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APWA Hosts Virtual National Public Works Week Brief on Essential Role of Public Works During COVID-19 Pandemic

Washington, DC – May 20, 2020 – Today, in recognition of National Public Works Week, the American Public Works Association (APWA) hosted a virtual interactive briefing for Congress, *Public Works: Essential Before, During and Beyond the Pandemic*. The brief was held in cooperation with U.S. House of Representatives Public Works and Infrastructure Caucus Co-Chairs Reps. Dina Titus (D-NV) and Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA). The panelists included Chris Geldart, Director of Public Works for Washington, D.C., Ray Funnye, Director of Public Services for Georgetown County, SC and Tyler Palmer, Deputy City Supervisor, Public Works & Services for Moscow, ID.

“Our panelists come from state and local public works departments serving the essential roles of monitoring the water supply, providing sanitation services, and coordinating with our emergency response partners,” said APWA President Bill Spearman III, PE. “These public works services and the professionals who perform them are necessary not only to our regular daily life, but are a core part of the solution to support, restore and lead the nation beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.”

Emphasizing the critical role of public works in our society and economy, Tyler Palmer, Deputy City Supervisor, Public Works & Services for Moscow, ID discussed “the stability that public works provides as a safety blanket doesn’t have an option to fail,” and the fact that people see trash and other services continuing every day means we’re still out there and there is not a failure of the system.

Public works professionals’ safety is of the utmost importance to departments, and Ray Funnye, Director of Public Services for Georgetown County, SC spoke about taking steps with their Emergency Operations Center (EOC) to protect employees. “The past several months, we have tried to make sure our employees know what is expected of them to stay safe, such as recently giving shields to employees who come in contact with the public.”

Public works professionals’ recognition as first responders needs to undergo a major shift in our society to broadly and most effectively grant public works professionals the ability to do what is necessary during this pandemic, and in responding to other emergency situations. “Another reason

to be nationally recognized as first responders, in D.C. we are managing 600,000 sq. ft. of warehouse space for PPE and extra bed space for medical sites. Across the country, public works agencies are truly the backbone of a country's response to catastrophic events," said Chris Geldart, Director of the Department of Public Works for Washington, D.C.

As Congress works to craft a potential fifth COVID-19 legislative package, APWA urges support for broad infrastructure investment to expedite our road to recovery. With direct funding to state and local governments, federal assistance will aid in continuing to operate, maintain, and improve our nation's critical infrastructure.

"Public works professionals are first responders responsible for providing essential services critical to the health of our nation," said APWA Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Scott Grayson, CAE. "Public works creates a sense of normalcy – we create and maintain the infrastructure that allows people to go about their daily lives, and this wouldn't be possible without the incredible public works professionals dedicating themselves to providing these services each and every day."

APWA has been pleased to see both Congress and President Trump take swift legislative action over recent weeks in responding to this pandemic impacting everyone throughout our country, and the world. APWA and its over 30,000 members stand ready as a resource and partner in addressing the needs of our country through this current crisis, and into recovery.

For more information about APWA, please contact Public Affairs Manager Charlie Arena at carena@apwa.net, or by phone at (202) 218-6736.

About APWA

The American Public Works Association (www.apwa.net) is a not-for-profit, international organization of more than 30,000 members involved in the field of public works. APWA serves its members by promoting professional excellence and public awareness through education, advocacy, and the exchange of knowledge. APWA is headquartered in Kansas City, MO, has an office in Washington, D.C., and 63 chapters and 97 branches throughout North America.