

Currents

food&waterwatch



News from Food & Water Watch's Water for All Campaign

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Ohioans Join the Movement For Local Ownership Of Water

Add Ohio to the growing list of states where customers are challenging water privatization by American Water, the largest private water company in the United States.

On Tuesday, December 5, 180 people filled the gymnasium of the Blendon Township Senior Center outside Columbus, Ohio, to challenge a proposed rate increase by Ohio American Water. Ohio American is asking for a 19% rate increase in Huber Ridge, despite the fact that its customers already pay significantly more than their neighbors in Columbus, who get their water from a public utility. Residents also complain of consistently brown water and shoddy customer service.

A key theme at the hearing was the lack of choice that customers have when it comes to who provides their water. More than ten of the testimonies to the Commission reflected the same frustration with American Water; "Why can't I get my water from somebody else? We should tap

Continued on page 2



An administrative law judge from the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio is offered a drink of brown water from a customer's tap. Neither of the presiding judges nor any Ohio American Water Company employee drank a sip of water during the three and a half hour meeting.

California Update

Larkfield-Wikiup, located just north of Santa Rosa, CA, is one of many communities seeking to purchase their local water utility from American Water/Cal-Am before the company is sold on Wall Street.

After the community held back a proposed 36% rate increase to 7%, Sonoma County sponsored a feasibility study on acquiring the water system. The results are in and the numbers look good for local control. Cal-Am reaps over \$600,000 every year in profits from its Larkfield customers. That's a whopping \$250 per connection to pad American Water's bottom line – money that could be kept in the

community if the system was locally owned.

Meanwhile, the community is preparing for more than glossy mailers in the usual American Water public relations campaign against local acquisition. Other communities have accused Cal-Am of employing intimidation tactics against community groups like threatening to sue community leaders.

In this case, American Water is seeking to head off the community effort by consolidating its Larkfield and Sacramento districts into one ratemaking district. The consolidation must be approved by the California Public Utilities Commission. Cal-Am recently mailed a survey to its Larkfield

ratepayers asking them if they would approve of a consolidation if it meant lower rates. And indeed, as part of its request for consolidation, Cal-Am is asking for a 38% rate decrease in Larkfield. Apparently, Cal-Am thinks it can bribe its Larkfield customers into accepting a consolidation that will make public acquisition more difficult. But the company isn't planning on losing any money. The same request seeks a big rate hike in Sacramento to make up for its losses in Larkfield. Sacramento customers should be up in arms.

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www.foodandwaterwatch.org



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We're Calling on the New Congress to Protect America's Water

When newly elected and re-elected representatives arrive in January, Food & Water Watch will ask them to protect America's water by addressing the need for funding public utilities.

As our pipes and treatment systems age, more and more sewage spills into our streams, rivers, lakes and ocean, creating serious public health hazards. And population growth puts even more strain on our water systems.

There were more than 20,000 beach closings and swim advisories in 2005. A majority of beach closings are due to sewage overflows and malfunctioning sewage plants. The National Research Council recently warned that we should expect more water-borne disease outbreaks if there are not "substantial investments" made to improve America's water pipes and systems.

However, there is currently a shortfall of more than \$22 billion per year between the funds available and what is needed to keep water safe for human and environmental health. The federal government has cut the main source of funding for clean water year after year.

Sign our petition to ask the new Congress to do better and protect America's water.

Tell Congress to keep America's water clean and safe!
www.foodandwaterwatch.org/water/americaswater

Suez Contract Approved Despite Popular Uproar in Argentina

The provincial legislature in Cordoba, Argentina ignored public outcry against water privatization when it approved a new water contract for the next 27 years. On November 29 citizens surrounded the legislature, calling for "No to the re-negotiation!" Police attacked the protesters with rubber bullets leaving 60 wounded and detaining 10, including a 12-year old boy who was brutally beaten.

The new contract pardons wealthy Suez shareholders for millions of dollars in unpaid taxes and fines for contractual non-compliance, approve new government subsidies to Suez, and raise water rates beginning in April 2007

Civil society groups backed a governor candidate, Luis Juez, who had negotiated approval from city authorities to hold a non-binding referendum on water. But Governor De la Sota pressured provincial leaders to cancel the referendum scheduled for Dec. 10th. Despite all these

Felton, CA

The California Public Utilities Commission awarded Cal-Am, the local subsidiary of American Water, a 13% rate increase in its Felton District on November 30. Cal-Am had asked for a 105% rate increase. Felton ratepayers now pay twice as much as their neighbors served by the publicly-owned San Lorenzo Valley Water District.

Representing Felton ratepayers, San Lorenzo has offered Cal-Am \$7.6 million for the water system. If Cal-Am continues to refuse to sell, the community is ready to use eminent domain to acquire the system. Last year Felton ratepayers overwhelmingly approved a bond measure worth \$11 million to finance the acquisition.

Ohio, continued from page 1

into Columbus or Westerville. We'd do that if there were an emergency or a disaster. Well, this is a disaster."

One woman, who had recently moved to the Columbus suburbs with her husband, said, "We love this neighborhood. We love the people. We love the environment. But we never anticipated this with our water. Water has seeped into every fiber of our consciousness, and for all the wrong reasons. This is really about people versus corporate interests. We hope the solution will be made for the people, not for the corporation."

Residents and local officials in Huber Ridge and other Ohio communities are exploring options for purchasing their water systems from Ohio American Water, making them the newest players in the national movement for local ownership of water.

setbacks, citizen groups in Cordoba say that will continue their struggles for water justice!



Police in Cordoba, Argentina, fight back against citizens protesting continued privatization of their water. Photo by Cordoba Indymedia Collective.