

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 22, 2007

People's memo to Ottawa, Victoria: keep water public

VICTORIA— On World Water Day, March 22, the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) joins with other water activists around the world to send a simple message to politicians: listen to the people who have elected you and keep water and wastewater services public.

“Governments want to tie funding for new water and wastewater treatment to public-private partnerships or P3s, but citizens are clearly saying we want these services to be provided by government, not private corporations,” says Barry O’Neill, president of CUPE’s B.C. division.

O’Neill points to the recent federal budget that institutionalizes privatization as the preferred route for public investments in infrastructure, including water. This comes in addition to the B.C. government’s requirement that major capital projects be reviewed by Partnerships BC and be considered as public-private partnerships.

“In Greater Victoria – the Capital Regional District of Vancouver Island –the provincial government is relentlessly promoting private operation of new sewage treatment and it is frankly shameful,” says O’Neill. “How is this in the public interest? We need federal and provincial funding for community infrastructure - including water and sewage services – and it shouldn’t be tied to privatization and P3s.”

A comprehensive survey by the Environics Research Group in Greater Victoria this January finds overwhelming support for public operation of sewage treatment, with three out of four residents trusting local government more than a private corporation. Province-wide surveys find similar levels of mistrust of private corporations and support for public operation when it comes to water and wastewater services.

O’Neill says that while the major water privatization battle in British Columbia is in the Greater Victoria area, private water corporations are making overtures to many local and regional governments. “Despite this corporate hard sell, the vast majority of British Columbia and Canada’s water and wastewater systems are publicly owned and operated – many by CUPE members,” he notes.

“CUPE continues to work with communities to assure community control and safe drinking water and sewage treatment, including First Nations communities, many of which are suffering from generations of neglect.”



-30-

Contact: Barry O’Neill, CUPE BC president: (604) 340-6768
Roseanne Moran, CUPE Communications: (778) 835-7537