

While Whitmer and Biden pick cherries up north

# Residents protest backed-up sewers and uncollected trash in wake of metro Detroit flooding

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On Friday, about 100 residents of Dearborn, a metro Detroit suburb, gathered outside the 19th District Court building to protest the response of the city administration to recent flooding.

At least one resident, an 87-year-old man, Hussein Reda, was killed when he slipped and fell in his flooded basement. Neighbors found his body during a welfare check.

The protest was apparently organized through WhatsApp and Facebook by a small group of residents who are fed up with the city's repeated mishandling of floods. Last week, large parts of the metro Detroit area were flooded out as a result of a several days of rain. A similar disaster hit homeowners in 2014.

Last week's flood is now the second disaster in the space of seven years described by authorities as the result of a "thousand-year" rainfall. Once again, an unusually prolonged bout of rain has overwhelmed the region's crumbling infrastructure.

One of the organizers at Friday's rally told the crowd that he had never participated in a protest, let alone organized one, before that day's event.

The organizers are calling for an independent investigation into the flooding and for a fair distribution of city services. One of the main complaints is that the east side of Dearborn has received much less assistance than the west side.

The organizers called on attendees to vote in the next election for new officials and to attend an upcoming City Council meeting. They printed signs for attendees reading "Accountability" and "We want answers."

Meanwhile, the Great Lakes Water Authority (GLWA) announced plans to conduct an internal investigation into the reasons for the flooding. It said it would also hire a third party to carry out a separate investigation. GLWA Chief Executive Officer Sue McCormick told the press that pump stations had "operated as designed" during the storm.

**"There are things you cannot replace."**

Nearly all of the protesters who spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* explained that this was not the first time they had been impacted

by flooding.

Joumana is a preschool teacher at Wayne Metro Head Start. She has lived in Dearborn for 30 years. "I was sleeping and heard something exploding," she said. "It was my big bag of rice blowing up after expanding from all the water. I ran downstairs and saw that our first step was just all underwater. I first tried to save some of our electronics, but I became too scared of the electricity, so I stopped.

"I tried to wash but the smell won't come out. We lost couches, dry wall, electronics, our kids' play areas. But there are things you cannot replace. It is more than money. All of my children's books, my memories, are gone.

"I'm here to let others hear our voices. We just want them to hear our voices. In 2014, we thought, 'This is a once-in-a-lifetime disaster.' But here we are again. We did not get one penny in 2014. When you ask the city whose fault it is, they just say, 'Not our responsibility.' Then why does this keep happening? We only ask for our rights.

"We pay some of the highest taxes in the area, plus all of our insurance. I am sure there are so many people like me—residents who get nothing from the insurance company. We are afraid. This is a threat to our safety. My brother slept in his car under the bridge last night because he was afraid. His life was in danger when the flood happened.

"Why is all the trash still sitting out at the curb? We were supposed to get our trash picked up Tuesday and it is all sitting out everywhere. It is a health hazard. What about the safety of my family?"

**"Our taxes are going up and so is the water in our basements."**

Ahmed is an autoworker at the local Ford Rouge plant. He was born and raised in Dearborn.

"This was unheard of before 2007," he said. "In 2007, back then, we had a class action lawsuit that was settled against Dearborn and Detroit. This is not normal. It is as if we live in a flood zone. Enough is enough! Our taxes are going up and so is the water in our basements.

"It is a custom for Arabic people to deck out their basements, to

really make use of the space. People put a lot of money into fixing their basements. So, a lot of these people you see here have probably lost entire kitchens, beds, furniture, TVs, that sort of thing.

“Whose fault is this? If it’s not the city, then they need to show us that it isn’t their fault. We’re showing up, we’re proving evidence of all our damage, but it’s like a one-way street. It’s their turn to prove to us that this is not their fault.

“Apparently, two out of three pumps failed again. So, I’m not just here for me; I’m here for all the residents of Dearborn. And yes, we can take it to the insurance company and the city, but look—I don’t want the money, I want the problem fixed.

