Dear friends,

What a winter we have had! Our “No Pipelines! No Tankers!” tour in B.C. last October was wonderful. It drew great crowds and lots of media. It ended with the opening night of our fabulous AGM in Nanaimo where a crowd of 900 people came out to hear guest speakers Snuneymuxw Chief Douglas White, Bill McKibben and Linda McQuaig. I am fully convinced the western export pipelines will never be built. The people of British Columbia are doing a stellar job as keepers of the land and water.

December was taken up in court to stand in support of the eight brave Canadians who are challenging the robocalls that tried to steer voters to false voting sites during the last federal election. The case showed that these were not just a random set of phone calls and that widespread fraud may have taken place. The week in court was one filled with tension and drama and closely watched by the Conservative Party. I am sure. I came out of the closing arguments so proud of the fact that whatever the judge decides, it was right to stand behind these voters in their fight for democracy.

December took me on an incredible trip to Mexico where I had the honour of sitting as a member of a Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal on Dams and Evictions, and then visited two sites where Canadian mining companies are threatening local water sources. I was taken to a sacred site by the people of Wirikuta in North Central Mexico and felt blessed by the spirit of “place where the sun was born.”

The last days of 2012 welcomed the rise of Idle No More and the courageous stand by Indigenous women and youth against the loss of watershed protection contained in the two government omnibus budget bills. In solidarity with Idle No More, in January, we launched Common Causes, our “assembly of movements” to form a common front against the destructive changes the Harper government is making to social, environmental, labour, human rights and foreign policy. Local Common Causes groups are forming in communities across the country to share their work and to support one another in their struggles. This is a good antidote to the attempt by the Harper government to silence dissent in this country.

The last few months have been very busy for me personally, fighting water privatization in Regina, toxic dumping in a once pristine lake in Newfoundland, and a planned mega quarry in southern Ontario. Our fight against CETA has been relentless and we now have more than 40 municipalities that have expressed some concern or outright opposition to this corporate-friendly trade and investment deal.

In February, I had a very special trip to Vienna, Austria, to support a European-wide citizens’ initiative to hold a referendum against a European Commission directive that some countries have to sell off their water services in exchange for debt relief. The initiative has already garnered more than one million signatures and aims to collect at least another million. I was deeply impressed by their commitment, and promised to spread the word of their struggle around the world. Already water cut-offs and even evictions are happening in Greece, Portugal, Spain and Bulgaria.

Coming up in the spring is part two of our Great Lakes tour, which will visit cities in seven communities, including four in the United States. We are promoting water as a public trust and protected biosphere and decided it was important to choose an example of threats to Great Lakes waters in each community and see what we can do to help people take action. We are very excited that the notion of the Great Lakes as a public trust is taking root, and that Robert Kennedy’s Waterkeeper Alliance has endorsed our campaign and its model.

Preparations are already underway for a powerful civil society presence in Niagara-on-the-Lake in July, when provincial and territorial premiers will gather to discuss health care, among other issues. Prime Minister Stephen Harper is clearly planning to take the federal government out of the funding equation for health care in Canada, paving the way for privatized services. We will be there en masse to tell the premiers not to let this happen. The Council of Canadians has been fighting alongside front line health care workers and public health coalitions to defend our cherished health care system, and we will continue to do so with all our strength.

To all of you who make all of this possible, I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

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