

Democrats cover up role of Obama administration in Flint water crisis

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Democratic Party politicians and operatives descended on Flint before Tuesday's Michigan primary hoping to exploit public anger over the water crisis to boost their electoral chances. The selection of the city as the venue for the March 6 debate between Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton was designed to give the appearance that the Democrats were concerned with, and would seriously address, the disaster inflicted on the people of Flint over the last two years.

Both candidates sought to lay blame solely on the Republican governor, Rick Snyder, while concealing the role of state and local Democrats, including the state treasurer, the mayor, the emergency manager and the city council. They also said nothing about federal officials from Obama's Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) who knowingly concealed the fact that the city was not treating its water supply with anti-corrosive agents and that lead levels in the water had made it toxic.

While making various demagogic statements, neither candidate offers any serious proposal to provide relief to the beleaguered residents. During the debate, LeeAnne Walters from Flint asked both candidates if they would require public water systems to replace lead pipes throughout the US if they were elected. Neither candidate would give a direct answer to the question.

Clinton replied, "We will commit to a priority to change the water systems and we will commit within five years to remove lead from everywhere," referring to all lead sources, including paint and dust.

Walters, a key figure in exposing the consistent cover-up by water quality officials, told the *Huffington Post* on Monday, "I hated Clinton's answer. To tell a Flint resident that we'll handle this in five years is no different than what the city was telling us and what the state was telling us."

The Flint mother noted that federal agencies, particularly the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), have been downplaying the importance of lead in drinking water for decades, focusing almost exclusively on lead in paint and dust. This attitude toward public water systems was a significant factor in the lead poisoning of Washington, DC from 2001 to 2005 and contributed to the culture within agencies tasked to protect drinking water safety that has been exposed in the Flint events.

"If you look at the numbers, most of the grants and funding go to lead paint, so to lump it all together is unacceptable," Walters said.

Walters said Sanders' response to her question—that the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) under his administration would monitor water safety—was "lame," adding that this is what the EPA is already supposed to do.

Thousands of emails have emerged exposing the role of top employees at Michigan's Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) in covering up the lack of proper treatment in Flint's water leading to the spike in lead levels. A spate of resignations and firings in the department have occurred as a result.

While the Democrats denounced the Snyder administration, they have consistently given a pass to the EPA, with US Congressman Dan Kildee from Flint, for example, saying that claims that the EPA is equally as responsible as the MDEQ is a "false equivalency."

In fact, the EPA played a key role in aiding and abetting the efforts by MDEQ and the Snyder administration to conceal the danger to the public. A March 5 article in the *Detroit Free Press* examines emails between MDEQ and EPA officials from February 25, 2015 through the end of 2015. The emails reveal that the EPA was well informed that Flint was in violation of federal safe drinking water regulations, and that the MDEQ was not only aware, but itself instigating Flint officials to falsify water testing.

The article dates exchanges starting on February 25, when LeeAnne Walters' home tap water tested at 104 parts per billion (ppb)—7 times more than the EPA action level of 15 ppb. Her child developed skin rashes. The next day, EPA program manager for Region 5 (the Midwest region), Jennifer Crooks, relates this to MDEQ's Lansing District Coordinator for Drinking Water, Steve Busch, and Mike Prysby, MDEQ district engineer, with a note that says: "WOW!!!! Did he find the LEAD! 104 ppb. She has 2 children under the age of 3... Big worries here."

This message was forwarded to EPA Region 5 Ground Water and Drinking Water Branch Chief Tom Poy, and Regulations Manager Miguel Del Toral, who is a leading expert on lead in water.

Del Toral, alarmed by the test results followed up with visits to Walters' home to do further testing. Further emails corroborated Walters' testimony at the February 3 US Congressional hearing, where she described Del Toral's work in Flint, which culminated in a June memorandum to the EPA and the MDEQ, after which he was silenced by the federal agency.

Walters testified that she had made that report public. "So when he called me and asked me if he could use my information for this report, I said yes, and I asked for a copy. When I saw it in black and white—there is a difference living it and seeing it in black and white—that is why it was given to the ACLU and made public, because people did have a right to know. From that point, he was then no longer allowed to have association with me or anybody else in Flint. By the EPA."

Del Toral and Walters had uncovered that there had been no corrosion control treatment of the water in Flint since the water source was switched to the Flint River in April 2014. For decades, the water supplied to Flint from the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department's treatment plant near Lake Huron had been treated for corrosives, in line with federal law, in order to prevent lead and other chemicals from leaching from Flint's pipelines into its drinking water.

The long-mothballed Flint treatment plant neither had the technical capacity or the manpower to treat the water, but this did not stop state and local officials from both parties from approving the switch. The officials essentially rolled the dice hoping there would be no public outcry until a new pipeline that would connect Flint directly to Lake Huron was completed.

In his June memorandum, Del Toral also revealed that sampling of the water in Flint homes was done improperly, making the high lead levels less like to be revealed.

EPA Region 5 head, Susan Hedman, since resigned, told Flint's Mayor Dayne Walling and others who raised concerns about the Del Toral memo, that she wished it had never been produced and that after she edited and vetted it, it would tell a different story—that Flint's water was in compliance with lead and copper standards established by the federal government.

In early July, Walling asked Hedman to make a public statement to the ACLU to justify the city's actions and she replied, "I'm not inclined to have any further communications with the ACLU representative."

Dr. Marc Edwards, the leader of the Virginia Tech University team that performed an extensive testing of Flint's water in August, told the February 3 Congressional hearing. "I did not know what happened for quite some time until MDEQ bragged to Ms. Walters and laughed at her and she reported back to me that 'Mr. Del Toral had been handled' and it was very clear that an agreement had been reached of some sort between EPA and MDEQ that would let MDEQ have their way with Flint's children.

"That they were not going to install corrosion control. They had no intention to do it. There's many emails that show that

they were waiting for this new pipeline to come on next year and they thought it was a waste of time to do anything to treat the water. When we got involved, in August as a matter of fact, an MDEQ email said 'Shouldn't someone tell those folks from Virginia Tech that we're switching to the pipeline next year so they don't bother wasting their time on this issue?'"

National EPA Director Gina McCarthy, an Obama appointee, appeared for the first time in Flint at a February 2 EPA press conference. When a *World Socialist Web Site* reporter asked her directly about the quashing of the Del Toral memo, she lied, insisting the lead-in-water expert had not been silenced.

The significance of the cover-up for the EPA by the Democratic Party establishment is vast. Over the last weeks, it has emerged that lead poisoning of the population through the water systems is not isolated to Flint, but is a national phenomenon. In the state of Ohio, lead levels in the blood of children are high in many areas of the state. In the village of Sebring, Ohio, near the deindustrialized city of Youngstown, it has recently been made public that state water quality officials kept quiet for months when they knew that residents had lead-tainted water flowing through their taps.

The map above shows the extent to which children's blood levels exceed the 5 micrograms per deciliter ($\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$) level considered high by the CDC across the country in 2014. Even more disturbing is the number of states that are not required to submit those levels to the federal government.

Food and Water Watch, the Washington DC-based advocate for public water, reports that federal water infrastructure spending has been cut by 74 percent in inflation-adjusted dollars since 1977. Obama's latest budget calls for another 11 percent cut.

Neither Democratic Party candidate has any intention of investing in desperately needed infrastructure. They dare not cut across the agenda of the financial elite to amass greater and greater profits at the expense of the working class, and to dedicate obscene sums to the endless pursuit of technology and weapons for war.



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