



Congressional Briefing:

**A Briefing on Water Affordability and Accessibility in the United States
*And implications of the human right to water***

March 26, 2015

**Unitarian Universalist Service Committee
PRESS KIT**

Table of Contents

2 - Media Advisory

5 - Briefing Presenters - Profiles

11 - Reports and Research

16 - Facts: Water Accessibility and Affordability in the United States

20 - Water Accessibility and Affordability In the News

23 - Background: UUSC's Advocacy for Water As a Human Right

26 - Background: UUSC Advocacy Points - Water Accessibility And Affordability
For The Most Vulnerable In The United States

28 - UUSC Corporate Profile

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST SERVICE COMMITTEE

689 Massachusetts Avenue • Cambridge, MA 02139-3302 • 617-868-6600 • fax: 617-868-7102
www.uusc.org

*Contacts: Media liaison: Jan Dragin, Dragin Communications - 24/7 - Cell phone: (339) 236-0679
UUSC communications director: Paul Twitchell, (617) 301-4355*

MEDIA ADVISORY

Congressional Briefing: Trouble on Tap: Challenges to Affordable Water in the U.S.

Washington, D.C. — Wednesday, February 18, 2015 — There are citizens in America who can't afford to pay for clean running water in their homes. A **Congressional briefing on Thursday, February 26**, will present a special focus on the affordability of water for the nation's poorest and most vulnerable, set in the context of soaring costs of water to consumers nationally and the related challenges facing America's urban and rural water and wastewater services.

WHAT

International Human Rights Organization the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee

In collaboration with

**Representatives John Conyers, Jr. (D-Mich.), Earl Blumenauer (D-Ore.-3),
Debbie Dingell (D- Mich.-12), Brenda Lawrence (D-Mich. - 14), Sheila
Jackson-Lee (D-Texas-18) and Charles Rangel (D-New York)**

Invite you to

A Briefing on Water Affordability and Accessibility in the United States *And implications of the human right to water*

The briefing is scheduled to a backdrop of water rates that have increased threefold in some cities over the past decade, mass water shutoffs in Detroit, low income residents across the country struggling to pay their bills, and municipal and regional challenges to maintain water quality and rebuild the nation's decaying water infrastructure.

Proceedings are open to media, who are invited to remain for a post-event question and answer session with presenters.

[Congressional Briefing: Water Affordability & Accessibility . . . Page 2 of 3]

WHEN

Thursday, February 26

2:00 PM - 3:30 PM

Media question and answer session:

3:30 PM - 4:00 PM

WHERE

Hearing Room 2226

Rayburn House Office Building

Washington, D.C. 20515

WHO

Briefing Moderator:

Michael Shank

Journalist and Director of Media Strategy for Climate Nexus

Presentations:

The View from Detroit

Alice Jennings, Esquire - Edwards and Jennings, P.C.

Lead lawyer in a federal class-action lawsuit brought on behalf of community organizations and Detroit residents affected by the city's mass water shutoffs

The Economics of Affordability

Roger Colton, Economist - Fisher, Sheehan & Colton: Public Finance and General Economics

Developer of the original Detroit Water and Sewer Affordability Plan and its subsequent updates and expert witness in the city's 2014 bankruptcy case

National Trends in Affordability

David Gatton, Director, Council on Metro Economies and the New American City - U.S. Conference of Mayors

Represents views of the nation's mayors on environmental policy to Congress and the Administration

[Congressional Briefing: Water Affordability & Accessibility . . . Page 3 of 3]

National Trends in Shutoffs and Legislative Remedies

Patricia Jones, JD, LLM, PhD

Senior Program Leader for Environmental Justice

Unitarian Universalist Service Committee

International expert on the human right to water and coordinator of the 2011 and 2014 United Nations missions to Detroit, Mich., of the Special Rapporteur on the human right to water

Media may sign up at the event media desk and are encouraged to RSVP to Jan Dragin, Dragin Communications, jandragin@gmail.com, phone: (774) 553-5470, cell phone: (339) 236-0679. Press packets available at the briefing. Video, audio and photo opportunities available during the briefing and post-event media session. One-on-one interviews on request.

###

**Congressional Briefing on Water Affordability and Accessibility
In the United States
*And implications of the human right to water***

Thursday, February 25, 2015 • Washington, D.C.

PRESENTER PROFILES

ROGER COLTON

Owner, Fisher, Sheehan & Colton, Public Finance and General Economics
Belmont, Massachusetts

Roger Colton's extensive accomplishments reflect expertise with special focus on low-income energy programs and affordable housing, particularly energy and zoning implications.

Colton has testified in state and federal courts in the United States and Canada and has appeared in more than three dozen states as an expert witness before regulatory agencies and legislative committees regarding energy and telecommunications issues.

