

OPINION: A bright future

March 12, 2009

The future economic development of Colorado Springs, El Paso County and Pueblo County took another giant leap forward Wednesday, as Pueblo County commissioners gave the green light for the Southern Delivery System, a \$1.1 billion pipeline that will carry Arkansas River water to Colorado Springs.

Unfortunately, for some politicians and short-sighted business executives the phrase "economic development" has morphed into code speak for a weird sort of Ponzi scheme throughout the United States. The practice of enticing economic development has been reduced to communities shopping and bidding for the favor of a few corporate executives in the business of shopping for cash incentives or veiled cash incentives instead of genuine, sustainable business opportunities. Give me this and give me that and I'll move to your town with glitz and glamour promises of prestigious white-collar jobs. Of course, the incentives shoppers never stop shopping. They're always looking for their next artificial fix from some other community that wants pie in the sky.

Fortunately, Colorado Springs doesn't seriously engage in that quick-fix game. Instead, our community strives to maintain an environment of limited government, low taxes, minimalist regulation, and the infrastructure needed to provide opportunity for those who really mean business.

The Southern Delivery System might be one of the largest, most ambitious, most innovative, and most realistic economic development projects in the United States. It will provide what businesses and employees must have to live and succeed and provide for future generations: water, and plenty of it.

No community can possibly grow without enough H₂O. Compared to water, all other basic needs of businesses and employees are relatively easy to come by.

In the past month, city officials have cleared two of the biggest hurdles that stood in the path of SDS, a project that has been in the planning stages for 10 years. First, the city was able to secure approval from Fremont County commissioners for Plan B. Under that plan, Colorado Springs would tap into its Arkansas River water upstream from Pueblo Reservoir. The plan was devised to give our city an option in the unlikely event Pueblo County commissioners wouldn't permit the pipeline to run through their jurisdiction.

But Pueblo County commissioners, acting in friendly, neighborly and professional fashion, have given tentative permission for Plan A, which would tap water directly from Pueblo Reservoir. Commissioners said they will approve the project if the Colorado Springs City Council approves a variety of expensive stipulations. The most substantial involve Colorado Springs contributing \$50 million over five years to a Fountain Creek district the Colorado Legislature plans to create, and assurances that \$75 million will be spent on upgrades to our city's sanitary sewer system.

The conditions require new water quality monitoring sites along Fountain Creek, storm water control in the creek, dredging requirements to preserve Pueblo levees, and stipulations pertaining to the hookup of users on the system.

Ultimately it's up to members of the City Council to decide yes or no on the Pueblo County requirements. But the stipulations seem reasonable and prudent. Our city has no business causing downstream burdens that it can, and should, mitigate as a cost of doing business. Springs Councilwoman Margaret Radford, who has worked for years to get the pipeline built, said it best:

"I think we have a burden to meet. I think we have a responsibility to meet and frankly I'd be disappointed if we didn't."

Said Colorado Springs Utilities CEO Jerry Forte: "We've gained a new approach to our neighbor to the south and they to us and we've tried to make something that's a win-win for both communities."

It appears both sides of the equation feel that way.

"This is a tremendous accomplishment to make Fountain Creek an amenity," said Jeff Chostner, chairman of the Pueblo County Board of Commissioners, as quoted in the Pueblo Chieftain. "We are on the verge of re-forming a relationship between Colorado Springs and Pueblo where we work as partners."

It does appear that way, and what a wonderful world it would be. Pueblo is a beautiful and historic city, rich with culture. Pueblo's proximity to Colorado Springs makes our city a better place. Working together on concrete projects such as SDS - projects with tangible, genuine and irrefutable value - these two cities could comprise one of the most desirable regions in the country for legitimate economic development.