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DEQ Takes Blame On Flint Water; Ananich Unforgiving

The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality's (DEQ) top official today admitted his department mishandled the city of Flint's water crisis, pointing to departmental issues with experience and protocol in corrosion control efforts.

Director Dan **WYANT** announced in a statement that staff used a federal protocol they believed was appropriate. Those testing steps "would have been correct for a city less than 50,000 people, but not for a city of nearly 100,000," he said.

In response to that finding, DEQ Chief Deputy Jim **SYGO** was named the interim chief of the department's Office of Drinking Water and Municipal Assistance. Liane Shekter **SMITH**, the former chief of DEQ's Office of Drinking Water and Municipal Assistance, will be reassigned and "given duties as assigned," Wyant said.

The information came to light last week through a combination of an internal review and during the collection of correspondence between the DEQ and the Environmental Protection Agency, Wyant said. The results of that correspondence were first published in *The Detroit News*.

Gov. Rick **SNYDER**'s administration has also called for an independent third party review, plans for which are actively underway, spokesperson Sara **WURFEL** said. Wyant said the department also plans to continue its own internal review, and that more action would come as additional findings come to light.

Public furor over the water quality began shortly after the city switched its water supply from Detroit's water system to the Flint River in 2014, but reached critical mass in recent weeks after a study found lead levels in children's blood have increased since the city switched off of Detroit's water supply.

Today, the Flint lawmaker leading the charge for immediate action on the crisis took a verbal hammer to the state and federal bureaucracy for allowing the problem to occur and continue.

Senate Minority Leader Jim **ANANICH** (D-Flint) said it remains unclear whether the mistakes made by the state were deliberate misapplications of the law, or negligence. Neither of those possibilities is acceptable, he said.

"What is clear from several, now available documents is that certain MDEQ and EPA staff chose to protect their reputations rather than the health of the citizens and children of Flint," Ananich said.

In a follow-up statement, Ananich added that the Legislature should have a robust role in any investigation and in "ensuring those responsible for Flint's water crisis are held accountable."

Wyant said he was convinced the staff involved in the program believed they were doing their job right, and that the state took appropriate steps once it became clear there could be a health threat to Flint residents.

"They were operating under historical protocols they believed to be correct, and they weren't," Wyant said. "We

are fully committed to a full internal and external review and want to make those findings absolutely transparent.”

Wyant's announcement concluded that the department will “learn from this” and that those who brought the issue to light deserve credit. We will make necessary changes to see to it that our program becomes a national leader in public health protection.”

“All who brought this issue to the department deserve credit for bringing it forward,” he added. “Lead is a serious issue, particularly for young people, and we take it seriously.”

Michigan Democratic Party Chair Brandon **DILLON** said the department's botched handling of the situation was less a question of experience and protocol, but rather one of competency and judgment.

Dillon called for Wyant and everyone else involved in the decision making-process regarding Flint's drinking water should be immediately removed, arguing that a pledge to correct procedures moving forward does not negate the negative effects of mistakes already made.

“You may be able to fix the problem of Flint's drinking water going forward, but the damage done to the health of thousands of Flint's children is irreversible,” Dillon said in a statement.

“For months, warnings from the EPA about the safety of Flint's water system, sent directly to DEQ, were repeatedly ignored,” he added. “That's not just a glitch in the system, it's an institutional failure caused by incompetence and a lack of leadership.”

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Flint Mayoral Election Rests On Who Residents Blame For Its Water

(FLINT) -- The Department of Environment Quality (DEQ) admission of fault in the Flint water crisis may have come today, but in the city, which is two weeks from a municipal election, the blame game is far from over.

Incumbent mayor Dayne **WALLING** seized upon the statement from DEQ chief Dan **WYANT** as validation both of the state's full culpability, and the city -- especially his administration's -- innocence.

"This was the state's fault," Walling told reporters today. "Flint was relying on the information provided to MDEQ, and clearly that information was wrong."

His opponent in the race, Karen **WEAVER**, a clinical psychologist running for office for the first time, did not seem to stand much chance against Walling emerging from the August primary. She has significantly less funding and fewer major endorsements.

But the attention fixed on Flint's water woes throughout the state and nation has revealed a pivotal, albeit tragic, opportunity for her campaign.

