environmental health professionals in Washington, DC, and ensure that the environmental health profession always has a seat at the table.

2019 HUD Secretary's Awards for Healthy Homes

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), in partnership with NEHA, announces the fifth annual Secretary's Awards for Healthy Homes. These awards recognize excellence in making indoor environments healthier in four categories: public housing/multifamily housing, policy and education innovation, cross program coordination, and research. Nominations must show measurable benefits in the health of residents and be available to low-to-moderate income communities. Applications open January 11 on the NEHA and HUD websites. The deadline to submit an application is March 1. Previous year's award winners are ineligible to apply. The awards will be presented at the NEHA 2019 Annual Educational Conference & Exhibition, July 9–12, in Nashville, Tennessee (www.neha.org/aec).

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NEHA Staff Profile

As part of tradition, NEHA features new staff members in the *Journal* around the time of their 1-year anniversary. These profiles give you an opportunity to get to know the NEHA staff better and to learn more about the great programs and activities going on in your association. This month we are pleased to introduce you to one NEHA staff member. Contact information for all NEHA staff can be found on page 47.



Reem Tariq

Eager to move out of my childhood home in Kuwait, I relocated to America at the cusp of adulthood to venture out on my own. Frolicking from one city to the next, I finally settled upon the idyllic rolling hills of Pullman, Washington, to get my bachelor's degree in genetics and cell biology at Washington State University. Upon graduating, I explored a spectrum of vocational experiences ranging

from teaching at a local college of nursing in South India to corporate photography in Texas. I decided to enroll in graduate school

at East Tennessee State University (ETSU) based on my quest for a meaningful career in environmental health sciences.

I learned about NEHA through my experience of participating in the National Environmental Public Health Internship Program in summer 2017. That year I attended my first NEHA Annual Educational Conference & Exhibition and fell in love with the way the association operated. Soon after graduating from ETSU, I joined NEHA in February 2018 as a project coordinator in NEHA's Program and Partnership Development department. As a project coordinator, my work is primarily focused on developing and maintaining projects in private water, environmental public health tracking, and undertaking student and academic outreach. My work at NEHA is everything I expected and more. Above all, I enjoy building programs and relationships with partners with the collective goal of providing a healthful environment for all.

In my spare time I enjoy cooking complex recipes and failing to get them right, undertaking the esteemed hikes of Northern Colorado, reading fantastical fiction and historical accounts, and writing poetry to make sense of it all. If you have any questions about the work I do at NEHA, please feel free to reach out to me at rtariq@neha.org. 🐾

STUDENTS Don't Miss This Opportunity!

Applications for the 2019 National Environmental Health Association/American Academy of Sanitarians (NEHA/AAS) Scholarship Program are now available.

Undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in an accredited college or university with a dedicated curriculum in environmental health sciences are encouraged to apply.

VISIT

www.neha.org/scholarship.

Application and qualification information are available online.

CONTACT

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with a request for information.

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Deadline: March 1, 2019