

Millions of Texans without water, hospitals closed as power outages continue

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19 February 2021

Millions across Texas are continuing to suffer the effects of a historic blackout resulting from the criminal negligence of the state government, working hand in glove with the private utility companies. These corporations, in pursuit of higher profits, have refused to upgrade their plants so as to withstand the type of severe cold that hit the state last weekend.

The power outages, which started on Sunday, were both foreseeable and preventable, with a winter storm in 2011 resulting in a similar collapse of the power grid. The Republican state government has faced backlash for its role in the deregulation of the energy grid and its failure to address any of the issues made clear a decade ago.

The sole reason for keeping most of the state off the national grid is to enable private energy companies to reap larger profits, in part by not spending money on expensive upgrades, such as winterizing power plants, providing extra capacity and carrying out other measures that are required under federal regulation. This is illustrated by the misnamed Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT) grid suffering blackouts, while the El Paso region of the state, which is connected to the federally regulated Western International Grid, did not lose power.

Power remained out for 340,000 Texas customers as of Thursday, down from over three million at its peak, according to Poweroutage.us. Many in Texas were left freezing and in the dark for multiple days, with many areas recording temperatures in the single digits.

This massive blackout has caused millions of people to lose water, heat, lights and internet. Most of Houston woke up on Wednesday to find that there was little or no water, with more than 1.37 million in the city having no energy on the same day. In addition to Houston, there have been major disruptions to water systems across Texas, including the cities of Dallas, Fort Worth, San Antonio, Austin, Galveston, Corpus Christi and many more. All of these cities have issued boil water notices and have had water run out, with 13.5 million people lacking access to clean water in their homes.

At least 47 people have died due to the winter storm, according to tracking by the *Washington Post*. In Abilene, a 60-year-old man was found frozen to death in his recliner after losing electricity to his home, with his wife recovering, nearly dead, next to him. A homeless Abilene resident was found dead

on the street early Monday morning. Many people have desperately attempted to heat their homes by running cars, grills and propane stoves indoors or in garages, causing a spike in carbon monoxide poisonings. Harris County, which includes Houston, recorded over 300 carbon monoxide cases as of Tuesday.

Those seeking food and water at grocery stores have found empty shelves, with food pantries running out of supplies. Deliverers of basic food supplies have been hindered by the Texas Department of Transportation's failure to de-ice many highways and other roads. Food shortages have been compounded by the power outage, which resulted in food spoiling in refrigerators and many grocery stores being forced to shutter.

As of Wednesday, Celia Cole, the CEO of Feeding Texas, which operates a number of food pantries across the state, stated that eight food banks have requested public aid in order to continue feeding their respective communities. Texas Department of Agriculture Commissioner Sid Miller reported that in light of the inability to transport their products, dairy farmers are pouring \$8 million worth of milk down the drain daily.

The state is also running dangerously low on natural gas, with Republican Governor Greg Abbott issuing an order to ban natural gas exports. This is despite Texas producing around 25 percent of the natural gas in the United States. The situation was largely created because of the failure to insulate natural gas well-heads, which caused the freezing of gas processing plants and pipelines. As a result, as many as 4.77 million people in northern Mexico were also without power Monday. The country obtains 40 percent of its natural gas from Texas.

Those who are on variable rate electricity and gas plans have also seen record increases in their utility bills. One woman reported that her gas bill was over \$200,000 after two days without water or electricity. The electricity supplier Griddy has been charging customers thousands of dollars, with one resident, Royce Pierce, reporting that he had an "eye-watering \$7,000 power bill accrued over just two days of deadly winter weather."

In Houston, a line of people could be seen filling up buckets of water from a spigot at a neighborhood park after losing

running water in their homes. Residents of the Fair Avenue Apartments, which houses about 200 elderly or disabled residents and is owned by the San Antonio Housing Authority, were left without light, heat or running water. Some residents did not even have access to food.