As co-founder of the economics consulting partnership Fisher, Sheehan & Colton, Public Finance and General Economics, Colton provides services in a variety of areas, including regulatory economics, poverty law and economics, public benefits, environmental and natural resource economics, fair housing, community development, energy efficiency, utility law and economics, government budgeting, health care economics, (energy, telecommunications and water/sewer), and planning and zoning. He is noted for creative program design and implementation within tight budget constraints.

Previously, as a staff attorney with the National Consumer Law Center (1986 - 1994), Colton worked on low-income energy and utility issues. He pioneered cost-justifications for low-income affordable energy rates, as well as developing models to quantify non-energy benefits of low-income energy efficiency, such as reduced credit and collection costs and reduced working capital. He designed and implemented low-income affordable rate and fuel assistance programs across the country and was charged with developing new practical and theoretical underpinnings for solutions to low-income energy problems.

[Congressional Briefing on Water/Presenter Profiles . . . Page 2 of 6]

[Roger Colton, cont'd.]

Earlier, as staff attorney for the nonprofit research and consulting organization Community Action Research Group (CARG), Colton worked primarily on energy and utility issues. He provided legal representation to low-income persons on public utility issues; legal and technical assistance to consumer and labor organizations; and legal and technical assistance to a variety of state and local governments nationwide on natural gas, electric and telecommunications issues.

He received his Juris Doctorate (Order of the Coif) from University of Florida (1981), Master of Arts in Economics from McGregor School, Antioch University (1993), and Bachelor of Arts degree from Iowa State University (1975).

###

David Gatton

Director, Council on Metro Economies and the New American City

U.S. Conference of Mayors

Washington, D.C.

David Gatton currently serves as Director of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, Council for Metro Economies and the New American City, a consortium of mayors, businesses and nonprofit organizations.

The Council's goal is to promote strategies for increased capital flow, homeownership, business investment and sustainable development in America's cities. The Council also oversees the economic work of the Conference, responsible for publishing its Metro Economies report series.

Gatton's was previously the founder and Director of the Municipal Waste Management Association, founder of the Urban Water Council, the National Recycling at Work Campaign, and the Council for the New American City.

Over his 30 year career in urban affairs in Washington, D.C., Gatton's outstanding contributions include the successful negotiation of MACT air regulation standards (Maximum Achievable Control Technology Standards) under the Clean Air Act; assistance in development of President Clinton's Recycling

[Congressional Briefing on Water/Presenter Profiles . . . Page 3 of 6]

[David Gatton, cont'd.]

Executive Order on Procurement; the preservation of key tax provisions related to municipal bond financing; assistance in promoting the redevelopment of commercial or industrial brownlands in U.S. cities that are idle or underused due to real or perceived pollution; and work on many other issues.

Gatton received his Bachelor of Arts degree from Cornell College, Mt. Vernon, Iowa, and his Masters of Divinity degree from Harvard University.

###

ALICE B. JENNINGS
Edward and Jennings, P.C.
Detroit, Michigan

Alice Jennings is co-founder of the Detroit firm of Edwards & Jennings, P.C., specializing in civil and human rights and employment law, where she has been a partner since 1981. Formerly, Jennings was an attorney and partner at the firm Philo, Atkinson, Darling, Steinberg, Harper & Edwards, P.C., specializing in workers' compensation and personal injury.

She is a current member of the State Bar of Michigan and former chairperson of its Civil Liberties Committee (1994-1995).

In 2007, in *Elezovic v. Ford Motor Company*, Jennings changed the law in Michigan in the area of sexual harassment and individual and independent liability on the part of the harasser. Jennings and partner Carl R. Edwards have represented thousands of people in several civil rights and environmental justice class action lawsuits.

Most recently, in the face of thousands of massive water shutoffs by the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department, she was part of a national legal team, filing a constitutional challenge to the irreparable harm occurring to Detroiters because of the humanitarian crisis. Lawyers for the Sugar Law Center, NAACP, Legal Defense Fund, ACLU, National Lawyers Guild and other attorneys are involved in this legal and political case.

[Congressional Briefing on Water/Presenter Profiles . . . Page 4 of 6]

[Alice Jennings, cont'd.]

Jennings is affiliated with the Michigan Association for Justice (sustaining member), the Wolverine Bar Association and the Black Women Lawyers Association. She is a recipient of the 2007 Harriet Tubman Trail Blazer Award and the NAACP Legal Award for her work as a pro bono trial attorney with the Sugar Law Center in the landmark environmental justice case, NAACP et al. v. John Engler, Governor et al.

She has served on numerous nonprofit boards, including the Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self Development, the Grace and James Lee Boggs Center to Nurture Community Leadership, the Subcommittee of Artists and Children Creating Community Together (coordinator), and Detroiters Working for Environmental Justice (DWEJ). Jennings has served as general counsel for DWEJ, Detroit Summer, Save Our Sons and Daughters (SoSad), and served on the legal committee for the Coalition to Save the City of Detroit Human Rights Ordinance. She has authored a number of articles and chapters addressing education, civil rights and activism.

