

Democrats visit Flint: Hypocrisy, lies and cover-up

Sheila Brehm
27 July 2018

Several members of the Democratic Party's congressional delegation dropped in on Flint, Michigan last week for a photo-op where city residents still suffer from a health crisis four years after the lead poisoning of their water supply. The July 20 event included Nancy Pelosi, the minority leader in the US House of Representatives, and her colleagues Dan Kildee and Debbie Dingell (Michigan), Jim McGovern (Massachusetts), and Sheila Jackson Lee (Texas).

The trip was the prelude to a campaign visit Saturday by Dr. Abdul El-Sayed, a candidate in the Democratic gubernatorial primary backed by Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the Democratic Socialists of America member who won the Democratic primary in New York's 14th Congressional District. The trips to Flint, which has become a national and international symbol of government indifference, are part of the Democrats' efforts to feign sympathy for working-class and minority voters in the run-up to the mid-term elections.

The Democrats share full responsibility with the Republicans for the disaster in the city. Democratic State Treasurer Andy Dillon, appointed by Republican Governor Rick Snyder, approved the moneymaking scheme to build a redundant water pipeline to the city, which set into motion the decision to switch the city's water supply to the polluted Flint River. President Obama came to the city in 2016, sipped a glass of water and essentially told the residents to get over it, while the Democratic mayor and Democratic-controlled city council have overseen the continued neglect.

Pelosi, Dingell and others donned hard hats and posed for the cameras at a Flint home that was having its pipes replaced. To date only 6,725 pipes have been replaced with at least 7,000 remaining.

Residents responded to the visit with the contempt it deserves. Typical was the commenter on the online publication MLive.com who said, "How insulting. I guess Flint is the new Political Tourist location. Nothing like visiting the poor victims and doing nothing about it. I remember the bus tours of the ninth ward after Katrina and how demeaning the residents felt as people rode by in their

air-conditioned buses and shook their heads as they returned to the luxury hotels of the French Quarter. Well, at least we have the photo's in MLIVE to look forward to..."

During a press conference they made no concrete proposals to relieve the city's working-class residents, who saw the value of their homes plummet, their health and the health of their children compromised and their savings eliminated. Instead Pelosi focused her remarks on Russian meddling!

Answering a reporter's question about Trump, Pelosi did not denounce the Republican president for neglecting the victims in Flint or Puerto Rico, or for dismantling the Environmental Protection Agency or cutting food stamps and other programs vital to Flint's largely impoverished population. Instead she blurted out, "The President of the United States owes an apology to the American people for his behavior toward Vladimir Putin, adding, "We can't afford this blackmail."

Pelosi went on to parrot the unsubstantiated charges of the Russian government's interference in the US 2016 elections, "It is the consensus of our entire intelligence community that the Russians interfered with our beautiful right to vote, the sacred right to vote, and Putin himself ordered it," Pelosi said. "That is an assault on our democracy..."

Presumably, the appointment of unelected emergency managers to rule over cities like Flint and extract massive payments on behalf of Wall Street and wealthy bondholders is part of the democratic paradise in the US.

At one point, Pelosi passed the microphone to Representative Denny Heck of Washington state who serves on the House Intelligence Committee. Heck said of congressional Republicans, "They need to stand up for America—they need to put country over party—because our country is in fact, being attacked by Russia."

One would think from these hysterical statements that the switch to the highly polluted Flint River had been ordered by the Kremlin.

The poisoning of the city's population was a conspiracy, but not by the Russian government. One of the largest public

health disasters in American history was set into motion as a result of the deliberate policies of Democratic and Republican politicians on all levels of government.

The water source was switched to the toxic Flint River in April 2014 without adding corrosion control chemicals to the antiquated water treatment plant. In spite of hundreds of residents protesting the foul-smelling water, which was producing deaths from Legionnaires' disease, rashes and countless other health problems, the lead-tainted water coursed through the bodies of residents for 15 months until the city's water supply was switched back to Lake Huron.

While Pelosi denounced Trump's broken promises to provide funding for the infrastructure, she made no mention of the paltry amount of money the Obama administration provided.

The visit coincides with continual efforts by the authorities and the corporate media to downplay the current disaster in Flint. While residents are advised to only drink the tap water if filters are in place, the majority of residents do not drink the water, even with a filter. The state of Michigan stopped the distribution of free bottled water, leaving families to rely on charitable handouts or buy their own water to cook, drink and bathe in.

Moreover, days before the congressional visit, there was a warning that steep water rate increases are coming. Flint's rates are already among the highest in the nation. An estimated \$300 million is needed over the next 20 years, or approximately \$15 million a month for capital improvements like replacing water mains and fixing leaks in the distribution system. Adding insult to injury, the people of Flint are expected to pay for upgrades to a nearly 100-year water treatment plant.

According to John Young, a consultant for the Flint City Council, "If we do not improve anything with collections, or the water theft rate, analysis shows us that we need three rate increases over the next three years. They would be 20 percent, 16 percent, and 10 percent."

Two days after Pelosi's charade, the *New York Times* published an opinion piece claiming that Flint's children were not poisoned at all but were merely "exposed" to lead. The article was co-authored by Hernan Gomez, an associate professor at the University of Michigan, and emergency medicine pediatrician and medical toxicologist at Hurley Medical Center in Flint. Principled scientists describe Gomez as a "rented white coat."

The basis for Gomez's argument is that the CDC recommends medical treatment for high blood lead levels at 45 micrograms per deciliter and that Flint children did not test this high. The article concludes, "It is therefore unfair and inaccurate to point a finger at Flint and repeatedly use the word "poisoned." All it does is terrify the parents and

community members."

Gomez does not address if the lead levels that exist in the water will do or have done damage to Flint residents, but only repeats that the word "poisoned" should not be used.

The timing of the NYT article is curious. Gomez's initial report was made public in May and appeared in the *Pediatric Journal* in June. There is a concerted effort on the part of the political establishment, and the Democratic Party in particular, as well as the media to totally abandon Flint. A lie is being pushed that the Flint water crisis is over, and that its seriousness and deleterious effects are being exaggerated.

In May, the WWS reported on Gomez's study and interviewed two health experts, Dr. Bruce Lanphear and Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha, who both disagreed with his findings. Lanphear told the WWS, "It is true that blood lead levels have come down. But it is proven that every six years, 24 million IQ points are lost at the lowest level of exposure to lead. While children of two-to-three months are the most vulnerable, children aren't the only ones vulnerable to lead poisoning."

Workers living in Flint and elsewhere have every right to be outraged at any amount of lead in their water. No amount of lead is safe. The cost to fully repair Flint's water system has been estimated at \$1.6 billion. While joining the Republicans in claiming that there is no money for critical infrastructure improvements or to meet the economic, social and health needs of Flint residents, the Democrats approved over \$700 billion to meet Trump's military funding request.



To contact the WWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact