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The Council of Canadians believes that political literacy is crucial to regaining control of our communities and our country. We encourage you to copy articles from Canadian Perspectives – most conveniently fit on one or two pages. If you would like to reprint articles, or if you would like to distribute Canadian Perspectives in your community, please contact us at 1-800-387-7177.

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Authorized by the Council of Canadians.
**Letters to the Editor**

**Toilet paper ballot**
Could the Council of Canadians please lobby to change the electoral system?

We are in our sixties and really value our right to vote. We moved to the U.S. from 1989 to 2005 and, being unable to vote, survived two Bushes and a Clinton. As we looked forward to coming home to the Ottawa area, the ability to vote was very much anticipated. Unfortunately, we did not consider this when we decided to buy our 208-acre farm in the riding of Leeds Grenville, an hour south of Ottawa. Being voters in this Conservative bastion is absolutely futile. One could use our ballot as toilet paper and it would be more useful in today’s electoral system.

We will continue to vote, but this could be a good reason for others to decide not to bother wasting their time.

Mandatory voting is not going to help until this futile electoral system is changed so that our vote will be worth at least the time it takes to make it.

**Nicolaas and Maki Hilferink**  
North Augusta, Ontario

**Our “Turtle Pond” (pictured above)**
We are long-standing members of the Council of Canadians. We noticed and admired the photography on the front cover of the last issue of Canadian Perspectives.

My husband’s hobby is photography and I write poetry and over the last few years we have combined our talents and produced some rather nice pieces of artwork.

There is one we have named “Turtle Pond” and it speaks to protecting our wetlands. We would be honoured if you would share it with your readers.

**Ferelith and Rainer Hoffmann-Taylor**  
Tobermory, Ontario

Send us your letters!
If you have something to say about an article you have read in Canadian Perspectives, or an issue you think would interest our readers, please write to us. We reserve the right to edit your letter for clarity and length. Letters must include your full name, address and phone number.

Send your letter to:  
Canadian Perspectives  
The Council of Canadians  
300-251 Bank Street  
Ottawa, Ontario K2P 1X3  
Email: inquiries@canadians.org  
Attention: Editor, Canadian Perspectives
Dear friends,

We celebrate our thirtieth anniversary this year. Thirty years! I can hardly believe it.

I remember the founding of the Council of Canadians well. I met so many wonderful people I had only known and admired from afar: Mel Hurtig, Marion Dewar, Bob White, Pierre Burton, Margaret Atwood, David Suzuki, Grace Hartman, Walter Gordon, Ed Broadbent and many more.

We came together to fight Brian Mulroney and Ronald Reagan’s free trade agreement – the one that would launch NAFTA, the WTO and the MAI – and to fight for a different vision for our country and our continent. So was founded a movement that is still going strong and growing, and that has tackled so much more over the years.

It was our vision then, and remains so now, that the policies of economic globalization – unlimited growth, corporate-friendly “free” trade, privatization of essential services, deregulation of financial markets, and the gutting of environmental protections to promote a free market – would create deeper social inequality inside and between nations and devastate the environment.

Indeed, in the year 2000, there were 111 billionaires in the world; this year there are 1,826. The income gap is widening everywhere and the UN warns about the rise of “the Precariat” – the three-quarters of the world without a secure job. And we all know the dire warnings about climate change, destruction of forests and wetlands, and disappearing watersheds. This is a failed model and it is time to assert a new one based on the principles of equality and justice for all and reverence for – and fierce protection of – the planet.

This vision is present in all of our campaigns. We fight not just to stop the continued erosion of our public health care system, but for an expansion of it to include home care, long-term care, and a national pharmacare plan.

We don’t oppose bad trade agreements because we oppose trade – this is a false accusation. We oppose them because they are not really about trade at all, but about challenging the right of governments to protect their people and natural resources. Deals like the Canada-EU Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) and the Trans-Pacific Partnership represent a model of corporate power that profoundly undermines democracy.

When we fight fracking or massive pipelines, it is because we want to preserve our water heritage for future generations, and we work for sound environmental law that will stand the test of time.

When we oppose water privatization here in Canada and around the world, we do so by working with local grassroots and Indigenous communities to assert their local authority and promote their human rights to clean safe water and sanitation for all.

When we fight voter fraud and bad election laws, it is because we know our democracy is precious, but also fragile, and we want to build a society in which everyone is welcome to participate in the democratic process.

We have had many successes over the years. When I hear Stephen Harper and Jean Chrétien take credit for not allowing the deregulation of the banks, I remember the fight we led to stop the Chrétien government from doing just that!

And with our civil society allies – unions, environmentalists, First Nations, human rights activists, students, women, and many others – we have kept alive the dream of a better Canada and a better world in the face of constant threat.

I often wonder what Canada would look like without the Council of Canadians and the incredible energy and commitment of our many supporters, staff and board members, and chapter activists. I want to thank each and every one of you for the commitment and faith in our organization and movement. I surely could not do my work without all of you.

As we pass through this historic federal election, we face an incredibly busy year, and the rebuilding of our country. In December, I will proudly represent the Council in Paris for the UN climate summit, perhaps one of the most important global gatherings ever. You can be sure our vision and values will be put forward in your name.

So thank you for 30 wonderful years – and here’s to the next 30!

With hope and resolve,

Maude Barlow

Maude Barlow is the National Chairperson of the Council of Canadians.
A Better Canada Is Possible: Envisioning our future

A vision for water
by Emma Lui

The year is 2045. Like our neighbours down south in California and in regions around the world, we experienced worsening drought year after year in the west, Ontario and Quebec, and saw it spread to other provinces. The droughts further impacted the hunting, fishing and food gathering of Indigenous communities.

In 2015, we had a federal government that gutted most of our water protections. Millions of dollars were slashed from water protection programs. More than 3,000 environmental assessments were cancelled because of changes to the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act. Ninety-nine per cent of lakes and rivers in Canada and the traditional territories of Indigenous peoples were delisted from the Navigable Waters Protection Act. The Fisheries Act, originally legislated to protect fish, no longer did so.

While we are still seeing the effects on our lakes and rivers, in 2045 we, thankfully, have reached a time where a critical mass of people truly understand the sacredness of water. And most importantly, they take action to protect it.

The gutting of our environmental legislation and the onslaught of tar sands expansion, pipelines, fracking and privatization...
Board members Andrea Furlong and Ken Kavanagh were in the streets of St. John’s, Newfoundland when provincial premiers were in town, reminding politicians of the importance of health care.

Projects represented a turning point for many people. Building on the advocacy work of generations before them, new and older generations worked together educating people, marching, organizing creative actions, and participating in direct actions.

In 2014, the Supreme Court of Canada unanimously recognized Aboriginal title to 1,700 square kilometres of land to the Tsilhqot’in Nation, giving them the right to determine how their lands were used. This decision later spurred the public and governments to recognize and respect traditional territories of Indigenous peoples. Indigenous communities now decide how the land and waters will be used, managed and protected.

Water literacy has grown exponentially. At a very early age, children are taught where their drinking water comes from, what can harm it, and how to protect it. Children learn that there are some things – like tar sands bitumen and other fossil fuels – that must just stay in the ground.

In 2045 we no longer pit creating jobs against the environment. It is hard for most of us to imagine creating jobs that would risk our drinking water, or to understand that people once believed it had to be one or the other.

Every decision about water is now discussed within communities and everyone participates because we know the central role water plays in our lives. Governments now truly serve the people and they manage water as a public trust – it is not appropriated or subordinated for private gain. And governments take direction from the community because they know people outnumber governments and corporations.

In 2045, people have come to know their individual power as well as their collective power. With knowledge, they lead the way to water justice.

A vision for democracy by Dylan Penner

In the 2015 federal election, up to 1.9 million citizens could be deprived of their right to vote due to voter suppression (including Canadians living abroad and people who relied on Voter Information Cards or vouching in the past). In this election, too, 2.6 million non-citizens who currently live and work in Canada will not be allowed to vote (including migrant workers, refugee claimants, permanent residents, and undocumented immigrants).

Between now and 2045 we can change course to build an inclusive democracy where everyone has a voice, not only in elections, but every day. Many places are already taking preliminary steps in this direction, such as New York City, which is exploring legislation to extend voting rights to permanent residents.

What if we didn’t just vote for the leadership of governments, but also democratized corporations and the economy? Given the huge role large corporations play in shaping society, imagine if they were accountable not just to their shareholders, but to the communities they operate in and the people who work for them.

There are baby steps in this direction being taken through rights-based organizing, which, as Global Exchange in the U.S. puts it, aims to “place the rights of people and nature over the interests of corporations.” If communities everywhere were to define acceptable corporate behaviour, this powerful expression of democracy could outweigh corporate power.

We need to transform decision making through an evolution of representative democracy into one that’s more participatory and includes much deeper engagement beyond elections. We need to empower communities with greater self-determination in tangible ways,
People of all ages joined to form a literal line in the sand against the Energy East pipeline in Red Head, located just outside of Saint John, New Brunswick. Communities across Canada are trying to stop this massive pipeline project.

such as general public votes on key issues and legislation, and participatory budgeting.

One model is liquid democracy (also known as delegative democracy) where people can vote directly on issues or choose to delegate their vote to someone they trust to vote in their best interest. We need to respect the rights of Indigenous peoples to free, prior, informed consent and build a nation-to-nation treaty relationship. We need to recognize that much of our society exists and operates on the traditional territories of Indigenous peoples and enshrine the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the make-up of our democratic institutions.

If we want a future where we have more control over the realities that impact our daily lives and hopes and dreams, and where corporations have less control, we need people who will stand up and speak out for truly representative democracy.

A vision for health care
by Michael Butler

When Tommy Douglas first campaigned to introduce universal public health care in the 1960 Saskatchewan provincial election, he had long-term aspirations for building a better tomorrow. His dream that health care should be based on need, not ability to pay, was truly visionary in scope and groundbreaking in its effects.

Perhaps most important though, Tommy Douglas saw medicare as something greater; it was about the values and principles we aspire to and choose to defend. Medicare was meant to inspire us to build a more just Canada where we make choices that are grounded in community, kindness and decency. Looking forward to the future of our public health system, it is these values that need to guide us as we imagine how to build a healthier nation.

If we were to imagine a future for health care in 2045, we would see that Canadians have been successful in their demand that medicare be protected, strengthened and expanded.

In 2045 governments recognize and prioritize public health care, ensuring it is available to everyone without cost. Provincial and territorial governments work with the federal government to provide accountability on health care spending, foster innovation, and share best practices.

For-profit schemes and public-private partnerships have been abandoned in favour of a properly funded public system.

Medicare has been expanded to include pharmacare. All Canadians now have access to the medications they need. The federal government leads a bulk purchasing program that produces significant savings on the cost of medications. People no longer have to choose between being able to pay for food and housing or pay for their medications.

In 2045, Canadians continue to show overwhelming support for our universal public health care system. Despite neoliberal profiteers’ earlier attempts to privatize the health care system, Canadians recognize that health care is better left in public hands. Medicare continues to be our most cherished social program and a part of our national identity.

Tommy Douglas showed us that anything is possible if Canadians come together and demand an equitable and caring nation.

A vision for the North
by the Northwest Territories Council of Canadians chapter

It is the year 2045. Longstanding discussions between Indigenous and
non-Indigenous peoples have finally led to the establishment of Denendeh, formerly known as the Northwest Territories.

Denendeh is governed by a coalition of indigenous and public governments. It is the envy of citizens throughout the country. Its structure and decisions are significantly influenced by the voices of Elders and Youth and a commitment to gender parity.

The Denendeh government truly follows consensus decision-making traditions, having eliminated the colonial form used by the now disbanded government of the Northwest Territories.

All individuals elected to the Denendeh, Inuvialuit, and Nunavut government assemblies are required to speak the Indigenous language most common among the Indigenous people they represent even if these people make up a minority of the population. Broad use of Indigenous languages has spurred all Denendeh residents to decolonize and reconceptualize relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, and with the natural environment. As in the rest of Canada, mandatory voting has greatly increased the activism and engagement of the electorate.

Water shortages and erratic, dangerous climatic conditions are urgent issues in Denendeh. Residents knew these days were coming three decades ago when sub-Arctic and Arctic communities forced governments to prohibit fracking and any more hydrocarbon development.

Denendeh communities completed a decade of intensive renewable energy development in 2025, the same year that all public and private use of fossil fuels became illegal, except as an occasional back-up to a renewable energy source. Relocations of Denendeh communities due to droughts, forest fires and erosion provided the opportunity for citizens to reclaim traditional territories and to reconstitute communities on the basis of distributed renewable energy systems. Today, solar and biomass are Denendeh’s main energy sources.

Keepers of the land and water are active in every community. They are guided by the Elders and manage and monitor the natural environment. They have the authority and support to intervene in ways that keep all elements of the ecosystem in balance.

Partnerships and coalitions have reshaped social dynamics in Denendeh. In the old days under the government of the Northwest Territories, there was a huge gap in the socio-economic well-being of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Today, the gap has closed. There is equal priority given to meeting the needs and finding a meaningful place for every resident in Denendeh. The Elders say that communities today are egalitarian places, just as they were centuries ago.

Civil society groups continue to thrive in Denendeh. They are no longer silenced or marginalized by government but are actively sought as partners in support of local communities and the coalition government. Most often, civil society groups provide valuable research and analytical skills to these parties. The Denendeh Chapter of the Council of Canadians – formerly the Northwest Territories Chapter – continues to be active mainly through the leadership of young people from communities throughout Denendeh.

A vision for trade by Sujata Dey

Today, in 2015, with a new era of globalization, and the communications and technological revolution that spawned it, trade could unite us rather than broaden our divides. With Twitter and Facebook,
we can exchange viewpoints with activists all over the world. We can follow the revolution in real time. Social media has the power to bring masses of people together instantly.

However, globalization, or corporate-led globalization, has come at the price of mass injustices. Companies seek to make the most profits by pressuring states to lower environmental, labour and social standards. As globalization goes on, many, including the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Oxfam and the International Monetary Fund, have warned against rising inequality between people. Thomas Piketty says that we are entering historic levels of inequality – where the 1 per cent have reached a point never seen since the French revolution.

