

NOREEN: No whining, please, on doubled water rates

July 23, 2009

BARRY NOREEN

THE GAZETTE

You can never expect to pay your parents back for all they've done for you.

The closest you can come is to live well and help provide for those who come after you.

Some in Colorado Springs are bound to howl about their water rates doubling during the next 10 years, bound to complain that if the Southern Delivery System is needed to fuel new growth, the newcomers are the ones who should pay for it.

Next time you hear someone whining like that, or before you raise that flimsy argument yourself, understand that this has all happened before. If you moved here after, say, 1975, (most who live here did) you benefited from two ambitious water projects that dramatically increased rates before you got here.

The Blue River project took water from the river on the other side of Hoosier Pass. The Homestake project, which doubled residents' water rates after 1965, gets its water from the Holy Cross Wilderness Area upstream of the Eagle River.

On Wednesday, before City Council members gave the go-ahead for the SDS, Utilities Director Jerry Forte said the \$1.4 billion project "will ensure water supply for many generations."

With apologies to Trekkies like former Councilwoman Margaret Radford, who put in some sweat equity on this, you might call it "SDS: The Next Generation." When it comes to big-time infrastructure, one generation pays for the next.

That's the way it has to work.

In every generation there are those who can't embrace that historical perspective, so they gripe about helping to pay for Denver International Airport, or the four-laning of I-70 through Glenwood Canyon, or even relatively small-scale projects such as the World Arena in Colorado Springs.

Dave Robbins, Colorado's top gun water lawyer, who attended Wednesday's meeting of the utility board, knows how hard it is to build a water project these days. Projects since the early 1970s withered on the drafting board.

"You have done an amazing thing," Robbins told the council. "You have obtained local state and federal approval."

The water department first sketched SDS 20 years ago. The city struggled; it's fair to say some city officials took too long to recognize SDS was mainly a political problem, not an engineering one.

"It took 20 years for us to get here," the Water Department's Bruce McCormick said. "We're not sure we could do it again."

Water will be more expensive, but you don't have to water and mow, water and mow. There are attractive, cheaper alternatives.

SDS is part of the cost of doing business in a city that wants to grow. Some oppose the growth, but it's clear they are in the minority.

Roy Heald, general manager of the Security Water District, put it this way: "Let's get ready to turn some dirt."