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March 22, 2010

Independent Expert on the Issue of
Human Rights Obligations Related to
Access to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation
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29 MAR 2010

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To whom it may concern:

I am John Perkins and I am the Public Utility Consumer Advocate for the State of Iowa. Through recent articles in Global Water Intelligence, I understand you are gathering information regarding the role of the private sector in providing water services to the public. I would like to offer my perspective on this issue as a consumer advocate.

First, I would like to take the opportunity to explain my role. The Iowa legislature created the Office of Consumer Advocate to represent the interests of consumers in rate and other proceedings before the Iowa Utilities Board. This board regulates public utilities, including investor-owned electric, gas, telecommunications and water companies. The board sets utility rates, hears customer complaints, and performs many other functions with regard to the delivery of essential public utility services. The position of Iowa Consumer Advocate, which I hold, is appointed by the Attorney General of Iowa with confirmation by the Iowa Senate.

My overall view of the role played by investor-owned utilities in Iowa is positive. In general, these companies have provided the capital and technical operating expertise necessary to extend and maintain reliable services to the public for many years.

This includes private investor-owned water companies. In fact, because water is essential to life, it is even more important that water service providers be able to attract

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cost-effective capital and provide technical and operating expertise that ensures replacement of aging infrastructure and provision of water service that complies with all national and state water quality requirements.

Large investor-owned systems can bring capital and operating expertise to small systems, whether they are governmentally or privately owned which may not have the same access to those things. From my perspective, the important issue is not the ownership structure, but the ability to bring capital and expertise to the provision of water service at rates that are fair and reasonable.

While it is true that in Iowa, most water service is provided through government – owned entities, it is also true that over 60,000 customers, or a population of about 200,000 people in and around the city of Davenport, is served by a large, investor-owned water utility. This utility has been providing reliable service that complies with all applicable quality standards for many years.

Combining professional regulatory oversight of private-sector provision of water and wastewater services by public service commissions, and consumer representation through state consumer advocates, with the benefits available from the private sector in the area of capital attraction, represents one type of a positive and effective model for the provision of these essential services to the public.

If you should have any questions, please let me know.

Very truly yours,

John Perkins by Ben A. Stead
John Perkins
Consumer Advocate
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