

On the Road with Maude Barlow

Dear Friends,

As always, I greet you from the road. 2009 has been no exception to the rule, with the January 15-city "Unbottle It" tour of Ontario, a "Peace with Water" summit at the European Parliament in February, and the World Water Forum in Istanbul, Turkey, in March. Off to Australia next to help found the Australia Water Network!

As you can imagine, all of this takes place against the backdrop of incredible activity in the national office, the regions with our organizers, and chapters who are busier and more prolific than ever. I often wonder what the country would look like if it were not for groups like ours and others who serve as watchdogs for the public interest.

With many other Canadians, we supported the pre-Christmas threat of a coalition government when the opposition parties forced the Harper government to back down from a series of outrageous policy initiatives while refusing to deal with the economic crisis growing in Canada. (That's us at a Parliament Hill rally to support the coalition.) Like most Canadians, we are in a "watch and wait" mode now as the Harper government attempts to undo the damage of these mistakes. We are also shocked at the stacking of the Senate by a man who vowed to hold elections for the upper house but who, in an old-fashioned power grab, appointed party faithful when he saw the weakness of his position in Parliament. Unquestionably, we are in a time of transition and it is more vital than ever that we remain a strong presence in this country, holding this and all governments accountable to their citizens.

And of course, the issues continue to present challenges. Trade issues are back on the front burner with the Harper government promoting a cross-Canada interprovincial trade deal that would let business sue provincial



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Brent Patterson, Maude Barlow and John Urquhart (left to right) hold the Council of Canadians' banner during a December rally on Parliament Hill in support of a coalition government.

governments over higher environmental, health and safety standards. The Harper government is also touting a trade deal with the European Union on services, a pact that might open up Canadian public services like health care and water delivery not only to big European service corporations but also, under the terms of NAFTA, to American service corporations.

One of our most pressing issues is the pro-privatization stance of the leadership of the Canadian Medical Association along with the unchecked growth in for-profit health services across the country. The controversy over the Alberta tar sands also continues to pose a terrible threat to the health and well-being of Albertans and Canadians alike. On our February 4 coast-to-coast Energy Day of Action, activists across the country from dozens of Council chapters sent a strong message to the Harper government: protect Canadian energy security and implement an envi-

ronmentally sustainable green energy policy to replace our current dependence on heavy oil, which is destroying the environment and livelihood of so many people in Alberta.

However, we have a great opportunity with President Obama, who has promised to reopen the North American Free Trade Agreement to make trade relations in North America more just, green and sustainable. Top Canadian priorities must be to cancel the egregious Chapter 11 provision that allows American corporations to hold Canadian governments to ransom for protecting the public and the environment and removing water in all references from the trade deal.

Meanwhile, I continue to be honoured to serve as Senior Advisor on Water to Father Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann, the wonderful President of the UN General Assembly, and to move the right to water agenda forward at the UN and around the world.

I look forward to working with you with renewed energy and hope in the months to come.

Maude Barlow is the National Chairperson of the Council of Canadians.