

Forum editorial: An attempt to scuttle diversion?

Rep. Al Carlson, R-Fargo, can't possibly justify amendments to a water funding bill that, if they survive, will halt progress on the most important feature of Fargo's permanent flood control plan, the Red River diversion.

Rep. Al Carlson, R-Fargo, can't possibly justify amendments to a water funding bill that, if they survive, will halt progress on the most important feature of Fargo's permanent flood control plan, the Red River diversion. The House majority leader surprised many lawmakers, including a few from Fargo, by attaching amendments to the State Water Commission funding bill. By any honest reading, the amendments constitute a threat to Fargo's ongoing and thus far successful flood control projects and plans.

The threat is so real, one of the community's most experienced flood control veterans, Cass County Administrator Keith Berndt, said this: "There's no doubt, (the) amendments (are) intended to kill the diversion project." Berndt served for years as county engineer. He knows more about the funding nuances and engineering challenges of the diversion than Carlson will ever know. Responding to Berndt's remarks, Carlson said: "He can take that attitude if he wants, but he's not right." Berndt is right, as are several other local officials, including Fargo Mayor Dennis Walaker and Cass Commission Chairman Darrell Vanyo, who are outraged by Carlson's stunt.

Among Carlson's reasons for the amendments is his alleged concern that federal funding won't materialize because "when the first dollar is in from the state, we don't believe it'll be easy to access federal funds." What? He has it backward. When a locality and a state put up their shares of a project's cost (as Fargo and Cass County have repeatedly done via direct appropriation or special voter-approved taxes), it's much easier to make the case to the feds for funding. That's the proven premise local governments – and the state until now – have operated under for decades. Big project funding is a three-legged stool; that's the model for the diversion and other water projects. Carlson (the man who almost single-handedly gave his state the expensive, embarrassing and unnecessary University of North Dakota logo fiasco), is attempting to kick out one of the legs of the funding stool. If he gets his way, he will be responsible for killing the only option for permanent flood protection for Fargo and 90 percent of the people in Cass County.

The amended bill cleared the Appropriations Committee 19-2, with several Fargo members saying they voted for the bill in the hope "the Senate can fix it." The "fix" is to strip out the amendments.

Carlson's explanation amounts to cheap-cut baloney. His "expertise" doesn't come close to the knowledge of floods and flood projects that Fargo and Cass officials such as Berndt, Walaker and Vanyo have accumulated over years of hard work. Now they've been undercut by a Fargo legislator who should understand the cost and trauma of urban flooding. He's insulted local leaders and betrayed the people he purports to represent.

Have a comment to share about a story? Letters to the editor should include author's name, address and phone number. Generally, letters should be no longer than 250 words. All letters are subject to editing. Send a letter to the editor.

Forum editorials represent the opinion of Forum management and the newspaper's Editorial Board.

Tags: opinion, editorials