In Austin, the state capital, apartments filled with ice after having been flooded by busted pipes. In the Sabina Apartments in central Austin, multiple frozen pipes burst Monday. Brad Casebier, the CEO of Radiant Plumbing and Air Conditioning, told Fox7Austin, "We've never seen anything like this. There was one year, six years ago, seven years ago that it was pretty intense and did a lot of damage, but this one, this one wins for sure." Casebier reported that his business usually gets 100 calls a day, but now is getting over 1,000. He stated that what happened at the Sabina Apartments was happening across central Texas.

Residents took to social media to document bursting pipes and other extensive damage caused by freezing temperatures, with pictures and videos on Twitter and Tik Tok from Houston, Dallas, Austin and other cities. Water could be seen gushing from ceilings of apartments and photos showed homes with extensive interior flooding. The Austin Fire Department said it had received hundreds of broken water pipe calls between Monday and Wednesday, with the department responding to over 685 calls about burst pipes on Tuesday alone.

Many hospitals in the state have also been without water or even electricity for days. St. David's South Austin Medical Center ran out of water and heat on Wednesday, forcing the hospital staff to use trash bags to clean the contents of toilets. The CEO of St. David's HealthCare told the *Washington Post* on Thursday that in Austin "no one hospital currently has the capacity to accept transport of a large number of patients."

This put into question how the hospital would transfer the most critical of its 300 patients. Ascension Seton Southwest Hospital, which has 33 licensed hospital beds, and Dell Children's Medical Center, with 248 licensed beds, have both been affected by loss of water.

Pipes have burst at multiple Houston Methodist hospitals across the city, with at least two hospitals operating without water. Hospitals in San Antonio, Arlington and elsewhere have also lost water supply.

While millions were without power or running water, US senator and coup conspirator Ted Cruz, in an act of complete indifference, flew to Cancun, Mexico with his family for a vacation, as confirmed by Fox News and later Cruz himself. After his trip became public, with images of Cruz at the airport going viral on social media late Wednesday, and his staff refusing to confirm his whereabouts, Cruz said he would fly back to Texas on Thursday, in an obvious attempt at damage control.

Cruz stated that "with school canceled for the week, our girls asked to take a trip with friends." He continued: "Wanting to be a good dad, I flew down with them last night and am flying

back this afternoon."

Cruz and his family not only flew out of the state when most people were stuck at home in freezing temperatures in the dark. He booked rooms at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel, which, according to its website, is "a five-star, oceanfront retreat" that "seamlessly fuses coastal luxury with the region's rich cultural legacy."

Michael, a teacher from Texas, commented to the WSWS, "We are in a Third World situation. People are dying of the elements and an uncontrolled plague, with no power, no groceries and no water. And where we have it, we are told to boil it despite having no power. All this as our oligarchic ruler flees to Cancun."

The Texas Democratic Party issued a hypocritical statement denouncing Cruz, stating, "In the middle of one of the worst crises in Texas history, Texas Republican Senator Ted Cruz jetted off to Cancun, Mexico. His constituents in Texas remain trapped in the cold, without clean water, heat, or warm food. 37 of them have died ... This is what we've come to expect from Texas Republican leadership. They are self-serving, inept, corrupt politicians who think that being in office entitles them to do whatever they want."

For their part, there has been no shortage of Democrats going on vacations during the deadly COVID-19 pandemic.

Austin Mayor Steve Adler traveled to Cabo San Lucas, Mexico in December amid the mass spread of coronavirus. Denver Mayor Michael Hancock traveled to Mississippi for a family visit in November after telling residents to "avoid travel" and "stay home as much as you can."

Top California Democrats attended the Independent Voter Project's annual policy conference in Hawaii in November just after California issued a warning against non-essential and out-of-state travel. State lawmakers, lobbyists and industry representatives "rub[bed] elbows over cocktails while discussing policy under the Hawaiian sun," as the *Sacramento Bee* reported.



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