

October 11, 2011

Dear Senator,

As people of faith, we believe that water is an integral part of both physical and spiritual life. In living out our faithful call to serve as stewards of God's creation and to seek justice for all people, particularly the most vulnerable, ensuring clean water is a vital part of our mission. We urge you to oppose any legislation that would undermine the authority of the Clean Water Act (CWA).

Water is essential to our health and our nation's economic well-being. Before the CWA there was no federal safety net to protect our watersheds and our communities: Drinking supplies were regularly contaminated, moving water was often treated like a sewer, and rivers even caught fire. For four decades the CWA, overseen by the federal government, has protected countless miles of water sources from harmful contamination suffered before its enactment. This milestone act led the way for other vital environmental legislation and continues to serve as a model of environmental justice in the United States.

The House has recently passed a piece of damaging legislation, HR 2018, or the Clean Water Cooperative Federalism Act of 2011, which would undermine the CWA and severely weaken water quality standards in the United States. Ignoring the fact that water, and any pollution it carries, flows freely across state lines, HR 2018 would give states primary control over water standards. Removing federal oversight of state water quality programs from the EPA would adversely affect not only the environment from water pollution but would weaken public health and local economies as well, reversing important improvements made to the CWA since its introduction.

One example where support for the CWA and rejection of HR 2018 is vital for protecting both communities and creation alike, is mountaintop removal mining. This mining technique puts nearby communities at risk from water pollution, mudslides, flooding, loss of crops, decreased property values, loss of potential tourism and recreation revenues, loss of livelihoods and dignity, demise of cultures, and increased levels of respiratory disease and cancer. A recent study shows that birth defects are significantly higher in areas with mountaintop removal mining.

Supporters of HR 2018 have admitted that part of the impetus for this legislation has been the EPA's enforcement of the Clean Water Act by vetoing a section 404 permit for a large mountaintop removal project that had unacceptable impacts on valley streams in West Virginia (Spruce Mine No. 1). We applaud the EPA for enforcing the Clean Water Act when state regulators had yielded to industry pressure. Twenty-five percent of the water in the eastern United States begins in the headwaters of the Appalachian Mountains. In order to maintain the integrity of this water supply, it is important that the EPA maintain its veto authority over pending or previously issued permits.

The CWA is under attack from HR 2018 and other harmful legislation and budget cuts. We respectfully urge you to defend the Clean Water Act, one of our nation's oldest and most important environmental laws, by voting against legislation that compromises our watersheds and

communities. As people of faith, we urge you to support efforts to maintain and improve the integrity of our nation's precious waters for the sake of our communities and God's Creation.

Sincerely,

Caretakers of God's Creation

(A Creation Care Ministry of the Virginia Conference of the United Methodist Church)

Church of the Brethren

Church World Service

Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach

Evangelical Lutheran Church of America

Friends Committee on National Legislation

Institute for Multi-Track Diplomacy

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office

Missionary Oblates, Justice, Peace/Integrity of Creation Office

National Council of Churches USA

Presbyterian Church (USA) Office of Public Witness

Union for Reform Judaism

Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations

Unitarian Universalist Ministry for Earth

United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries