

Nothing resolved as Flint water crisis nears fifth anniversary

By Sheila Brehm
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Flint, Michigan has not returned to normal. The end of April will mark the fifth anniversary of the water crisis, when the water source was switched to the toxic Flint River without adding corrosion controls, causing lead and other bacteria to leach into the drinking water. None of the underlying issues, including the replacement of the water infrastructure and numerous health problems, have been resolved.

All those who presided over the poisoning of the population and its cover-up remain at large, having never been charged, let alone prosecuted, for their crimes. These include former Republican Governor Rick Snyder, Democratic state Treasurer Andy Dillon, numerous state-appointed emergency managers, and officials from the state-run MDHHS (Michigan Department of Health and Human Services) and MDEQ (Michigan Department of Environmental Quality). It appears that the new Democratic administration of Governor Gretchen Whitmer is trying to wrap up the legal proceedings as quickly and with as little political fallout as possible.

Last year, preliminary hearings dragged through the court system for several months to determine if there was enough evidence for anyone to be bound over for trial. To date, not a single trial has been held, nor has anyone been held accountable. The preliminary hearings were halted after Whitmer became governor. No new dates have been set.

The photo posted above sums up the almost indescribable conditions facing the working class population in Flint. The photo was taken at around 7 A.M. on Thursday, February 28 by Beth Moody. Her Facebook post reads: "This line is waiting to get water in Flint, Michigan. It was about 2 miles down Dort Highway and around the corner for who knows how far. Don't let anyone tell you there is no water crisis."

To emphasize the point, her post goes on to note the recent death of Jassmine McBride, a young woman who contracted Legionnaire's Disease in August 2014, during the height of the Flint water crisis. She became the 13th Flint resident to die from the disease since the authorities switched the city's water source.

In the 1930s, during the Great Depression, there were bread lines. But today, in 2019, there are water lines.

Every Thursday morning, Nestlé distributes free bottled water for which residents line up for hours. The state of Michigan halted its distribution last April under the direction of Snyder.

Flint residents do not consume the water from their taps. Besides being a very poor substitute for the replacement of the aged water infrastructure, Nestlé's "giveaway" is a drop in the ocean compared to the massive profits the company makes from the spring water it bottles for Ice Mountain and Pure Life, just two of its 51 labels.

The largest bottled water company in the world pays a mere \$200 annual fee for taking spring water from Michigan. Nestlé's 2018 agreement with the state of Michigan allows the multinational conglomerate to pump 570,000 gallons per day--two-and-a-half times what it would take to provide for every person in Flint. Last year, the MDEQ awarded Nestlé the right to draw 167 percent more water from the state's aquifers than it did in 2017.

Evart, Michigan, about 140 miles northwest of Flint, is one of three Nestlé water-pumping locations in the state. Because Nestlé owns the wells it is pumping, the company only pays \$200 in administrative fees to authorize groundwater extraction, plus a one-time \$5,000 fee for permit application review.

To put things in perspective: Nestlé pays \$200 for 210 million gallons a year. An average Flint family

pays the city between \$120 and \$200 each month for water, which is not safe to drink from the tap.

Given these conditions of everyday life, it is not surprising that the article published on the *World Socialist Web Site* about the recent funeral of Jassmine McBride struck a nerve in Flint, across the United States and internationally. Tens of thousands shared the article on social media because it expresses the reality of present conditions, contrary to mainstream claims that “the crisis is over and the water is fine.”

The comments posted on Facebook give a picture of growing political opposition to the entire political order. A common theme refers to the tremendous amount of attention Flint received in the run-up to the 2016 elections, when politicians from Barack Obama to Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders traveled to Flint and promised to help its residents.

Kent, for example, wrote: “So many people think the Flint Water Crisis is over. Although the news networks, cameras and lights are gone, the crisis remains!”

Similarly, Tim wrote: “2 movies made about this Flint water crisis. Another movie made about Flint, Mi police department not getting the popular funding to protect the citizens of Flint. And yet still no fresh clean water, no new water pipelines, folks still dying and being poisoned, etc. If they don’t want to listen, than we the people are going to make them listen. It’s time.”

There is growing anger that no one has been held accountable. Jackie declared: “Snyder, Calley and Schuette are guilty of murder and must be prosecuted! Enough!”

Barrington added: “Shameful. Let's send all those responsible for the poison water crisis to prison.”

Sheryl wrote: “Those who switched the water or knew of it being switched and stood by and did nothing all need to be held accountable to murder in my eyes. They should be behind bars. And there are still others who may not be dead or dying, but are dealing with lifelong health issues due to this, and children whose exposure will negatively affect their ability to learn, which will impact their life forever.”

Many others expressed their opposition to Trump and the building of a wall against immigrants. For example, Susan declared, “I can’t believe the wall that Trump wants is more important than this nasty water that the people of America drink and take a shower with... The

water should be fixed. This has been going on for years. It is horrible how some people live in Flint with horrible water. People are dying, children are suffering. This place called America is falling apart fast.”

Heather asked, “Why is trump invading another nation under the guise of humanitarian aid when he still hasn’t done one dang thing to help his own people in Flint? It’s time to invade Michigan, Mr.President. This is the True American Crisis. It claimed its latest victim.”

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