

# **Save Our Groundwater**

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## **NEWS**

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### **SAVE OUR GROUNDWATER FORUM WITH CONGRESSMAN DENNIS KUCINICH OFFERS HOPE OF CONGRESSIONAL INVESTIGATION**

BARRINGTON, NH—More than 100 people turned out on a snowy Sunday morning to attend Save Our Groundwater's public forum with Congressman Dennis Kucinich (Ohio) February 18, 2007 about groundwater issues. Save Our Groundwater (SOG), a regional citizens' action group advocating that water is a natural resource to be held in the public trust and to be protected now and for the future, hosted the forum at Kucinich's request in his capacity as chairman of the Domestic Policy Subcommittee of the United States House of Representatives.

The Subcommittee is part of the Government Oversight Committee and has jurisdiction over the Department of Justice, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Transportation and the Department of the Interior.

Kucinich took time from his presidential campaign to make the early morning stop at the Sugar Shack in Barrington, meeting with local residents concerned about water issues in a preliminary fact-finding session for his committee. He heard from residents who are into their sixth year of trying to stop a water bottling company that intends to pump out water from an aquifer under the company's 100-acre site in the towns of Nottingham and Barrington. The company has stated in public hearings their intention to bottle the water and sell it to other countries.

State Representative Marsha Moody of Newmarket, described a bill she is sponsoring in the New Hampshire legislature to address a situation in Nashua where a privately-held public water company has sought to profit from both water and land sales at the expense of the public. Kucinich questioned whether the state has a right to give away a resource held in the public trust to a one entity through a permit without conducting a competitive bidding process. He also questioned why the state would give away a natural resource to a private company that stood to gain more than \$1 billion over time without some benefit returning to the people.

Kucinich emphasized that he believes that water is a human right and that issues relating to the control of water go to the core of democratic governance. He stated he would use his authority as chair of the Domestic Policy Subcommittee to investigate avenues for federal fact-finding and intervention in the USA Springs, Inc. case. He made clear that there are many links between this local case and water cases taking place throughout the United States, at one point quoting from former Cleveland Mayor Tom Johnson who said "If you do not own them, they will own you." The Ohio congressman cited examples of water issues that he has worked on including the Great Lakes region with water being shipped out of the region and the impacts of international trade agreements and water, which he said have no provisions to protect environmental laws.

“He seemed to get to the heart of the matter right away,” said Anne Whitney, Barrington resident and member of Save Our Groundwater. “He understood how to go about it, how to tackle it. There was not a wasted word.”

Both Save Our Groundwater and the Neighborhood Guardians, residents who organized a year ago to tackle land use issues related to the water bottling case in the town of Nottingham, welcomed Kucinich’s interest and his stated intention to hold a Congressional hearing either in New Hampshire or Washington, DC about this case. “It’s long overdue,” said Mike Russo, chair of the Neighborhood Guardians. “We’ve been asking for sworn testimony and cross-examination to get to the bottom of this.”

The state Department of Environmental Services (DES) denied the necessary permits USA Springs, Inc. needed twice for numerous scientific reasons in 2003, only to reverse itself 7 months later in 2004 after a new governor, Craig Benson, and new agency commissioner took over.

Both Save Our Groundwater and the Neighborhood Guardians believe that a trade of permits for the clean-up of a contaminated waste site underlies the state’s permit reversal. In November 2002, the company conducted a pump test that resulted in contaminants being drawn further into the aquifer, creating a waste management problem for the state to address. State records document that the company initially refused to clean up the site unless they received the permits they needed for the water business. State officials at DES had estimated that the cleaning up the site would cost millions.

”We look forward to working with Congressman Kucinich and his staff to have our voices and concerns heard about the importance and need to keep our water resources in the public trust,” said Michael Moroukian, who moderated the event. “The process that we have experienced is seriously flawed and doesn’t protect our most precious resource: water.”

Save Our Groundwater is a nonprofit, nonpartisan citizen action group that believes that the conservation and wise use of water is a topic of concern to all. Save Our Groundwater regularly sponsors educational events and conversations with public officials about water topics. For more information, please visit: [www.saveourgroundwater.org](http://www.saveourgroundwater.org). To learn more about the Neighborhood Guardians, please visit: [www.neighborhoodguardians.org](http://www.neighborhoodguardians.org).