



Letters To Editor

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Gov. Burgum is the ‘Godfather’ of the current development plan

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In 2010 North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum, then Fargo developer Burgum, formed the political action organization F-M Flood Protection Coalition and kicked off a political campaign to convince the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and local leaders to abandon the Army Corps’ preferred Red River diversion plan that protected existing infrastructure.

Burgum and his coalition instead proposed a river diversion alignment that more than doubled the footprint of the Army Corps’ plan. Burgum’s organization then produced several high-end videos promoting the expanded alignment and hired former N.D. Gov. Ed Schafer to be the spokesman. These videos can still be found on YouTube.

Burgum and the F-M Flood Protection Coalition then set up a website, bought spots on the local networks and began touring and lecturing to promote the expanded plan. They were successful. The Army Corps’ preferred plan was abandoned. The present diversion alignment, the locally preferred plan, essentially follows what Burgum and his group proposed and has a footprint of approximately 71-square miles, more than double the Army Corps’ plan. According to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, 54 percent of the area protected by this alignment is sparsely developed flood plain.

The impacts occurring as a result of the removal of so much natural flood plain storage was originally to occur to the west and north of the F-M Metro. After the downstream folks demonstrated that the massive impacts from Burgum’s expanded alignment would impact all the way to Canada, the impacts were transferred to upstream by adding a high hazard dam running east and west at the southern end of the project. Once the impacts of the expanded plan became known, Burgum and his organization did nothing. When the plan to build a high hazard dam emerged, flooding 50,000 acres upstream of the expanded

alignment, Burgum continued to support the plan rather than give up the development purpose.

After becoming governor, Burgum continued to actively promote the current alignment. The minutes of the Diversion Public Outreach Committee show that in February of this year Gov. Burgum was providing media consultants to the Diversion Authority, “with creative suggestions to integrate social media” to assist in the promotion of the current plan. The minutes are unclear whether these consultants were paid for by Burgum personally or with state funds. Burgum’s assistance came at a time when the Army Corps, the F-M Diversion and its lawyers were actively and aggressively litigating to deprive Minnesota of its permit authority over the project.

Earlier this year, the North Dakota Legislature passed House Bill 1020 that would have limited North Dakota state funds going to the F-M Diversion without approval of the legislative committee that funded flood control projects. The thinking was that state funds could be withheld from the project until it had the necessary permits to proceed. Gov. Burgum vetoed the line in the bill that reserved control by the committee. He then attempted to channel \$66 million of these state funds to the F-M Diversion Authority – he did this while the pending injunction was under advisement by the federal judge and when Fargo’s position was that Minnesota had no right to object to the project. By law, up to 10 percent of these state funds may be used to pay the very same Fargo lawyers who are trying to eliminate Minnesota’s right to control its waters.

Gov. Burgum is not a disinterested leader attempting to broker a fair negotiation – he is in fact the Godfather of the current development plan. It matters little to him who has to pay the price for the transfer of waters off of Fargo’s undeveloped flood plain – whether it is upstream, downstream or Minnesota. As governor he has refused every request to meet with Richland County residents.