

Mike McFeely

9-noon WEEKDAYS



Moorhead-Area Democrats Embarrass Themselves

October 6, 2016 Mike McFeely Law, Government & Politics

MOORHEAD — Hello? Any Democrats home? Any at all?

Hello?

Bueller?

More silence, which is what we've come to expect from Minnesota-side Democrats in the prolonged battle over the Red River diversion.

That's not entirely accurate. Minnesota DFLers are silent when it comes to voicing full-throated support for the permanent-flood protection project that would remove the need for stress, sandbags and uncertainty when it comes to the possibility of a catastrophic flood devastating the region's economic center.

When it comes to knocking the project, U.S. Rep. Collin Peterson, state Rep. Paul Marquart and Moorhead City Council member Heidi Durand have been quite vocal. Durand has practically been a Richland County

Commissioner in her opposition to the diversion, which seems odd considering she represents Moorhead. But that's old news.

But when it comes to supporting the project that will protect the jobs of those 60 percent of the Moorhead residents who work in Fargo, there is only crickets.

SOUND OFF

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State Rep. Ben Lien, whose district includes the entire city of Moorhead ... silent.

State Sen. Kent Eken, who was elected four years ago on the strength of gathering votes in Moorhead ... silent.

City councilman Chuck Hendrickson ... silent.

City councilwoman Mari Dailey ... silent.

Moorhead mayor Del Rae Williams, a member of the Diversion Authority, at least has voiced support for the diversion, even if it has been rather tepid. And she at least, kind of, voiced disappointment in the latest major news regarding the project. But even that was sort of, well, passive-aggressive.

The latest major news, of course, is that the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources — at the behest of Gov. Mark Dayton — denied a crucial permit that halts the diversion in its tracks. At least for now. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers says it will continue to move forward, but Minnesota denying the permit is a major stumbling block.

That Dayton (using the DNR) is trying to kill the diversion is not surprising. Dayton has long opposed it, apparently believing that he is somehow standing up for Everyman in the southern end of the Red River Valley by fighting the big, bad Republican bullies from Fargo. Peterson, the Congressman long in the back pocket of Big Ag generally and American Crystal Sugar in specific, certainly has communicated his concerns with Dayton. And Marquart, also trying to portray himself as the friend of farmer, has likely played a role, too.

What is surprising is that the DNR's 57-page rebuttal of the diversion wanders far outside the boundaries of an environmental regulatory

agency and into socio-economic, city planning and flood fighting commentary.

The DNR essentially told Fargo-Moorhead that the metro area is on its own when it comes to fighting floods. What the cities have done in the past, the DNR said, is good enough.

“Get those sandbag machines fired up, Fargo-Moorhead, you’re going to need them!”

Worse is that the dismissive, offensive “up yours” drew zero response from Minnesota’s elected Democrats. No anger, no push-back, no “wait a minute.” Nothing.

Silence.

The Democrats hold most offices, but apparently don’t feel the need to be supportive of jobs, health care, retail and all the other things Moorhead depends upon Fargo for.

You’d think people elected to represent the citizens of Moorhead would’ve been just a little bit pissed off that the governor basically told the city to take a hike. Lien, Eken, Williams and others sure were mad when metro Democrats insisted on a light-rail project in the Twin Cities suburbs and that, in effect, killed an long-needed railroad underpass for Moorhead. The politicians played the Metro vs. Rural card in that dust-up, waxing about public safety and needing to keep routes open for first responders and every other cliché politicians like to use to make their point.

But when a metro-centric governor who pushed a billion-dollar NFL football stadium and helped kill the railroad underpass with his stubborn refusal to take light-rail off the table tells a city of 40,000 to get lost ... we get nothing but compliant silence from the Democratic politicians.

Why?

Are they afraid of crossing the governor?

Are they afraid of the Wilkin County vote?

Are you too busy promoting sidewalk art?

Perhaps they just believe the diversion is a bad project, unneeded because Moorhead currently has better flood protection than Fargo.

If that’s the case, please go on the record saying you oppose the diversion and are just fine with Fargo-Moorhead sandbagging in the case of a potentially catastrophic flood.

Rep. Peterson, do you support sandbagging as the No. 1 option for Fargo-Moorhead flood protection? Please answer before you retire from Congress and take a lobbying job with Crystal Sugar.

Rep. Marquart, do you support sandbagging as the No. 1 option for Fargo-Moorhead flood protection?

Sen. Eken?

Rep. Lien?

Moorhead City Council?

Anybody?

Anybody at all?

Bueller?