

## Akron Mayor Don Plusquellic's plan to lease water and sewer system will hurt consumers

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In endorsing Akron's Issue 8, The Plain Dealer opined that Mayor Don Plusquellic's plan to lease the city sewer system is "innovative." However, a closer look reveals that Plusquellic's proposal is as reckless as it is naive.

For starters, the mayor insists that a private corporation would be just as committed to protecting the purity of the city's drinking water as elected officials. Unfortunately, a look at the history of water privatization tells a different story. One case in point is Atlanta.

The watchdog group Food & Water Watch points out that after awarding a \$428 million contract to a private corporation, the quality of Atlanta's drinking water showed a marked decline. Why? Because the company decided that the only way it could generate the profits it wanted was by firing almost 400 workers, including many who were directly responsible for assuring water purity.

Not surprisingly, warnings by health officials to boil tap water became commonplace as discolored water poured out of Atlanta's faucets. As a result, Atlanta cancelled its contract and restored municipal control over its system. But the problems with privatized water don't end there.

A Food and Water Watch study of private water systems found that privatized water utilities routinely charge customers anywhere from 13 percent to almost 50 percent more than publicly operated systems. One case in point involves a group of residents in Richfield and Richfield Township, where the privatization of water and sewer services led to a 100 percent rate increase.

Ironically, that same kind of corporate price gouging historically is what first led city and county governments to create publicly owned and operated water and sewer services to begin with. That's why local governments still provide 86 percent of household drinking water and 98 percent of the sewer services Americans depend on.

Of course, it's possible that Plusquellic knows something about the virtues of privatizing that other city and county officials don't.

But don't bet on it.

At a time when corporate greed has taken America to the brink of another Great Depression, it is astonishing that Plusquellic is willing to put the health and safety of Akron families in the hands of private corporations. An innovation? Hardly. Instead, privatization is a disaster waiting to happen.

That's why, in addition to voting down Issue 8, citizen groups are urging voters to support Issue 9, our proposal that would bar the privatization of any city service unless it is approved by the public at the ballot box.

Sombati is director of the Save Our Sewers and Water Committee and works with Ohio Council 8 of AFSCME, the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees.

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