

CURRENTS

News from the Water for All Campaign

April 2006

Bush and EPA put drinking water at risk

The Bush administration is proposing to weaken health protections under the Safe Drinking Water Act. This change may result in up to three times or more the amount of cancer and other disease-causing chemical contaminants in the drinking water than is currently allowed for millions of Americans. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) proposed policy change re-defines “affordability” under the Safe Drinking Water Act in a way that will seriously undermine health protections. If the EPA proposal stands, it would allow water utilities to cut corners and serve contaminated drinking water, arguing that it costs too much to clean it up, while still labeling the tap water as “protective of health.” As if weakening drinking water protection wasn’t bad enough, experts are concerned that industries will use the change to justify higher levels of pollution in landfills and toxic waste sites. Most drinking water providers, state environmental and health agencies, and public health and environmental groups are strongly opposed to this scheme to weaken the nation’s drinking water protections. The Bush administration and EPA, charged with safeguarding our environment, are gambling with the health of our communities, particularly those Americans living in low-income and rural areas. This rollback is completely unacceptable and must be stopped immediately! The deadline to comment is May 1, 2006. Please tell President Bush and the EPA to stop this unprecedented attempt to undermine our environmental and public health protections. Instead, the administration must provide direct financial assistance to meet drinking water standards that protect our health —not create second-class communities that would be stuck with more contaminated water. See our action alert below.

U.S. mayors make a splash at RWE’s annual shareholder meeting in Germany

Mayor Laurel Prussing of Urbana, Ill., addressed hundreds of RWE shareholders and the corporation’s top executives at its annual meeting in Essen, Germany, April 13, with a loud and clear message: “Our experience in Illinois has taught us that we need local control of our water systems. We are willing to pay a fair price, and we believe investors will benefit more from selling to us than by wasting money on a political war while neglecting much-needed maintenance.” Mayor Prussing was joined by Food & Water Watch, as well as German allies from Wasser in Burgerhand (Water in Citizens’ Hands) and Critical Shareholders. The groups presented a joint statement signed by mayors and elected officials from 8 communities in the U.S., calling on RWE to negotiate fairly with communities interested in buying their local water utilities from the multinational corporation. Read the statement at: http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/water/corporate-control-1/rwe-1/official-statement_rwe.pdf/ The actions were covered by more than 40 news outlets in the United States, plus German newspaper and radio! Support the U.S. communities fighting for local democratic control of their water by sending an email to RWE’s CEO, Harry Roels. Just go to: <http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/water/rewire-american-water>.



TOP: FWW staffer Victoria Kaplan (far right) and Urbana Mayor Laurel Prussing (second from right) join German groups in Essen, Germany, at a press conference in Berlin. BOTTOM: German NGO allies hold sign in front of RWE meeting.

The promise of affordability in Detroit slowly emerges

After several years, where as many as 15% of households in Detroit were disconnected from water, an affordability proposal has been brokered between activists, the Detroit water department and the City Council. The plan would provide a \$5 million fund, which will assist low-income residents to pay their water bills and avoid shutoffs. Local activists, including Michigan Welfare Rights Organization, which has lead the effort, calls the deal a victory. The Detroit City Council is expected to vote on the issue in late April.

The Inter-American Development Bank and the politics of water

The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) hasn't received nearly as much attention as the World Bank, but its lending policies may be doing just as much damage. In scenes reminiscent of World Bank, International Monetary Fund and World Trade Organization ministerials, hundreds of protesters gathered outside the IDB's annual meeting in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, April 3-5. Led by newly elected presidents Evo Morales of Bolivia and Manuel Zelaya of Honduras, the protesters demanded that the IDB cancel billions of dollars in debt that their governments are being forced to repay and stop pushing policies and projects that require privatization of water and other natural resources. Major water privatization programs pushed by the IADB in Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Honduras and Nicaragua have either collapsed completely, leaving countries with even more debt to repay (such as Argentina and Bolivia), or are the subject of serious controversy and social unrest. For more details, go to <http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/water/inter-american-development-bank>.

Financing water for all... or just a few?

The World Water Council, which organizes the undemocratic, corporate-controlled World Water Forum, commissioned a report on "Financing Water for All" for the 2006 Forum. A Task Force of mainly corporate executives and financiers pulled the report together - to think that a group like that can come up with democratic solutions to get water for all is absurd! The report offers absolutely no new solutions for financing access to water for the poor - the people who actually lack access to water. The only, and not very original solution, is to increase aid flows - a message that has been heard over and over again - and enables governments to grandstand on the issue, but rarely results in real action to increase aid. The report instead focuses on solutions that might work in middle-income countries - solutions that are all based on richer countries' blue prints for first-class water delivery. The panel also reiterates solutions offered by the last commission, chaired by the former Managing Director of the IMF, Michel Camdessus, and somehow missed that even the World Bank has abandoned these solutions as unusable in the water sector. Maybe we should teach the Council and the panel a new word for the next panel and see if they can do better: Equity, a word which refers to principles of conscience, fairness and justice.

Want the latest scoop on water rights, anti-privatization campaigns, and community struggles?

Check out our blog!
www.foodandwaterwatch.org/blog

Are you a D.C. local? Come to a panel discussion on water rights

Join us for a panel discussion on April 27, 2006, from 6:30-8 p.m. to discuss global struggles to ensure universal access to safe, clean, affordable water with Maude Barlow, co-founder of the Blue Planet Project and best-selling author of 15 books; Rudolf Amenga-Etego, National Coalition Against the Privatisation of Water, Ghana, and winner of a 2004 Goldman environmental prize; and, Wenonah Hauter, executive director of Food & Water Watch. The event will be held at All Souls Church, 1500 Harvard St., NW.

Read our latest reports and newsletters:

New **Defend the Global Commons**:

<http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/publications/newsletters/defend-the-global-commons-march-06/pdf>

New **RWE corporate profile**:

<http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/publications/reports/rwe-thames-water-a-corporate-profile>

TAKE ACTION!

Act now to safeguard the nation's drinking water!

The Bush administration is proposing to weaken health protections under the Safe Drinking Water Act that may result in up to three times or more the amount of cancer and other disease-causing chemical contaminants in our drinking water than is currently allowed.

For more information, go to <http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/water/human-rights-1/Drinking-Water-Alert>

To read the federal notice, visit: <http://www.epa.gov/fedrgstr/EPA-WATER/2006/March/Day-02/w1917.htm>

Please join us in welcoming
**Jessica Roach, our new organizer
on the Water for All Campaign!**

Want to subscribe to our Water for All e-mail list? It's a great way to stay informed with information, updates and action alerts regarding water privatization. To subscribe to this list email water@fwwatch.org with the words "subscribe Water for All" in the subject line.