Trade agreements could be used to fight corporate power, balancing it out globally.

Instead, current trade agreements are the opposite. They are shielded from public scrutiny, negotiated in idyllic resorts between corporate lobbies and a select group of lawmakers. Instead of granting more power to people, they enshrine corporate rights. The investor-state dispute settlement provisions, which allow corporations to sue governments, are a prime example of that. Corporations and their investments have been protected and elevated in trade agreements. A corporation can sue a government to protect their profits and can overturn legislation meant to protect our environment, labour and social programs.

So what would a people-friendly trade agreement look like? What can we strive for 30 years from now, in 2045? The primary criteria would have to be that governments would preserve their right to regulate. As well, trade agreements would be linked to democratic bodies or court systems that would protect human, democratic, environmental, social and labour rights.

The process of creating a trade agreement would have to be transparent and inclusive. It wouldn’t be enough to analyze the economic bottom line through questionable models, but the effects trade would have on human rights, on the environment and on social programs should be considered. It wouldn’t be enough to show that there is economic growth; but that this economic growth should be distributed evenly among all people in society. The agreement should protect public services, encourage food sustainability, promote alternative energy, and work towards a global fossil-free economy.

Can we get there? In our fast-changing technology-driven world, we have the ability to come up with solutions that we have never been able to produce previously. With our collective brainpower of 7.3 billion people worldwide, we can share ideas of how to save our planet and make this imagined future a reality.

A vision for youth by Brigette DePape

1989 is the year I was born. In This Changes Everything, Naomi Klein explains how it was just around that time that the world had a choice: to choose a path of sustainable development (1988 having been a year when climate became part of the public consciousness), or to plough forward with capitalism.

In the battle of worldviews, capitalist globalization won in many ways, with the “Western consumerist lifestyle not only surviving,” but, according to Klein, growing “significantly more lavish.” This came at the expense of the Earth, and of thousands of cultures, languages, and even people’s lives.

So in 1995, when I was in grade one and NAFTA was being signed, a group of people stood and held up an American flag behind then-Prime Minister Brian Mulroney to make the invisible visible – to show we were all becoming like the United States. This is just one story of many of the anti-globalization movement.

I am grateful to those who came before me who were critical of NAFTA, who resisted and pointed to more sane and healthy ways of being. They carry the seeds of another way.

I see the world at a turning point, much like the choice the world had in 1988 when climate first came to mass public consciousness. My hope for the next 30 years is that we will carry the seeds of our mamas, papas, grandmas, and grandpas in the movement and choose a world that isn’t made of oil and plastic, but instead plant the seeds and grow a wonderful, healthy world.

Here are some of my hopes for the next 30 years:

▼ Good, healthy nutritious food that is local and affordable is the norm.
▼ We have a Council of Canadians chapter in every city.
▼ Canada is 100 per cent powered by renewable energy, as envisioned by Melina Laboucan-Massimo’s vision in the speech she gave at the Jobs, Justice, and the Climate rally in July. “We have a huge opportunity to transition even in places like Alberta, which has the highest solar potential in this country. We’ve been looking down for far too long, and we’ve been digging the bottom of the barrel, and we must now turn our gaze towards the sun.”
▼ Everyone living in Canada can vote. Right now, newcomers to Canada cannot vote. How is this possible? I have friends who have been here for eight years who are not allowed to vote.
▼ Farmers’ markets are the new shopping malls and fair trade is the new free trade.
▼ Happiness and health are the measures of a country’s well-being. All people feel a sense of community, health, belonging, and purpose.
▼ We have good-quality, accessible public health care.
▼ The right to water is respected. We see the end of water plundering for corporate interests, and instead a protection of water and the respect of the human right to water.
▼ Indigenous rights are respected. All of the Truth and Reconciliation recommendations are implemented.
▼ Progressive policies promised by progressive parties in our 2015 Youth Voter’s Guide, including those to address youth employment, student debt, the climate crisis, Indigenous rights and democracy, are implemented.

With the federal election now just days away, I do believe we are at the beginning of a new wave of change. We will see a record number of youth vote for change this election. And no matter what the outcome is on October 19, the people’s movements will be stronger than ever.
The Council of Canadians has long supported electoral reform, specifically proportional representation.

Proportional representation is more democratic than the current first-past-the-post electoral system. It ensures a fairer representation of votes cast and prevents a governing party from holding total power after gaining only a small percentage of the popular vote.

The day after the 2011 federal election, our ally Fair Vote Canada stated, “The Conservatives have won 54.22 per cent of the seats with only 39.62 per cent of the votes…. If the seats were won in proportion to the votes that were cast, the numbers would look like this: Conservatives 122 (45 fewer seats than they won under our current electoral system and less than the 155 seats required for a majority government), NDP 95 (7 fewer seats), Liberals 59 (25 more than what they now hold), Bloc Québécois 19 (15 more), Greens 13 (12 more).”
Council of Canadians National Chairperson Maude Barlow echoed that analysis later that year when she said, “Now Stephen Harper and his Conservatives – the most right wing government we have ever had in this country – have a so-called majority. I say so-called because if we add the number of people who did not vote for him and combine it with the number who did not vote at all, he has the support of less than one-quarter of Canadians.” She has also commented, “We have to find a way, either through proportional representation or an alliance of progressive forces, to form a government that truly represents the views of the majority of Canadians."

Since our current electoral system produces an unfair reflection of the overall vote, many people feel their vote doesn’t count and opt not to vote. Pundits have speculated that a low voter turnout will likely mean another Harper majority government.

Elections Canada says there were 23.9 million eligible voters in 2011 and that 14.7 million – or 61.4 per cent – of them voted in that federal election. The Harper Conservatives received their “majority” with just 5.8 million of those votes, or about 24.2 per cent of all eligible voters. More than 9 million Canadians did not vote at all and 8.8 million voted for other parties.

Writer and educator Duncan Cameron has stated, “The 25/60 rule says when only 60 per cent of Canadian voters go out to vote, 25 per cent of the voters can deliver a majority government. In 2011, the Conservatives received 39 per cent of the vote, and won 55 per cent of the seats because only 61 per cent of Canadians made the effort to vote. The disengagement from the electoral process is the key to the success of the Conservatives in Canada and of right-wing politics elsewhere.”

With the October 19 federal election just days away it’s instructive to know where the parties stand on the issue of proportional representation.

NDP leader Thomas Mulcair has stated, “We’ve been clear for a long time on the importance of bringing in proportional representation in our country – we believe in it. We think that it’s more fair, and that’s why we are going to fight hard for it.” In 2014, the New Democrats tabled a motion in Parliament calling on the House to introduce a proportional representation system after the next election.

While Liberal Leader Justin Trudeau has previously stated, “Too many people don’t understand the polarization and the micro issues that come through proportional representation.” Just past June he pledged this election would be the last held under the first-past-the-post system and that his government would convene an all-party parliamentary committee to examine proportional representation and other alternatives, and then introduce legislation based on the committee’s recommendations.

