

# Half of Texas without clean water as state and federal governments look the other way

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More than 14.6 million Texans, about half of the population of the state, remained under a boil-water advisory Friday, according to Texas Commission on Environmental Quality spokeswoman Tiffany Young. This encompasses more than 1,225 water supply systems and 63 percent of Texas counties following the record winter storm which hit the state last weekend.

In a press conference Austin Water Director Greg Meszaros stated that “we know that there are tens of thousands of leaks,” and that the Austin Fire Department responded to “thousands upon thousands of burst pipes.” In Houston, the fire department received almost 5,000 reports of burst pipes.

Texas Republican officials are currently in the process of trying to pin the blame on each other for the disaster. Governor Greg Abbott blamed the state’s grid operator, the Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT), claiming that it told state officials five days before the blackouts that everything would be under control.

The “rolling blackouts,” which ERCOT claimed would be temporary, turned into multiple-day blackouts during freezing temperatures. The state government has done basically nothing to remedy the problem, with no systematic mobilization to bring utilities back and distribute food and water to millions of desperate Texans.

While people were left in the dark with many lacking water and heat, images of empty downtown office buildings with their lights on could be seen on social media in Austin, Houston, Dallas and other cities throughout the state. These are not areas that are largely populated or occupied for business, as most of the upper-middle class jobs that are in the city centers have gone remote as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Austin Energy officials have claimed that shutting down the vacant office buildings would cut off electricity to critical infrastructure and government buildings. Democratic Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner washed his

hands of any blame Monday, tweeting, “ERCOT is the traffic manager of the electric grid which reports to the State. Neither the City nor the County controls or regulates ERCOT or the power generators. That is solely the responsibility of the State.”

With empty office buildings remaining well-lit and heated, thousands of homeless people have been left in the bone-chilling cold. Some churches have allowed people to shelter inside, and the Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center Dallas saw 800 people sheltered, according to Wayne Walker, a pastor and CEO of OurCalling. In Austin, officials said that 1,000 people are at shelters across the city, including the Palmer Event Center. Many more homeless are not in shelters and forced to suffer the cold, with those seeking shelter in non-profit and city-provided homeless shelters, which were already overcrowded, facing the deadly coronavirus.

One of the few measures taken by the Texas government, which has made a point of doing the least amount possible to help residents, was to open “warming” centers, many of which close at 9:00 p.m., forcing residents to return to freezing homes and apartments. On top of this, the warming centers themselves will likely serve as superspreader events for COVID-19 as social distancing and masking measures are extremely difficult to enforce.

Many people forced to seek shelter with relatives and friends in order to avoid the cold and or get water will likely be spreading the virus as well. The only silver lining is that schools were shuttered for the week, which serves to inhibit the spread of the virus.

A map of Austin provided on the city government’s website Friday morning shows all but two of the water districts in the city without water, and the two with water having low water pressure. The majority of the city’s residents have been forced to melt snow in order to flush their toilets, with grocery stores mostly out of water as

well.

The Abilene Fire Department (AFD) reported that a third patient died in the city after a loss of water pressure prevented staff from performing necessary treatment. He died before transfer to another hospital was possible, with AFD saying weather conditions did not delay the transfer.

Despite ERCOT declaring an end to the energy emergency, around 170,000 customers were still without power Friday afternoon as temperatures were expected to be below freezing overnight in many areas.

In San Antonio fire fighters were unable to put out a blaze at an apartment complex due to frozen fire hydrants, being forced to wait for water trucks to arrive at the scene. The fire, which started at 1:00 p.m. on Thursday, lasted well into the night, completely engulfing the building, which later collapsed, with burning cars in a nearby parking lot.

Trucks that had been sent from around the region carrying thousands of gallons of water were depleted quickly leaving the fire to regain strength again. In an interview with NBC affiliate WOAI Bexar-Bulverde Volunteer Fire Department Chief Jerry Bialick stated, "Our problem is we get a little bit ahead and then the water runs out."

A spokesman for the Red Cross stated that 32 units were affected with 87 people displaced. This was at a point where temperatures were below freezing, with shortages of gasoline preventing vehicular travel out of the state for many.

On Tuesday morning, 11-year-old Christian Pavon, who had immigrated from Honduras and was excited to see snow for the first time, was found unresponsive and later died after his family's trailer home lost power on Sunday night, causing the home to become very cold. His aunt told ABC13 KTRK that he had no underlying conditions and that the cold was a contributing factor to his death. An official cause of death has not yet been produced.

Illustrating the absolute contempt for the population held by both parties, the Biden administration sent an insulting 60 generators, 10,000 wool and 50,000 cotton blankets, 729,000 liters of water and 225,000 meals as of Thursday. This to a state where 14.6 million people are without water, 170,000 customers are still without power, and grocery stores across the state have empty shelves. The amount of water delivered would only satisfy around 200,000 people for one day.

The phrase "too little, too late" does not even begin to scratch the surface of the essentially non-existent and frankly ridiculous response by the administration hailed as

"progressive" by the corporate media and pseudo-left.

Biden's response is similar to the Bush administration's response to Hurricane Katrina, which wreaked havoc in New Orleans and surrounding areas in 2005, during which the Republican administration ignored the suffering of hundreds of thousands of residents of Louisiana.

Biden has barely said anything, only stating on Friday that he will sign a "major" disaster declaration sometime soon and would perhaps visit the state in the middle of next week. As with the initial efforts, his disaster declaration likely entails little of significance to Texans.

In continuing the Trump administration's herd immunity policy, which sacrificed thousands of lives per day in order to keep the stock market afloat and continue the production of profits for the financial oligarchy, the Biden administration, while posing as a friend to workers, will do as little as possible to respond to the catastrophe in Texas. This would be seen as siphoning billions of dollars away from Wall Street and the Pentagon.

Amid the unfolding disaster, Comstock Resources Inc., a shale driller in Texas and Louisiana whose majority shareholder is Jerry Jones, the billionaire owner of the Dallas Cowboys, is profiteering off of the crisis, increasing its prices upwards of 33,000 percent for each mBtu of natural gas.

While some natural gas producers have had a freeze because wells stopped working, Comstock is already ramping up production and charging \$15 to as much as \$179 per thousand cubic feet, as opposed to a last quarter average of \$2.40 per thousand cubic feet. President and Chief Financial Officer Roland Burns stated Wednesday that "obviously, this week is like hitting the jackpot."

Amazon has started price gouging as well, with bottles of water being sold online for as much as \$25, or more than five times the normal price.



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