

<https://www.eastvillagemagazine.org/2017/01/18/analysis-spirit-of-76-and-36-evident-at-packed-water-town-hall-as-data-pours-in/>

The Blowback:



EVM's Ford (center) in a packed house at North Bank Center. (Photo by Jan Worth-Nelson)

Despite Mayor Weaver's call for unity and the omnipresence of law enforcement, the deep mistrust of government featured in the "Voices of Flint" report was evident throughout the meeting. The crinkling of—what else?—water bottles from dozens of audience members signaled disagreement with many utterances of panel members. The crinkling began less than eleven minutes into the meeting during a presentation by Dr. Nicole Lurie, an Obama appointee to the US Department of Health and Human Services. At times, the noise of the water bottles was replaced by rhythmic clapping. Midway through the presentations, one audience member shouted, "Your lies are killing us!" **This was to have been a signal for a "die-in" staged by members of Flint Rising Coalition, an advocacy group that had also planned the crinkling of water bottles and rhythmic clapping of hands.**



The EPA's Miguel Del Toral is a hero to many in the water crisis narrative (Photo by Jan Worth-Nelson)

However, the die-in didn't happen and was possibly muted by the presence of panelists perceived by many as heroes in the water crisis saga. Miguel Del Toral is the Chicago-based EPA official who advocated for Flint in the barely responsive EPA Region 5. Dr. Marc Edwards, who weighed in remotely to the Town Hall via Skype audio, has vigorously represented Flint's citizens in congressional hearings and other settings. Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha stood up to the dismissive Michigan DEQ when her findings of elevated lead levels in Flint children were discredited.

"I never thought that (the die-in) was going to be something that actually happened," Flint activist Brandon Strong told EVM. "The die-in required one moment where somebody said something that was...a really blatant lie."

Nonetheless, discord boiled to the surface when Flint resident Adam Murphy twice rose from his chair and unloaded some of his anger onto the panelists: "Shame on you! Shame on you guys! My house was 530 parts per billion after the state ripped all the pipes out of my house! You gotta' get the mains out, buddy! You're wasting our time! And we're dying; people have died from this damned water! I got kids that are sick and teeth falling out. You have no solutions to this problem."

Another woman, inspired by Murphy, joined in the scolding of the panelists: "And (you) get paid for nothing, nothing but killing us! Nobody's done shit at my house!" The entreaties of Murphy and his female compatriot encouraged the shouts of others and stoked the rhythmic clapping.

The cacophony was not unexpected by the event organizers. In fact, the meeting was to be by invitation only until Mayor Weaver lobbied for an event open to the public. Nonetheless, town hall organizers were hardly surprised by the angry expressions.



Mayor Weaver besieged by media before the Town Hall (photo by Jan Worth-Nelson)

Weaver attempted to quiet the crowd. “Let me talk please,” she implored, “We’re angry, and we’re scared, and confused,” she continued. “We’ve been waiting for this; we have an opportunity to get some things that we didn’t have before.” Referring to the panelists she warned, “We deserve some more money...I want them to talk; I want it on the record, to hold them accountable in front of all these people.”

The clamor continued. “Liar!” shouted one man. “You’re killing us!” repeated another. Eventually Flint Police Chief Tim Johnson stepped to the mic, and calmly said, “I have a lot of friends in this hall, and I know you’re upset. We’ve all got the same kind of goals in mind. Friend or no friend, I’m gonna’ get you out of here.” And with the application of his cordial, but firm, verbal nightstick, Chief Johnson quieted the troubled waters for the remainder of the meeting.