U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
"Examining Federal Administration of the Safe Drinking Water Act
in Flint, Michigan, Part 3"
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2154 Rayburn House Office Building
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Governor Rick Snyder
Opening Statement

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Chairman Chaffetz, Ranking Member Cummings, and Members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about the crisis in Flint and the actions we are taking to ensure that nothing like this ever happens again.

Let me be blunt. This was a failure of government at all levels. Local, state, and federal officials – we all failed the families of Flint.

This is not about politics or partisanship. I am not going to point fingers or shift blame; there is plenty of that to share, and neither will help the people of Flint.

Not a day or night goes by that this tragedy doesn't weigh on my mind…the questions I should have asked… the answers I should have demanded… how I could have prevented this. That's why I am so committed to delivering permanent, long-term solutions and the clean, safe drinking water that every Michigan citizen deserves.

Today, I will report what we've done, what we're doing, and what we will do to deliver real results and real relief for the families of Flint.

But before going through the facts, I want to express my profound gratitude for the help and heroism of Professor Marc Edwards, Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha, and Flint resident LeeAnne Walters. They were among the first to sound the alarm about the failures of government and the crisis afflicting the Flint community.

Here are the facts.

From the day the City of Flint began using the Flint River as an interim water supply on April 25, 2014 – and repeatedly after that – the state Department of Environmental Quality assured us that Flint's water was safe.

It wasn't. A water expert at the federal EPA, tried to raise an alarm in February 2015, and he was silenced.

It was on October 1, 2015, that I learned that our state experts were wrong. Flint's water had dangerous levels of lead.

On that day, I took immediate action.

First, we quickly reconnected to the Detroit water supply to begin sealing the damaged pipes.

Second, I ordered the immediate distribution of water filters and extensive blood-level testing in schools and homes to identify those at the highest risk so they received healthcare, nutrition and additional support.

Third, we deployed $67 million to address both short-term needs and long-term solutions.

Our focus, and our priority, is on both short-term health and long-term safety. This includes diagnostic testing, nurse visits and environmental assessments in the home to treat any children with high lead levels.

That is only the beginning.

Right now we are in the appropriations process for an additional $165 million to deliver permanent, long-term solutions. I urge Congress to pass the bipartisan bill for aiding Flint immediately so we can further protect the health and safety of Flint families. From identifying every pipe that must be replaced to long-term medical support, we are working with local leaders like Mayor Karen Weaver and our representatives here in Washington to deliver the assistance our citizens deserve.

We are also holding those who failed accountable. And we are being open with the public about how these failures came about – including releasing my emails and my staff's emails relating to this water crisis.

And we are in the process of publicly releasing relevant documents from the state agencies involved, so that the people have an open, honest assessment of what happened and what we're doing to fix it.

We also began a thorough investigation of what went wrong. We have uncovered systemic failures at the Michigan DEQ. The fact is, bureaucrats created a culture that valued technical compliance over common sense – and the result was that lead was leaching into residents' water.

That's why I am committed to a complete and comprehensive change in state government that puts public health and safety first. And it's why I called for a thorough investigation of the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services by the auditor general and the inspector general.

We are taking responsibility and taking action in Michigan, and that is absolutely essential here in Washington, too. Inefficient, ineffective, and unaccountable bureaucrats at the EPA allowed this disaster to continue unnecessarily.

I am glad to be sitting next to the Administrator from the EPA, because all of us must acknowledge our responsibility and be held accountable. I do want to thank Miguel del Toral, a water specialist at the EPA, who spoke up early about the crisis. Tragically, his superiors at the EPA told local leaders in Flint to ignore his call for action.

The truth is, there are many communities with potentially dangerous lead problems. And if the DEQ and EPA do not change … and if the dumb and dangerous federal lead and copper rule is not changed . . . then this tragedy will befall other American cities. Professor Edwards has been sounding this alarm for years. I look forward to joining with him to address this failure of government.

I am grateful to have been elected to serve the people of Michigan. I understand their anger. I've been humbled by this experience. And I'm going to make Flint and every community in Michigan a better place to live. We have a lot to learn, and a lot to do.

I close with a simple plea … Partner with me in fixing this – not just for the people of Flint, but for people all over the country. Ranking Member Cummings is right. This is America, and this never should have happened. The American people deserve rules that make sense and professionals to enforce them who know that health and safety are urgent matters. I can make sure that happens in Michigan. You can make sure it happens for every American.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.