Jennings is also committed to improving educational opportunities for Detroit children. She and her law partner and husband Carl R. Edwards have six children. She attained her Bachelor of Arts degree at Michigan State University and Juris Doctorate at Wayne State University Law School.

###

PATRICIA A. JONES, Ph.D., J.D., LIM
Senior Program Leader for the Human Right to Water
The Unitarian Universalist Service Committee

Patricia A. Jones is senior program leader for the human right to water for the U.S.-based Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC). Her work, which focuses on the human right to water in the Americas, Africa and Asia, includes research, drafting law and policy, supporting civil society organizations in campaigns and litigation, and advocacy with national and international human rights institutions.

[Congressional Briefing on Water/Presenter Profiles . . . Page 5 of 6]

[Patricia Jones, cont'd.]

As an international expert on the human right to water, Jones was coordinator of a 2011 United Nations mission to Detroit, Michigan, by the UN Special Rapporteur on the human right to water Catarina de Albuquerque, and coordinated the combined fall 2014 UN mission to Detroit of Special Rapporteur de Albuquerque and UN Special Rapporteur on adequate housing Leilani Farha.

Jones provides technical assistance in shareholder advocacy efforts that have resulted in the first human-right-to-water policies at major U.S. corporations, including PepsiCo, Intel, Connecticut Water and Proctor and Gamble.

As a panelist in the October 7, 2014 Government Consultation on Environmental Issues Relating to the United Nations Universal Periodic Review, * hosted by the International Human Rights Law Clinic at Berkeley School of Law, Jones presented the case of the human right to water and the effects of public water shutoffs to some of the nation's most vulnerable citizens in cities like Detroit.

Jones holds doctor of philosophy and master of law degrees in international water law from the Centre for Water Law, Policy and Science at the University of Dundee (Scotland). She earned her law degree from the Washington College of Law at American University (Washington, D.C.), where she worked for the Center for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law. Jones received her bachelor's degree in international studies from the University of Washington (Seattle, Wash.).

Headquartered in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC) is an international human rights organization powered by grassroots collaboration. In 15 countries worldwide, UUSC fosters social, economic and environmental justice, protection of civil liberties, and works toward a world free from oppression. Since 1940 the organization has delivered aid with dignity and advanced the rights of people left behind during conflicts and natural disasters.

* <http://www.law.berkeley.edu/17648.htm>

###

[Congressional Briefing on Water/Presenter Profiles . . . Page 6 of 6]

MICHAEL SHANK, Ph.D.
Director of Media Strategy
Climate Nexus

Climate Nexus is a strategic communications group dedicated to highlighting the wide-ranging impacts of climate change and clean energy solutions in the United States.

Appreciating the fact that climate change is at the nexus of almost every issue imaginable — from the environment to the economy, from human security to public health — Michael Shank brings an extensive background in media and policy work to Climate Nexus. As a former congressional staffer and a columnist for multiple media outlets, Shank loves the challenge of messaging complex concepts, especially when the survival of the planet and its people is at stake.

He received a doctor of philosophy degree from George Mason University's School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, with a doctoral dissertation focused on climate conflict, and maintains teaching and board positions at institutions that are keen to understand and address drivers of violent conflict.

In 2013-2014, Shank served as the Associate Director for Legislative Affairs at the Friends Committee on National Legislation in Washington, D.C. Prior to FCNL, he worked for four years as U.S. Congressman Michael Honda's senior policy advisor and communications director.

He is Adjunct Faculty and a Board Member at George Mason University's School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, Board Member at Communities Without Boundaries International, and Senior Fellow at the Just.Jobs Network and the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict.

In addition, Shank is a former columnist for Washington Post's *The Root DC* and is now a columnist for US News & World Report and an energy insider for the National Journal. Michael writes regularly for USA Today, The Guardian, Daily Beast, Roll Call, among others, and is an on-air analyst for CNN, FOX News, CCTV, Al Jazeera and RT.

###

**REPORTS AND RESEARCH ON WATER AFFORDABILITY, ACCESSIBILITY
AND THE HUMAN RIGHT TO WATER**

**Public Water Cost Per Household: Assessing Financial Impacts of EPA
Affordability Criteria in California Cities
The United States Conference of Mayors**

Nov 2014

<http://www.usmayors.org/pressreleases/uploads/2014/1202-report-watercostsCA.pdf>

**Financial Capability Assessment Framework for Municipal Clean Water
Act Requirements**

United States Environmental Protection Agency

Nov 24, 2014

http://water.epa.gov/polwaste/npdes/cso/upload/municipal_fca_framework.pdf

**Price of Water 2014: Up 6 Percent in 30 Major U.S. Cities; 33 Percent Rise
Since 2010**

Circle of Blue

May 07, 2014

Water scarcity and successful conservation programs force utilities to adapt their business plans . . . The price of water rose again in 2014, though less steeply than in previous years, according to Circle of Blue's annual survey of single-family residential water rates in 30 major U.S. cities. . . . Annual rate increases quickly build over time. Since 2010, average prices rose 33 percent for the index, the equivalent of adding \$US 15 per month to a \$US 45 water bill. . . .