And Green Party leader Elizabeth May has commented, “[Democratic renewal] may mean forging ahead with proportional representation and taking lessons learned by other countries who have done the same to come up with an electoral process that is truly meaningful and engages all Canadian voters.”

Of all the federal leaders, only Stephen Harper opposes proportional representation.

In June, The Globe and Mail reported, “The Conservative Party said it would fight to keep the current system, stating voters have already laid out their opposition to different forms of proportional representation, including in referendums in Ontario and British Columbia.”

But it’s not quite as simple as Mr. Harper would have us believe.

In Ontario, it is widely believed that a major factor in the outcome of that October 2007 referendum was a lack of adequate information about the proposal itself and the Citizens’ Assembly that had recommended it. Elections Ontario didn’t formally launch its public campaign on it until August and spent about half of what had been recommended by Fair Vote to raise public awareness. An Environics poll found that 70 per cent of Ontarians were not familiar with the proposal.

And in British Columbia, the outcome of the May 2005 vote was in fact 57.7 per cent in favour of reform, including a majority of voters in 77 ridings out of 79. It fell just short of the 60 per cent threshold set for implementing the reform. In the subsequent May 2009 referendum, support dropped to just under 40 per cent. The reasons for that are complex, but it may be partly attributed to Liberal voters wanting majority governments under the current system. Otherwise, it has been argued that the more voters learned about proportional representation, the more they liked it.

After those referendums, the Council of Canadians commissioned an Environics poll in April 2010 which found that 62 per cent of Canadians support “moving towards a system of proportional representation in Canadian elections.”

The Council of Canadians encourages its supporters to state their support for proportional representation when candidates knock on your door for your vote. As noted in our Voter’s Guide, you can ask them, “Will you commit to introducing electoral reform to ensure every vote counts in future elections?”

We are also supporting Fair Vote Canada’s Declaration of Voters’ Rights. The Declaration calls on federal parties and candidates to commit to conducting a citizen-led consultation process immediately following the next federal election and implementing a suitable form of proportional representation in time for the following election.

Brent Patterson is the Political Director of the Council of Canadians.
“This body of water is like a time capsule,” explains Stewart Redsky, a local resident. “Shoal Lake 40 is many years behind in our development, yet we are 20 kilometres from the TransCanada Highway. [You can] see the results of what was done by humans to supply Winnipeg’s drinking water…on the better side of the aqueduct.”

Shoal Lake 40 First Nation sits close to the Manitoba-Ontario border. It was cut off from the mainland a century ago when an aqueduct was built to supply Winnipeg with fresh water. While clean water flows through the aqueduct, murky, polluted water is diverted to the community.

Shoal Lake 40 has been under a boil water advisory for 17 years and relies on massive quantities of bottled water for their needs. But bringing the water into the community – and accessing jobs, food, health care, and more – is extremely difficult as the community has no all-weather road connecting it to the mainland.

Building a permanent, all-weather road – dubbed “Freedom Road” by the people who live in Shoal Lake 40 – would cost an estimated $30 million. While the Winnipeg and Manitoba governments have pledged $10 million each to build it, the federal government has refused to pitch in.

At a recent meeting with community residents, Natural Resources Minister Greg Rickford refused to commit federal funds for the construction project. Several community residents were reduced to tears, frustrated by the history that continues to isolate them.

Since then, the community has struggled with isolation and the lack of clean water.

In the 1990s, simple running water systems were installed in the homes in Shoal Lake 40, but the treatment is not adequate to make the surface water safe to drink. Low-grade Falcon River water reaches the unprotected Shoal Lake 40 taps first. Since a 1997 outbreak of Cryptosporidiosis, the community has been on a boil water advisory. It is one of the longest-lasting advisories in Canada.
Stewart Redsky describes how people put washcloths over their taps before bathing to catch debris – how the water has led to skin conditions and other health problems. People experience digestive issues occasionally, which is likely a result of not rinsing their plates with bottled water before eating.

But Shoal Lake 40’s troubles don’t end with water.

As a result of their isolation, residents don’t have adequate garbage disposal. They are left to dig and rotate pits overflowing with garbage. When Stewart explained this situation, and why old and full septic tanks are now being dumped on land – chosen as the location to have the least negative impact – it was clear that this is a desperate situation for the community.

The people of Shoal Lake do not choose to live this way; they are forced to.

The leaking of this sewage into groundwater and into the surrounding lakes is a major concern to the community.

Adding to the risks the community faces is TransCanada’s proposed Energy East pipeline. If approved, it will run above Falcon Lake and High Lake, which drain into the area. A pipeline spill would risk contaminating Falcon River and Shoal Lake.

Preston Redsky, a single father from Shoal Lake 40, described an elder of the community who used to visit him every morning for coffee. “He told me: ‘You youth, you have to stop this. You have to stop this pipeline.’” Preston, along with others in the community, pledged to do just that.

There have been two designs completed for a water treatment plant in past years. At the tender stage, the federal government decided in both cases that it was simply too expensive and too complicated to build on the island.

That is why Freedom Road is so important.

“Having a road means a water treatment plant. It means an economy, it means survival as a community,” said Cuyler Cotton, a policy analyst with the First Nation in a recent Globe and Mail article.

The road will also improve safety. Nine people have died in recent years after falling through the ice while trying to cross the lake.

“My family calls me a broken record,” says Stewart. “Until we see a firm commitment from the governments for this money, it is hard to believe this will change. People here are lacking hope.”

The Council of Canadians is working with the people of Shoal Lake 40 to help draw attention to the issues and secure funding for Freedom Road.

The tour of Shoal Lake 40 ended in the recreational room built off of the community centre. It has two pool tables and rows and rows of large bottles of water.

“Imagine your family, your elder, picking up one of these to make their tea every morning, to make their food,” said Stewart. “When you leave to the better side of the aqueduct I want you to know that I am not asking for your sympathy, I am asking for your knowledge, for your awareness, for justice.”

With files from Andrea-Harden Donahue. Jan Malek is the Publications Officer for the Council of Canadians.
I don’t recall how I first heard of the Council of Canadians, but I do remember how refreshing it was to know that there was a group of people out there with whom I shared values. For most of my adult life – I am 63 years old now – I feel I have been at odds with mainstream society, including friends, family and co-workers, in terms of my views on the need to be politically aware in order to maintain truly representative democracy.

For the most part other people seemed indifferent to political issues, and to our part in the deteriorating natural environment and the negative impact of capitalism – free enterprise – on the natural world. Throughout the 20th century things seemed to be deteriorating at an accelerated rate, and I felt this indifference was a main reason.

Under the current Canadian Conservative government (and most capitalistic, democratic governments worldwide) the natural environment is rapidly being destroyed due to an over-focus on the economic bottom line. I believed this was, at least in part, in order to maintain political power, with little regard for the broader ripple effect nationally and worldwide. This became more and more frustrating as I began to realize that I no longer had a voice in Canadian Parliament.

I always try to remain politically aware and base my voting choices on an informed opinion. Under the current government, I came to realize that fairness, truth, and freedom of choice were rapidly disappearing. Even representatives in Opposition, who were supposed to provide the sober second thought, became impotent because of the closed nature of the current majority government. This impotence affected Conservative representatives in Ottawa who were no longer free to represent us, but instead were toeing the party line, more than I have ever seen in Canada.

