

From: Wells, Eden (DHHS)
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To: ewells@umich.edu
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Sent: Tuesday, December 29, 2015 10:49 AM
To: CommOffice <CommOffice@michigan.gov>
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Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder, legislative leaders name biggest disappointments of 2015

MLive.com – December 29, 2015, By Jonathan Oosting

LANSING, MI — The Flint drinking water crisis was the biggest disappointment of 2015, according to Gov. Rick Snyder and Senate Minority Leader Jim Ananich, who have very different perspectives on the situation.

Snyder says the state acted swiftly once it was alerted to the link between elevated blood-lead levels in children and Flint's switch to a local river for drinking water.

But the state did too little too late, according to Ananich, D-Flint, who continues to criticize the administration and call for legislative hearings on the crisis.

MLive.com, in a series of year-end interviews and media roundtables, asked the governor and legislative leaders to describe their biggest disappointment of 2015.

Read their responses below, [click here](#) to find out what they described as their biggest accomplishments of the year and check back tomorrow to learn about their top priorities for 2016.

Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder: Flint water crisis

The biggest challenge, the thing that you really would have liked to see not be an issue, would have been the Flint water situation. Again, that's not something you'd ever want to see in terms of elevated lead levels, and as we were alerted to those issues, we became proactive and worked hard to address them by offering free water testing, free water filters, free blood testing, follow-up work, helping in the transition back to the Great Lakes Water Authority. This whole issue, we've gone into the schools now to do testing of the water down to the particular fixture. That surprised me that there was no federal or state requirement to do water testing in schools if you didn't happen to be on your own well. We found the issues tend to be isolated, actually, at the fixture. The drinking fountain itself. So the water doesn't have an issue in the system itself, coming in, and even throughout the school until it happens to hit a fixture that has particular problems, so far, in terms of what we've found.

Senate Majority Leader Arlan Meekhof: Courser-Gamrat affair and expulsion

The fact that you all had months and months of coverage on a couple House members that didn't end up very well. That light shines on all of us, and it was unfortunate, those poor choices on their part. (Editor's note: State Reps. Todd Courser and Cindy Garmat were forced out of office in September over allegations they misused taxpayer resources to hide their extra-marital affair. The House voted to expel Garmat roughly an hour after Courser resigned.)

Senate Minority Leader Jim Ananich: Flint water response

That's an easy one: the governor and his administration's total lack of urgency when it comes to the poisonous water in my community. Even today, they still seem to be missing the boat on the crisis in my community, the credibly that a number of individuals and departments have. This is not a political issue, this is a public health — basically an emergency disaster — issue, and that's how it should be treated. I think if everybody treated it that way, we'd have a lot more work and cooperation, we'd have a lot more action that would be moving in the right direction a lot quicker, and unfortunately that's not be the tact that they've taken.

House Speaker Kevin Cotter: Partisanship

The biggest disappointment, I would say overall, has been partisanship on a number of issues. For me, I think this really started, or at least it reared it's head during another disappointing process or development, which was the expulsion hearings (of Courser and Garmat). That became very partisan. It was a situation where there was unanimous support on the Republican side to expel two of our members, and unfortunately we went until the wee hours of the morning to get the 2/3 votes we needed because there was political gamesmanship going on that then continued into other areas — third-grade reading — it then continued to the bills we just passed (in December) regarding the data centers. It is something that is very prevalent, and it is disappointing. I certainly understand that we're going to have differences on policy, and that is to be expected, but to the extent that it is holding up things. Take the third-grade reading, for example. Take the expulsion vote. That wasn't about the subject matter of the vote, but rather that was how do we clobber each other. In this case, how do we clobber Republicans and try to take back control of the chamber.

