On January 21, 2020, the U.S. confirmed its first-known coronavirus infection. Since then, more than 25 million Americans have contracted the COVID-19 virus and more than 400,000 Americans have died from this horrible disease. On March 13, 2020, President Trump declared the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic a national emergency, and by April 11, 2020, had declared that the epidemic had caused a major disaster in all 50 states and four territories and authorized reimbursements to states through the Federal Emergency Management Administration for emergency protective measures.

Quarantines to slow the spread of this disease resulted in more than 25 million Americans losing their jobs from February through March of 2020, with 10 million Americans remaining unemployed by December, and another 5 million Americans having simply abandoned the job market. The U.S. economy shrank by nearly $2 trillion in the first two quarters of 2020 and by September the gross domestic product remained nearly $1 trillion below the level a year before. As a result of these trying circumstances, tens of millions of Americans will owe nearly $40 billion on natural gas and electric utilities by March of 2021, according to the National Energy Assistance Directors’ Association.

Public power utilities have taken extraordinary steps to continue operating under these unprecedented circumstances while keeping workers and customers safe, including redesigning work procedures and work sites to meet Center for Disease Control recommendations; acquiring COVID-19 testing, personal protective equipment (PPE), and other equipment; and building virus contact tracing programs and applications. They have also quarantined and isolated workers in their homes or on-site to ensure reliability and partnered with local organizations or set up shops internally to create and manufacture PPE and sanitizer.

Public power utilities have taken unprecedented steps to help their customers meet the financial burdens caused by the pandemic and pandemic quarantining, including waiving late fees and penalties; foregoing power shutoffs; and seeking out state and local aid for their customers. They have also sought to secure funding for, and access to, federal programs providing assistance to utility customers, including the Coronavirus Relief Fund, the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, and Community Development Block Grants for Coronavirus Response.
President Biden has stated it is a top priority of his Administration to address the effects of the pandemic and has called on Congress to draft another COVID-relief package. The House of Representatives has started drafting legislation, which will seek to assist Americans hard hit by COVID-19 and to help the economy recover. These efforts build upon earlier efforts by Congress, which passed multiple COVID-relief packages in 2020 that were signed into law. Throughout 2020, the American Public Power Association advocated for policies to help electric utilities continue to deliver electricity while keeping their employees and customers safe and to assist residential and business customers in need.

NOW, THEREFORE, LET IT BE RESOLVED: That the American Public Power Association (APPA) believes that Congress should immediately provide an emergency $10 billion supplemental appropriations for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program increase income thresholds for eligible households, and increase the amount of funding that can be used for administrative expenses to ensure that these funds go to the households that need this critical relief; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: That APPA believes that the Federal Emergency Management Administration should move swiftly to reimburse public power utilities for the costs of emergency protective measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including by approving the costs for steps taken by public power utilities to ensure the life and safety of public power workers and customers; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: That APPA believes that federal agencies, including the Departments of Treasury and Housing and Urban Development, should work to ensure that utility customer relief programs benefit all customers, including public power utility customers; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: That APPA believes that Congress should treat public power utilities the same as other employers by granting them payroll tax credits to offset the cost of federally mandated emergency paid sick leave and emergency paid family leave; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: That APPA believes that Congress should help state and local governments reduce the cost of existing debt by immediately reinstating the ability to issue tax-exempt advance refunding bonds.

Adopted at the Legislative & Resolutions Committee meeting
March 2, 2021
Sunsets in March 2029