

\$87 million Flint water line settlement announced

By James Brewer
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In what the media is hailing as a “victory for Flint residents,” a federal judge approved a settlement Tuesday in which the state of Michigan will pay \$87 million for replacing service lines in the city over the next three years. An additional \$10 million is to be held in reserve for “unexpected costs.”

The lawsuit that led to the settlement was brought against the State of Michigan by several groups, including Concerned Pastors for Social Action, Natural Resources Defense Council, American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan and Flint resident Melissa Mays, who heads the local activist group Water You Fighting For.

US District Judge David Lawson, who presided over the settlement, gave the following characterization. “In my view the settlement agreement is fair, adequate, reasonable and consistent with the public interest and it furthers the objectives of the safe water drinking act [sic].” The federal Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) establishes the standards for public drinking water supplies throughout the US. Lawson made a point of praising Michigan Governor Rick Snyder—who is responsible for the disaster in Flint—saying that without his cooperation the settlement would not have been possible.

The \$87 million mandated by the settlement will be added to the \$100 million recently appropriated by the federal government to fix the pipes, an amount far below the actual amount needed, according to many estimates. The wording in the settlement outlines a program of replacing 18,000 lead service lines in the city by the end of 2020—6,000 each year.

At the same time, an exit strategy is provided for Michigan aid to Flint. After September 1, all nine water and filter distribution centers will be closed after beginning a phase out starting in May. The

door-to-door distribution of bottled water, a demand raised in the original lawsuit, was ruled out. A call-in service for residents to get delivery of water within 24 hours can be ended by the end of June, if pending results of lead-in-water testing being conducted by the Environmental Protection Agency come in below the action level of 15 parts per billion.

Next month will mark three years since Flint’s longtime safe water source, the Detroit water system, was switched to the Flint River, without proper treatment. It took 18 months before Flint residents—with the aid of water and health experts—were able to expose the lies of state functionaries and force the state to switch back to Detroit water. In the meantime, the corrosive Flint River water leached lead from the city’s antiquated water infrastructure, poisoning Flint residents. Even after switching back to the original Lake Huron-treated water source supplied by Detroit, the water is not only not safe to drink, but residents’ lives continue to be disrupted.

Basic activities such as cooking, personal hygiene and cleaning are onerous without safe water. In addition, home values have plummeted as a result of the water crisis, making it hard for residents to relocate or even refinance their homes. Adding insult to injury, the city of Flint has resumed water shutoffs, after the state declared it would no longer subsidize residents’ water bills.

The replacement of lead and galvanized service lines has become an urgent necessity, since the corrosive water has destroyed the protective layer inside lead pipes, causing high levels of lead in the water due to leaching. Galvanized iron pipes must also be replaced because of the lead buildup in their inner walls.

In March of last year Mayor Karen Weaver initiated a service line replacement program to much fanfare,

called “Fast Start.” Since then, only a woefully small number of 800 service lines have been replaced.

While the news media is reporting the settlement in the most glowing of terms, citing many who declare it to be a “victory for Flint,” a large number of residents view it as too little too late.

The announcement of this settlement comes shortly after the city of Flint announced the resumption of water shutoffs in order to compel residents to pay their water bills—calculated at the highest rates in the country—for water that is unsafe to drink. Only weeks ago it was revealed that state of Michigan authorities—who are responsible for the disaster in Flint—would no longer subsidize residents’ water bills, meaning that residents are now responsible for the full amount.

The following are some of the comments Flint residents made on a Facebook page in response to the settlement.

Linda Turner: “It’s going to take 3 years and the south end won’t see any replacement until the third year in all probability. That means that we are going to have to buy bottle water for 3 years AND pay for the poison that they call water.”

Deborah Beck: “Burns I will never drink the water again. Been lied to too many times.”

Gladyes Williamson: “LOL! Water line replacement what a joke! If it doesn’t include ALL service lines and pipes then we get a system that is still broken for the majority!!!...without disaster status they’ll wait for us to be forced out, land bank will take owner ship of the walked away homes and the County will proceed to create the master plan!! And it don’t include most of the Flint population!”

James Milton: “The PODs [water distribution points] could close as early as May or June. Forcing people to buy water, water filters and cartridges out of pocket.

“We have yet to see someone go to prison for this disaster.”

Kitty Bucher: “What are the elderly, disabled and homebound people supposed to do? This is outrageous!”

Barbra Caldwell: “This is soooo horrible. what about the ones that are not able to go anywhere? Why is there not public outcry to this injustice everywhere?”

Meanwhile, the city of Flint says it is sending 31 more residential customers shutoff notices. If they don’t pay on their water bills, they will lose service as

early as April 10.

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Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>