<http://www.circleofblue.org/waternews/2014/world/price-water-2014-6-percent-30-major-u-s-cities-33-percent-rise-since-2010/>

**Sharp Inequalities in Water Security Across the City of Boston; People of
Color Communities Most Impacted
Massachusetts Global Action**

. . . This report calls attention to severe and durable patterns of racial and economic inequality across the City of Boston, Massachusetts, as it impacts the provision of water and sanitation services to the city's residents. Of particular

[Water Affordability, Accessibility Research . . . Page 2 of 5]

concern are the facts that (1) residents in communities of color and low-income neighborhoods are more likely to receive water-shut off notices and to be in arrears with respect to their monthly water bills; . . . no mechanisms exist to determine the impacts of planned water price increases on low-income residents and communities of color. . .

INT_CERD_NGO_USA_17798_E Boston.pdf

Energy Strategies Report - Providing Valuable Strategic Insights to the Energy Industry

Black & Veatch

Aug 2013 Issue

. . . There are two views of affordability – from the policymakers who talk incessantly of “median household income,” and from the kitchen table, where the talk often revolves around the question: “how are we going to pay the water bill?” Utilities need to engage the question of kitchen table affordability – focusing on real people, real budgets and impacts. They need to enact programs that will help demonstrate a genuine connection to the community. To be effective, utilities need to focus their efforts on a thin slice of the customer base. Generally speaking, they will have the resources to help only those in the most desperate circumstances, since attempting to give everyone a break is not financially feasible. . . . <http://bv.com/energy-strategies-report/august-2013-issue/affordability-is-becoming-an-issue-for-water-utility-customers>

New Research Confirms Local Government Commitment to Improve Water Quality: But the High Cost Begins to Burden Elderly, Poor and Middle Class Households

The United States Conference of Mayors

May 08, 2013

<http://www.usmayors.org/pressreleases/uploads/2013/0508-release-waterlocalcosts.pdf>

[Water Affordability, Accessibility Research . . . Page 3 of 5]

The Human Right to Water Bill in California - an implementation framework for state agencies

International Human Rights Clinic

University of California, Berkeley, School of Law

May 2013

[http://www.law.berkeley.edu/files/Water_Report_2013_Interactive_FINAL\(1\).pdf](http://www.law.berkeley.edu/files/Water_Report_2013_Interactive_FINAL(1).pdf)

Tapped Out: Threats to the Human Right to Water in the United States

Georgetown Law Human Rights Institute

Georgetown University Law Center

April 2013

<http://www.law.georgetown.edu/academics/centers-institutes/human-rights-institute/upload/HumanRightsFinal2013.pdf>

Tough times increase focus on affordability programs

Public Works Magazine

Oct 2012

Water and wastewater utilities prove compassion isn't dead by enabling financially challenged customers to maintain vital services. . . . Managers, governing boards, and fellow customers are increasingly concerned about the impact of rate increases on customers who can least afford them, such as: Low-income customers, whose ranks have grown because of continued higher-than-average levels of unemployment and under-employment - Elderly residents on fixed incomes - Other financially challenged groups such as customers with disabilities. In addition to concern for customers' physical welfare, disconnecting and reconnecting service is expensive. . . .

<http://www.pwmag.com/funding-and-user-fees/tough-times-increase-focus-on-affordability-progr.aspx>

Can poor consumers pay for energy and water?

An affordability analysis for transition countries

European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

. . . Affordability is relatively easy to understand as a concept, but it is difficult to define precisely. There are a number of related notions. One important

[Water Affordability, Accessibility Research . . . Page 4 of 5]

distinction is between 'affordable' and 'low-cost'. Utility services may be low-cost, in the sense that a basic, no-frills service is provided cheaply, but this does not mean consumers have enough income to pay for it. Affordability has to do with the ability of certain consumers or consumer groups to pay for a minimum level of service . . .

<http://www.ebrd.com/downloads/research/economics/workingpapers/wp0092.pdf>

Replacing the Nation's Deteriorating Water Infrastructure While Maintaining Affordable Water Rates

Insight on the Issues #56 - AARP Public Policy Institute

Oct 2011

Much of the nation's drinking water and wastewater infrastructure is at or near the end of its useful life. The expense of replacing the water infrastructure is contributing to a rapid increase in the cost of water service that is of concern for older, lower-income consumers, who pay a larger share of their income for utility services than other consumers. With water rates increasing at a much faster pace than inflation, finding ways to ensure that the necessary infrastructure repairs take place while supporting affordable rates for consumers should be an important concern for policy makers. . . .

http://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/research/public_policy_institute/cons_rot/2011/insight56.pdf

Text of the Clean Water Affordability Act of 2014

govtrack.us

This bill was introduced January 14, 2014, in a previous session of Congress, but was not enacted. The text of the bill below is as introduced.

