

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY
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FLINT, MICHIGAN, WATER CRISIS

Mr. REID. Madam President, in recent weeks the Nation has become concerned, afraid, and even outraged to learn that nearly 100,000 people who are residents of the city of Flint, MI, have been poisoned. About 9,000 of those poisoned are children under the age of 6 years.

Two years ago, in an effort to pinch pennies, an unelected emergency manager appointed by Governor Rick Snyder switched the water supply from the city of Flint, MI, water source to the Flint River. Water from the Flint River is contaminated with lead, bacteria that causes Legionnaires' disease, and lots of other bad things. As a result, the residents of Flint, MI, were forced to drink the water.

There is no trick photography here. This is a person in Flint, MI. You could go to any house you wanted to go to. This is the water that they were drinking and bathing in. It is hard to comprehend that this went on for such a long time.

Can you imagine taking a bath in this, brushing your teeth, or drinking it? How about bathing a new baby? This is your little bathtub.

Through no fault of their own, the people of Flint, MI, are being forced to endure a public health crisis that could have been avoided. This is a manmade crisis. We will never know the full extent of the damage to the people who live in Flint, MI—especially to the children. They have been harmed because they have been poisoned by the acts of the leadership in the State of Michigan, especially the Governor of the State of Michigan. The reckless decision to switch to unsafe drinking water was forced upon 100,000 people. These people in Flint, MI, are now exposed to water with high levels of lead—frighteningly high levels of lead—among other things. This is not just lead. There is bacteria, and they haven't determined the full extent of it. It is established.

I can remember when I first came to this body many, many years ago. I had the good fortune to chair a number of hearings in the environment committee dealing with lead poisoning.

At the time that we studied it, lead poisoning was lead that children ingested—children who lived in developments where there were large amounts of lead-based paint. The children who ate this lead—not on purpose—were not what they could have been. It affected their brains.

This lead in water, lead anyplace, affects the brain. It affects adults, too, but especially children. Lead causes serious problems for adults, as I mentioned, but it is especially dangerous for children, causing lifetime effects.

You can't get well. They have a program where they try to take the blood out and run it through a purifier. It takes a long time, but there are no safe levels of lead for children.

After the city made this wrong decision to switch its water source, it was really very quickly that the citizens of Flint complained that the water was discolored, and it also smelled. Everyone began to develop rashes.

The response of State government was appalling. Rick Snyder, the Governor of Michigan, is one of those who berates government all the time. Emails released from his office just last week referred to a resident who said she was told by a State nurse in January 2015, a little over a year ago—she was complaining about her son's elevated blood levels. The nurse told this woman: It is just a few IQ points. It is not the end of the world.

Can you imagine a health care worker telling someone: It is your baby, but it is just a few IQ points. No big deal. It is not the end of the world. This was a State nurse.

The water was so poisonous that General Motors, the manufacturer of automobile parts there, stopped using the source for their Flint engine operations because the parts corroded during the manufacturing process. They had to stop using this water. People were still drinking this water and bathing in this water.

Despite overwhelming evidence that a city in his State had lead poisoning, Governor Snyder failed to act and protect the people of Flint. This went on for a long time.

As Flint struggles to recover from this terrible public health problem, an investigation will determine who exactly is to blame for this reckless decision. We know who caused the problem.

This was a manmade disaster, as I said earlier, but now we must act to protect the residents of Flint. This protection should start with repairs to their water infrastructure. Like many cities—and there are quite a few in the Midwest—Flint has lead pipes, but the highly corrosive nature of the Flint River damaged them. It ate away at the insides of those pipes. Now these lead pipes are leaching into the clean water supply from Lake Huron. It will cost over \$1 billion to replace Flint's corroded water infrastructure.

The people in Flint, MI, are struggling. There has been money spent there. Flint had been doing quite well until this came along. There was a new vitality. But now people are afraid to eat in restaurants, and the businesses have been terribly damaged because people don't believe the water is pure. A lot of these restaurants, for example, put in their own water supply and water purification system, but people don't believe it. They are afraid.

We need this done now. The State and Federal Government must cooperate now to end this crisis, which requires that we make investments. I repeat: now.

President Obama has declared a state of emergency in Flint, MI, and given FEMA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the authority to provide resources for the people of Flint. The problem is that right now they are just getting bottled water. The infrastructure is so bad.

Governor Snyder has finally—finally—declared a state of emergency and finally apologized for his administration's slow response. The Governor's apology is too late. The residents of Flint have already been poisoned.

It is too bad the people on that side of the aisle disparage the government all the time. It is too intrusive. It is too involved. It is detrimental to our society.

The Governor of Michigan is one of the leading cheerleaders of that theory. He denigrates government every single chance he gets. But to whom does he turn when the State of Michigan is in trouble? To the Federal Government. When emergency strikes, the Federal Government steps in. That is one of the responsibilities we have to protect America.

So I hope Senate Republicans will support our efforts to protect the people of Flint in this time of need. Senator MURKOWSKI—the chair of that important committee that has jurisdiction of the bill that is before this body today—is working with Senator CANTWELL. They are committed to doing something to help in this. Let's make sure we support them.

Sadly, some of the same Republicans who have called for relief when their States faced natural disasters are disparaging government action in Flint. For example, last year, Texas was devastated with historic flooding. But who stepped in? It was the Federal Government that stepped in to provide disaster relief for the people of Texas.

That is why I was disappointed to see the senior Senator from Texas say: "While we all have sympathy for what's happened in Flint, this is primarily a local and state responsibility." He didn't say that when the flooding was taking place in Texas.

Last year, as Florida was hit with extreme flooding, the junior Senator from Florida called for Federal disaster assistance. But when it comes to the children and families of Flint, the Senator, who finished third last night in the Iowa caucuses, cautions against any action. This is what he said about Flint: "I believe the federal government's role in some of these things (is) largely limited unless it involves a federal jurisdictional issue."

Well, the issue was that the State of Michigan didn't do what it was supposed to do.

The junior Senator from Florida is not alone. Republican Senators routinely rush to the floor to demand Federal aid when trouble hits their backyard. That is the right thing to do. Americans help each other in times of crisis.

This week the Senate has a chance to help the families suffering through a