“On top of it all, they just sent out the tax bills. Most people just got theirs in the mail. The flood happened last week, so bills were sent out after that. You’d think they would have the sense to maybe hold off on sending tax bills out given the disaster.”

### **“Who’s going to replace everything we lost?”**

Cleo is a homemaker. She has lived in Dearborn for nearly 20 years. She said: “My husband woke me up in the middle of the night and told me that the sewer was backing up. I ran downstairs and there was over two feet of water! It seriously damaged my basement. We lost a fridge, washer, dryer, a bed, and the most valuable thing: our memories and photos.

“Where is the mayor? Where is everybody? They are hiding. In 2014, we got zilch. Not an effing penny. So, what I want to know is, who’s gonna pay my big fat bill? Who’s going to replace everything we lost?

“My husband has been out of work. He had a heart attack last month but is back to work already. So, he cannot help me move all this and clean all that. And I am a two-year breast cancer survivor.

“I don’t want to be touching all of this disgusting sewage. But where else am I going to go? What am I supposed to do? Who’s going to pay for my furnace? I had to buy three new appliances. I needed a washer and dryer to wash my clothes after living in filth. What am I supposed to do?”

### **“Every single person is impacted.”**

Zima, Jesse and Hash were all born and raised in Dearborn. Jesse told the WSWs, “It was raining outside, so I went to check on the basement. A little bit of water can be normal, but this was different. It was all brown water, it didn’t smell right, and as the night went on it just kept getting worse.

“We had to get rid of all the walls in the basement. Somewhat lucky for us, we never actually finished fixing our basement [after the 2014 flood], so getting rid of the walls wasn’t that big of a deal. But we rely on our basement. We have our furnace, washer and dryer down there—the type of stuff you expect to be able to keep in a basement.

“Lucky for us we had savings, but a lot of people don’t have that privilege. I don’t know what needs to happen in order to fix this. Raise taxes? But we’re already paying, we shouldn’t have to pay more. And it’s all hearsay at this point as to why it happened again,

but what we’ve heard is that the pump station was down for two hours during the storm. Why don’t they have backup generators?”

One speaker at the rally told the crowd, “I have six children. We have no hot water. My entire house stinks. I go outside to get a breath of fresh air and the outside stinks. I have maggots in my trash. Mice are coming.

“The insurance company came and said we aren’t going to get much. So, who will pay for what I lost? My family is starting to get sick. My cat has been throwing up. I can smell the mold growing in the walls. But I was told that I was not allowed to remove the walls until the insurance company came, and they didn’t even get here until yesterday, so now the mold damage is done.”

Another speaker asked, “Where are the elected officials? Today, yesterday, for the last 10 years? Are we second-class citizens? We left countries with miserable systems to come here and we expect better than this. Our grandparents came here for opportunity and helped build this city. So, we will not allow this city to deteriorate.”

Another attendee noted that a significant portion of the city budget is spent on the police force. “Unless the cops are gonna help us pick up all our trash that’s been sitting in the street since the weekend, I don’t really think we need to be giving them any more money,” he said.

While residents were protesting the health hazards from raw sewage and lack of trash collection, President Joe Biden was visiting Michigan—but not to speak with flood victims. He strolled through an orchard and ate cherry pie in a northern Michigan vacation spot with Democratic Governor Gretchen Whitmer and Senators Gary Peters and Debbie Stabenow.

Whitmer told the press: “I’m the ‘fix the damn roads’ governor, so I talk infrastructure with everybody, including the president. We haven’t had a conversation about specific projects, but certainly with the incredible flooding that we suffered a week and a half ago, infrastructure is on everyone’s mind.

“That’s why [Biden’s] infrastructure package is so important. That’s also why I got the president rocky road fudge from Mackinac Island for his trip here.”

Vice President Kamala Harris had been scheduled to visit Detroit but abruptly canceled her appearance after the flooding severely damaged much of the area.

In contrast, one protester told the crowd: “We are living in America. We are supposed to be celebrating the Declaration of Independence this weekend. We are supposed to have the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, but how the hell can you pursue happiness when you are literally cleaning crap out of your house?”



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