

# Amid coronavirus pandemic, thousands in Detroit remain without running water

Kevin Reed  
21 March 2020

It has become clear over the past week that the March 9 announcement by Detroit's Democratic Party Mayor Mike Duggan—with the backing of Michigan Democrat Governor Gretchen Whitmer—that the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department would restore water to thousands of residents who had their service terminated was a public relations fraud.

The announcement was made with great fanfare and it was reported by the corporate media across the US and internationally that running water was critical to fighting the spread of the coronavirus and that having more than 100,000 Detroit residents without access to it was a public health catastrophe in the making.

However, as of last Friday less than three percent of the city's more than 2,800 occupied homes without water had their service restored as the number of confirmed cases of coronavirus in the city continues to rise. Access to running water is critical for basic hygiene which the Center for Disease Control and Prevention has stressed is essential for stopping the spread of COVID-19.

As reported on March 12 by the WSWs, the claim by Mayor Duggan that water service would be restored to Detroit residents was made on the heels of the state of emergency declaration by Governor Whitmer in response to the coronavirus crisis. In his statement to the media, Duggan actually exposed his own role in the policy that victimizes the poor by admitting that there was no financial reason "anyone in the city of Detroit should have water shut off."

For her part, Whitmer—who is being groomed by the Democratic Party for a national leadership role—was quoted far-and-wide by the corporate media saying, "The state is stepping up to cover the cost of water restoration for the first 30 days, because it's the right thing to do to keep families safe and protect public

health."

They did not report that until three weeks ago, both Duggan and Whitmer had repeatedly refused to halt water shutoffs in the poorest large city in America. Whitmer even denied a request by the ACLU to do so and rejected the warnings of health experts that the lack of running water is connected with numerous illnesses and diseases saying in February that there is "insufficient data to support the use of emergency powers in this instance."

The so-called "Coronavirus Water Restart Plan" was suspect from the beginning when the city reported that only after residents make a \$25 down-payment, the state government would cover the costs of water for the first month and then residents would pay a flat \$25 fee each month thereafter.

When asked about the failure of the program after the first week, Detroit Water and Sewerage Department director Gary Brown said there were difficulties such as a lack of water meters and homes that needed plumbing repairs as well as a lack of available plumbers. Residents have also reported wait times of an hour or more on telephone help lines.

Once the water department office received 1,500 calls, they reportedly stopped answering the phone because it would take six to seven months to process this first round of water restoration requests.

It has also been reported that the coronavirus moratorium plan does not apply to Detroit residents who are already enrolled in another payment program called the 10-30-50 plan. Families on this program are still having their water shut off after one missed payment.

It is no accident that this water shutoff fraud was carried out during the week of the Michigan Democratic Party primary. With both Joe Biden and

Bernie Sanders in town promoting their campaigns for the party's presidential nomination, the city and state Democrats took advantage of the national and international media presence to stage a photo op. They lied about taking serious steps to address the spreading pandemic by turning the water back on for the city's most oppressed and impoverished people.

Comments on the Detroit Department of Water and Sewerage Facebook page paint a picture of both the serious social crisis in the city as well as the growing anger among working class families to the Democrats' false promises.

On Wednesday, March 18, Cynthia Torres posted, "I called last week on Tuesday and they told me that I would get a phone call to set up an [appointment] so someone can come and turn the service back on but I still haven't heard anything yet. I have 5 children and is so hard for me to keep buying gallons of water just to flush the toilet!

"It's sad cuz we have children that don't understand what's going on ... My baby daughter was like, 'mom why other houses have water and we don't, how can you pay them if they don't let you work just like we can't go to school, can we just move to another house that has water?' That broke my heart!"

Jennifer Teed posted on March 19, "\$25 dollar assistance doesn't make water affordable. If people can't afford their water bill, they won't be able to stay in the plan- why don't you understand this!!! They deserve no applause! They deserve to be held accountable. The program does not work."



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**