

Michigan attorney general seizes cell phone of former governor Snyder in probe of Flint water crisis

By James Brewer
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The Michigan State Attorney General's Office confirmed Monday that it had obtained search warrants to seize cell phones, laptop computers and iPads of former Governor Rick Snyder and dozens of other state officials as part of an ongoing criminal investigation into the Flint water crisis.

In addition to those belonging to Snyder, the devices of 65 other current or former officials were acquired by the prosecution team under the newly-elected Democratic administration of Governor Gretchen Whitmer. The officials whose state-owned devices are being seized include former senior adviser Richard Baird, Lt. Governor Brian Calley, Chief of Staff Dick Posthumus and former cabinet members Nick Lyon of the Department of Health and Human Services and Dan Wyant, who headed the Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ), the agency responsible for drinking water safety.

In a public statement, Michigan Solicitor General Fadwa Hammoud declared that "the prosecution is aware of substantial potential evidence that was not provided to the original prosecution team from the onset of the investigation." He continued: "The team is currently in the process of obtaining this evidence through a variety of means, including search warrants. The team is also conducting a thorough review of existing and newly received evidence pertaining to the Flint water crisis."

These measures do not guarantee that criminal charges will be laid against the culpable individuals. Neither Snyder nor any other top official has been charged to date in connection with a criminal conspiracy that led to the deaths of dozens of people and poisoned the water supply of a city of 100,000

residents, mostly moderate and low-income workers.

The longer-term health effects of lead poisoning on thousands of residents of the former center of General Motors car production, including children, remain unknown. Certain things, however, are known. The toxic water was responsible for an outbreak of Legionnaires Disease that sickened possibly hundreds and killed from 13 to more than 100 people. Almost 300 miscarriages resulted and the fertility rate in the city fell by 12 percent.

The economic devastation to working class families, including the collapse of home values, massive health bills and expenses related to relying on bottled water continues to mount five years after the state and city switched the water supply to the heavily polluted Flint River.

The Attorney General's Office is saying as little as possible about how it will proceed. It made the announcement about the seizure of cell phones and other devices on Monday only in response to questions raised by the Associated Press after the AP acquired the May 19 search warrant through a Freedom of Information Act request.

Special Prosecutor Todd Flood, who led the criminal proceedings under the previous attorney general, Bill Schuette, a Republican in Snyder's Republican administration, was fired by Hammoud on April 29.

Monday's announcement raises some obvious questions about the investigation that has been conducted into the poisoning of Flint. Why has it taken so long to obtain this evidence? Why has not a single official been successfully prosecuted?

The prosecutions, launched over three years ago by Schuette with much hype about providing "justice for

the people of Flint,” were a combination of damage control and cover-up. Beyond the initial crime of switching the water supply at the behest of financial interests that were building a new pipeline from Lake Huron as part of a scheme to privatize the city’s water supply, state officials under Snyder and federal officials under the Obama administration repeatedly lied to residents distressed by foul-smelling and discolored tap water, rashes and other health problems linked to the water supply, telling them the water was safe to drink and bathe with.

If it wasn’t for the determined and persistent protests by Flint residents, who enlisted the help of independent journalists and scientists to test the water, the population might still be using the toxic water.

Snyder to this day claims that he was unaware of any problem with Flint water until October, 2015, well *after* news of toxic levels of lead and other chemicals in the water supply had been widely reported in the local, national and world media, and just days before he ordered the switch back to the city’s original treated water source.

Between April 2016 and June 2017, 15 mid- and low-level state and local employees were indicted on various criminal charges, including involuntary manslaughter. The pretrial hearings dragged on at a glacial pace until the November 2018 gubernatorial election, in which Schuette was the losing candidate.

After the defeat of the Republican campaign, the lame duck Schuette made plea deals with some of the key defendants, allowing them to accept minor misdemeanor charges. Michael Prysby, Stephen Busch, Liane Shekter Smith and Adam Rosenthal of the MDEQ, key players in the conspiracy to violate federal water treatment standards, falsify water sampling results, and silence opposition in the population, are now off the hook. They could have provided insight into the role of Snyder and his right-hand man Richard Baird.

The devices that are coming into the possession of the new prosecutors are in addition to “millions of pages” of documents from the water crisis which the new team claims had not been turned over. Some of the seized phones are encrypted, requiring that a warrant be issued to the Department of Technology, Management and Budget. The warrant requests access to photos, videos, audio files, emails, chat messages, web

addresses, user names and passwords.

The crime against Flint was bipartisan. State Treasurer Andy Dillon, a former top Democratic state legislator, worked with Snyder on drafting the emergency manager law that was utilized to impose a bankers’ dictatorship on Flint, supplanting the elected mayor and City Council (both of which supported the water switch). Dillon personally approved the scheme to remove the city from its longstanding Detroit water source to sign onto the Karegnondi Water Authority (KWA) pipeline scheme. The CEO of the KWA, Jeff Wright, is a Democrat. The city’s mayor at the time of the switch was Democrat Dayne Walling.

In May of 2016, President Obama visited Flint, where he downplayed the seriousness of the health effects of lead poisoning and vouched for the safety of the water.

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