

HARVEY HOLLINS IS SUPPOSED TO BE LEADING FLINT RESPONSE BUT SNYDER SENT RICHARD BAIRD INSTEAD

In my posts on Flint, I've alluded to a guy named Rich Baird, whom Governor Rick Snyder calls his "Transformation Manager."

This morning, the Detroit News reported Snyder is sending Baird to oversee his Flint response.

The governor is dispatching his fixer and confidant, Rich Baird, to Flint to help coordinate the state response and to reassure the city's elected leaders of direct, daily contact with the governor's office.

Eclectablog has written several important posts on who Baird is and, importantly, how he was originally funded.

Baird, who had recently retired from PricewaterhouseCoopers, set up a consulting firm called MI Partners and took on one client: Governor Rick Snyder. He makes \$100,000 year, paid for by unknown donors to the NERD fund, and sits at the right hand of the governor. His office is literally in the governor's executive office suite. If you look at the [Executive Office directory \(pdf\)](#), there is Richard Baird's name, listed along with the normal staffers paid like most other government officials with taxpayer money:

The important point though is that Baird, who

has been a critical figure in Snyder's emergency management schemes, started as a public/private fixer, working for private entities we can't know about. In advance of the reelection campaign, at a time when people were demanding to know *who* had been paying Baird's salary, Baird was brought onto state payroll. But he is a key figure in Snyder's corporate driven effort to loot Michigan.

There are two reasons I'm interested in the report that Baird is overseeing Snyder's response.

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 suggested 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.

But now he’s putting (or the press is reporting that he already did put) someone else – Baird – in charge of his response.

Which brings us to what Snyder’s emails show about the involvement of Baird.

Now, I hope to get around to posting evidence from his released emails that Snyder has a second email account, and that much of what we see in the released emails are efforts to keep certain things off the books (not just in that second account but in phone or face-to-face conversations). So – as MotorCity Muckraker pointed out – it’s perhaps not surprising that Baird doesn’t appear to send Snyder many emails (on this account) but it is notable.

When he does appear in emails is interesting, however.

Baird appears in emails forwarded with public announcements relating to Flint in 2014.

- PDF 5: January 15, 2014: Public announcement of federal funding
- PDF 26: April 30, 2014: Flint EM's budget talking points

Then Baird didn't show up in emails again until the shit started hitting the fan in October 2015. It's quite clear from these emails that Baird had a key role in responding to this crisis, including as the go-between with the Task Force Snyder set up to make the whole problem go away.

- PDF 110: October 06, 2014: Public distribution of water filters
- PDF 217: November 17, 2015: DEQ's (significantly misleading) self-report to Snyder's Task Force
- PDF 240: December 7, 2015: Task Force (Ken Sikkema)'s formal conveyance of its report to Snyder
- PDF 243: December 10, 2015: Response to Task Force, reflecting input from Baird
- PDF 246: December 11, 2015: DHHS testing data
- PDF 250: December 24, 2015: Office of Auditor General response to State Senator Jim Ananich
- PDF 252: December 28, 2015: DEQ concurring in OAG's analysis
- PDF 269: December 28, 2015:

Response to pre-shared copy of Task Force report, reflecting conference call involving Baird, noting a phone call to follow

- PDF: December 29, 2015: Snyder's statement about Task Force response, with note that Baird would meet face-to-face with Task Force on follow-up

By late December, it's clear the governor's staff was avoiding putting certain things in writing. In some key moments, in fact, Baird was involved in conversations about the response.

None of this is surprising. But it does make it clear that Snyder's real response here is being led by his public-private fixer.