

# Flint mayor proposes to stay with Detroit water

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At a Tuesday press conference that became raucous at times, Flint Mayor Karen Weaver reversed her decision from last June and declared that changing the city's water source again, this time to the Karegnondi Water Authority (KWA), was "too risky." Standing with representatives from the state of Michigan, water utilities and federal and state water agencies, Weaver announced a proposal to remain with the water source that the city reconnected to in October, 2016.

On the eve of the third anniversary of the disastrous switch from the city's long-time water source to Flint River water, the harm inflicted on the residents of Flint has become well-known around the world. The switch was recklessly perpetrated by state officials, supposedly as an interim source, while the KWA pipeline was being constructed.

The levels of lead in tap water spiked as corrosive river water was pumped through city pipes without the corrosion control treatment required by law, causing lead from the pipes to leach into the water, poisoning residents, children and adults alike.

Lead is the most potent neurotoxin known to man. In addition to causing long-term cognitive and behavioral issues, exposure to lead can cause irreversible damage to any system in the body. Infants and young children, whose bodies are growing rapidly, are most vulnerable, though the danger to adults can also be dire.

Residents have been afflicted with other contaminants in the water. The largest outbreak of Legionnaires disease in the country, sickening scores of people and killing at least 12, was proven to be a result of the switch to Flint River water. Hair loss, skin rashes and sores have plagued the population since almost immediately after the April 25, 2014 cutoff from the city's reliable water source provided by the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department (DWSD) for almost

50 years.

The entire city has been described by medical expert and pediatrician Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha as suffering from PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder).

Despite recent testing showing that lead levels in the water have gone down, experts still recommend the use of certified filters for drinking, cooking and hygiene. Flint has the highest water rates in the country, and the water is still undrinkable, but subsidies to help residents pay their water bills have been cut off as of last month. To add insult to injury, the city has resumed the practice of shutting off water to residents whose bills are delinquent.

Weaver explained at the press conference that the proposal to stay with the DWSD, now managed by the regionalized Great Lakes Water Authority (GLWA) was prepared over months, in negotiations with officials from all concerned, including Jeff Wright, CEO of the KWA.

Alongside Weaver stood a rogues' gallery of Wright, Richard Baird from Governor Rick Snyder's office, Susan McCormick from the GLWA, Keith Creagh from the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, Robert Kaplan of the US Environmental Protection Agency and John Young of the American Water Works Service Company.

Weaver's proposal consisted of the following points:

- Flint would remain a customer of the GLWA for the next 30 years.
- As part of the contract, the GLWA would provide credits to pay the \$7 million a year obligation to the bondholders for signing on to the KWA.
- As part of the GLWA contract, water assistance will be provided to low-income residents of Flint.
- A seven-mile stretch of pipeline that will allow the city of Flint to continue receiving water from the

GLWA will be built by the Genesee County Drain Commission, headed by Wright. Before the 2014 switch to the Flint River, Wright purchased the pipeline from the city so that Genesee County would continue to have treated water from the Detroit system while the KWA pipeline and Genesee's own treatment plant were under construction.

- A 30-day period of discussion will precede the scheduled vote by the city council.

When Weaver announced the decision not to switch to the KWA pipeline, there was an audible response of approval from the audience. Significant public opposition to the KWA deal was no secret. The Flint water crisis was a man-made disaster, not simply, as the mainstream media presents, as a money-saving measure, but as a result of vested private interests, particularly that of Wright and his KWA scheme.

Following Weaver's speech, she called upon other officials. After an obsequious introduction, she asked Young of the American Water Works Co. to speak. When he reached the podium a voice from the audience asked, "What about privatization?" Young glibly responded, "Don't worry about that," provoking more animosity from the crowd. "We know who you are!" was heard, referring to his role as the head of the organization representing the water utilities of the US.

There seems to be an irresistible urge by those invested in the system to self-congratulatory praise. So, when Young singled out Wright for his role in the negotiations, someone in the audience shouted, "I'd like to single him out!"

Wright was praised for agreeing to build a parallel pipeline to the one his office purchased for several million dollars to ensure that his jurisdiction would still receive treated water from the DWSD pipeline during the construction of the KWA and the Genesee treatment plant, leaving Flint to the Flint River "solution."

As Young continued with his praise for Wright, shouts from the audience of, "No way!" and "What a joke!" expressed the hatred for Wright by many residents for his role in causing the Flint disaster in the first place.

Weaver took the microphone to say, "I can't change what happened in the past," and went on to praise the proposed agreement.

The question and answer period at the end was reserved for media only. Even so, crucial questions

were raised. A reporter from MLive.com asked if there was any guarantee from the GLWA that rates wouldn't rise past the 4 percent per year that Susan McCormick promised would be the maximum. She answered that it was impossible to make any guarantees of that sort.

Weaver concluded by announcing a public Town Hall meeting for Thursday evening at which residents could speak.



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