<https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/113/hr3862/text>

USA TODAY analysis: Water costs gush higher

USA Today

Sep 29, 2012

A USA TODAY study of residential water rates over the past 12 years finds that crumbling infrastructure is forcing repairs from coast to coast, with costs more

[Water Affordability, Accessibility Research . . . Page 5 of 5]

than doubling in 1 of 4 localities. . . . While most Americans worry about gas and heating oil prices, water rates have surged in the past dozen years, according to a

USA TODAY study of 100 municipalities. Prices at least doubled in more than a quarter of the locations and even tripled in a few. . . .

<http://www.usatoday.com/story/money/business/2012/09/27/rising-water-rates/1595651/>

###

FACTS

WATER AFFORDABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY IN THE UNITED STATES

Overview

Globally:

- **One out of 10 people** can't access clean water. Some 1,400 children die every day from water-related diseases. Unless there's a spill or equipment failure, these numbers exclude U.S. residents. Across the 50 states, 155,000 public water systems treat, filter, and deliver 100 gallons per person per day, all for the low cost of less than 1 cent per gallon.

- Waterborne illnesses kill 1,400 children every day — the second leading cause of death for children.

— UNICEF, *Clean water saves lives*

<http://www.unicefusa.org/mission/survival/water>

- The International Water Management Institute reports that a third of the world's people suffer from water shortages. The United Nations estimates number will grow to two-thirds of world's population by 2025.

— *United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Water for Life Decade 2005-2015,*

<http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/scarcity.shtml>

In the United States:

- **Our underground aquifers are shrinking:** Underground aquifers in the United States, a primary, hidden but mostly unrenewable source of fresh water, supply about half of our needs, particularly in times of drought. Those aquifers are being drawn down at unsustainable rates.

California's severe, four-year-long drought has depleted snowpacks, rivers and lakes. [A new report from Stanford University](#) says that nearly 60 percent of the state's water needs are now met by groundwater . . .

. . . Aquifers in the Colorado River Basin and the southern Great Plains also suffer severe depletion. Studies show that about [half the groundwater depletion nationwide is from irrigation](#). . . The Colorado River Basin, which supplies water to 40 million people in seven states, is losing water at dramatic rates, and most of the losses are groundwater. . . the Ogallala Aquifer under the High Plains is also shrinking because of [too much demand](#). . .

— National Geographic, *If You Think the Water Crisis Can't Get Worse, Wait Until the Aquifers Are Drained*, Aug 19, 2014,
<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/08/140819-groundwater-california-drought-aquifers-hidden-crisis/>

— *Water in the West - Understanding California's Groundwater*, Stanford Woods Institute for the Environment and the Bill Lane Center for the American West, Dec 2014,
<http://waterinthewest.stanford.edu/groundwater/>

• 1,100 counties — **one-third of all counties in the lower 48 states — face higher risks of water shortages by mid-century as the result of climate change.** More than 400 of these counties will face extremely high risks of water shortages.

— NRDC, *Climate Change, Water, and Risk Report*,
<http://www.nrdc.org/globalwarming/watersustainability/>

Clean water access and affordability in the United States:

• **“Water rate affordability is a central element to water access, and cost makes water excludable and inaccessible to those who cannot afford it,”** according to Dr. Juliet Christian-Smith of the Pacific Institute, Sacramento, California, one of the world's leading nonprofit and policy organizations. “Water affordability is also a major concern to public welfare, safety, and security,” said Christian-Smith. “When households are unable to make their water payments, **consequences can include public health crises, social unrest, and lost revenue for water providers that can threaten their fiscal stability.**”

— Pacific Institute, Aug 14, 2013,
<http://pacinst.org/publication/assessing-water-affordability/>

- A new study in California shows **many households, even within affluent communities, routinely spend over the affordability threshold of 2 percent of their household income on their water bill.**

— Pacific Institute, Aug 14, 2013, *Assessing Water Affordability*,
<http://pacinst.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/21/2013/08/assessing-water-affordability.pdf>

- According to an AARP report, consumer **costs for water service are rising "at a rate well above inflation and faster than other utility rates,"** creating hardship for those with lower incomes or on fixed income. Consumers age 65+ spend a greater portion of their utility expenditures on water service than do younger consumers.

— AARP Public Policy Institute, *Insight On the Issues 56*,
http://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/research/public_policy_institute/cons_prot/2011/insight56.pdf

- **Water use across the country has reached its lowest level in 45 years,** reflecting positive trends in conservation achieved by improved water-use technologies and water management.

— U.S. Geological Survey, *Estimated Use of Water in the United States in 2010*, <http://pubs.usgs.gov/circ/1405/>

- In 2010, Americans withdrew about 355 billion gallons of water each day from various sources of water supply — a 13 percent reduction since 2005 and the lowest level since 1970.

