

Harvard awards fellowship to Rick Snyder, Flint's poisoner-in-chief

Sheila Brehm
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Rick Snyder, the former Republican governor of Michigan and one of the chief conspirators in the lead poisoning of Flint's water supply, has been named senior research fellow at the Taubman Center at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government. Snyder began his work at the university on July 1, and will "teach and study subjects related to state and local government," according to a statement released by Harvard.

The reaction to the appointment by many Flint residents was summed up by Deanna Avery, a Flint resident and nurse, who told the WSWS: "It is a disheartening choice. The man who was behind the poisoning of Flint is unconscious of human lives. He should not be appointed to anything but prison."

Harvard University's welcoming of Snyder stands in marked contrast to the 2017 rescinding of a fellowship invitation to courageous whistleblower Chelsea Manning by the university's Institute of Politics. At the time, she had been released from a military prison after serving seven years of a 35-year sentence after her sentence was commuted by Obama shortly before he left office.

Michael Morell, former deputy director and acting director of the CIA, resigned his fellowship post at Harvard over the school's decision to include Manning as a visiting fellow, declaring that he could not be part of an organization that "honors a convicted felon and leaker of classified information." Morell was joined by Mike Pompeo, CIA director at the time, who cancelled an appearance at the school to protest Manning's appointment. Hours later, Manning was "disinvited."

Since May 16 of this year, Manning has been imprisoned indefinitely by the Trump administration for refusing to give perjured testimony before a grand jury against WikiLeaks and its founder Julian Assange.

Chelsea Manning and Assange are being persecuted for making the war crimes of the American government in Afghanistan and Iraq known to the world's population.

Snyder's fellowship is with Harvard's Taubman Center for State and Local Government, which, according to its website, "focuses on areas of public policy including public management, finance, labor-management relations, urban development, and environmental protection."

It was founded in 1988 when A. Alfred Taubman, a Michigan billionaire who made his fortune building indoor shopping malls, gave \$15 million to Harvard to fund the center. Taubman served as the chair of the center's advisory board until his federal conviction in 2002 for antitrust violations, when he was imprisoned for 10 months and fined \$7.5 million.

After his conviction, Harvard continued to retain his name for the center. A spokesperson at the time stated, "In the great scheme of things (Taubman) has led a very ethical life. His conviction does not mean that his life has not been ethical, or one that Harvard doesn't want to be associated with."

Jeffrey Liebman, the Taubman Center's director, is a Democrat who worked at the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) during the first two years of the Obama administration and previously worked in the Clinton administration, where he was involved in Social Security "reform" that included drawing up privatization plans.

Liebman said the two-term Republican governor "brings expertise in management, public policy and promoting civility." These laudatory remarks will cause anyone who has followed the Flint water crisis since its onset five years ago to rub his or her eyes in disbelief. A more realistic description of Snyder's role would be a lecture on public policy entitled "How to poison a

city and get away with it.”

Under Snyder’s administration, a working-class city of nearly 100,000 people, including 9,000 children, was poisoned by lead-contaminated water for 18 months. The switch to the polluted Flint River resulted in the largest man-made health disaster in US history. At least 13 people died from Legionnaire’s Disease and recent studies indicate that some of the additional 119 deaths attributed to pneumonia were likely due to Legionnaire’s. The lead poisoning caused as many as 276 miscarriages and a 12 percent decline in the fertility rate.

Snyder’s subordinates repeatedly lied to Flint residents who protested against foul-smelling, discolored tap water and outbreaks of rashes, breathing problems and other health issues. The Snyder administration falsified water test results and continued to pump toxic Flint River water to thousands of homes until scientists recruited by residents published test results showing that the water contained highly toxic levels of lead.

Adults and children continue to suffer in countless ways, including from diseases of the digestive, endocrine, renal and immune systems as well as the heart and lungs.

What makes Snyder, a right-wing Republican operative, so endearing to Liebman and others at Harvard? Presumably they see in Snyder’s policies a model for implementing, through undemocratic means, the even more draconian attacks on the jobs, social programs and living conditions of the working class that are being demanded by the financial oligarchy.

While Snyder is best known for his criminal role in Flint’s water crisis, this was the culmination of anti-working class policies his administration imposed beginning in 2011, when his first term began.

Claiming the need to reduce budget deficits through “shared sacrifice,” Snyder imposed \$1.8 billion in budget cuts targeting the working class and poor, including drastic cuts to public education and social programs and the elimination of tax exemptions on pensions. At the same time, he greatly reduced taxes on corporations.

More than 60,000 welfare recipients were removed from the welfare rolls at the beginning of his first term. With workers still reeling from the impact of the 2008 financial collapse, Snyder reduced unemployment

benefits from 26 weeks to 20 and made it easier for corporations to avoid paying compensation to the unemployed.

Snyder backed Obama’s auto bailout, which cut the wages of new-hires by 50 percent and opened the door to today’s multi-tier low-wage system and super-exploitation of part-time temporary workers.

Next to the Flint water poisoning, Snyder is most closely identified with the implementation of the undemocratic emergency manager law, which made possible the imposition of attacks on the workers of Michigan previously considered impossible.

The original law faced widespread opposition and was struck down by a popular referendum in November 2012. The law was quickly passed again by a post-election lame duck session of the Michigan legislature in December 2012. It was passed in the dead of night, with no public debate.

The act gave state-appointed emergency managers financial and day-to-day control of cities and school districts deemed financially troubled, and removed a clause from the previous law requiring the emergency manager to comply with the state constitution, which protected workers’ pensions.

This redraft of the emergency manager law provided the legal cover for wealthy financial interests to plunder municipal assets—from the looting of public employee pension funds to threatening the priceless collection of the Detroit Institute of Arts. The installation of an emergency manager in Flint was instrumental in the establishment of the Karegnondi Water Authority by corporate interests to divert Flint’s water supply from the Detroit system and put it in private hands.

In 2013, Snyder used the emergency manager law to throw Detroit into bankruptcy under a Wall Street lawyer, Kevyn Orr, who proceeded to slash the pension benefits of city workers and privatize public assets.

Harvard’s rewarding of Snyder with a prestigious position shows that all sections of the ruling elite view his assault on the working class in Michigan not as a crime, but as a model for further austerity measures.



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