

WATER, from page 4

school students. So the very water, life-giving system that half the state relies on now has substandard management and oversight of the very system that was once a world-class system. What happened in Detroit was, as they were rushing to seize the water department during the biggest contrived bankruptcy in the history of America, the largest asset was the water department, and Flint was the largest external customer to the water department. You had the city of Detroit offer Flint a water contract that would have actually saved Flint \$80 million over the course of 10 years. But you have the governor and the use of this private company that is interested in privatizing water globally actually advise Flint to purchase and invest in building their own water system, which was KWA, the Karegnondi Water Authority. Well, that system was never intended to provide potable water. What it was intended to do was provide water for when the governor is out of office – he already has plans to create a parallel system for fracking!

When you look at what has played out in both Detroit and Flint, the communities have been driven deeper into debt. They have less power over their municipal governance. They have less say-so in terms of their assets, and both cities right now are suffering from either the lack of access to clean, safe and affordable water or the fact that Flint is being forced to pay for poison water. What is even more egregious than what I already said is the fact that if you don't have running water in your household for 72 hours or more, you're in jeopardy of losing custody of your children! They are threatening people if they can't pay these enormous water rates, then they will lose their children. For poor folks, that's the most valuable asset that you have is your children. It's your hope; it's your belief there will be a better day. In order to get people to move out of the city of Detroit. Because right now they are waging a comeback, but that comeback is happening on the backs of working and poor folk.

We're sitting right now in the middle of a public health crisis. We have a hepatitis A epidemic. We have also had an uptick of cholera, an uptick of listeria. Some of these diseases are directly correlated with waterborne diseases. You have on top of that the fact that in Detroit, we have an older, concentrated population. Many of them are elders that deal with respiratory problems. You have a large population of children that are asthmatic, so many of them have breathing issues that require water and require cleaning.

There is a major issue around people being clinically dehydrated. We were the community from the grass roots that had to raise the question within the health system and Global Health Initiative to begin to even look at the correlation of the uptick of these infectious diseases and the fact the community didn't have water. Of course they push back on that issue once we got the evidence because Henry Ford (Foundation) told us that they knew the data was correct, that they supported the actions we were taking, but they had \$2.2 billion in contracts with Mayor (Mike) Duggan and the city of Detroit, and the mayor has a reputation of being very

WATER FACTS: PORTLAND VS. DETROIT

	PORTLAND	DETROIT
Typical monthly water bill	\$100*	\$75
Median household income	\$58,423 (2016)	\$26,249
Number of residential shut-offs, 2017	4,459	17,689 (Jan.-Oct.)

*Water accounts for only a third of the billing amount. The rest is fees from the Bureau of Environmental Services which manages stormwater, sewage and Portland Harbor fees.

Sources: Portland Water Bureau, U.S. Census, The Detroit News

vindictive, and they were worried that he would close those contracts if they stepped out with us and made this information public.

E.G.: *Last week, free bottled water for Flint was discontinued, with the state citing two years of test results showing the water is now safe, but the mayor of Flint is threatening to sue over the cutoff. This is the narrative we're getting in the national news. What do you see as being the issue on the ground there? Is the water safe, and is this becoming an issue of affordability as much as it is about lead poisoning?*

M.L.P.: It's both. It's affordability and it's poisoning. It's not just lead and contaminants in the water; there's also other toxins. There's phosphates. There are bacteria issues. So what you have is the very person that had come into the community, Marc Edwards, as an ally and an advocate for the people is actually now on the payroll of the governor. So we believe he's been bought and paid for at this point, so therefore the community can no longer trust his independent opinion. I believe the mayor is right on point with the position he is taking, which is to pursue litigation, because the governor is in his last year of his second term and his position is, he wants to be able to take a victory lap, if you will. So part of that victory lap would be impeded with the narrative that Flint is still having to consume bottled water. So what better way to make that narrative go away than to make the bottled water go away. What we know on the ground is my organization, one of the first organizations to deliver water relief to Flint. We have continued to support water relief to Flint. We will not stop until there is a restoration of water relief to Flint.

E.G.: *I read that We the People delivered more than 125 tons of safe, drinkable water to the residents of Detroit and Flint in 2015. Can you tell me a little bit more about your organization and how you're able to do this?*

M.L.P.: My organization was founded in 2008 by myself and four other women. Each of those women has an incredible resume in their own right, but at the time, we were just fighting for our children to have the right to quality public education. At that

point, the mayor was wanting to take over control of the Detroit public schools. We organized for five weeks, showed up with our children; we resisted that austerity and were successful.

Little did we know that was just part of the canary in the mine of what else they had in store for us. Over 80 percent of the bankruptcy was on the back of pensioners. We had no idea this was really a large scheme to take over and gentrify land and to

also take control over the largest asset and one of the most key assets of North America because Detroit sits on international waters. Also, 23 percent of commerce that comes into the country comes in by way of Detroit. Knowing those dynamics, we knew that we were in the crosshairs of big business and the oligarchs in terms of seizing control of our entire city. Out of that work, my business partner and I, who is also another founder of We

the People of Detroit, we begin to work on policy work for what I consider one of the greatest legislators of the history of Detroit, the honorable council member JoAnn Watson, and out of that work there was a rude awakening about what people were being told and what was really happening.

You had key cursors acting as the mayor and a City Council that was working in concert with big business to give away these assets. We begin, that day, working on our behalf to support her pushback against emergency management. At night we were organizing, on our free time, with other community activists to build community power to resist it. In 2013, a community activist, Charity Hicks, was arrested for just knocking on the door of her neighbors and friends to tell them there was imminent danger of having their water cut off. She was arrested and actually jailed.

For me, being a black woman and a mother, it became a personal assault on black women and on black families. We organized ourselves in about three or four days. I had past experience around emergency response. I headed up an eight-county emergency response team for children who were having psychiatric emergencies. We took that model and flipped it over to providing emergency

Recode promotes water equality, reuse in Portland

BY EMILY GREEN
SENIOR STAFF REPORTER

Portland-based nonprofit Recode organized the upcoming panel featuring Monica Lewis-Patrick. Recode promotes sustainable and equitable water systems across Oregon, Washington and California.

The visit from Detroit's "water warrior" is timely, said Recode Program Manager Maria Cahill, because her organization worries planned upgrades to Portland's water system could increase costs to ratepayers, and therefore exacerbate displacement of marginalized communities in Portland.

This concern comes as Portland Water Bureau works to install a filtration system by 2027 following positive tests for Cryptosporidium, a potentially harmful microorganism, in the Bull Run Watershed.

According to Cahill, the new system will "cost taxpayers more money and raise our water bills."

Portland Water Bureau spokesperson Jaymee Cuti confirmed that this upgrade will likely increase costs, however the city is looking to expand its water assistance program in response. (See "Portland's proposed water assistance expansion.")

"Over the past 10 years, the city's total water use has decreased by 13 percent while population has grown by 18 percent due to increasing water use efficiency by Portland water customers," explained Cuti. "The bureau anticipates lower total demands in 2045 than our current demand. Portland's water system is expected to continue meeting customer needs into the foreseeable future, even when factoring in climate change and population growth."

But given the increased costs to ratepayers, Cahill said Portland should consider a tiered system of billing. In this system, households that use more than their allocated monthly amount of water pay higher rates to subsidize low-income ratepayers. Allocations are typically based on the number of people in the household and other factors. She said this would make the city's billing system more equitable, and has already proven to be a successful model in some parts of the country, such as by Inland Empire Utilities Agency in San Bernardino County, Calif.

Another focus of Recode's policy-making efforts is the utilization of greywater and blackwater for reuse. Greywater is the dirty water that drains from laundry machines, bath tubs, showers and sinks, and blackwater is water containing sewage or water that drains from a garbage

See RECODE, page 7

See WATER, page 7