

McFeely: Bombshell story about F-M diversion turns into a dud

By [Mike McFeely](#) on Mar 31, 2018 at 10:59 p.m.



1 / 2 U.S. Rep. Collin Peterson was quoted by KFGO as saying an email he received from DNR commissioner Tom Landwehr indicated Landwehr was "shocked by the Diversion Authority's Plan B and "didn't like the way it was done." Landwehr says he never sent such an email and Peterson's chief of staff also said no such email exists. Forum file photo



What looked like a bombshell story about the Fargo-Moorhead diversion turned out to be—forgive us for using this phrase—a nothingburger. A real, actual nothingburger.

KFGO-AM reported this week that U.S. Rep. Collin Peterson, representing Minnesota's 7th District, said he's skeptical the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources will grant a permit for the \$2.4 billion flood control project because of an alleged negative email Peterson received from DNR Commissioner Tom Landwehr and Water Management Division Director Kent Lokkesmoe.

The email was alleged to have said Landwehr and Lokkesmoe were "shocked" by the F-M Diversion Authority's so-called Plan B for the diversion and "didn't like the way it was done."

This would qualify as massive news. The diversion was halted by a federal judge because it wasn't OK'd by the DNR, which insists it has permitting power over the project. After a task force convened late last year to bridge differences between project supporters and opponents, the Diversion Authority worked with engineers—including some from the DNR—to come up with an acceptable plan.

The Diversion Authority believes it has done that and made another application for a permit in March. Supporters are confident the new plan will receive a permit, or at least that the two sides can work toward a solution that would receive one.

So for Peterson to claim that Landwehr and Lokkesmoe are strongly opposed to the new project at this early date would be devastating. Diversion opponents like the Joint Powers Authority from Richland County, N.D., and Wilkin County, Minn., jumped on the news item as proof the project is dead on arrival. The story spread rapidly on social media.

There is only one problem with the narrative: The email Peterson allegedly referred to doesn't exist.

Reached via email, Landwehr said, "I am not sure of the conversation Rep. Peterson is referring to."

When asked to provide a copy of the email, Peterson's chief of staff Allison Myhre said the congressman never received such an email from Landwehr and Lokkesmoe.

"There is no email," she said.

Myhre said KFGO misreported the story. She said Peterson might have been referring to an article he saw alleging Landwehr and Lokkesmoe were upset with the manner in which the Diversion Authority re-submitted their application. A March 11 article in the Wahpeton Daily News quoted opponents Cash Aaland and Tim Fox of the JPA saying Diversion Authority members "turned their back" on the DNR. Fox was quoted as saying the DNR will deny the diversion permit again.

Landwehr tamped down what was reported in that article, saying people should take what others are saying about the diversion "with a grain of salt."

"The Diversion Authority did show us a news release before we finished our Leadership Team discussions. The release said they were ready to submit a proposal. I was surprised by that because we hadn't finished discussions," Landwehr wrote in an email. "As it turned out, however, they did not submit an application until at least a week after the last Leadership Team meeting, so the news release errantly suggested a premature application date. We now have their application and are thoroughly reviewing."

That Peterson is skeptical of the diversion is no surprise. He's long been an opponent. What's shocking is that he continues to parrot the talking points of upstream opponents instead of trying to help find a solution—much like other longtime naysayers like Minnesota Rep. Paul Marquart and Moorhead city council members Heidi Durand and Mari Dailey. It's as if Peterson and the others haven't bothered to newly inform themselves on the progress of the project before spewing JPA talking points.

The proper thing for Peterson to say would've been, "I'm hoping the latest permit application will meet the proper requirements and if it falls short, hopefully the Diversion Authority can work with the DNR to make sure it does."

That seems to be where Landwehr and the DNR are coming from. While there is no guarantee Plan B will be permitted, the commissioner sounds much more optimistic and receptive than he did last year.

"We worked closely through the task force and with all sides on the project to develop alternative ideas. I'm confident we pushed the envelope on finding options to bring the project into better alignment with Minnesota law," he said in an email. "We are looking at the permit with a completely fresh perspective with no prejudicial bias. If we find shortcomings, we are free to work with the Authority to address them. It is very premature to speculate what the outcome of the permit review will be, but we are in a much better place than we were last summer."

It's not as juicy as a nothingburger, but there seems to be some meat in the process.