- However, **as customer usage goes down, water service providers are raising rates,** in need of revenues to cover maintenance and replacement costs for the nation's crumbling infrastructure.

- The EPA estimates that there are approximately **54,000 community water systems operating in the U.S.** However, a small number of systems (8 percent or 4,132 systems) serve 82 percent of households. The majority of these systems are publicly owned, with approximately percent of all community water systems owned by private water companies.

- The American Society of Civil Engineers estimates that **7 billion gallons of clean drinking water are lost each day due to leaky pipes owned by water utilities**. One study suggests that the annual cost of these leaks is \$3 billion in lost revenue for water utilities.

Additionally, according to the EPA, **shortcomings in wastewater systems result in an annual discharge of 850 billion gallons of untreated water into the nation's surface waters each year**. These discharges reduce the quality of water sources across the nation.

- The U.S. Conference of Mayors estimates that **an investment of \$4.8 trillion in capital outlays is needed over the next 20 years** in order to bring water and wastewater systems "to a state of good repair."
 - The United States Conference of Mayors 82nd Annual Meeting, *"2014 Adopted Resolutions," p. 98,*
http://www.usmayors.org/resolutions/82nd_Conference/env09.asp

###

WATER ACCESSIBILITY AND AFFORDABILITY IN THE NEWS

Water privatisation: a worldwide failure?

The Guardian

Jan 30, 2015

... 180 cities and communities in 35 countries, including Buenos Aires, Johannesburg, Paris, Accra, Berlin, La Paz, Maputo and Kuala Lumpur, have all “re-municipalised” their water systems in the past decade. **More than 100 of the “returnees” were in the US and France**, 14 in Africa and 12 in Latin America. ...

<http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/jan/30/water-privatisation-worldwide-failure-lagos-world-bank>

Detroit's Water - Not Flowing

UNTV: 21st Century

Jan 21, 2015

You can't live without water - if you're rich or you're poor - and that's the threat facing thousands of people right now in the United States - in Detroit. 21st Century, Episode #98 ...

<http://www.unmultimedia.org/tv/21stcentury/detail/3993059906001.html>

EPA Aims To Ease Local Financing Challenges

Water Online

Jan 06, 2015

After two years of deliberations, the EPA took a step toward updating policies designed to overcome local affordability challenges in the fight against water pollution. The EPA released the ["Financial Capability Assessment Framework for Municipal Clean Water Act Requirements"](#) on November 24, after receiving input from the National Association of Clean Water Agencies (NACWA) and the U.S. Conference of Mayors (USCM), among other groups. ... "We appreciate EPA engaging local governments in this critical discussion of how to meet water and wastewater goals without placing an undue burden on the poor. ...

<http://www.wateronline.com/doc/epa-aims-to-ease-local-financing-challenges-0001>

[Water Accessibility And Affordability In The News . . . Page 2 of 3]

The Politics of Drinking Water

The Atlantic

Dec 30, 2014

It's no surprise that the West Virginia leak, the more recent Duke Energy coal ash spill, or the newest BP oil rupture rile consumers. Hydration isn't a luxury; it's a necessity. Providing access to clean water is a fundamental measure of effective government. . . .

<http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2014/12/the-politics-of-drinking-water/384081/>

Utilities Worry Water's Becoming Unaffordable

Governing - The States and Localities

Dec 04, 2014

. . . Water utilities -- many of them government agencies -- increasingly are worried that their services will become unaffordable to low-income customers. ". . . we are now coming face to face with a social problem of big dimensions . . . Water expenses grew faster than all other utility bills for low-income Americans except electricity. At the same time, though, the take-home pay for low-income Americans has fallen, when adjusting for inflation . . .

<http://www.governing.com/topics/transportation-infrastructure/gov-water-utilities-worry-about-high-costs-for-low-income-customers.html>

OPINION: Water Shutoffs and Unintended Consequences – Lessons from Detroit

IPS Inter Press Service News Agency

Oct 24, 2014

By Patricia Jones - United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Human Right to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation Catarina de Albuquerque and Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing Leilani Farha were in Detroit, Michigan Oct. 17-20. What they saw and heard in a city struggling to emerge from historic bankruptcy were mass water shutoffs and conditions they described as "a perfect storm." The U.N. experts issued a call for a national affordability standard that would protect the poorest and most vulnerable. . . .

<http://www.ipsnews.net/2014/10/opinion-water-shutoffs-and-unintended-consequences-lessons-from-detroit/>

[Water Accessibility And Affordability In The News . . . Page 3 of 3]**What Happens When Detroit Shuts Off the Water of 100,000 People
The Atlantic**

July 17, 2014

. . . With the city's average of [just under three people per household](#), these numbers mean that roughly 100,000 [Detroitters](#) out of a total population that hovers [just under 700,000](#) have already been affected by the shut-offs, with tens of thousands more awaiting their turn. . . . "Water is not affordable if the person must give up another human right to pay for water and sanitation services—medicines and health-care costs, food, rent, school fees," says Patricia Jones, a senior program leader at the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee. . . . "This is a public-health emergency," says Peter Hammer, a law professor at Wayne State University and director of the school's Center for Civil Rights. . . .

