opinion/editorial

Norden project delays are expensive, but necessary

A report earlier this week that the decision on whether to construct the Norden Dam is at least one year away was welcome news.

According to the Lincoln Star, environmental concerns over the protection of the endangered whooping crane have prompted a U.S. Bureau of Reclamation study which will take at least one year to complete.

The proposed project, would place a dam on Niobrara River near Norden in north-central Nebraska. The 180-foot dam would create a 19½-mile reservoir to provide irrigation water for the area.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has indicated that streamflows below the dam might need to be increased to protect the habitat for whooping cranes. In order to increase the streamflow, with increased releases from the dam, the dam might have to be reduced in size—reducing the amount of land that could be irrigated from 77,000 to 27,000 acres.

This latest study is just the latest in a long series of lawsuits, feasibility reports, and studies that have delayed construction of the dam for several years.

And over the years, as a result, the cost of the proposed project has increased tremendously—causing many persons to criticize those lawsuits, reports and studies. But the delays have been well worth the costs. Before concern about the environment was prevalent, dams were constructed without consideration of such things as whooping cranes, plant life and streamflows. And the results were disastrous.

Whether in the end, the dam should be built obviously is still up to debate, but in the meantime, study which will make the final decision a good one is in the best interest of all involved.

1984 observation suggests changes

LINCOLN—1984—Anniversaries always serve as times of reflection. Just this week, the golden anniversary of Black Tuesday caused public attention to be riveted on the nation's economy, both past and present. Time Magazine printed memories of several life-long Wall Street financiers—memories of walking down the middle of the street at the end of a hopeless day on the market, so as to avoid being hit by any falling bodies of suicides. That type of memory one hopes never to relive.

jan stahn

The economy has seen great growth and inflation in the ensuing half century. The $74 billion lost during the Crash would total almost $300 billion by today's standards. But no one is predicting with certainty a repeat of the 1929 disaster, mainly because of precautions taken on Wall Street to insure that fact.

So, 55 years after the country's economic bubble burst, we can look back at 1929 with painful nostalgia, but not fear of recurrence.

Nonetheless, we *were* warned that diaster can strike. But here in Cornhusker country, where we grow our money, the harsh example of 1929 was not close enough to home to teach us about money management. It was not until that golden anniversary had come and gone that Nebraska realized the full impact of economic breakdown. I am speaking, of course, of the faltering and collapse of the state university, which occurred over Christmas break in the winter of 1979-80 (when, suspiciously, no students were on campus to protest the action).

Yes, we all remember the first day of second semester five years ago, when the by-then-inflated-to-twelve-member Board of Regents declared that, despite their best preventative efforts, the University had failed them, and financial ruin was at hand.

Preventative measures had indeed been taken during the last half of the '70s.

Faculty salary increases were tabled indefinately. Dormitories were purposely overbooked each fall to provide more room and board revenue.

A new Alumni Center, financed by enormous alumni donations, was planned for the heart of campus, to encourage alums to give their life savings to UNL, and in return have a parking stall named after them.

Tuition was raised, then re-raised, then raised again, until the infamous comparison to Harvard University became, in one respect at least, quite accurate.

However, all these good intentions were of no avail. The university spent the spring semester of 1980 searching for ways to keep the ship from sinking, vowing not to accept defeat and close down. And, like their grandparents did in the 1930s, students learned to improvise.

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Professsor protests university layoff

The decision by the Board of Regents to close down the university from December 22 to Jan. 6 is yet another example of the arrogance and exploitation which are the watch words whereby the administration deals with employees. For many faculty and graduate students, this "lock out" will effectively bring research to an abrupt halt during one of the few periods when many people can devote full time to research. Of course, the faculty was not consulted about the plan.

guest opinion

An Oct. 19 memorandum from Ron Wright, UNL vice chancellor for Business and Finance, says that only "areas containing essential on going research projects" will be open. Essential to whom? By what standards? Is the research of a full professor who will lose expensive equipment in cold temperatures more "essential" than the research of an assistant professor facing a tenure decision who will lose his or her job if the working conditions in the office or lab obstruct research? Will research be a less important factor this year in promotion and tenure decisions than in other years when the university accorded adequate working conditions to the faculty during the student holiday when faculty is expected to do research and not "vacation?"

Classified employees, especially those in B and C line classifications, will suffer the most direct economic exploitation as a result of the closing. The university's original plan was to layoff for four days all but "essential" employees; those who had vacation days could cover the loss of income by taking vacation days at that time. Those without accrued vacation time were just out of luck. Needless to say, the classified staff was not consulted about the plan, either. Many were not at all happy about the layoff or having to chop up their vacation time at the convenience of the Board of Regents.

There are at least two lessons to be drawn from this experience. One is to note again the arbitrary and exploitive way in which the administration habitually deals with staff; the other is the potential effectiveness when staff members raise their voices to protest such treatment.

The Retail and Professional Workers Union which is organizing classified staff on the three UN campuses can hardly believe the managerial stupidity that gave such an organizing issue as a layoff. Classified staff at the Medical Center have already completed a card campaign and are now in the Court of Industrial Relations requesting to be named the bargaining agent, and the UNO card campaign is nearing completion. Just a month ago the Retail and Professional Workers succeeded in winning the election as bargaining agent for all the classified staff in the four state colleges. Many UNL staff now see unionization as their best option.

The business managers who favor this shutdown tell us it will save $10,000 a day, but they do not say at whose expense. Under the original plan for a four-day layoff, a substantial portion of the savings would have come from the wages of those affected by the layoff. Given a turnover rate in the upper 40 percent, a significant number of C line employees are already crippled by a wage structure so low that many are at or near the minimum allowed by federal law. The university system rarely has money for merit pay, and "promotions" most often come through transferring into other positions. In addition to the taxes these employees pay as citizens of the state, they are now being asked to contribute their wages to the university's fuel bill.

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