

Opinion

Keeping healthy business climate requires water

We're fortunate to be in a city that is a wonderful place to live, work and do business.

Colorado Springs has been rated as the best place to live in the United States by Money magazine and among the top 25 cities for business by Forbes.

Access to a dependable supply of water is critical to ensure that it stays that way. We need the Southern Delivery System to provide water for our future. Our ability to do business and continue our quality of life depends on it.

It is easy to take for granted that Colorado Springs is a great place to live and work. With the beauty of our natural surroundings and our wonderful climate, how could it not be?

But the city we know and love did not just happen.

Water is the lifeblood of any community. Getting the water we need has been a challenge for Colorado Springs since the earliest settlers came here during the 1870s. We are one of the few major cities along the Front Range not located near a major river.

Luckily for us, the men and women who went before us stepped up again and again to provide the water we need.

It is estimated that we will have a population of 800,000 in Colorado Springs by 2050. That's almost double our city's

population today. Much of that increase in people will come from our own children, the military families moving to the area and new businesses attracted to the area. With more than 15,000 people on its payroll, Fort Carson is our single largest employer. The number of troops stationed at Fort Carson is expected to more than double during the next three years. We need to ensure we have water to meet this need.

Despite what some might believe, the Southern Delivery System will not cause that increase. But it will deliver the water we need to maintain the quality of life and economic well-being of our city.

We are fortunate to have a diverse economy. Manufacturing, space research, software, transportation and utilities, mining and construction, financial services, customer service, sports, education and training, professional and business services, and health services all contribute to our economy. And tourism adds \$1 billion a year.

But we can't sustain all that without adequate water.

And it's not just the future of Colorado Springs that is at stake. Colorado Springs is important to the economy and qual-



Stephanie
FINLEY

ity of life of the entire region. In his annual housing report for Horizon Communities and Pueblo Bank & Trust, economist David Bamberger said Pueblo residents who commute to work in Colorado Springs make up 21 percent of Pueblo's housing market. So, our economy is important to their economy — and vice versa. We need each other.

The Bureau of Reclamation has published a Draft Environmental Impact Statement examining seven alternatives for SDS. The one proposed by Colorado Springs Utilities and its partners (Fountain, Security and Pueblo West), which the bureau has identified as its initial preferred alternative, would bring water to Colorado Springs through a 43-mile-long pipeline from Pueblo Dam.

The Southern Delivery System will use water rights Colorado Springs already owns and will maximize the return on the investment El Paso County residents have made in Pueblo Reservoir and the rest of the Frypan-Arkansas Project. Through property taxes, El Paso County residents have invested more than \$65 million in the Fry-Ark Project since 1959.

Without the Southern Delivery System, we will eventually run short of water and

virtually every business in our city will suffer the consequences.

The Southern Delivery System also will help protect our city against droughts. Those of us who lived through the drought just a few years ago likely recall how the lack of water made it challenging for both businesses and residents.

The Bureau of Reclamation recently published a Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Southern Delivery System which is now available for public review and comment.

The Greater Colorado Springs Chamber of Commerce supports the Southern Delivery System. I encourage every businessperson in Colorado Springs to learn more and get involved by seeking out more information and casting your support for the Southern Delivery System. Our ability to do business and maintain our quality of life is closely tied to a reliable source of water for our future.

Visit www.sdseis.com to view the Draft EIS. For information about the Southern Delivery System, visit www.csu.org and click on the Southern Delivery System link.

Stephanie Finley is president of the Governmental Affairs Division of the Greater Colorado Springs Chamber of Commerce.