<http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2014/07/what-happens-when-detroit-shuts-off-the-water-of-100000-people/374548/>

**Huge Rate Increase Could Cripple Austin's Water Utility
Austin Affordability - AustinAffordability.com**

May 21, 2014

If you have been recently stunned by the tax appraisal notice on your house, how would you feel about a 30% increase in your water rates next year? And then, how about a new "drought fee" on top of that base rate increase? . . . On May 7th, the Austin American-Statesman published a sobering article that details the scenarios for what seems like unimaginable rate shock coming to City water customers. . . . "The utility plans to increase its base water rates next year, resulting in a monthly bill of \$49.12 for the typical homeowner, up from \$38.35 this year — a 30 percent jump." . . .

<http://austinaffordability.com/2014/05/21/huge-rate-increase-could-cripple-austins-water-utility/>

###

BACKGROUND

Unitarian Universalist Service Committee

Advocacy Initiative for Water as a Human Right

In 2010 the United Nations General Assembly and the Human Rights Council explicitly recognized the human right to water and sanitation.¹ The human right to water entitles everyone to sufficient quantities of safe water that are affordable, accessible, and delivered in a participatory, accountable and nondiscriminatory manner. Yet, 783 million people globally do not have access to safe and clean water.

UUSC is a nonsectarian human rights organization with a 75-year history of advancing human rights and social justice around the globe. To address the stark gap between the human right to water and the realities on the ground, UUSC works with a variety of partners to advance new laws, challenge violations and systemic discrimination, and create new models for implementation at local, state, national, and international levels.

Scope of UUSC Human Right to Water Actions:

- Researching discrimination in water and sanitation services
- Pursuing legal recognition of the human right to water in the United States and throughout the world by working with local partners as well as international institutions like the United Nations
- Engaging in shareholder advocacy to hold corporations accountable for respecting the human right to water
- Collaborating with grassroots organizations nationally and internationally to restore access to safe, affordable water in communities dealing with water contamination (caused by mining, industrial agriculture, and more) and in communities where unjust, discriminatory water service and pricing policies disregard the basic human rights to water for the poorest and most vulnerable

Recent Right to Water Projects and Actions:

1 For details, see: un.org/waterforlifedecade/human_right_to_water.shtml.

- Announcing a fellowship and grant for individuals or organizations of up to \$25,000 focused on innovations in groundbreaking research, processes, or products that support the human right to water.

The right to water fellowship marks the first in UUSC's new yearly Human Rights Innovation Fellowship, dedicated to supporting projects with the potential to affect systemic change in the field of human rights.

<http://www.uusc.org/updates/announcing-uuscs-innovation-fellowship>

- Advocating locally and nationally and providing legal consultation for the City of Detroit to cease its year-long-plus massive water shutoff campaign that in the past year has affected more than 30,000 households in the beleaguered Motor City, the majority of whom are the metro area's poorest or most vulnerable — the elderly, ill, disabled and families with small children
- Presenting to the first U.S. Government Consultation on Environmental Issues Relating to the United Nations Universal Periodic Review (September 2014), on the effects of soaring water service rates and unjust payment and shutoff policies that are increasingly burdening and transgressing the human rights to water of the most vulnerable consumers in cities across the nation
- Partnering with the Community Water Center and the Environmental Justice Coalition on Water to successfully pass the California Human Right to Water Act of 2012, the first state recognition of the human right to water in the U.S.
- Funding the Center for the Environment and Human Rights in Argentina to support workshops, a legal clinic, community mobilization and litigation that led to the Glacier Protection Act of 2010 and its implementation
- Providing technical and expert assistance to the Habitat International Coalition of Latin America to win constitutional recognition of the human right to water throughout Mexico
- Working with the Indigenous People's Association of the Americas of Sipakapa in Guatemala to create a human-right-to-water curriculum in local schools, advocate for environmental protections and water infrastructure, and hold a mining corporation accountable for damage to local water sources

- Collaborating with the Tanzania Gender Networking Program to mobilize and educate grassroots feminists and women's groups to address systemic failures to implement the human right to water for women in that country

2 "2013 United Nations International Year of Water Cooperation: Facts and figures," UN Water, accessed January 13, 2015, unwater.org/water-cooperation-2013/water-cooperation/facts-and-figures/en/.

