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Where Will We Go For Drinking Water? Solidarity America By John Funciello BC Columnist

Most of the time, we don't give it a second thought.

We turn on the spigot and water comes out. It has been established by testing all across the country that the water that does come out of our spigots is potable (drinkable) and is of equal or better quality than the water that comes in bottles, which are usually tinted blue to give the impression that it comes from a pristine spring somewhere in a forest glade.

But we pay dearly for that water that comes in bottles and people who drink from them believe that, when all of the good water in lakes, reservoirs, rivers, streams, and ponds has been tainted so it is not drinkable, they will still have their bottles.

There was an illustration in a magazine a few months ago that explained bottled water very well. It was one of those blue-tinted bottles with a line across it, about one-third up from the bottom. That line delineated the amount of petroleum that was used in bringing the bottle of water to the retail shelf. For example: there was the cost of making the plastic for the bottle, making the bottle itself, running the plant that filled the bottle with water (often, it's water from a municipal water system that just filtered one more time), packing the bottles, transporting the bottled water (usually by truck), and the costs in money and oil in maintaining a retail sales outlet.

If our public water supplies across the country are ever so polluted that it will take extraordinary efforts to make the water clean enough to drink, it can only be imagined how much it will cost to have clean water come out of our taps. Or, how impossibly expensive it would be to have water delivered to our homes in huge trucks (again, at a tremendous cost in fuel for delivery).

Try turning off your spigot for just a day and you'll see how important that free-flowing, low-cost water is to your life, and how many times a day you turn it on...and waste a lot of it. Filtration systems for cities, large or small, are very expensive and, depending on the water source, could be very slow in providing the volume of water we are accustomed to using. It could be that future meters will not only count the gallons of water used in each home, but they may be used to measure the amount to which you are limited each day.

Our water supply is in danger and the most glaring example is our oceans and the damage that has been done to them, particularly over the past half-century. The fish and other sea life have been reduced in number, such that there is little chance for recovery of some stocks.

We're finding out that the oceans are not limitless, just as America's forests were not limitless. We can, and have, severely damaged them and we continue to do so. We depend on forests and the oceans for life, just as we depend on farmland to feed us.

In the past week, there have been news reports of toxic algae blooms on lakes, particularly in Wisconsin, but there have been reports of blooms in 20 states. The algae (cyanobacteria), when contacted, can cause sickness and, sometimes, death. Dogs that have been in the water sickened and five of seven of them died. One owner, who cleaned the algae off his dog, was seriously sickened by the growth, which is described as looking like green paint, pea soup, or thick, green cake. It can cover wide areas of lakes and ponds or other slow-moving bodies of water, especially when the temperature is high, as in this time of global climate change.

In Minnesota, the state's Pollution Control Agency has this advice: "Scientists do not yet know what causes some blooms to produce toxins while others do not, so the safest course of action is to avoid contact with all blue-green blooms." This, of course, has a potentially profound impact economically, on commercial fishing, recreational fishing and boating, on swimming and water sports, and on the

tourism, on which many lake and river communities depend for their livelihoods.

Some of the causative factors include the presence of quantities of phosphorus and nitrogen, much of which comes from agriculture and from over-fertilized residential lawns. There are other sources, but these two are cited as the most common polluters. There are places where this problem is bad, possibly the worst, in the nation. This month, a court suit is opening, over the pollution of the Chesapeake Bay, which, for decades, has been continually degraded by runoff.

This time, giant agribusiness and its stand-ins couch it in terms of a "war on the family farm," conducted by environmentalists. There has been a tension between polluters and environmentalists for as long as the environmental movement has existed. It was perhaps first played out between factory workers and environmentalists and some efforts were made by union workers to reconcile the two back in the 1970s, as: Safe jobs and clean air (or water). There was some success in this effort, but Corporate America does not like to be trifled with and they have routinely overwhelmed their opposition, with money for advertising, lobbying, and litigation.

