

WATER TOPICS OVERVIEW COMMITTEE MEETING
ALERUS CENTER, GRAND FORKS, NORTH DAKOTA
FEBRUARY 3, 2014

Comments by Representative Curt Kreun, District 43 :

Thank you to my colleagues in the Legislature, State Water Commissioners and Governor's office, and all those who were able to attend the meeting today and speak about project's around the State.

As we have been listening to presentations from around the State, I was struck by the needs of the communities in the region and the State as a whole.

Cities across the State are facing infrastructure challenges with limited resources to address them. Whether it is in the west where cities face the demands on infrastructure from increasing population or in the east where there is aging infrastructure, and simultaneously the threat of flood and the potential lack of drinking water supplies. Regardless, the residents of our State are in need of assistance with improving basic water infrastructure.

And here we are, we are in the enviable position of having one of the robust economies in the country, and a surplus in our State for infrastructure opportunities to shape our future through thoughtful and pragmatic investments.

But with this great windfall comes great responsibility to those we serve.

Through the 2013 legislative session, great care was given to addressing numerous water needs. The Governor provided solid leadership and direction as we navigated through a number of bills that spelled out the funding of water projects and appointed a water topics committee to oversee the implementation of those bills.

From my viewpoint, however, there seems to be disconnect from what was intended through the legislative process to what is taking place currently in terms of rewriting funding policy and implementation.

While I think we all can agree that the State Water Commission is an extremely important agency – with its mission and goals focused on developing, managing, and regulating water resources, I am not convinced that it is its mission to rewrite legislative intent.

SB 2233 set the tone for water policy and goals, and further, HB 1020 specifically defined the role

of the State Water Commission and the Water Topics Committee.

HB 1020 states "The Committee shall prepare a schedule of priorities with respect to water projects. The State Water Commission and State Engineer shall assist the committee in developing the schedule of priorities, and the committee may seek input from stakeholders within the state regarding water project priorities. **The committee also shall study policies regarding the development and financing of municipal projects, including water treatment plants; pipelines, including pipeline expansion, public and industrial use of water, cost analysis of future project development, and ongoing maintenance cost of current and future projects.....**"

It is important to have a flexible framework in which to address water issues, but, I wonder if there is a way to respect the legislative intent of the bills that were passed, while working together to implement a timely and fair distribution of funding?

I would like to see us focus on establishing policies or frameworks that support this collaboration.

I understand that with this many needs and budget surplus comes many challenges and new demands; however, I firmly believe that investing in basic water infrastructure is a worthwhile and necessary use of these resources.

As it stands right now, it appears policy has jumped ahead of vision and the original legislative intent of the bills mentioned earlier. I do not seek to delay or slow the progress of water funding development, but rather set a reasonable time frame in which to gather information from the State Water Commission and Water Topic Committee in order to collaborate in an effective manner.

The goal would be to collect the information, have time to work with entities affected by funding development, prioritize issues, and develop solid legislation to be presented at the next session – which is now less than a year away.

We have an opportunity through this type of investment to put our resources to work in projects that benefit this generation and generations to come. Let's get to work together and make this happen.