House Minority Leader Tim Greimel: Lack of bipartisan solutions

I think there were some really great bipartisan solutions that we reached in the previous term. We saw Medicaid expansion. We saw the approach to provide assistance to the city of Detroit and allow it to emerge successfully from bankruptcy. Those are the kinds of bipartisan solutions that the people of Michigan expect and deserve, and it's disappointing that under the current House leadership, we have not seen those kinds of bipartisan solutions. I think the House Republicans have become increasingly dominated by the far right-wing conservative elements of their caucus and of the Republican party more broadly. As a result, I think we've seen more partisanship from them, and I think we've seen more ideology and less pragmatism and bipartisanship.

http://www.mlive.com/lansing-news/index.ssf/2015/12/michigan_gov_rick_snyder_legis_1.html

Auditor general findings set off Flint water debate

The Detroit News – December 28, 2015, By Jim Lynch

Findings compiled by Michigan's Office of the Auditor General have set off another debate about who is to blame for Flint's 18-month-long water crisis.

Two state lawmakers are blaming Flint's contaminated water on state environmental officials based on the auditor general's letter. A state spokesman, however, said the findings of state Auditor General Doug Ringler merely confirm what has already been reported.

The document, a set of answers to detailed questions from Senate Minority Leader Jim Ananich, D-Flint, and Rep. Sheldon Neeley, D-Flint, was released late last week. On Monday, Ananich and Sheldon charged state officials with being behind the 2014 decision to have Flint change the source of its drinking water to the Flint River from the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department's Lake Huron.

"This is another example of how the state failed, initially, and continues to fail, by not treating this situation like the emergency it is," Neeley said in a statement. "We need answers, we need action and we need them sooner rather than later."

In the letter, though, Ringler indicates that when Flint and the Detroit water system officials failed to reach an interim agreement on water supply after Flint decided to build its own water authority, "the City of Flint notified DEQ through a permit request of its intent to operate the Flint WTP (Water Treatment Plant) full time using the Flint River."

While under the control of an emergency manager appointed by Gov. Rick Snyder, the city began drawing its drinking water from the Flint River in April 2014. The cost-saving move immediately led to complaints from residents about the taste, color and smell of the water coming from their taps.

In July, August and September, testing results began to paint a darker picture — children in certain areas of the city were beginning to show signs of lead contamination.

The city has since switched back to its previous water supplier, the Detroit water department. A task force is charged with figuring out how Flint's water situation went wrong, including an examination of how corrosion controls were not used in bringing the river water into homes.

Corrosion controls, like phosphates, are added before water leaves the treatment plant to help coat pipelines to prevent lead from leaching in. Following the switch to the Flint River, no such corrosion controls were added. And many of the questions surrounding the problems in Flint center on who decided to omit corrosion controls.

For months, DEQ officials have been under the microscope for their handling of the issue. Some of the harshest criticism has come from those who believe state workers purposely misled the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency over whether corrosion controls were in use.

Critics point to a Feb. 27 email from a state employee to the federal agency contending that a corrosion control program was in place. The Auditor General's report lays out the resulting situation.

■ "It appears the EPA interpreted corrosion control program to mean that corrosion control treatment was in place."

■ "On April 23, 2015, the EPA again inquired as to what the Flint WTP was doing for corrosion control treatment."

■ "DEQ responded on April 24, 2015 that the Flint WTP was not practicing control treatment."

"Based on our review of this and other emails, we have no specific reason to believe that DEQ willingly misrepresented the information to the EPA," the report reads.

On Monday, Ananich contended the Auditor General findings put the blame on state officials.

“What’s clear is that corrosion control should have been used, and there are serious failings in our system that must be addressed,” Ananich said in a press release. He added that city officials voted in 2013 to switch to the Karegondi Water Authority — a new regional water supply system that is still under construction — but never addressed the issue of using the Flint River.

State environmental and health officials got a measure of support from the office of Snyder, a Republican.

“The letter from the Office of the Auditor General includes some criticisms, but also reflects that state officials were following accepted protocols, or in one case, an interpretation of the corrosion control program that the EPA later clarified,” said David Murray, the governor’s spokesman.

“But we need to do better in ensuring Flint residents have safe water and tracking children affected by elevated lead levels. We continue to work with the bipartisan task force that is reviewing all the actions at the state, local and federal level and is expected to offer recommendations in a month or so. Gov. Snyder is committed to working with Flint Mayor Weaver and officials on these issues.”

On Monday, DEQ Spokesman Brad Wurfel addressed the auditor general’s letter.

“The findings of the Auditor General are consistent with our findings at DEQ in our own internal review,” Wurfel said. “We appreciate their careful consideration of the issues they were asked to look at.”

<http://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/politics/2015/12/28/michigan-auditor-general-flint-water-debate/77982594/>

Bill Berry: Safe drinking water a sure bet no longer

The Cap Times – December 28, 2015, By Bill Berry

STEVENS POINT — There was a time when people in states like Wisconsin and Michigan could be sure that their drinking water was safe. Not anymore.

The stories of bad water in Kewaunee County in northeast Wisconsin and Flint, Michigan, in the Lower Peninsula differ in detail but are eerily similar on some important basics. And those basics point to state administrations that put business interests and government spending cuts above the health and well-being of their most vulnerable citizens.

Flint’s troubles began when it was being run by a state-appointed emergency manager. It changed its drinking water source from Detroit’s water system to the Flint River to save money. In a massive regulatory failure, state officials never required that the river water be treated to make it less corrosive, causing lead from plumbing and pipes to leach into the water supply.

Soon residents learned of rising levels of lead in the blood of Flint children. Lead poisoning can cause irreversible health and behavioral problems, and children exposed to too much can permanently lose IQ points.

As we learned last week, the state ignored conclusive evidence of lead poisoning and publicly dismissed research findings that linked lead in children’s blood to Flint water. Those findings were sent directly to Gov. Rick “Austerity” Snyder’s office. Now the state is claiming it made an honest

mistake. Mistake? You bet. Honest? Come on. The city reconnected to the Detroit water system in October, but local officials are still advising residents not to drink the water unless they're using a lead-clearing filter.

There was a time when this kind of malfeasance would be enough to end the political career of the likes of Snyder, but not in today's world.

Meanwhile, people in Kewaunee County are dealing with unsafe wells and a regulatory agency, the Department of Natural Resources, run by political appointees who are more interested in being "open for business" than protecting human health. It got so bad that citizens in Kewaunee County have petitioned the Environmental Protection Agency to step in and enforce clean water laws where the DNR has refused or claimed it doesn't have the authority to do so.

The problem in Kewaunee County is too many cows and too much manure. The county has nearly 100,000 cows, up 64 percent from 59,800 cattle in 1983. Large-scale farms have proliferated. The county is perched atop fragile karst topography, which allows pollutants to make their way to groundwater through cracks and fissures. So while large-farm operators might be doing everything according to current rules, the current rules aren't enough. And in the current framework of failing rules, the land has exceeded its carrying capacity.

Results of a study released this month show that more than one-third of wells in the county were found to be unsafe because they failed to meet health standards for drinking water. The study is significant because unlike previous ones, it was random. While the researchers caution that cow manure can't be blamed for the unsafe wells just yet, would anyone like to venture a bet?

Rather than stepping into the picture on behalf of citizens whose wells are tainted, state officials and Gov. Scott Walker have ignored or danced around the issue. What's clear about this administration is regardless of the environmental issue — metallic mining in northern Wisconsin, frac sand mining in western Wisconsin, cow manure in eastern Wisconsin — this administration will err on the wrong side of the rights of the little people.

But times may be changing. Local people are acting where their state has failed. In April, voters in the Kewaunee County OK'd a groundwater protection ordinance prohibiting manure spreading from Jan. 1 to April 15 on land with 20 feet or less of soil before reaching bedrock.

The trend in the Legislature, meanwhile, has been to reduce local powers. Flint, Michigan, might have some advice on that.

http://host.madison.com/ct/opinion/column/bill-berry-safe-drinking-water-a-sure-bet-no-longer/article_5b16a1c6-f680-57f4-b37a-5d98e081820b.html