Boil-water notice lifted in Jackson, Mississippi, but serious problems remain

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After nearly two months, the boil-water notice for the city of Jackson, Mississippi was lifted on September 15, following the resumption of water service across the city.

Since late July, the state's health department instructed the more than 150,000 residents of the state's capital to bring all water used for consumption, food preparation, and hygiene to a boil, after harmful bacteria were detected in cloudy water coming from residents' taps.

Then, at the end of August, torrential rains—fueled by climate change—led to the cresting of the Pearl River. Flood water knocked out one of the city's two water treatment plants, leaving Jackson residents with either low or no water pressure to perform basic necessities, such as flushing toilets.

Mississippi Republican Governor Tate Reeves confirmed during a news conference Thursday that water pressure had been fully restored and the boil-water notice lifted. "Since the state of Mississippi stepped in to fix Jackson's water system, we've significantly increased the quantity of water produced. We've restored water pressure to the city. We've installed an emergency rental pump. We've fixed and re-installed broken parts on-site, and we've monitored and tested water quality," Reeves said.

"On Tuesday, the Mississippi State Department of Health [MSDH] began officially conducting tests of the water quality," the governor explained. "They collected 120 samples for two consecutive days. We can now announce we have restored clean water to the city of Jackson."

The city of Jackson's last update on Wednesday, September 14, said investigative sampling was underway, but the system was not ready for full sampling, requiring a report and clearance from the MSDH. During the Thursday news conference, a reporter asked Reeves whether the city knew if full sampling began Tuesday. Reeves responded nervously, "I don't read the city's daily reports and I don't think you should, either."

The lifting of the boil-water notice came just a week after a video went viral on Twitter showing coffee-brown water coming from a resident's faucet. The MSDH issued a warning, while lifting the boil-water notice, that those who are pregnant or five years-of-age or younger should use an NSF 53 water filter or bottled water for drinking and cooking. One incredulous resident commented on Facebook underneath a video of Reeves announcing the lifting of the boil-water notice, demanding the governor, "Prove it's safe! Let's see him drink a glass of water from a faucet from the affected location!!"

Moreover, privatization of the city's water system remains on the table, utilizing the under-funding of the essential system to justify handing it over to corporate conglomerates in order to extract profit. Water and sewage infrastructure has only been repaired to the point of restoring "clean" water back to the residents, leaving the city in a precarious position. There has been no plan put forward by Reeves, or the city's Democratic Mayor, Chokwe Antar Lumumba, to overhaul the city's water systems, which would only cost an estimated $1 billion.

Reeves' remarks highlight the unwillingness of either capitalist party to appropriately address a social crime—a crime for which they bear responsibility. Stop-gap repairs on dilapidated and crumbling infrastructure is the official response from the state. "The system is still imperfect, and we're going to address issues throughout the duration of the state's response. It is possible, although I pray not inevitable, that there will be further interruption. We cannot perfectly predict what will go wrong with such a broken system," Reeves stated.

Moreover, Reeves is receiving major backlash due to dismissive comments he made the day after the lifting of the boil advisory: "I've got to tell you it is a great day to be in Hattiesburg. It's also, as always, a great day to not be in Jackson," he quipped, continuing, "I feel like I

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should take off my emergency management director hat and leave it in the car and take off my public works director hat and leave it in the car."

In other words, Reeves does not care one iota about the people of Jackson. Many have spoken out against the governor on the Twitter post of the video, with one saying, "This is who we have to depend on to fix the water crisis in Jackson Mississippi ... what a joke this guy is." Yet another wrote, "Imagine your governor implying that water is only for those that can pay. Isn't sanitation and drinkable water a basic human right?"

With winter arriving just in a few short months, the residents of Jackson face the possibility of yet another cold snap as they did in 2021, which resulted in pipes freezing over and bursting, leaving thousands without water for weeks.

Lumumba once declared he would make Jackson "the most radical city on the planet." What has he achieved for the residents of Jackson? Under his mayoral reign, the water system went virtually neglected, save for the routine funding allotted to maintain the system each year, but not without allowing the infrastructure to continue to degrade, with no demands for the funds necessary to overhaul the system.

Jackson's residents can expect continued hardships, including the possibility of another sales tax increase floated by Lumumba even as soaring inflation pushes workers' already meager wages down.

As the right to clean water, a necessity for life, remains under constant threat under the auspices of the Democrats and Republicans, workers must break with these parties and enact their own demands to ensure and safeguard the necessities of life to all, ending the subordination all social and economic life to private profit.

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