For Weaver, this is the issue that will define her candidacy -- and the outcome at the polls Nov. 3. She insists the Mayor was fully aware of the dangers of Flint's river water and Walling is falsely casting his administration as an ingénue.

"I want people to know the Mayor knew," Weaver said. "We know he knew this information a while ago. He had access to this information back in the summertime. He knew it, and he covered it up because he wanted to

get through this campaign."

Weaver contests Walling's claim that he was unaware the city and DEQ were not properly treating the city's water.

"He knew that it's the law for a city to have corrosion control for a city that's 50,000 or more," she said. "He knew it and his staff knew it, and he chose to remain quiet. . . . The buck stops with him and the city."

Former Lt. Gov. John **CHERRY**, who lives in the area and follows local politics, said "because the issue's so huge," "anything could go" in the upcoming election.

"In the end, the things that perhaps are not accurate about what has transpired isn't going to make any difference in the election," Cherry said. "People are going to believe what they're going to believe."

Flint's mayor is full time position that pays \$91,801 a year.

Weaver emerged from the August primary on top of two other challengers but behind Walling, and her resources appeared paltry in comparison.

The most recent campaign filings reported Walling had emerged from the primary with \$11,796, after raising a total of more than \$146,000. Weaver, meanwhile, had less than \$200 left after raising a total of \$23,742. Weaver did not declare her candidacy until February of this year, though.

Still, in the period the filings covered, from mid-July to mid-August, she reportedly out-raised Walling. She gathered \$7,680 where Walling only managed \$4,295.

She said the prominence of Flint's water crisis has been an inadvertent boon to her fundraising efforts, but was loathe to reveal much more about her campaign's financial outlook.

"It has helped me, because people are angry and disappointed," Weaver said. "Because politics have been put over the lives of the people, the health and the well-being of the community. The children of this community have been impacted, so people are coming out."

In the next two weeks, both intend to canvass each of Flint's neighborhoods and work the phones. Weaver estimated she has assembled about 150 volunteers, while Walling put his number at about 200 in total. He said he has specific targets for each of Flint's nine wards and Weaver declined to name specific strategies for outreach.

Their endorsements, though, could not be more dissimilar.

Walling has received endorsements from the local AFL-CIO, which comprises a number of smaller labor unions, a smattering of building trade unions as well as the Flint & Genesee Chamber of Commerce. He also has endorsements from the chair and vice-chair of the Genesee County Commission. Some community activists also back him.

Weaver, however, has endorsement from associations representing Flint's police officers and fire fighters; the former had previously endorsed Walling. She also has more than 50 pastors backing her, including some of the most prominent in Flint, in addition to a litany of community and neighborhood leaders.

The United Auto Workers has remained neutral in the election. Walling said the union interviewed both candidates and came to the decision recently. This represents a change for the union, which chose no candidates

in 2007, but did back him in 2009 and 2011.

Flint's nine-seat City Council is split between the candidates. The president, Joshua **FREEMAN**, and councilmember Jacqueline **POPLAR** have come out for Walling. Weaver has secured endorsements from councilmembers Eric **MAYS**, Monica **GALLOWAY** and Herbery **WINFREY**.

Walling, said he would aim to emphasize his track record in the run-up to Election Day. Key to this will be his ability to distance himself from the water crisis.

"We have a comprehensive plan, we have a good team in place, and I'm asking voters to look carefully at my record," Walling said. "I hope they'll see the experience and the ethics that I bring to this job and give me another four years."

Weaver's success appears to rest on her ability to mobilize the residents who associate Walling's administration with contaminated water. This morning a small handful of them gathered outside the city's municipal building to call for Walling's resignation. Although they weren't part of Weaver's campaign, they all intend to back her in the election.

Arthur **WOODSON**, a community activist and former nuclear, biological and chemical specialist for the U.S. military, has been active throughout the crisis. Although he has his own technically intricate arguments about Walling's culpability, he said the health effects Flint residents showed to officials after the switch to river water in April 2014 and the period of inaction that followed is damning enough.

"They knew back then," Woodson said. "(DEQ) knew about it, and Flint knew about it, so all of them need to go."

Sent from my iPhone