

MACOMB COUNTY

LOCAL LEADERS SAY RICK SNYDER NOT DOING ENOUGH

Republicans note there was no outcry over Flint's poor finances

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Still not enough.

That's what some local lawmakers and observers said about Gov. Rick Snyder's attention to the water crisis in Flint during his sixth annual State of the State speech on Tuesday night in Lansing.

While Snyder used his past addresses to promote the state's various achievements, on Tuesday, he devoted 25 minutes to the Flint situation, apologizing for the state's handling of the situation and vowing to release government emails to provide further information on how it grew to a crisis.

Snyder said Michigan would work on the situation to provide clean water to the city "no matter what."

But some in attendance at the State Capitol said the governor didn't go far enough.

"I appreciate his apology," said state Rep. Sarah Roberts, a St. Clair Shores Democrat who has worked as a community outreach coordinator for Clean Water Action. "But although he said the buck stops with him, but the whole tragedy of this is it was preventable. It happened on his watch, under his state appointed emergency manager. He should be apologizing."

John Chirkun, a Democratic state representative and former mayor of Roseville, agreed.

"He can talk about his accomplishments, but he can't say Michigan is any stronger today if the water in Flint is poisoned. He wants to run our state like a business, but sometimes that doesn't work," Chirkun said.

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"We are praying for you, we are

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Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder delivers his State of the State address to a joint session of the House and Senate on Tuesday at the state Capitol in Lansing. With the water crisis gripping Flint threatening to overshadow nearly everything else he has accomplished, the Republican governor pledged a fix Tuesday night during his annual address.

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working hard for you and we are absolutely committed to taking the right steps to effectively solve this crisis,” he said. “To you the people of Flint, I say tonight as I have before, ‘I am sorry and I will fix it.’” Snyder committed \$28 million more in the short term, announced the deployment of more National Guard members to the city and promised to quickly release his emails regarding the crisis that has engulfed his administration with criticism from across the country.

He also announced his appeal of President Barack Obama’s denial of a federal disaster declaration for the area and his aides pledged that, by the end of the week, officials would visit every household in Flint to ensure they have water filters.

While Snyder has come under fire from a variety of sources, some Republicans such as state Rep. Tony Forlini of Harrison Township say the city of Flint and its representatives also share in the blame.

At the state Capitol, Forlini sat with Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha, a pediatrician from Flint who authored a study showing elevated lead levels in the blood of some children in Flint.

“The governor is not a chemist, he didn’t give the orders to people in Flint to mix water the wrong way, and that’s where people are trying to take this tragedy to,” Forlini. “How many years did the officials in Flint run that city down to the point we had to come in with state dollars from my constituents to fix their town. I know the Democrats are having a field day with this, but where were they when their town was being pillaged by their elected officials?”

Snyder devoted much of his 49-minute evening address to the GOP-led Legislature to the disaster, which has put residents at risk for lead exposure. Many of his other priorities except the mounting financial problems in Detroit’s state-overseen school district were shelved from the speech due to the crisis. Snyder, who is exempt from public-records requests, plans to release his emails on Wednesday.

He outlined a timeline of the “catastrophe,” blamed it on failures at the federal, state and local levels, but also said: “I let you down. You deserve better. You deserve accountability. You deserve to know the buck stops here with me.”

The \$28 million would pay for more filters, bottled water, school nurses, intervention specialists, testing and monitoring. It also would replace plumbing fixtures in schools with lead problems and could help Flint with unpaid water bills.

The crisis began when Flint, about an hour’s drive from Detroit, switched its water source in 2014 to save money while under state financial management. Michigan’s top environmental regulator resigned over the failure to ensure that the Flint River water was properly treated to keep lead from pipes from leaching into the water.

Exposure to lead can cause behavior problems and learning disabilities in children and kidney ailments in adults. Elevated blood-lead levels were found in two city zip codes.

But for all of the attention Snyder gave to Flint on Tuesday, some observers say he could be doing more on a personal level to illustrate his concern.

Macomb County Executive Mark Hackel, an oft-mentioned future gubernatorial candidate, said the

governor should have moved an emergency command center to Flint and maybe even take up a residence there for a time.

“The bottom line is nobody cares how much you know until they know how much you care,” said Hackel, who attended Tuesday’s event in Lansing.

“Even if he has to ask a homeowner to let him move in, so he could live this nightmare with them. It would attract all the resources you need by being there instead of Lansing. If it were me, I would be resting my head on a pillow in Flint, and come up with a plan of action. I wouldn’t have waited this long to show he cares.”

State Republicans, such as Peter Lucido, a state representative from Shelby Township, said political grandstanding will not bring clean water to Flint.

“This means the fingerpointing and assumptions which may or may not be politically motivated must stop now,” Lucido said in a statement. “I was taught as a lawyer to not rush to judgement or cast any dispersion of guilt or wrongdoing until all arguments are made and all facts are presented.”

Warren Mayor James Fouts, who watched the address from home, agreed there are more questions than answers at this point. But he said Snyder’s business- model approach to government may have failed in this case.

“Is this a lesson for all, that you can’t literally apply business principles to governing as you have to take into account the health, safety and welfare of the people. The state of Michigan tried to save millions of dollars and it will now cost at least several billion taxpayer dollars and countless young productive lives,” Fouts wrote in a Facebook post.

In an unrelated side note, a local girl received a standing ovation at the address in Lansing.

Aliana Kiehl, 13, a student at Anchor Bay Middle School North in New Baltimore, was introduced for an illustration she created for the Secretary of State program cover.