

ON THE ROAD



The last few months have turned out to be very busy and challenging. Everyone at the Council's national office and in the field is working to capacity and meeting the heavy demands with enthusiasm and commitment.

We were involved in the civil society actions around the First Ministers meeting on health care in September and expressed our feelings about the outcome loud and clear. While we are very pleased that a deal was struck and that new money was earmarked for health care, we are concerned that the issue of for-profit services was not dealt with, in spite of all the promises made by Paul Martin and the Liberals during the election to stop rampant privatization of our health care system. In at least three provinces, for-profit services are growing fast.

We were disappointed to lose our court challenge, taken with a number of labour and health care groups, against the federal government. Essentially, we had argued that the federal Minister of Health was not living up to his statutory obligations to report on whether the provinces were violating the five principles of the Canada Health Act by allowing for-profit services to proliferate. We said that, as a result of this breach, there is a lack of accountability to the public for money to the provinces earmarked for health care. While the judge agreed that our case was a very important public policy issue, he turned the issue back to Parliament to be resolved. We are now working with opposition parties and other groups to keep the pressure on the government in this crucial area.

As well, we intervened aggressively to respond to a proposed agreement on water diversions from the Great Lakes. Called Annex 2001, the plan, drawn up by the governors of the Great Lakes states, with minimal input from the two Canadian provinces involved, would open the door to massive new water takings from outside the basin and potentially set the stage for the eventual commodification of Great Lakes waters. Further, all the decisions about water diversions and exports would be made on the American side of the border, by those who see the Great Lakes as a "national treasure" of the U.S.

And of course, our work on deep integration is taking a great deal of our time, both the Citizens' Inquiry on Canada-U.S. Relations and a symposium we are planning with a number of other civil society groups and labour unions early in the new year. Missile defence, the move to end foreign restrictions on telecommunications, the Mackenzie Valley pipeline, "Smart Border" rules – all these and other issues are crucial to the future of our country and we are on the front lines fighting for the right choices for Canadians.

We were all terribly saddened by the tsunami that struck with such devastation at the end of last year. It is a sobering reminder of the destructive power of nature and the fragility of human life. While this was, of course, an act of nature, it is crucial to note that it was also the forces of globalization that weakened some of the natural protections of the environment and pushed millions of people to locate on the waters for the livelihoods.

My own travels have taken me to Berlin for a meeting with NGOs from around the world to launch a campaign for a United Nations convention on water as a human right, Winnipeg for our wonderful AGM, and right across Canada meeting and listening to citizens talk about their dreams and hopes for this great country.

Everywhere I go, I am so moved by the quality of the people I meet. I have great faith that ordinary Canadians will continue to seek to build a caring society, one in which every person counts. The values of "sharing for survival" upon which this country's great social programs were forged are still (under attack as they are by our elite) bedrock values for the majority of our people. This is a message that has never been more needed in the world than now. We have a responsibility to others to hold on tight to these values and fight for the Canada – and the world – we want. As the Council of Canadians celebrates its 20th anniversary this year, these are thoughts that will be foremost in my mind.