Through the Council of Canadians, an organization that, in my view, “walks the talk,” I felt I had an opportunity to reverse this trend, and an opportunity to spend the remainder of my active years improving the prospects for coming generations.

The Council of Canadians seems more needed today than ever as a forum for critical analysis about the momentum of the current political, economic, environmental and social trends.

I am buoyed by our part in the reversal and blockage of efforts to turn pristine waters into tailings ponds, by our part in helping municipal and provincial governments think twice about allowing fracking, by our support for the rights of Indigenous peoples of this continent and worldwide, and by our role in informing Canadians and Americans of the real risks of pipelines criss-crossing the continent, with far more to lose than to gain.

The Council of Canadians, with a mix of young and “seasoned” supporters, has a great opportunity to let our youth know the benefits of working together with elders to re-establish a higher Canadian and worldwide standard. I am encouraged that the Council is actively encouraging the youth vote. Hopefully, that is a sign that the Council is attracting the next generation, and the Council’s future will be in good hands.

I am heartened that the Council offers optimism beyond the acceptance of the perceived negative inevitable. Without the belief that we, individual citizens, can make a positive difference, lethargy will grow as more and more people adopt the attitude that one person’s effort is insignificant.

The Council is a collective voice, with proven clout. That is why I joined, and that is why I hope others will do the same.

Become a part of the Council of Canadians collective voice by joining today. Make a donation by calling toll-free 1-800-387-7177, or by emailing inquiries@canadians.org.
Suzy Coulter and Wendy Major are founding members of the Council of Canadians’ Chilliwack chapter. Chilliwack is a city located in the Fraser Valley about 100 kilometres outside of Vancouver in British Columbia. The two women were working together on local issues even before the chapter formed. In the same spirit in which they do their work, we’ll be highlighting them both this issue.

What do you see as upcoming chapter priorities?

Wendy: Concerns were raised in 2011 around tar sands and heavy product transportation through an old Kinder Morgan pipeline, which was proposed to be twinned and carry triple its present amount. The proposed route is planned through very urban neighbourhoods, public schoolyards and pristine waterways. Compounding this is a diminishing protection of the Agricultural Lands Reserve (ALR) and its ability to protect farms from being sold for non-food use. The ALR was established in 1973 to encourage local food production.

Suzy: We may have a Blue Communities push and, of course, the federal election and getting out the vote in this long-time Conservative stronghold. We will also be raising awareness about the B.C. Water Sustainability Act.

What ongoing issues does the Fraser Valley have?

Suzy: The folks we connect with around here are concerned a lot about protecting water, revitalizing democracy, protecting wild salmon, preserving farmland, stopping bitumen pipeline expansion, and protecting the Fraser River. As settlers and occupiers, we are learning how to better be allies to the Sto:lo people whose territory we live on. We want to comprehend the truth stated in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommendations and help push for the adoption of these recommendations at our community level.

How do you connect with others?

Wendy: This spring we connected with WaterWealth, a local NGO working on B.C.’s proposed Water Sustainability Act. The Chilliwack Naturalists and Sto:lo tribal council were also part of the Water Week event in March. We organized a protest march against the proposed Aevitas Hazardous Waste plant. We want it relocated – we don’t agree with the plans to build it on floodplain 500 metres away from the banks of the Fraser River. We also joined the Protect the Fraser Coalition.

Suzy: We are presently working hard to reach out with Council of Canadians blogs and publications and events around research and analysis to encourage voters in the “Go Vote” campaign for the October 19 federal election. We are glad to see our group’s numbers increasing at each monthly meeting as the community becomes more familiar with who we are.

What keeps you committed to social justice work in your community?

Suzy: We feel as though there is no choice – social justice work is pretty much the only thing that makes sense in this upside down world, other than hanging out with loved ones, including my dogs, goats and chickens, and growing healthy food.

Wendy: I first arrived in Chilliwack in 1967 and raised my family on a hobby farm. We appreciate what a fascinating region and rich history this part of Canada holds. Over the years my friends and family have come to understand how good neighbours need to collaborate together to protect this special environment.

What else do you do outside of your activism that’s important to you?

Suzy: I am working on building and regenerating an off-grid self-sufficient (hopefully!) homestead with my partner and other family members.

Wendy: I am an oil pastel artist who enjoys depicting the amazing environmental landscapes of this province. This summer’s drought has been shocking – seeing the water levels decline rapidly and temperatures rise.

For more information about how to join a chapter in your area, visit our website at www.canadians.org/chapters or call us toll-free at 1-800-387-7177.
Council of Canadians chapters are active in communities across Canada protecting water and public health care, challenging unfair trade deals, calling for “system change not climate change,” and standing up for democracy. Here are a few examples of their work in recent months.

Protecting drinking water
Many chapters are defending drinking water. In June, the Victoria chapter participated in a blockade of the entrance to a South Island Aggregates site at Shawnigan Lake. Chapter members want to stop a company from dumping contaminated soil at the gravel pit there because it would put the drinking water for 12,000 people at risk. Shawnigan Lake is located about 48 kilometres north of Victoria in the Cowichan Valley Regional District. The Sudbury chapter spoke out against the building of the Keast Drive subdivision near Ramsey Lake in the city’s downtown area. The proposed subdivision would mean the construction of 54 single-family homes and 93 condominiums near the lake. Due to smelter emissions from mining in the area, the lake was considered dead for many years. In the 1970s a major environmental project was launched to clean up the lake and reintroduce aquatic life.

Marching for health care in Ontario
The London, Hamilton and South Niagara chapters all participated in regional days of action to call attention to health care cuts and privatization. They joined with the Ontario Health Coalition to send a message to all provincial political parties that our health is not for sale and that access to quality health care in their community is a right, not a privilege.

Community in New Brunswick seeing red
Several chapters joined the Red Head Anthony’s Cove Preservation Association’s protest against the proposed Energy East pipeline. Red Head is a community in Saint John, New Brunswick, adjacent to the Bay of Fundy. The community does not want a massive oil storage “tank farm” built for 7.8 million barrels of bitumen across the street from their homes. They also do not want a new deepwater marine terminal capable of loading about 115 supertankers a year in the Bay of Fundy.

Jobs, justice and the climate
Nineteen Council of Canadians chapters marched for jobs, justice and the climate in early July. The Vancouver, Delta-Richmond, Kelowna, Nelson, Nanaimo, Edmonton, Prince Albert, Saskatoon, Winnipeg, Peterborough-Kawartha, Montreal, Fredericton and St. John’s chapters all participated in the national day of action. On July 5, there was a march in Toronto to coincide with a Climate Summit of the Americas and a Pan-American Economic Summit. The Toronto, York University, Hamilton, London, Niagara South, Guelph and Peterborough-Kawartha chapters were present at that march. Chapters joined the call for an economy that is more fair and equal and provides good green jobs and a better future for people and the planet.

Encouraging people to “Go Vote!”
Council chapters across the country have been holding events, canvassing door-to-door, and organizing all-candidates meetings to encourage people to “Go Vote!” on October 19. More than 9 million people did not vote in the last federal election. Council of Canadians chapters have been actively trying to change that by sharing Voter’s Guides and information about how to register to vote.

