Police provocation at Flint Town Hall results in six arrests

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Armed police wearing bullet-proof vests dominated a so-called Town Hall Thursday evening called by Flint Mayor Karen Weaver to air the "feedback, questions and concerns" of residents after her announcement of a proposal for the 30-year future of the city's water system. Many residents questioned the selection of venue, the House of Prayer Missionary Church, rather than a public space, given that this was supposed to be a forum for residents to air their grievances.

The event opened with a provocation by Flint Chief of Police Tim Johnson, who told the audience of over 100 that no disruptions or profanity would be tolerated and that since it was a "house of God", that all males had to remove their hats. "I just want to make sure this meeting goes off the way it's supposed to and that everybody's respecting everyone," Johnson declared. "Please don't be in here trying to disrupt this meeting, because if you do, I'm going to escort you out and I'm only going to take you to the back door and then you're going to jail. I'm not going to play with nobody tonight."

During the course of the meeting, several residents expressed the view that the meeting should not have been held in a church, evoking applause. One person, who was recording the proceedings on his cell phone, shouted, "I can't wear a hat, but you can wear a pistol?" He was quickly escorted out of the meeting and arrested.

Under federal and Michigan law, the maximum time an individual can be held by police before being charged with a crime is 72 hours. The above video illustrates how law enforcement personnel abuse this limit.

Others, including Tony Palladeno, Jr., a Flint resident and a well-known outspoken opponent of the water conspiracy, were also arrested.

A woman recording the arrest of Palladeno was herself arrested, apparently for recording the actions of police.

A video from a local NBC news station showed an argument in the church vestibule between police and Tony Palladeno. A representative of the church pointed to Palladeno and directed the police to "get him out of here," adding, "This is my church."

A resident who did not attend because she had misgivings about the meeting being held in a church said she was up all night watching the videos of the arrests. She said, "I'm so glad that I didn't go, because I know would have been arrested. What they did to Leah [Tony Palladeno's wife], I wouldn't have stood still for that."

The decision to hold the Town Hall in a church was clearly aimed at discouraging public opposition. At a Town Hall held on January 11 angry residents opposed attempts by public officials to use the news of the improved lead in water sampling data to claim the Flint water crisis was over.

The moderator of that event was Michigan Governor Rick Snyder's right-hand man, Richard Baird, who has in the wake of the Detroit bankruptcy played a behind-the-scenes role in the Snyder administration as a "transformation manager." His recent role in Flint, where he poses as a "native son," has been to handle the political fallout from the exposure of the conspiracy behind the water crisis.

During the period after the switch to Flint River water, when residents were complaining of the foul-smelling, discolored tap water, Baird led the Snyder administration's "team" effort to speak with one voice that the water complied with federal safe drinking water regulations. He now has a vested interest in silencing the most determined oppositional voices in Flint.

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It was Baird who sent the official February 7 letter the city of Flint that the 65 percent subsidy to help residents pay their water bills was ending. Weaver made a public show of opposition to this move, under conditions where residents could still not drink the water, making a visit to Lansing, the state capital, to "argue" with the governor.

Baird was standing alongside Weaver last Tuesday when she announced that the city would not proceed with its original plan to connect to the KWA pipeline. They attempted to present this decision as the outcome of six months of hard work by officials from all levels to come up with a solution to the Flint water crisis. Jeff Wright, CEO of the KWA, who was chiefly behind the ill-conceived scheme that led to cutting off Flint from its long-term water supply, gloated that this was a "win-win-win" solution.

Wright is seen by many residents as bearing responsibility for the poisoning of the city. As previously reported by the *World Socialist Web Site*, attempts by to laud Wright for his supposed generosity evoked angry outbursts from residents.

In an attempt to placate the outrage of Flint residents, an anger shared by working people around the world, millions of dollars, both federal and state, have belatedly been allocated to address the infrastructure issues in the city. That money, which is controlled by the same administration that is responsible for the disaster, is being used to provide the flexibility to satisfy the financial interests, namely bondholders.

Weaver's proposal represents a backhanded exposure of the lies that have been foisted on the public for years. In advancing the proposal to reconnect to the Detroit water system the city rejected the solution that had been advanced for the last several years and confirmed by Weaver herself last June—connecting to the KWA and using the decrepit Flint Water Treatment Plant (WTP).

Up until Tuesday, the publicly presented picture of the Flint WTP was that after upgrades, it would be a state-of-the-art facility and provide the city with safe drinking water. JoLisa McDay, the director of the plant, gushed at the January 11 Town Hall that the facility and its employees were going through a transformation, because the city of Flint deserved it.

In an interview just after the Tuesday press conference, Robert Kaplan, acting EPA Region 5 director, presented a different picture. Flint WTP, he conceded, was like a broken-down used car and the closer you looked at it the worse it looks.

"No reasonable plant operator would have given the go-ahead" to use the Flint plant to treat water, he said.

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