

Last year, our town made a historic decision to promote a more sustainable community, a healthier planet and a better future for our children by moving away from bottled water and back to our excellent tap water. We have many concerns about bottled water: it is a virtually unregulated product that cannot be considered safe; empty water bottles add to our waste and recycling costs and pollute our public lands; bottled water produces carbon pollution that contributes to climate change; and bottled water is part of a concerning trend in which for-profit companies control public water resources.

We are committed to helping our community make the transition and have followed through on the promises made at Town Meeting last year. Hundreds of Concord on Tap bottles have been sold, netting thousands of dollars for our local businesses. The Concord Tap Map, now available at the Concord Visitor Center, shows our visitors where they can easily find our local water. Twenty-eight businesses are participating in the map, displaying “Ask for Local Water Here” decals in their windows. Links to their websites are contained in the new www.concordontap.org website. I have met with many business owners and appreciate their understanding and support. Many are moving forward in a positive way.

Transitions take time. It's too early to measure our success, but there are many positive signs. For example, the hydration stations installed in all of our public schools are regularly used by students; reusable bottle refills number well over 100,000 according to the counters. Concord Academy has signed on to the change, installing tap water dispensers in their campus buildings and at their new athletic complex. The Emerson Umbrella recently hosted a complimentary tap water bar for patrons. And our twelfth public water fountain opens this month at Junction Park.

It's no secret that we are under assault by the International Bottled Water Association (IBWA) and that the IBWA is working with the proponents of Article 30 to convince our citizens to repeal our historic bylaw. The IBWA hired Sage Systems, a PR firm in Boston, to collect signatures at our polls and in our neighborhoods in November. These signatures were delivered to our Board of Selectmen in December by two Concord residents. The Free the Water posters up in town that show our iconic Minuteman with a bottle of water in his hand are the work of Capital Results, LLC, a PR firm in Richmond, Virginia. Capital Results is also behind the www.bottledwatermatters.org/concord website. The www.freethewater.org website links to the IBWA website. And the petitioner for Article 30 has admitted to the press that industry reps attend her meetings. This is all very, very concerning.

This is a defining moment for our community. We've joined a national movement and become a role model for other communities. Our action has been reported worldwide and has already inspired other actions. The world is watching to see if we will follow through on our decision or will give in to outside forces that tell us that convenience and individual rights are most important.

Concord has a long history of concern for the natural world and collective action for the common good. Let's move forward, not back. On April 24th, please join the Board of Selectmen, the League of Women Voters, the Comprehensive Sustainable Energy Committee, ConcordCAN, ConcordConserves and REUSIT, and vote NO on Article 30.

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