Interested in getting involved? Join a Council chapter near you! Find a full list of chapters at www.canadians.org/chapters, or call us toll-free at 1-800-387-7177 for more information.

In memoriam
Members of the Inverness County chapter are saddened to lose David Martin, who passed away in August at the age of 73. David’s work to secure a municipal ban on fracking in Inverness County, Nova Scotia, was a poignant reminder that the most effective grassroots activism is work of gentle determination and respectful engagement. The Council of Canadians extends condolences to David’s partner, Johanna Padelt, his children, family, friends and fellow chapter activists.
The idea of universal public pharmacare in Canada has been around since the beginning of Canadian medicare, but the script remains unfilled.

Prescription drug coverage was recommended as a “next step” by the 1964 Royal Commission on Health Services. That call was echoed by the 2002 Commission on the Future of Health Care (the Romanow Commission) and a Senate report. Evidence-based studies continue to support the call for this needed program. Canadians have now been waiting over 50 years for pharmacare, and despite the continued recommendations, Canadians remain stuck with an inefficient, unethical and fragmented group of drug plans.

The World Health Organization has declared that all nations are obligated to ensure equitable access to necessary medicines through pharmaceutical policies. Consequently, every developed country that has a universal health insurance system provides universal coverage of prescription drugs – except for Canada. Of the 33 countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Canada provides the smallest percentage of its citizens with a public drug plan other than the United States. Two-thirds of the countries in the OECD provide 100 per cent drug coverage.

The result of our fragmented and patchwork system is that many Canadians have no drug coverage at all. One in ten Canadians are not able to afford their prescriptions. This does not include people who ration or skip taking their medication due to costs. A new research study has estimated the number of people who ration or skip medication could actually be as high as 1 in 5.

Medications are needed to keep people healthy and to save lives, yet every year more than 3 million Canadians don’t get these necessary medications, which include everything from asthma inhalers to insulin, because they cannot afford them. Not only is this unsafe; it is fundamentally unethical that Canadians are covered for their prescription drugs based on their socio-economic status, their age, where they live, or work, rather than on their medical needs.

Drug prices in Canada are also among the highest in the world due to our poorly structured system. Studies have shown that a universal pharmacare program could save between $4 billion and $11 billion a year depending on how the program is organized.

During the Council of the Federation meeting held in St. John’s, Newfoundland and Labrador, in July, the Council of Canadians signed a document with national labour leaders and four provincial premiers, calling on the federal government to establish a national drug plan. At the same time, a Canada-wide poll was released that found that more than 90 per cent of Canadians want pharmacare.

It is clear there is a growing call for our politicians to show leadership and implement a long overdue universal pharmacare plan that is public, affordable and safe. But this means real action at both provincial and federal levels of government. It is time for a universal, comprehensive pharmacare program that will meaningfully improve the health of all Canadians.

Michael Butler is the Health Care Campaigner for the Council of Canadians.
It’s mid-July at 7:30 a.m. when I reach Brussels by train. Tired, I monitor my cell phone. The troika and Greece have just “agreed” to austerity measures to renew funds to the Greek government. It’s an impossible deal, but given the rumblings of those who want to kick Greece out of the Euro Zone, bittersweet nonetheless.

I am here in Brussels to campaign against the Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA). The EU, like Canada, struggles to find a balance between public good and the power of big corporations. On the one hand, the EU is a model for how economic integration can be achieved with democratic oversight. But on the other hand, as we see with the crisis in Greece, it is also a reminder of the limits that governments and the EU face when confronted with powerful economic and corporate forces.

Activists are speaking out in Europe about the threats trade deals pose, including the deal between Canada and the European Union.

“Do You Hear the People Sing?”
Stopping CETA in Europe

by Sujata Dey
From July 13 to 16 this summer, I took part in a strategy session in Brussels organized by the Seattle 2 Brussels network on what to do about CETA.

While meeting like-minded Europeans, I discovered people with different languages, cultures and political traditions, who nevertheless hold a common belief: that another world is possible. For example, while most Germans are very harsh in their attitudes about Greece, German activists were very critical of their government’s narrowness in dealing with the country. In Spain and the United Kingdom, people often criticized the austerity of their governments, preferring another economic and political model. In central and eastern Europe, they face other barriers, including a lack of resources, and government leaders who believe that the people are secretly pro-Russian when they criticize European trade policy. While most people were upset at the unnecessarily harsh conditions of the Greece bailout, the general feeling was that there is still a soul in the EU, and many activists are willing to speak out.

The Europeans are formidable campaigners. They have amassed 2 million signatures against CETA and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) agreements. TTIP is a deal between the European Union and the United States. Activists working to stop the deals have proven themselves a force to be reckoned with in the European Parliament. In the national parliaments, they have been getting states to oppose investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) clauses that give corporations the power to sue governments if their policies interfere with profits. Their coup de grâce was having the largest EU consultation ever reject ISDS. In 2015, 97 per cent of the respondents to the European Commission’s own consultation on ISDS rejected special rights for investors.

Although our Canadian government would have us believe that CETA is a “done deal,” our European allies show us that the fight is far from over. Neither TTIP nor CETA has yet to pass any significant ratification steps in the EU. During our strategy sessions in Brussels we plotted the various points where we can work to defeat CETA. First, the deal must obtain the consent of national parliaments, then the consent of the EU parliament. At both of these stages, signatory nations such as France, Austria, Germany, Belgium and Slovenia might have something to say. We agreed that while TTIP, the EU-U.S. trade agreement, seems more threatening to Europeans, CETA is going to be the first hurdle. If activists are successful in defeating CETA in the European Union, they will have a better chance defeating TTIP. This could happen by the beginning of this year. It is imperative that legislatures not sign the agreement before it goes to the European Parliament.

We reflected on how trade is related to climate change and what we could do at the upcoming Paris Climate talks. With ISDS clauses in place, it is often environmental regulation that suffers, as lawsuits against Canada on fracking and mining demonstrate.

In September we held an International Day of Action on the anniversary of the preliminary signing of CETA. Activists from Canada and Europe demanded that our legislators refrain from ratifying CETA, pointing out that the necessary legal, human rights, environmental, employment and democratic analyses have not been done for this trade deal.

Maude Barlow, the Council of Canadians’ National Chairperson, will be going to Austria, Germany and the United Kingdom in November to talk about Canada’s objections to CETA. She will share Canada’s experience with the North American Free Trade Agreement, and explain that we are the most sued nation in the developed world, and that Europeans have much to learn from our experiences before they adopt CETA. She will talk about how tar sands conglomerates are eyeing CETA as an opportunity to export crude oil at the expense of European alternative energy industries, and how Canadian mining companies are already taking advantage of ISDS abroad to protect their environmentally dangerous and unpopular mines. Garry Neil, the Council’s Executive Director, will talk about cultural and other issues in France and Spain.

I met with European parliamentary assistants to talk about CETA. Along with Denise Gagnon from the Fédération des travailleurs du Québec, we spoke with representatives of the Socialists and Democrats, the New European Left, and the Greens. They were very aware of ISDS issues and enthusiastic about exchanging perspectives and ideas about what could be done. And of course, news about Greece was in the air and they were eager to share their insights into what was happening while CETA debates and strategies continued, work was also being done in response to TTIP. Washington negotiators were in Brussels to negotiate the EU-U.S. agreement.

Outside the negotiating site, a rally was building. Activists danced, wore costumes, and led chants. One person reminded the crowd of the injustices people faced before they rose up in the French revolution. They sang the rousing refrain from the musical Les Misérables: “Do you hear the people sing? Singing the song of angry men. It is the singing of a people who will not be slaves again.” Then, adapting to our corporate-driven era, they added “Stop TTIP, Stop CETA!”

Brussels is one of a host of cities that have been declared “TTIP-free.” Belgium, on the whole, has been cool to both TTIP and CETA. The rally organizers used both of these points to declare the TTIP negotiations illegal. They used tape to cordon off the TTIP-free zones, or “zone hors TAFTA.”

Canadians have many allies in Europe, ready and willing to collaborate with us. We are not alone in wanting to stop CETA.

Sujata Dey is the Trade Campaigner for the Council of Canadians.
On Sunday, June 21, in her 100th year and with loving family at her side in Guelph, Ontario, Vi Morgan peacefully passed away.

The measure of one’s life can be made in any number of ways: by the love you’ve given and received, by the difference you’ve made in the lives around you, and by the actions you’ve taken to make your community and the world beyond a better place.

By these and every other measure, Vi’s was a life richly lived.

She once said that the values of social justice, education and equality were instilled in her from a very young age by her mother. She was taught to read voraciously, think critically, and challenge injustice – principles that would become a driving force throughout her life.

Before the age of 30, Vi was already the celebrated author of the novel A Better Harvest. She went on to author numerous short stories and poems, published in Chatelaine and Toronto newspapers.

They also emerged as outspoken activists in their hometown of Guelph. From challenging municipal, provincial and federal policies that harmed communities, to standing up to corporate abuse that put profits ahead of people and nature, Vi and Griff were an activist power couple to be reckoned with.

It was the hotly debated NAFTA talks of the mid-90s that brought Vi and Griff to the Council of Canadians – and it was the start of a beautiful friendship.

The two travelled to Ottawa in the spring of 1998 to meet with Council of Canadians National Chairperson Maude Barlow. They came to discuss how they could better help the Council’s efforts to build a powerful cross-Canada civil society movement to counter regressive governments and growing corporate influence.

The two travelled to Ottawa in the spring of 1998 to meet with Council of Canadians National Chairperson Maude Barlow. They came to discuss how they could better help the Council’s efforts to build a powerful cross-Canada civil society movement to counter regressive governments and growing corporate influence.

They returned home and immediately began forming the Guelph Chapter of the Council of Canadians, which would grow to become one of the Council’s strongest chapters, as it is today.

In 2004, Vi, Griff and fellow chapter members led a massive local campaign to stop Wal-Mart from bringing its “high cost of low prices” to Guelph. The global retail giant was planning to purchase a huge parcel of land adjacent to the local Jesuit cemetery, against strong public opposition. Later that year, at one of their final protests and alongside fellow community activists young and old, Griff passed away.

Vi said that it was her deep faith and eternal optimism that carried her through losing the love of her life. In the years that followed, she was emboldened to continue learning, teaching and fighting to make her community and the world beyond a better place, right up to her final days.

The Council of Canadians family across the country pauses to mourn the loss of our dear friend.

Vi, we thank you for your tireless work and generous spirit. We will miss your fierce mind, courageous heart and sharp wit. But we are heartened by the indelible stamp you have left on this organization and grateful for the enduring legacy you’re leaving.

One of Vi’s favourite expressions when speaking of her relationship with Griff was: “We were closer than two coats of paint.”

It makes me smile to think they are once again together.

Jamian Logue is the Director of Development for the Council of Canadians.
The daily news is starting to read more like recent Hollywood sci-fi movies that depict a world without water.

California’s drought is being increasingly compared to Mad Max: Fury Road, a film that takes place in a drought-stricken future where those who control water control the people. And a look at what’s happening globally shows the scenario is becoming frighteningly real.

All around the world, communities are facing historic levels of drought. The California government called for a mandatory 25 per cent reduction following NASA scientist Jay Famiglietti’s announcement that the U.S. state has only enough water to last one year. Communities have been outraged that Nestlé, as well as fracking and big agricultural companies, continue to draw water at massive rates. People in Taiwan, whose water has been handed over to the global electronics industry,
As wildfires rage, drought is spreading across British Columbia and in the traditional territories of Indigenous communities. Most of southern B.C. is being categorized under “Drought Level 4,” which indicates it is extremely dry and is experiencing the highest level of drought. In these regions, all commercial use of water and residential outdoor tap use is prohibited. Fishing has been banned in most of the lakes in southern B.C. and farmers are being asked to restrict water-takings from rivers and their tributaries throughout the summer.

In Alberta, the drought is affecting crops and the cattle industry. At least 17 counties have officially declared states of agricultural disaster.

There are 17,000 glaciers in British Columbia and research by UNBC shows they are all melting. Melting glaciers in both B.C. and Alberta will have an impact on all the communities in western and Prairie provinces where the glaciers provide water.

Ontario and Quebec have also experienced record levels of drought, although not as severe as the west. Still, there have been six major droughts in southern Ontario since 1998 and the first six months of 2012 had been the driest since 1958.

As of January 2015, there were 1,838 drinking water advisories in Canada. At any given time there are over 100 Indigenous communities under a drinking water advisory. Despite the record levels of drought and drinking water advisories, governments are still allowing projects that threaten remaining water sources like large-scale bottled water withdrawals, fracking, industrial farming, mining and tar sands development.

Potential spills by tar sands pipelines like Northern Gateway and the Kinder Morgan Trans Mountain pipeline pose a threat to the hundreds of lakes and rivers along their routes.

The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Basin are being threatened by extreme energy projects such as tar sands and fracked gas pipelines and shipments.

These droughts signal the need to revamp the way water is managed, governed and allocated.

Quebec is under a fracking moratorium, but the Ontario government has promoted fracking in southern Ontario. Despite much of eastern Canada being under fracking moratoria, western and Prairie provinces are still moving forward with fracking projects that use massive amounts of water.

Farmers and landowners in Alberta have been raising concerns about water sources and the impacts of drought on cattle and crops.

Nestlé, a company that owns 70 per cent of bottled water brands worldwide, and other bottled water companies continue to draw water from community water sources in Ontario and British Columbia. Bottled water takings also occur in Quebec, the Prairies and the Atlantic.

Droughts are occurring in communities where the local economies are agriculture-based and reliant on a steady source of clean water. The agriculture industry generates $11 billion in revenue in British Columbia and $10 billion in Alberta, and creates nearly 1 million jobs in the farming sector in Ontario.

These droughts signal the need to revamp the way water is managed, governed and allocated. Both Alberta and British Columbia allocate water based on a “first in time, first in right” (FITFIR) system that prioritizes water permits by the date they are issued. In other words, if fracking, mining or bottled water companies like Nestlé have older permits than municipalities, small-scale farmers or other community water users, we could see scenarios where the companies’ permits are honoured while community users are told they cannot draw water.

