Today, the Council of State Governments joins nearly 350 other organizations, businesses and government agencies in expressing support for Imagine a Day Without Water, an initiative of the Value of Water Coalition, a group focused on elevating the importance of water in the economic, environmental and social well-being of America.

I often write here about what state governments and the federal government are doing to try to help maintain a transportation infrastructure that in many places is showing its age. But there is also another separate, hidden infrastructure system that is larger and, in some cases, a hundred years older than the nation’s roads and bridges. It ensures we are able to go about our daily routines without a second thought. It keeps our food growing, our manufacturing plants humming, and the lights on in our houses and offices.

These are our water and wastewater systems—underground, out of sight and out of mind. But they work 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year, to bring clean, safe water to us and take it away after we use it to be treated before it is safely released back into the environment.

Unlike the potholed roads you see on your daily commute, these systems—many of which were built for the America of a century ago, not modern metropolises and sprawling supply chains—don’t show their age as easily. But the American Society of Civil Engineers’ “2013 Report Card for America’s Infrastructure” gave the same poor grade to the nation’s wastewater and drinking water infrastructure systems that it gave to the nation’s roads and transit systems, a grade of “D.”

When we think about the impacts of what communities experience when these systems fail, Flint, Michigan is of course one place that comes to mind. In the July/August issue of CSG’s Capitol Ideas magazine, my colleague Liz Edmondson wrote about how Flint’s water crisis has prompted states and the federal government to take a closer look at the status of the nation’s water infrastructure and its ability to deliver safe drinking water. Our friends at CSG Midwest also have chronicled the challenges that Michigan and other Midwestern states face.

There are numerous places around the country that for a variety of reasons are facing broken infrastructure that taints water supplies: from frequent water main breaks in the Northeast to sewage overflows making water unsafe for swimming at Great Lakes beaches to frequent boil water advisories in New Orleans to lost water and wastewater services in South Carolina and West Virginia due to flooding to the epic drought in California’s Central Valley that has prompted the relocation of residents because wells have run dry. These states and communities all know what a day without water is like.

That’s why the Council of State Governments is taking part in this nationwide educational effort called “Imagine a Day Without Water.” Hundreds of organizations across the country, including water agencies, mayors, engineers, contractors, business and labor leaders, schools, and other community organizations are joining forces to raise public awareness and spark action to solve water and wastewater problems today, before they become a crisis tomorrow.
One way these groups hope to spark action is through a petition to that will be delivered to members of Congress, the 2016 presidential candidates, governors, state legislatures and mayors asking them to prioritize investment in water infrastructure and water resources. The petition states that now is the time to:

- Increase public and private investment in water infrastructure; and
- Ensure that water is affordable, reliable and accessible to all communities and businesses.

The petition, which anyone can add their name to, as of this writing has the support of more than 850 signatories.

By:

Thursday, September 15, 2016 at 04:08 PM

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