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This man has a bad case of writer's block. Discover why on Page 15

Joe Dupcza's Lonely Battle for Honest Government



By Michael Moore

Fifteen years ago, when Joe Dupcza was Flint police officer, he was responding to a B&E call when he spotted a black youth running from the scene of a burglary. Dupcza ordered the youth to halt, but he kept running. Instinctively, Dupcza drew his gun, aimed it at the youth and again ordered him to stop. The youth still kept running. At that crucial moment of decision, Dupcza could think only one thing: "That is a human being I'm supposed to shoot."

He put away his gun and chased after the kid. He was worried that if he didn't catch him, he would be in trouble for not shooting him.

Dupcza apprehended the youth and took him down to the city jail. When he arrived back at the police station, his fellow officers had heard about how Dupcza had decided not to shoot the black youth. Commented one officer, "You had your chance to waste a f----- nigger and you didn't."

Fifteen years later, Joe Dupcza still thinks it is wrong to shoot unarmed people suspected of committing a crime. But now he is in a position to do something about it.

Joe Dupcza is Flint's Ombudsman, a post he has held since it was created by a new city charter in 1975. His job has been to listen to citizen complaints about city officials and investigate any wrongdoings. In the last five years, he and his staff have received over 6000 complaints from city residents. He has conducted over 2500 investigations and issued a number of scathing indictments on the conduct of the city administration.

Joe Dupcza is the city's whistle blower and, as far as a number of city

officials are concerned, it's time to put his whistle out of commission.

On November 4, Flint voters will decide, as directed by the city charter, whether or not to keep the ombudsman's office permanently in operation.

One man is working very hard to see that the office—and Dupcza—are eliminated next month. His name is James W. Rutherford, mayor of Flint and, as the city's chief administrator, the target of most of those 6000 complaints. He doesn't like all those investigations and wants them stopped. He has fought hard over the past five years to cut Dupcza's budget and last year said that he would recommend a budget of "35 cents" for the ombudsman's office. Last month, after Dupcza released the results of the Billy Taylor investigation, charging that the police shooting of the 15-year-old was not justified, Rutherford devalued Dupcza's worth to "two bits."

It is no surprise that Rutherford doesn't like Dupcza, considering the things Dupcza has made public:

- City CETA employees were forced to give money and campaign for Rutherford's re-election (first exposed in the *Flint Voice*);
- Rutherford violated the city charter by appointing Nan Lunn, a political crony, as "acting" city administrator;
- Rutherford's "double-dipping" pension plan in which he collects, in addition to his \$40,000 a year salary as

mayor, a \$23,000 a year pension from his years as Flint's police chief. The city also pays another \$9000 a year into a second pension for him that he will collect after his term in office has expired.

Dupcza has also investigated a number of Rutherford's department heads. He has revealed that:

- The city's sewage treatment plant was being mismanaged, items were being stolen, hours were being padded and raw sewage was being dumped into the Flint River;
- The director of Bishop Airport was using city employees to do work on his home;
- Hurley Hospital employees were having to pay more into the retirement account than they were supposed to and, therefore, were entitled to a refund from the city;
- Police chief Max Durbin violated Ceta regulations by hiring his son and, thus, put the city's CETA funds in jeopardy;
- Durbin also obstructed a number of Dupcza's investigations into police brutality, jail conditions and blacks killed by police;
- Nan Lun illegally used the state-wide police computer to track down the identity of blacks thought to be seen delivering the *Flint Voice* in a white section of town.

Dupcza, obviously, does not enjoy the warm and enthusiastic support of the city's administration.

He does, however, have the support of hundreds of Flint citizens who have found that, when they have no where else to turn, they can always look to Joe Dupcza to go to bat for them. He is probably the most trusted and respected official in the city. He is honest, down to earth, and totally devoid of any political ambitions.

He is, perhaps, too honest—and therein lies the controversy that has surrounded his tenure as ombudsman. He has never been afraid to tackle any official—regardless of who they were—if it meant making things better for the residents of Flint. He has been threatened, courted, ridiculed and denounced.

But he has never been proven wrong. Not one of his 2500 investigations have been found to be untrue. The integrity of his work is of his own personal integrity.

Joe Dupcza grew up on Flint's north side, between North Street and Industrial Avenue. After digging ditches for the city's parks and recreation department, he became a police officer in 1958. In his 17 years as a cop, Dupcza received a number of merit citations and was successful in apprehending two murderers and a rapist. He was also stabbed twice in the line of duty.

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