

February 4, 2014

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

As West Virginia State Senate Majority Leader, I am writing to express outrage with the federal response to the chemical spill along the Elk River near the capital city, Charleston, and requesting immediate assistance from your administration.

While over 300,000 West Virginians were under a "Do Not Use" water ban due to a major chemical spill, the entire state has been negatively affected, and many citizens around the state remain unsure of the safety and protection of their own water supplies.

In particular, Mr. President, we are outraged that our crisis did not even rate a mention in your State of the Union address, yet you did make reference to the disaster in the Philippines. This may be part of your strategy to focus on your strengths on foreign policy, rather than highlighting weaknesses, such as joblessness and poverty. The conspicuous absence of any reference to our crisis magnifies the truth behind the criticisms.

Had this crisis happened anywhere else in the United States, I'm sure the CDC, FEMA, Army Corps of Engineers, and every cabinet secretary would be playing a role in the clean-up and recovery. I have no doubt that the chemicals that were released would have been analyzed immediately, and a plan for remediation, as well as a health assessment plan would have been developed and implemented. Also, people would continue to be provided clean water until this mess is cleaned up, and there is definitive proof that the water is safe to drink.

If it can happen here, it can happen anywhere. Water is a basic, foundational need. Clean water is not only necessary for life, but also commerce. Manufacturing and the food industry are just two examples of economic areas negatively affected here by poor quality, contaminated water.

We still have no idea how the chemicals break down, we have been given no guidance on the long-term impacts to our health.

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
Page two
February 4, 2014

Your administration should be more involved and concerned, because the release of a different chemical or a larger amount of these chemicals could have affected water quality all the way to the Gulf of Mexico.

We now call on you to help us and to live up to your belief in the inherent dignity and equality of every human being. Provisions need to be put in place that will prevent this from ever happening here or anywhere else again. FEMA should continue to provide water supplies. The CDC, ATSDR and EPA should assemble a team to fully analyze the released chemicals and to determine the effects to human health and the environment from exposure to the chemicals from the date of the spill. The NIH should work with our local health officials to diagnose and identify the present and future impacts on health due to exposure to these chemicals.

The people of West Virginia want answers!

I am more than willing to discuss this matter and work with you to find a solution that benefits the people of West Virginia.

Sincerely,

John R. Unger II
Majority Leader