

State workers in Flint supplied with bottled water one year prior to acknowledgement of crisis

E.P. Bannon
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Documents reveal that the administration of Michigan Governor Rick Snyder has been providing state workers in Flint with bottled water for over a year. The revelation came from examination of an internal email sent out to state workers by the Department of Technology, Management and Budget (DTMB) back in January 2015. This notice, sent out long before any officials publicly acknowledged a health hazard, cited a contamination problem within the Flint water supply.

The email stated: “While the City of Flint states that corrective actions are not necessary, DTMB is in the process of providing a water cooler on each occupied floor, positioned near the water fountain, so you can choose which water to drink. The coolers will arrive today and will be provided as long as the public water does not meet treatment requirements.” Just days later, the city issued an advisory that cited the presence of trihalomethanes in the water, but maintained the water was safe to drink for residents in good health. By the time researchers released a lead advisory due to high levels found in Flint residents’ bloodstreams, the Snyder administration had been supplying state officials with bottled water for over eight months.

This new piece of evidence further indicts city, state and federal officials, suggesting they had been well aware of the health hazards relating to the Flint water supply for quite some time. The contamination of the Flint water began in 2014 when the city switched from the Detroit municipal water system to the polluted Flint River. The highly corrosive water from the river caused lead to leach from the city’s antiquated piping and accumulate at dangerously high levels.

The decision, made under a state-appointed emergency manager, was made despite a counter offer

from the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department (DWSD) that could have potentially saved the city hundreds of millions of dollars. It is now suspected that the move to the KWA was not made in order to save money, but as a part of a broader move to “monetize” DWSD.

Despite evidence of widespread lead poisoning of residents, Governor Snyder waited until earlier this month to declare a state of emergency. It has since come to light that Flint residents had been exposed to dangerously high levels of lead for a period of a year and a half. Prolonged exposure to lead causes an array of serious health hazards, including organ damage and neurological disorders.

The effects of lead are particularly dangerous to young children, whose brains are still developing. The number of children potentially exposed to dangerous amounts of lead from Flint drinking water is 8,000-9,000 with potentially devastating public health consequences that will be felt for generations.

In a press statement a few days ago, Snyder announced that a full replacement of the city’s lead piping is “not imminent.” He stated that an overhaul of the city’s water system would take 15 years, despite statements from local plumbers that it could realistically be done in two. The governor put forward the absurdly low figure of \$55 million as the cost of such a project. In fact, estimates of the cost of replacing Flint’s aging piping are as high as \$1.5 billion.

Meanwhile, Democratic Party politicians have been scrambling to distance themselves from the disaster. Both President Obama and Hillary Clinton have made statements on the crisis, feigning sympathy for Flint residents. Obama recently issued some \$80 million in

“relief,” a token amount, which is being made available as part of Michigan’s revolving loan fund and is not necessarily targeted directly to Flint.

Various media shills for the Democratic Party are attempting to deflect criticism by placing blame for the disaster solely on the Republican governor. Filmmaker Michael Moore has called for the arrest of Snyder and paints the water crisis as a “racist crime,” despite the fact that it has impacted both the white and black residents of the city. MSNBC news host Rachel Maddow, a long-time cheerleader for the “War on Terror,” held a carefully orchestrated “town hall” meeting in Flint on Wednesday. Maddow used the meeting as a public relations stunt for the Democrats, while posing as a champion of Flint residents.

A WSWS reporting team spoke to workers and young people attending the Rachel Maddow meeting in Flint on Wednesday. All expressed anger over the crisis of infrastructure as well as the empty promises and lack of response from the political establishment.

Angela, a Flint schools employee, said that she had concerns with Flint water before the present crisis erupted. “I made my first complaint in 2011. It was discolored and had foul odor. It took months to get someone to check my water. At the time they told me I would have to be responsible for my own repairs, but they assured me the water was drinkable.

“I don’t think the politicians will get back our trust. Actions speak louder than words. At the end of the day they don’t care.

“We are economically challenged. We are being screwed by every institution. It is hard to find employment. We are under attack at every level.”

Derrick Britton, a state worker, said he had family members who had been tested for lead and were waiting for results. “This is about politics over people. I grew up here. I wish someone would take responsibility.

“It is not just Flint. The infrastructure needs to be fixed across the United States.”

Don, a student at Wayne State University in Detroit, drove up to Flint to attend the town hall meeting. He told the WSWS, “It is a shame they allowed this to happen. You can see how the infrastructure is falling apart. If you look at the map, there are other places besides Flint that are having problems with lead. It is a big issue on our campus. They are having lectures on

it.”



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