Next week, this drama will play out on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, where Waterkeeper Alliance is taking to court a poultry operation that is connected to Perdue, one of the nation's largest chicken producers and retailers, for what the Alliance says is the pollution of feeder streams of the Pocomoke River, which feeds into the Chesapeake. The Chesapeake is famous for its crab cakes and other culinary delights that come from its waters, but the alarm has been raised for decades about the declining (some say plunging) quality of its waters and the effect on the food that comes from it.

The court drama next week focuses on a family, the Hudsons, who raise a reported 80,000 chickens each year for Perdue. The Waterkeeper Alliance says that the Hudsons are violating the Clean Water Act and Maryland anti-pollution laws. The operation's run-off goes into ditches, which flow into a river, which flows into the bay, the Alliance contends.

The Alliance also maintains that Perdue is equally responsible, since it owns the chickens and provides the feed and orders the protocols that their contract farmers are required to maintain during the life of the birds. Good corporate overseer that it is, Perdue has tried to separate itself from the Hudsons, saying that they are independent family

farmers and has even tried to claim that the Hudsons have been problematic as contract farmers. This tactic has not worked and the court case may determine who owns, and is responsible for the massive amounts of manure (just one of the pollutants in question), from the corporate-owned chickens.

Environmentalists and agribusiness are following this case closely, because it could set precedent for the kind of industrial farming that is done all across the U.S. In our time, the power of Corporate America is nearly complete. Its tentacles reach into nearly every aspect of our lives, affecting the quality of our water, our air, our soil, and, perhaps most importantly (next to water), the quality of our food. Often, in "contract farming" operations, the giant agribusiness owns most of the product, from start to finish. The family farmer is often more like an employee, without any benefits of wage work.

Above all, however, the power of Corporate America determines how much economic and political power will be shared with the American people (The answer? Not much.) The Supreme Court has made certain that the power of corporate money will silence the voices of the people in this nation of Free Speech, in the wake of its *Citizens United* decision. Little by little, the power of working people in their workplaces has been made puny. The laws that were passed to protect workers' rights, under the administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt, have been chipped away, decade by decade, until there is not much left to keep the living standard of *all* workers at a decent level.

As this case of the Waterkeeper Alliance will examine, the power of Corporate America is enough to control everyone who actually works for a living - industrial workers, public workers, small farmers, and most others. Corporations and their politicians are determined to change or eliminate the laws that protect our water, air, soil, and food, so they have a free hand in making their profits. That's what the "deregulation" of virtually everything is about. Their goal is to be empowered to make all of the decisions for the people. It's why they have bought and paid for so many politicians at every level of government. They seem to own the majority everywhere.

Try as they might, though, they can't control everything. They can't control the blue-green algae and they can't advocate the use of less fertilizer, pesticides, and herbicides, on the farms and on residential lawns, because their profits come from those sales. They can't control nature, although they are working on that.

This is why the oil and gas industry has pulled out all the stops in pushing for hydrofracturing (or fracking) for the two fossil fuels. Using this method, they actually *inject* toxins into the earth to get the oil and gas out of the shale formations, but they tell us that fracking is safe because it is done miles under the surface, as if there is never any shifting of the earth's crust. And they back up their contentions with ubiquitous television advertising that shows happy little communities in rural areas full of happy people. And, they turn loose their multitude of lobbyists. They don't show the noise, the ruination of residential water wells, the profligate use at each drill site of millions of gallons of pure water (that they will make toxic), the air pollution and dust, the pools of stored toxic waste, the traffic congestion, and the increase in crime that goes along with a short-lived boom economy.

Deregulation means corporations ride roughshod over the people, but the people are pushing back and they are bigger than Corporate America. The sleeping giant may take long to wake, but when it is awakened, it can be a formidable opponent. The "Occupy" movement opened up a national debate about power and who wields it.

The debate about how power is wielded by our own and other countries' transnational corporations is about over. The people, as long as they allow the continued existence of corporations, must take responsibility for forcing them to make the world safe for all living creatures. And, the small stirrings of the people need to be turned into action.

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