

Court testimony exposes governor's lies about Flint water crisis

Sheila Brehm
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In a critical turn of events in a Flint courtroom, testimony given by Harvey Hollins, an appointee of Governor Rick Snyder, contradicted Snyder's repeated claims that he did not learn of a deadly outbreak of Legionnaires' disease until January 12, 2016.

On October 6, in Genesee County's 67th District Court, Hollins stated he told Snyder about the outbreak of Legionnaires' disease in December 2015. The Flint water crisis began three and a half years ago when the city's water source was switched from the Detroit water system to the Flint River without adding corrosion controls, an act of negligence which allowed lead to leach from the pipes. Although health experts warned of the danger of Legionnaires' disease and the possible link to the change in the city's water source as early as October 2014, their efforts to investigate the situation were blocked by high-placed officials in state and federal agencies.

The issue of whether Snyder lied under oath before a US congressional hearing in March 2016, is a significant development. The matter arose during a preliminary hearing concerning the first of 13 officials facing criminal charges over the Flint catastrophe. The hearings are being held to determine if there is probable cause for the matter to proceed to trial. Attorney-General Bill Schuette, who recently announced his candidacy for governor, has been trying to distance himself from the highly unpopular Snyder.

The first hearing, which began September 21, involves Nick Lyon, the highest-ranking state official charged to date. Lyon remains the director of the state's Department of Health and Human Services. He is charged with involuntary manslaughter for the death of Robert Skidmore, aged 85, on December 13, 2015, and misconduct in office for failure to alert the public about the deadly disease. Documents made available

through FOIA show Lyon was aware of the outbreak as early as January 2015; he faces a possible 20 years in prison.

Harvey Hollins, was appointed by Snyder to head the Office of Urban Initiatives, and was later selected to be his point man for the state's response to the Flint water crisis. He was called as a witness on the fourth day of the Lyon's hearing to present evidence against Lyon to presumably show when Lyon knew about the outbreak of Legionnaires' and to demonstrate Lyon's failure to alert the public about the dangers. Hollins was aware of the Legionnaires' outbreak in March 2015.

In the course of taking testimony from Hollins, Todd Flood, the special prosecutor played the video of Snyder's testimony before a congressional oversight hearing in March 2016, showing Snyder testifying under oath that he first learned of the outbreak January 12, 2016 and called a press conference the next day—when he appeared with Nick Lyon and Eden Wells. Hollins was reminded he was under oath and stated he told Snyder in December 2015 about the Legionnaires outbreak.

In a curious exchange, Lyon's defense attorney objects twice to Flood's line of questioning when he continues questioning Hollins: "Clearly you had given the governor information about the outbreak of Legionnaires," at which point Lyon's attorney objects "leading," and when Flood continues, Lyon's attorney objects again.

While it is not known what transpired in the two private conferences between Judge David Goggins and the lawyers, the hearing ended abruptly without explanation. It will not resume until November 1.

Before any trials even take place, the hearings will take months to wind through the court system. However, in just four days of hearings, the narrative of

“not knowing” is unraveling, demonstrating that criminal activity took place within the state administration, right to the top level.

The majority of the cases brought by Schuette involve criminal activity surrounding Legionnaires. As horrific as is the cover-up of at least 87 cases of Legionnaires that resulted in 13 deaths, this leaves unresolved the impact of lead-laced water coursing through the bodies of nearly 100,000 residents for 18 months.

Less than six months after the water switch, the General Motors engine plant stopped using the Flint River after its parts became corroded. The recent study by researchers David Slusky and Daniel Grossman found fetal death rates increased by 58 percent and fertility rates decreased by 12 percent after the April 2014 change in the city’s water source. The researchers’ study demonstrated that 250 babies were not born due to the lead-in-water crisis.

There was permanent damage to an estimated 9,000 Flint children. Ingesting lead by young children causes brain damage and behavioral disorders. Many Flint residents, both children and adults, have on-going health problems due to the contaminated water. To put it mildly, Flint remains a crime scene.

Lying under oath to a congressional body is a felony, a crime that could have serious legal implications for Snyder, including prison. Flint residents see Hollins’ testimony as proof of Snyder’s criminal role, and justifiably would like to see him behind bars.

The reaction, however, by leading Democratic Party officials was very muted. US Rep. Elijah Cummings (D-MD), who led the grandstanding during the congressional hearings, issued a statement October 6 saying he is “deeply concerned the governor may have misled the Oversight Committee and the people of Flint.” He continued: “One thing that all members of this Committee—Democrats and Republicans—agree on is that witnesses testifying before us must tell the truth.”

US Rep. Dan Kildee, a Democrat from the Flint area, stated he wants a House committee to re-examine the governor’s Capitol Hill testimony from 2016 about the timeline.

Both Democrats and Republicans approved and allowed the switch to Flint River water and were responsible for monitoring water quality issues. The indifference and hostility of the political establishment

towards the public is not a personal matter. On the contrary, it sums up the criminality of the entire corporate-controlled political establishment.



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