UUSC ADVOCACY POINTS:**WATER ACCESSIBILITY AND AFFORDABILITY FOR THE MOST VULNERABLE IN THE UNITED STATES**

The following are among concerns of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee:

- Rates for water service are increasing beyond world guidelines (2.5-4% of monthly household income)
- Rates for water are set by local authorities, but the actual costs and subsidies for preferred economic sectors are spread to residential households.
- There is greater need for transparency by water service providers in reporting of operating costs, rates for residential accounts, and subsidies that set rates.
- Leaks in community water trunk lines are routinely charged to residential customers without consent. Rate payers are paying for services they did not enjoy.
- Storm water runoff costs are allocated to consumers without regard to affordability.
- Tenants have few protections against landlord abuse as related to water bill payment accountability, and those protections are not administered well where they do exist. For those living in poverty and the most vulnerable, water and sewer service shutoffs should be the last resort, not the first resort.
- There currently are no established national guidelines on water shutoffs, hence, no protected populations for whom a shutoff poses an extraordinary burden. There must be national guidelines and requirements developed for water service “affordability” programs for consumers.
- Affordability as it is conceived by the industry is in terms of long-term financial sustainability; not whether the service is affordable to the poorest consumers.
- The EPA is now taking steps to establish stronger “affordability” guidelines, and those steps need to be subject to consultation, further developed, implemented nationwide, and enforced.

- There is no regulation of punitive measures for non-payment of water bills, including water shutoffs. Some utilities penalize non-payment by adding surcharges that are excessive and disproportionate to the actual bill.
- **Identifying the challenges of "affordability:"** There is insufficient tracking by utilities and other entities of data by age, gender, race and ability to pay, as related to the impacts of water shutoffs on consumers — and what trade-offs consumers are making to pay increasing water rates.
- Water shutoffs can have catastrophic impacts to families. Current practice under state “neglect” laws require that, in homes suffering water shutoffs, children be taken from the home and placed in foster care, where bills are subsidized. Social workers say they don’t remove children if there is no other neglect present — but we could protect all households with children under 12 months, or as old as 18 years of age from water shutoff, as currently is provided by some states and by international standards.
- Unpaid water and sewerage bills are commonly placed as lien against property and homes can be foreclosed upon, expanding the scope of burden and cycle of trauma to those most vulnerable.

###

CORPORATE PROFILE

The Unitarian Universalist Service Committee

689 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02139-3302

Headquartered in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC) is a human rights organization powered by grassroots collaboration. UUSC fosters social justice and works toward a world free from oppression in 15 countries worldwide.

UUSC's innovative approaches and measurable impact are grounded in the moral belief that all people have inherent power, dignity and rights.

UUSC works specifically with people and communities who are denied their rights because of who they are: women, people of color, religious minorities, and others who are not served by mainstream human rights organizations. Every day, UUSC is taking action to advance a full array of human rights promoting economic justice, bolstering environmental justice, and protecting civil liberties.

UUSC also works to deliver aid with dignity and advance the rights of people left behind during humanitarian crises, which include forgotten conflicts and natural disasters. UUSC is a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation.

Core Initiative on the Human Right to Water

[See: <http://www.uusc.org/campaigns/the-human-right-to-water>]

As an advocacy and development support organization, UUSC concentrates its work on issues and initiatives that present fundamental and intertwined challenges to the most vulnerable people within the United States and in struggling communities worldwide. Campaigns include:

UUSC is at the frontlines of advocacy to ensure that all people — no matter their skin color or bank account — have access to safe, affordable water.

The organization and its network of partners have been instrumental participants in:

- Researching discrimination in water and sanitation services
- Pursuing legal recognition of the human right to water in the United States and throughout the world by working with local partners as well as international institutions like the United Nations
- Engaging in shareholder advocacy to hold corporations accountable for respecting the human right to water
- Collaborating with grassroots organizations to restore access to safe, affordable water in communities dealing with water contamination (caused by mining, industrial agriculture, and more)

[UUSC Corporate Profile & Human Right to Water Initiative . . . Page 2 of 2]**Notable Victories:****July 2014**

UUSC joined with more than 1,000 U.S. activists, civil society groups, pro bono legal teams, Canadian counterparts and Detroit residents in protesting ongoing draconian water shutoffs to thousands of the distressed city's most vulnerable residents, during the heat of Detroit's struggles to emerge from bankruptcy. UUSC delivered petitions to Detroit's leaders, with thousands of signatures from citizens across America who urged the city to restore water and sewerage service to those most in need -- families with children, the elderly, ill and disabled -- until a truly affordable water payment provision is made available to qualifying residents.

April 2012

UUSC supported the Habitat International Coalition of Latin America (HIC-AL) in winning a case that recognized Mexico's international obligations to uphold the human right to water.

August 2012

Peru adopted new national policy that includes the human right to water and prohibits privatization of water resources. The Federation of Unions of Water Workers of Peru, a UUSC partner, is credited for the policy.

September 2012

California passed a bill recognizing the human right to water after years of work by the Safe Water Alliance partners, of which UUSC is a part.

UUSC celebrated with the Sipakapense people and partners when the Guatemalan government, Goldcorp and 18 indigenous communities signed an agreement for Goldcorp to pay for drinking water infrastructure to remedy pollution of the water resources by mining.

###