

## Water most important issue last 10 years

*Waukesha needs **Great LAKES** governors to understand the facts*

Tuesday was my tenth anniversary of officially writing a column for the Waukesha Freeman. The Lovely Doreen from Waukesha and I had pizza. I would have shared but it was Tuesday and you're reading this Thursday, so no pizza for you.

The first official column was about how liberals around the state were trying to get local communities like Watertown to hold referendums opposing the war in Iraq as if this is the way foreign policy is made. They actually sued to force Watertown to hold the referendum. By the way, Watertown voted against the liberals and the referendum lost. I'm surprised President Barack Obama hasn't moved the Guantanamo Bay prisoners there yet.

Of course, I could spend a whole column just talking about me, about how great I am and about everything wonderful thing I have written. But Tuesday was also the first ever Celebrate Waukesha breakfast event hosted by Mayor Shawn Reilly. Gathered in the room were some of the city of Waukesha's business leaders and local government officials.

Which leads me to the most important issue that I have been covering for the Waukesha Freeman and other publications for the last 10 years, our water crisis. Dan Duchniak, our city's Water Utility manager, gave a refresher update to the attendees on the status of our application for a diversion of **Great LAKES** water. Right now, the application is pending on the decision of each of the **Great LAKES** governors.

It's worth remembering just how far we have come in this whole process. Wisconsin joined the **Great LAKES** Compact in 2008 with the hope that the city of Waukesha would be able to use a built-in exception to divert water from Lake Michigan. At the time, support for the Compact and Waukesha's hope for a diversion was bipartisan. Democratic state Sen. Mark Miller even called the provision allowing diversions to communities in counties along the **Great LAKES** watershed dividing line "the Waukesha Exception."

There were some in the Legislature that were wary of the Compact, especially because it was supported by Gov. Jim Doyle. State Sen. Mary Lazich opposed the Compact by claiming that the "single veto" provision that could prevent a diversion of **Great LAKES** water was too strict.

It is, but as I wrote in my column at the time, "What the opponents appear to be forgetting is that the current federal law governing diversions also grants each state a veto. There isn't any criteria or process for granting permission for a diversion, so a state can veto a diversion application without offering any justification."

Now that the Compact has been approved, the **Great LAKES** governors have to provide a valid reason for denying Waukesha's application. I have heard local critics of our water application say it's unlikely that we will get unanimous approval from the governors so we should begin planning an alternative. But if the governors are required to look at the facts, and that there are really no alternatives, then we should expect an

approval. If not, the mutual trust among the states protecting the **Great LAKES** falls apart, and we can expect the Compact to fall apart, too.

The application for a diversion of water from Lake Michigan is the most important issue confronting this city. I just hope that it won't be too long before I get to write the column about the completion of the pipeline to Oak Creek and the first cup of clean drinking water. We can't wait another 10 years.

\*\*\* I did want to take a brief moment to thank Bill Yorth for taking the chance 10 years ago on letting me write a column for this newspaper. People often ask me how I was given this column. I always tell them, "I asked." But it was Bill who asked me if I really thought I could come up with a topic every week. So far, so good.

I also want to thank Brian Huber, who copy edits the column and makes me look good. I want to thank Jessica McBride, who first suggested I write this column. I want to thank the Lovely Doreen, who lets me do this. And finally, thanks to all of you who keep reading. Here's to another 10 years.

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