http://newiprogressive.com/images/stories/S5/clean-drinking-water-s5.jpg 

In response to the Senate committee vote Thursday on Assembly Bill 554, the Water Privatization Bill, the Wisconsin League of Conservation Voters warns that tens of thousands of Wisconsinites are at risk from drinking water contaminated with nitrates, lead, pesticides, e coli, and other contaminants as the bill moves forward.

MADISON, WI - The eyes of the world are on Flint, Michigan right now, as their citizens suffer from lead poisoning simply because they used water from their tap to drink, bathe, and cook. The crisis in Flint points to the critical need to have access to clean drinking water and effective sewer systems for the health and well being of any community, and makes us realize that unsafe drinking water is not just a problem in less developed countries.

In fact, it's a problem right here in Wisconsin – a problem that could get much worse if Assembly Bill 554
, the Water Privatization Bill, is voted into law.

The Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism has taken a deep look at Wisconsin's water systems, and found that tens of thousands of Wisconsinites are at risk from drinking water contaminated with nitrates, lead, pesticides, e coli, and other contaminants. This isn't just limited to private wells – many municipal water systems are at risk. In fact, in 2012, researchers definitively linked the presence of viruses in 14 Wisconsin municipal water systems to acute gastrointestinal illness. And, more than 73,000 people use water provided by 60 municipal water systems that do not disinfect, thanks to legislation in 2011 that removed a requirement to disinfect municipal water systems.

AB 554, which will lead to privatization of community water supplies, is another step in a downward march towards more Wisconsinites suffering from unsafe drinking water.

There are some things that are so critical and fundamental, like safe drinking water and management of sewage, that they require the transparency and accountability that comes with

local elected control. Government has a level of accountability to citizens that private companies do not.

Here's one way to think about it: Think about when you have a problem with your phone service. You typically spend hours being passed from faceless person to computer system and back to another faceless person who could be anywhere in the world. Sometimes it takes days, weeks, or more to solve the problem.

Now imagine that water starts coming out of your tap brown, your family starts getting sick, and you have to attempt to get help from a faceless, out-of-state private corporation that has no accountability to you or other voters living in the community. It's bad enough running into this lack of responsiveness when you're talking about a phone plan. The health of your family is certainly more important than phone service, and we should treat it that way.

Access to clean drinking water and effective sewer systems is a fundamental necessity, and should be open to public scrutiny. Wisconsin should be investing in these public systems to ensure they are in good repair and provide clean water to our citizens, not selling them off to the lowest bidder.

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Wisconsin League of Conservation Voters is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to electing conservation leaders, holding decision makers accountable, and encouraging lawmakers to champion conservation policies that effectively protect Wisconsin's public health and natural resources.

You can follow legislation impacting natural resources on our Conservation Vote Tracker, a real-time accountability tool that provides you with a complete picture of what conservation issues are in play and how legislators are performing: http://conservationvoters.org/vote-tracker/ .