

FLINT CRISIS: HARVEY HOLLINS NOT GIVING TASK FORCE INFORMATION THAT IMPLICATES HARVEY HOLLINS

Some weeks ago, I noted that Rick Snyder had picked his Director of Urban Initiatives, Harvey Hollins, to coordinate response with his hand-picked Task Force to respond to Flint, in spite of the fact that Hollins was intimately involved in all his prior decisions involving Flint.

First, back in early December, Snyder's hand-picked Task Force for responding to the Flint crisis met with him to tell him of their initial observations. One of their key recommendations, as made clear by a meeting summary they shared with him, was that he appoint one single person to handle the response. (See PDF 240ff)

We also believe it important that a single person or entity-potentially independent of any one particular state agency and mutually agreeable to this Task Force and you, Governor-be established to provide effective coordination of ongoing activities and reporting on the status of mitigation measures.

[snip]

Accordingly, in advance of our final report, we would like to ensure the independent coordinator suggest ed above engage trusted

community groups to begin rebuilding community trust in state actions.

Snyder responded by “appointing” Harvey Hollins, his Director of Urban Initiatives, as that person “independent” of the “involved state agencies.”

You make a solid suggestion about establishing a person who is independent of any one of the involved state agencies to serve as the point person to coordinate the ongoing work. I am recommending that Harvey Hollins, director of the Office of Urban Initiatives, carry out this effort. Harvey is well-versed in the issues and the challenges faced by our cities and will be effective in this role. Senior members of our executive team will continue to engage with your task force and provide direction and support to Harvey to ensure you will have continued support and cooperation.

The thing is, Hollins was in no way “independent” of the decisions that poisoned Flint. He has been involved at every phase, down to coordinating Snyder’s hush-hush water filters when he was still trying to cover it up. So basically Snyder just “appointed” the guy he had “appointed” to oversee all the decisions that got Flint poisoned in the first place.

The other day, Progress Michigan revealed that MI’s Department of Environmental Quality had alerted Hollins of concerns that the

Legionnaires outbreak in Flint might be tied to the water switchover last March.

In the next few days, officials at DEQ exchanged some panicked emails, pretty much blaming Flint for the non-response, noting that DEQ “became peripherally aware” of the spike in Legionnaires, but also bitching about the Genesee County supervisor suggesting that it might be tied to the switch to Flint river water.

Thelen, Mary Beth (DEQ)

From: Wurfel, Brad (DEQ)
Sent: Friday, March 13, 2015 6:49 PM
To: Hollins, Harvey (GOV)
Cc: Wyant, Dan (DEQ)
Subject: Part II
Attachments: FOIA Request Flint Water.doc
Importance: High

OK D.

This is the second issue I mentioned earlier today. In December, our staff became peripherally aware that the hospitals in Genesee were seeing an uptick in Legionnaires cases.

Legionnaires is a water-borne illness. It essentially is a type of pneumonia caused by a bacteria. It is treated with antibiotics. Untreated, it can be deadly. It most often manifests in nursing homes and assisted living facilities, because the transmission is through water vapor getting into lungs – via air conditioners, vaporizers or low-flow shower heads that produce a lot of misting. You can drink water with this bacteria in it and not get sick – it has to enter the lungs in vapor.

I don't have any details on the cases, but here is what I understand to this point:

- More than 40 cases reported since last April. That's a significant uptick – more than all the cases in the last five years or more combined.
- April / May is usually the start of Legionnaires season – it proliferates in warmer months – but April also is the point at which the city switched to the Flint River as a source.

It appears that panicked email was printed out by then DEQ Director Dan Wyant's assistant, Mary Beth Thelen, then initialed by Wyant, presumably indicating he had read it.

Also included on that email, though, was Harvey Hollins.

Yesterday, the Free Press reported that, in an interview, Hollins had explained that he had decided there was not yet enough information to brief the Governor on the public health crisis potentially tied to the water.

Harvey Hollins III, director of Michigan's Office of Urban and Metropolitan Initiatives, said in an interview Friday that he received an e-mail from a Department of Environmental Quality official in March about concerns over Legionnaires' disease in Genesee County. But Hollins said he told the e-mail's author, former DEQ

spokesman Brad Wurfel, in a follow-up call, that there was not enough information for him to take the issue to the governor.

Instead, Hollins said he told Wurfel to gather more information and have the department's director bring it directly to the governor if it was warranted. Hollins said he heard nothing more about the issue until late December when local officials in Flint revealed the outbreak had recurred.

Hollins said he should not be held responsible for what some have called the state's sluggish response to the Legionnaires' outbreaks starting in 2014. The outbreaks and the city's 2014 switch to the Flint River for its drinking water are suspected of being linked, but state officials said they have yet to make a direct connection.

"I have nothing to leave over," Hollins said when asked whether he considered resigning over the issue. "When you have people who are professionals who are hired ... to do their job and it takes four months to do that, for me to leave over their missteps, I'm not going to do that,"

"I don't feel any responsibility for grown-ups who don't do their jobs," he added.

It's unclear whether the Freep asked Hollins if he felt any responsibility for the 9 people who died in this Legionnaires outbreak.

Also yesterday, one of the doctors on the Task Force with which Hollins is supposed to be coordinating communication said that it is having problems getting information – notably, on the Legionnaires outbreak – from state agencies.

“Unfortunately, first on the list is the legionella issue,” said Reynolds of Mott Children’s Health Center, referencing spikes in the fatal Legionnaires’ disease after the city began using Flint River water in April 2014.

“Some agencies have been very forthcoming, other agencies it’s like pulling teeth to get information, and it can get real frustrating and doesn’t facilitate good communication,” he said.

Reynolds, who serves on the task force, raised his concern during a meeting of the Flint Interagency Coordinating Committee attended by Snyder and top aide Rich Baird, who vowed to help Reynolds push through any bureaucratic resistance.

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The Flint task force has been working to wrap up its investigation this month, but Reynolds said members may need to reinterview some officials because of recent developments.

“If we don’t ask the question, we don’t get the answer,” he said. “But there’s clearly information that’s being withheld.”

How curious that Hollins doesn’t seem to be terribly effective at getting the Task Force the information it needs about events that implicate Hollins.