

Schafer: We owe Gov. Burgum our support for his F-M Diversion efforts

By [Served as governor of North Dakota from 1992 to 2000](#). on Oct 14, 2017 at 12:00 p.m.

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In a recent op-ed in The Forum, former Democratic District Chairman, Cash Aaland, tries to divert us from facts about the Red River Diversion in an effort to disparage our Republican governor. Aaland calls Gov. Doug Burgum the "Godfather" of the current diversion plan and spins the tale that the governor somehow has maneuvered us into the current Army Corps of Engineers plan.

The FM Flood Protection Coalition was formed by local businessman, Ron Bergan, not Doug Burgum as Aaland asserts. At the time, the Corps was pursuing flood walls for protection similar to their installations in Grand Forks. The Coalition was put together with local business leaders to promote a larger diversion plan that would provide better flood protection for our families, communities and businesses. I was a member of the group and was asked to be the spokesperson for our efforts. No pay was involved for any of the members.

The Corps advanced their preferred plan which was on the higher elevation Minnesota side of the River and would have been a disaster in times of flooding by pushing water all the way to Mapleton, N.D. Our Coalition felt the plan must include better protection for the Fargo/Moorhead region and built some computer simulation models to prove it. Cash is right; we were successful in convincing leaders to set aside the preferred plan, although the Corps still uses it as a baseline for federal funding. It was a bad plan.

The article claims that after becoming governor, Burgum provided media consultants to assist in the promotion of the current plan, and therefore he is somehow complicit in trying to maneuver public opinion. Aaland wonders if these consultants were paid for by our governor personally or with tax dollars. He references the minutes of the Diversion Public Outreach Committee as proof.

I think I'll use this one for the communication section in my leadership class at North Dakota State University. A careful reading of the minutes without partisan glasses shows the governor provided his comments to the diversion consultants. He did not provide consultants. The minutes show how one can misread something when you are looking for negativity instead of the facts.

Finally, it was asserted that the governor tried to channel \$66 million into the diversion after vetoing a legislative restriction on money appropriated for the project. Wow, if someone would have actually checked the facts, such an outlandish statement might have been prevented.

Factually, an article in The Forum on April 26th reports the Legislature approved \$66.5 million for the Diversion Authority and Mayor Mahoney was full of praise for the lawmakers' actions. A week later the governor rightfully vetoed a provision that gave legislative power over the governor's authority. This, of course, had nothing to do with channeling state funds into the diversion. Aaland presents his "facts" totally backward from what actually happened.

Instead of trash talking our governor, we should be applauding his efforts to build a bridge of communication between himself and Gov. Mark Dayton and to try to understand and address Minnesota's concerns about the current design of the project.

Hopefully, when the true facts get put on the table, our two leaders can come to an agreement on how to proceed to best protect Fargo/West Fargo /Moorhead and surrounding communities from the omnipresent threat of flooding from the Red River of the North.

Schafer served as governor of North Dakota from 1992 to 2000.