

# Top advisors to Michigan governor urged switching water supply from polluted Flint River

Shannon Jones  
27 February 2016

Long before state authorities publicly acknowledged problems with drinking water in Flint, Michigan, internal emails show that advisers to Michigan Governor Rick Snyder advocated moving the water supply from the polluted Flint River back to the Detroit water system.

The revelation is the latest in a damning series of disclosures showing that Snyder and other top state officials were well aware of the dangers facing Flint residents long before raising any warnings or taking any action. Some 100,000 residents of the city were exposed to dangerous levels of lead in their drinking water after Flint's state-appointed emergency manager mandated that the city begin drawing water from the polluted Flint River. The city did not treat the water with corrosion control chemicals. As a consequence the Flint River water leached lead from the city's antiquated piping system.

On October 14, 2014 Valeria Brader, Snyder's top environmental policy advisor, requested the governor's office ask Flint's emergency manager to move the city's water supply back to the Detroit system, its original water source. This was a full year before the state finally authorized the switch.

Brader's request came shortly after General Motors asked to disconnect from the Flint water system, complaining that the water was corroding its car parts.

The email exchanges followed the issuance of a boil water advisory to Flint residents due to E. coli and total coliform in the water supply. The over-treatment of Flint water with chlorine to kill bacteria led to a further problem, the buildup of trihalomethane, a chlorine related chemical that can cause a range of health problems, including liver disease and cancer.

Mike Gadola, Snyder's chief legal counsel, agreed with Brader. He wrote in scathing terms, "To anyone who grew up in Flint as I did, the notion that I would be getting my drinking water from the Flint River is downright scary. Too bad the [emergency manager] didn't ask me what I thought, though I am sure he heard it from plenty of others."

Gadola noted that his mother remained a resident of Flint. "Nice to know she's drinking water with elevated chlorine levels and fecal coliform. I agree with Valerie [Brader]. They should try to get back on the Detroit system as a stopgap ASAP before this thing gets too far out of control."

The revelations followed the release of 1,600 emails by Snyder's office to the *Detroit News*, with even more emails expected to be made public soon. The exchanges between Snyder's closest aides are a further indication of a cover-up at the highest levels of the dangers facing Flint residents.

Brader now claims that these concerns were never discussed with the governor. For his part, Gadola is now refusing to respond to questions about internal Snyder administration discussions over the Flint water situation. Gadola currently sits on the Michigan Court of Appeals thanks to an appointment by Snyder.

Snyder's chief of staff Dennis Muchmore was one of those who received Gadola's email. He told the *Detroit News* that the proposal to switch Flint back to the Detroit water system was the prevailing view in the governor's office. However, the switch was never implemented because of the cost, estimated at \$1 million a month. "The assessment was you couldn't do it because it was a cost that should have been borne by the system," Muchmore said.

In another incriminating email, Muchmore advocated using a \$2 million grant the state had given Flint to upgrade its water system to defray the cost of a switch back to Detroit water. “Since we’re in charge, we can hardly ignore the people of Flint,” wrote Muchmore in an email to other high level state officials. “After all, if GM refuses to use the water in their plant and our own agencies are warning people not to drink it ... we look pretty stupid hiding behind some financial statement.”

Then in March, Muchmore wrote another email proposing the state buy bottled water for Flint residents saying, “If we procrastinate much longer in doing something direct, we’ll have real trouble.”

These latest revelations follow reports that health experts warned the state about an outbreak of Legionnaires Disease in October 2014 and its possible link to the Flint water system. However, state environmental officials suppressed the warning, calling local health officials “irresponsible.”

The difficulties facing the Republican Snyder administration have drawn a parade of Democratic Party politicians to Flint. The latest to visit the city was Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, a candidate for the Democratic Party presidential nomination, who hosted a town hall meeting Thursday.

Sanders has called for Snyder’s resignation over the Flint water crisis. The focus on the role of the governor, however, is an attempt to deflect attention from the role of the Democratic Party, which, at all levels, colluded with Republican state officials in the cover-up of the dangers facing Flint residents. Indeed, the emergency managers who oversaw the switch to the Flint River were Democrats, as were the Flint mayor and a majority on the city council. Former Democratic State Treasurer Andy Dillon signed off on the switch to the Flint River water supply.

The Obama administration’s Environmental Protection Agency also played a major role in the cover-up. The top EPA official in Michigan blocked attempts by a subordinate to raise warnings about the lack of corrosion control measures relating to Flint water.

Sanders, like his rival, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, has no serious policy proposals for addressing the crisis in Flint. Sanders again refused to criticize the response of the Obama administration, which declared a state of emergency in Flint in January, but said the city did not qualify for disaster relief.

While rubber-stamping the Obama administration’s massive military budget, the Democratic Party, like its Republican counterparts, chokes at providing even token levels of spending for infrastructure upgrades, such as the estimated \$1.5 billion needed to replace Flint’s antiquated piping system.

Currently Michigan’s Democratic senators are sponsoring bi-partisan legislation to provide a paltry \$220 million to address infrastructure repairs. The money would not all be earmarked for Flint and includes \$100 million in subsidized loans, not grants. Another \$70 million would be applied toward financing costs toward up to \$700 million in secured infrastructure loans across the US.

Even this miserable package faces likely continued delays. Meanwhile, Flint residents face contaminated water that is unsafe for drinking, bathing or cooking.



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**