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About the Contributors

Ben Beachy, research director, Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch

Angela Bradbery, communications director

Karilyn Gower, press officer

Barbara Holzer, broadcast and marketing manager

Leah Koechlin, intern

Nancy Nusser, project media coordinator, Public Citizen's Texas Office

Emily Peterson-Cassin, project coordinator, Public Citizen's Congress

David Rosen, press officer for regulatory affairs

Jeff Thomas, intern

Cynthia Williams, editor

Get to Know Public Citizen

An ongoing series profiling Public Citizen leaders and staffers

Public Citizen's Global Access to Medicines **Program** helps nations fight drug monopolies

that prevent the widespread availability of affordable medications. Amid the traveling and relationship-building, somehow, Peter Maybarduk, the program's director, finds time for his mul-



tiple passions. The accomplished musician has released three CDs and is part of a small nonprofit that supports Sierra Leoneans' work to strengthen their country's public institutions. The bilingual "Renaissance citizen" was born in Mexico and grew up in Sierra Leone, Nicaragua, Cuba, Venezuela and Washington, D.C. Having studied anthropology and law, Maybarduk brings to the team technical expertise, empathy and an understanding of – and curiosity about – human behavior.

Q: You travel quite a bit. What city have you enjoyed most and why?

MAYBARDUK: Small Andean cities like Ouito and Cuzco light up their Spanish archways at night and can be known on foot. Freetown, Sierra Leone, has my loyalty from childhood. Somehow these days, I am finding a quiet, personal peace in the motorbike chaos of Hanoi.

But Washington, D.C., is home. For all its faults, I cannot think of another place on earth where people gather in such concentration to work for causes in which they believe.

Q: Why did you study anthropology in addition to law?

MAYBARDUK: I chose anthropology for its uncommon insights and ways of understanding people that I could not learn reading a newspaper. I lived in as many different cultural contexts as I could – just to learn – before coming to work in Washington.

People are more complex than the law. Our work depends on understanding alliances and opportunities in each country. We think about our contacts' affiliations, backgrounds, ideologies, personalities. We earn trust and protect confidences, frequently over the course of several years, while watching for the opportunity to advance a public interest.

Q: What led you to this particular work? MAYBARDUK: Twelve years ago, I went to work for Ralph Nader. I met [now Public Citizen President | Robert Weissman and Inow director of Knowledge Ecology International] James Love, who were working together on global access to medicines issues. They and a relatively small group of committed advocates worldwide facilitated an AIDS treatment revolution that has saved millions of lives.

Their work revolved around patent rules and politics. It seemed a wonderfully wonky issue where a small group of people working smartly could make an outsized difference. I was attracted to that. This work is at once analytical and intuitive, technical and creative. It is based in advocacy and law. We work with people we admire on every continent. It is a sort of public citizenship on a global scale.

Q: What are the implications of Global Access to Medicines' work?

MAYBARDUK: This is a fight for people's lives. Many medicines for a wide range of diseases – cancer, for example – are priced beyond people's ability to pay, beyond even the capacity of governments to provide. Here in the United States, medical illness and high drug prices are the leading drivers of personal bankruptcy. This problem is more serious still in developing countries, leading frequently to preventable suffering and death.

There are several policy challenges to solve. Our focus is defeating the monopoly power of the pharmaceutical industry. Generic competition is the most effective means of reducing price, sometimes to a few cents on the dollar. With low prices, many more people can be treated. People's health and lives improve. Along the way, we change the balance of power, helping good people stand up and governments do the right thing.

- Interview by Cynthia Williams



Public Citizen is a national $nonprofit\ membership\ organization$ based in Washington, D.C. Since its founding by Ralph Nader in 1971, Public Citizen has fought for corporate and government accountability to guarantee the individual's right to safe products, a healthy environment

and workplace, fair trade, and clean and safe energy sources. Public Citizen is active in Congress, the courts and government agencies.

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Robert Weissman

Executive Vice President Margrete Strand Rangnes

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Editor Cynthia Williams

1600 20th St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20009 • (202) 588-1000 • pcmail@citizen.org • www.citizen.org