The global water crisis is here and many communities are facing a new reality – one that includes uncertainty in water availability. Council of Canadians National Chairperson Maude Barlow, who long has done extensive research and warned that the world was running out of water, has called for a new water ethic and for water to be put at the centre of all policy.

Governments are reluctant to make hard decisions, like stopping fracking, tar sands expansion and bottled water withdrawals. Yet these are the kinds of choices governments must make to ensure a clean water supply not only for the coming years, but for future generations.

More importantly, individuals and communities must become more knowledgeable about water. We must change our relationship with water and engage in decisions affecting water. We must understand that while we have a right to water, we also have a responsibility to protect it. We live in a time when governments are prioritizing corporate interests over the protection of water. We are faced with the challenge of protecting water ourselves. To do this we must reach out to neighbours, community residents, and environmentalists, as well as our union and indigenous allies, and take up this challenge.

Our water will dry up if we don’t.

Emma Lui is the Water Campaigner for the Council of Canadians.
Steve Mills has been an artist for as long as he can remember.

His grandmother taught him how to paint and how to express himself through art. His work tends to focus on the land and water. He hunts and fishes, so his thoughts are about preserving the resources for future generations.

“All of my reference is to the land – the land is important; water is important,” explains Mills. “Hunting and fishing is a universal cultural activity. Basically, we are all products of successful hunters and fishers. My artwork is based on that. I live my paintings.”

It was his concern for water that led him to do a piece of art he calls “Keep your hands off my (fracking) Alberta water.” The limited edition print is based on a larger work he’s done – a huge 40” by 60” acrylic painting depicting the clean river water he likes to fly-fish in. He has been fly-fishing for more than 50 years and knows many local waterways intimately.

For the artwork, he printed the painting twice and then added a drill hole using felt pens and a more contemporary style to show how water is being robbed from its natural source.

He has seen the theft first-hand.

While fishing the eastern slopes in Alberta last summer he noticed pumps had been placed in the Kakwa River, one of his favourite fishing spots, with kilometres of lines to carry the water away.

Artist Donates Work to Raise Awareness about Fracking Water Withdrawals by Jan Malek
“Last year was a drought and this year is even worse. I’ve fished that long enough – I don’t know much about fracking, but I do know about fishing. It was not a good time to be taking water out.”

Hydraulic fracturing – or “fracking” as it is more commonly known – is an extreme form of energy extraction. The technique uses and contaminates millions of litres of water by mixing it with thousands of litres of unidentified chemicals underground at very high pressure in order to create fractures in the underlying shale rock formations and extract the natural gas below the surface. Fracking for unconventional gas is rapidly expanding in almost every province across Canada and fracking companies are rapidly draining water sources for their projects.

Mills doesn’t know the name of the particular company that was taking the water for fracking, and he hasn’t been able to get much information from the government. He contacted the former Alberta government last summer. “They told me it was fine and talked to me like I was an idiot,” he said.

He has written to the new Notley government and sent in all of the information he has gathered, but at the time of publication he still had not heard back from anyone.

“‘I’m out there all the time and I see what is happening to the rivers. They are disappearing, but when I call the government they either don’t care or say ’it’s not our responsibility.’”

As for the fracking, he would like to see some kind of compromise that doesn’t put clean water sources at risk.

“I think there are creative solutions so that both jobs and the environment can exist,” he said. “Alberta is full of stinking swamps, why not take water from there? There are so few clear rivers here – they should just be left alone.”

The Council of Canadians sincerely thanks Steve Mills for his generous donation. To view more of his artwork please visit his website at www.stevemills.gallery.
On July 28, 2010, a landmark United Nations resolution put to rest a global dispute about whether water and sanitation should be recognized as a human right. After blocking attempts to have the right officially recognized for years, Canada and the United States were caught by surprise when Bolivia introduced resolution 64/292, affirming unequivocally that all people everywhere have a right to clean, safe drinking water and sanitation, and that this right is connected to the realization of all other human rights.

The states refusing to vote in favour of the resolution were outnumbered. Reluctant to make public their opposition, they simply abstained as history unfolded in favour of the activists and organizations that had campaigned for more than a decade to achieve this victory.

On the fifth anniversary of the United Nations resolution on the Human Right to Water and Sanitation, the Blue Planet Project (BPP) was once again at the General Assembly, pleading with decision makers from around the world not to forget the commitments they made five years ago. The human right to water and sanitation had become a point of contention among member states negotiating the final documents of the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

The Post-2015 Development Agenda will determine the shape of international development for the next 15 years. The agenda includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including one on water and sanitation. It was launched in September when the Millennium Development Goals expired.

The BPP was invited to participate in the discussions by the NGO Mining Working Group, a coalition of primarily faith-based groups working at the UN to promote environmental and human rights as they relate to extractive industries. When the Mining Working Group discovered that Business and Industry were planning to position themselves as experts on water and sanitation within consultation processes set up for the Post-2015 Development Agenda, group members asked the BPP to intervene.

Together with the Mining Working Group, we warned UN member states that unless the agenda was rooted in a human rights–based framework, a water and sanitation goal would pave the way for greater commodification of water and sanitation services and freshwater supplies as the water scarcity crisis deepens. The Millennium Development Goals failed to meet the needs of the most marginalized communities because, among other weaknesses, it failed to hold states accountable to human rights obligations. Instead, it set up numerical quotas that allowed states to score easy points by improving the conditions of those who already enjoyed access rather than reaching those most in need. The private sector, which sees the SDGs as a channel for reaching new markets, has little economic incentive to serve poor communities.

In June 2015, a group of 624 organizations worldwide signed on to a petition urging member states to honour their commitments by explicitly naming the Human Right to Water and Sanitation in the Post-2015 Development Agenda. In the final hours of negotiations, despite a last-minute effort by the United States to block our campaign, we prevailed.

While we continue to have strong concerns and reservations regarding some components of the agenda, ensuring that the goals and targets relating to water and sanitation are rooted in the human rights framework is a vital first step in establishing people and local communities as “rights holders” rather than clients or aid recipients. Additionally, it establishes the obligations of states as duty-bearers that cannot pass off their obligations to private corporations.

As we continue to press for stronger mechanisms to hold corporations benefiting from the development agenda accountable, we hope the human right to water and sanitation will serve as an instrument to challenge and prevent corporate abuses of freshwater resources. Most importantly, we will use it to insist that governments put people at the centre of decisions regarding water resource distribution. As the former Special Rapporteur on the Human Right to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation has noted in relation to tensions arising from a call for increased energy production within the development agenda, a human rights–based approach requires states to prioritize the water needs of people over industrial consumption.

Meera Karunananthan is the Blue Planet Project Organizer.
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#GoVote2015

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Chapter Contacts

The Council of Canadians appreciates the energy and dedication of our chapter activists. If you are interested in joining a chapter please see the contacts list below, or get in touch with the regional office closest to you. For more information on the Council’s chapters, visit www.canadians.org or call us at 1-800-387-7117.

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