

**Our View - Wednesday
July 8, 2008**

THE GAZETTE

UDALL WANTS SDS TO STALL Senate candidate sides against city

Never mind that five years of extensive study and community discourse have run their course. Never mind that the official public comment period has come and gone. Never mind that the Southern Delivery System, needed for the future water supply of Colorado Springs, has been studied and debated to a point of exhaustion.

Forget all that, because U.S. Rep. Mark Udall is running for election to the United States Senate. What may be good for his campaign, it appears, holds more weight with the congressman than what's good for the economic welfare of Colorado.

The Southern Delivery System is a reasonable plan for Colorado Springs to obtain water it owns in Pueblo Reservoir. Don't be fooled by the reservoir's name: Colorado Springs is the majority owner of water stored behind the dam, and the city pays for 70 percent of the reservoir's debt. The water is rightfully ours, but a political mover and shaker in Pueblo has made full-time sport of finding ways to deprive our city of what it owns.

Udall, a Democrat, would surely love the endorsement of the Pueblo Chieftain, which serves a solidly Democratic community. He knows Colorado Springs mostly votes Republican, no matter what. Perhaps that's why he chose to intervene in a regional water and pipeline dispute driven mostly by community rivalry rather than common sense, mutual concern for the welfare of southern Colorado, or respect for water rights. He advocated a position that would harm Colorado's economy, most likely for what would be for him expedient political gain.

Udall penned a letter dated June 26 that asks Mike Collins, area manager for the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, to "slow down work on the final EIS so that public comments and concerns can be seriously considered." Completion of the EIS, or Environmental Impact Study, is essential for progress of the Southern Delivery System. The study is supposed to objectively weigh environmental concerns, not the desires of career politicians.

Udall wants a slow process, he insists, for the consideration of "public comments and concerns." But he doesn't want all public comments and concerns considered equally. If you or someone you know attended one of the Bureau of Reclamation's public comment sessions, or if you submitted opinions and observations, understand that Udall has done nothing to encourage the bureau to consider them carefully.

What he really wants, as stated in his letter, involves careful bureau consideration of the comments submitted by his powerful friend, Pueblo Chieftain Publisher Robert Rawlings - the most outspoken critic of the Southern Delivery System. As previously explained in this space, Rawlings has initiated a no-holds-barred crusade against the Southern Delivery System, using his newspaper and community status to trip it up. He refuses to see the future health and welfare of Colorado Springs as a boon to the regional economy, including all of central and southern Colorado. He seems to view a loss for Colorado Springs as a gain for Pueblo.

Here's what Udall said about the comments of Rawlings, the only person named in his letter: "I've had an opportunity to review Mr. Rawlings' extensive comments, and I hope you will give them your serious attention and full consideration."

Nowhere does Udall, a man who seeks to represent the entire state, advocate that Collins give "serious attention" to the comments of anyone from Colorado Springs who views the pipeline as an essential lifeline for the future economic health of Colorado Springs and El Paso County.

Nowhere does he mention the mayor of Colorado Springs, or the scores of central and southern Colorado business leaders who have spoken out about the benefits of the Southern Delivery System. No. He wants the most serious consideration, perhaps the only consideration, given to a man who owns a newspaper in one of the state's Democratic strongholds and has published scores of articles damning the proposal.

In other words, the pipeline will directly benefit more than 500,000 residents of Colorado - providing a sustainable source of clean water for generations into the future - and Udall cares mostly about the position of one powerful Pueblo resident.

In his letter, Udall expresses concern that the Southern Delivery System might somehow interfere with a bill he has introduced in the House of Representatives. He wrote: "I am also concerned about the implications for legislation that I have introduced (H.R. 4928) that would require a study of the feasibility of a Fountain Creek storage facility to benefit the communities of Pueblo and along the Lower Arkansas Valley."

This concern contradicts the language of the very bill Udall references. The bill clearly states that a feasibility study of a Fountain Creek storage facility may not interfere with any study pertaining to the Southern Delivery System. Here are the exact words, from Section 3, of Udall's bill: "The Chief of Engineers shall conduct the study independently from, and shall not affect, any other study relating to - (A) the Fountain Creek watershed; (B) the Fryingpan-Arkansas Project of the State; or (C) the proposed Southern Delivery System Project."

He advocates impeding the Southern Delivery System because of his bill, despite wording in the bill that forbids such conduct. Apparently he's not going to let facts, or the appearance of bold hypocrisy, interfere with low-hanging political fruit in Pueblo. His bill says "shall not affect." Yet his campaign stunt advocates bureaucratic interference that most certainly will "affect" the proposed Southern Delivery System.

Udall and his friend Rawlings feign concern about the additional effluent Colorado Springs will release into Fountain Creek if the water is piped from the reservoir. Today, water discharged by Colorado Springs maintains water levels near Pueblo at slightly higher than ankle level. When SDS is fully operational, the level would increase another inch and a half - at most.

Furthermore, most water in Fountain Creek is cleaner today than it was before Colorado Springs began releasing treated wastewater into the creek. The highly treated effluent dilutes harmful compounds that occur naturally in the creek, including salts and selenium and other forms of contaminants suspended in silt. Springs Utilities has spent tens of millions of dollars upgrading its wastewater collection system in an effort to improve Fountain Creek, and by 2025 the utility will have spent \$250 million on improvements that benefit the creek.

Unfortunately, opposition to the Southern Delivery System is rooted mostly in a needless intercity rivalry, and an erroneous belief that Pueblo can't win unless Colorado Springs loses. Udall either believes this absurd myth, or he has decided it might benefit him to choose sides in an unnecessary rivalry.

The fact is, the Southern Delivery System will benefit all of Colorado, and mostly the demographic and geographic region defined by Colorado Springs and Pueblo. In economic reality, what's good for Colorado Springs benefits Pueblo, and what's good for Pueblo benefits Colorado Springs. A rising tide, even a tiny rise in Fountain Creek, lifts all ships. If Rep. Udall wants to represent all of Colorado as a United States senator he should avoid taking positions that stand only to harm the economic health of the state's second-largest city - even if it mostly votes Republican.