

Canada News-wire

Vancouver water decision rocks federal boat

Fri Jun 29 2001, 8:14pm ET
Section: General News
Dateline: OTTAWA, June 29 /CNW/

OTTAWA, June 29 /CNW/ - Vancouver's decision to abandon water privatization plans is a victory for local residents and a wake-up call to the federal government that decisive action is required to protect our water under global trade deals.

The Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD) today announced it was scrapping plans to build a new filtration plant and then privatize operations to a multinational corporation. The reversal comes in the wake of mounting public opposition, churned up by a Canadian Union of Public Employees campaign that exposed the consequences of water privatization under the North American Free Trade Agreement.

"The GVRD heard the concerns of citizens loud and clear -- we don't want to go down the NAFTA road of no return when it comes to something as vital to public health as the safety of our water. It's time the federal government started taking some action when it comes to water and trade," said Judy Darcy, National President of CUPE, the union representing Canada's water workers.

"This decision will ripple across the country, because it shows just how serious the concerns are about privatizing water under NAFTA. Today, privatization pushers were dealt a serious blow," she added.

CUPE commissioned a legal opinion on the trade implications of privatizing the filtration plant -- a document that helped turn the tide of the debate and turn up the heat on the local government. The opinion found the controversial investor-state provisions in NAFTA could seriously hinder future attempts to either return water to public hands or introduce more stringent regulation.

"We've been calling on the federal government for months to show some serious leadership on water. Instead, they've been hiding behind the Alliance leadership sideshow, dodging their responsibilities on water funding and regulation. They also continue to ignore repeated warnings about the NAFTA dangers of privatization -- whether it's health care or water. It's time to wake up," said Darcy.

The federal government will also be hearing from the GVRD, which will be conveying its concerns about NAFTA consequences for water treatment projects in Vancouver.

"This week we've seen the power of local governments and local democracy affirmed -- first the Supreme Court's precedent-setting pesticide decision. Now, a municipal government is setting another precedent -- listening and responding to very serious concerns about the trade implications of

handing water to private control," said Darcy.

CUPE is Canada's largest union, representing one half million public service workers. The union has played a key role on trade issues, looking at the impact of trade on water, health care, the environment and municipal governments. As well, they are challenging the constitutionality of NAFTA's Chapter 11 arguing that it contravenes our Charter rights.

-0- 06/29/2001

© 2001 CNW Group Ltd.