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2009 REFERENCE GUIDE

Mind the Gap

As I lowered the tray table on my recent U.S. Airways flight, I was faced with a bright-red advertisement for Zicam Cold Remedy.

There has certainly been enough talk about the health of the airline industry in the U.S. and globally—in simple terms, like the car industry, it requires a strong dose of medication itself.

As a result, airlines have become more inventive. First came the additional charge to check in a bag. I paid U.S. Airways a $15 fee to check in a bag and didn't think twice about it—but then again, I am not a family checking a bag for each member.

A few years ago, the free peanut bags were replaced by $3 or $5 snack packs. On my recent flight, I also ended up paying $1 for a cup of coffee.

I would leave the calculations of the additional revenue generated by these add-on costs to the experts; however, I have to admit I am impressed by how quickly the airline industry has adjusted to the current economic market and its various financial problems. Of course, many of these changes are dipping deeper into consumers' pockets and may not be the ideal solution, but as far as the airlines are concerned, these are necessary changes for survival.

Neda Simeonova,
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The water and wastewater industry, however, is not as fortunate. Water and sewer rate increases are difficult to pass, and even then, such increases do not cover all necessary costs for maintenance and upgrades to meet new regulatory requirements. Thus, municipalities continue to rely heavily on state and federal funding.

Unfortunately, the gap between badly needed improvements to water and wastewater infrastructure and the funding to complete these projects continues to grow. These days, state revolving funds and federal funding are not nearly enough to meet these needs.

As we turn the page to yet another year, the question remains: "Will the water industry stand and wait for our policymakers to elevate maintenance and improvement of our water infrastructure systems to the level of priority it deserves, or will it take a cue from the airline industry and look for other alternatives, such as private funding, to fill the growing funding gap?"

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