

Our City

I knew it was the right decision when I made it; but I didn't like it then and I still don't. The decision, even though right, put me a bit crosswise with some folks that I care very much about. Even after explaining my position, in light of State law I felt obligated to apologize for holding firm to the decision. It would have been easy to turn a deaf ear or look the other way; few would have been the wiser. However, in a big picture sort of way I knew too that I would have been derelict and negligent in performing my duties as Mayor. And in my mind when it is all said and done that is what society comes down to; each of us doing the right thing even when it's hard, especially when it is hard.

I tell you this not because what I do as Mayor is really difficult and weighs heavily on my conscience, but because in the months to come and over the course of the next few years most of you will have a choice to make. At first it will seem simple enough and for me and most of you it will require a few timing adjustments and nothing more. The decision will become more complex over the course of the next two to five years I believe when we all are paying the same basic price for a commodity that is quickly becoming extremely valuable. It's one that I have forewarned you about. The problem will not go away. It will only get worse. It got worse for the City of American Falls on Friday when I received an email, an excerpt follows:

“The Director of the Department of Water Resources issued a curtailment order curtailing water rights within the ESPA for rights junior to February 8, 1989. The 1989 priority date implicates water rights owned by the following cities: American Falls, Ammon, Atomic City, Blackfoot, Bliss, Burley, Carey, Chubbuck, Declo, Dietrich, Gooding, Heyburn, Iona, Paul, Rexburg, Richfield, Rigby, Shelly, Sugar City, Ucon, and Wendell. Affected water right owners have until May 3, 2016 to establish to the Director that they have water to offset their proportional share of the depletions.

AIC has been working with representatives from cities in the ESPA preparing for such a call. The coalition of cities prepared and submitted a water mitigation plan to the Director of Idaho Department of Water Resources. Just this week the Director approved the city mitigation plan with the Surface Water Coalition. As a result, cities participating in the mitigation plan will have safe harbor from water calls during 2016. American Falls has indicated that it is interested in participating with other cities in the ESPA in the mitigation plan. We have secured water for the mitigation plan from the City of Pocatello.

In order to participate in the plan, American Falls will need to mitigate for 306 acre feet of water (99,710,537 gallons). The cost to do so is \$20/AF. The total cost for American Falls to participate in the mitigation is \$6,120. The Director of Idaho Water Resources needs to know what cities are participating in the plan by May 3rd. Please let the City of Pocatello know ASAP if you still plan on participating in the mitigation plan and wish to lease water through the city.”

By all accounts this past winter and this spring have been considered a normal water year with 96% of average snow pack in the Snake River watershed. Yet, we find ourselves having to pay

for 306 AF of water that we normally use over the course of the summer as we water our lawns and gardens. If my efforts to work through our membership in the Idaho Ground Water Association and with the Aberdeen-American Falls Canal District fail, the City will be obligated to buy the 306 AF of water to meet the curtailment order. Remember this is an average water year; yet we find ourselves in a situation where water or money is owed. When we have a drought year comparable to 2013, 2007, 2005 and 2004, how many acre feet will be curtailed and what will the cost be? That is the scenario that has me scared. If I can't find us a reprieve, the City will have no choice but to pay the \$6,120. Some may think, no big deal, and this year it won't be for you. But as we start to factor in future curtailment payments as we work through the budgeting process, the City cannot absorb those payments and continue to provide services within our water department even at the most basic of levels. So, where does that leave us?

Almost ten years ago now, the City proposed the installation of water meters through a grant and loan that was available when we ran the Water and Waste Water Bond for the first time. The cost to the City's water users would have been pennies on the dollar at the time; yet the bond failed because folks didn't want their water use metered. Now we find ourselves in a predicament where if the City is to maintain its services and maintain its water infrastructure the cost of future State declared water curtailments will be passed on to each of us as users of the resource. It doesn't sit well does it! Consider too, that my neighbor across the street with a much smaller yard than I have and using less water, will pay just as much as me because we have no way of knowing for sure who uses how much without water meters. Think of the retired couple on a fixed income or the family that works two or three jobs but still struggles to make ends meet. If as citizens we were to pay for this year's curtailment it would cost each water service about four dollars. No, it's not much unless you are one of the previously described folks. Please think beyond yourself and try and see the bigger picture. What will the payment be when we experience a year like 2013 and curtailment takes us back past 1989 to 1972 or 1960 water rights? That very real possibility has me worried, it weighs heavy and will not go away.

I am asking you to get in the habit of conserving water. Cut back your water use by 12%. As a City we have to or we will pay the cost to forgo curtailment. Don't think you are alone in this as this issue affects everyone and no one more so than our farmers and food processors who shoulder the brunt of the curtailment order. Do your part please. While the best time would have been years ago, I will begin to see what a City wide installation of water meters would now cost. Even if I am able to find us an immediate reprieve for this year, curtailment and its associated costs will be a part of our future. In dealing with that reality I believe no one should pay for more water than they actually use and meters are the only way to assure that this is the case going forward. It will be hard, it will not be popular, but nonetheless it is the right decision. If you don't agree I would gladly talk to you about it; maybe I overlooked something?

I need to thank our Fire Chief Pete Williams and our volunteer Fire Department for adapting the Willow Bay area to keep clean throughout the year. Even though it was cleaned by the Interfaith Volunteers two weeks ago garbage is already visible along the road. I sincerely thank both groups of volunteers for being Good Neighbors! Although our City personnel do a remarkable job, if you are associated with a group that would like to adopt a park or area in town to keep clean let either Jeremy Peirsol or me know.

And, lastly I need to put a plug in for my students and their work this year in our greenhouse. Bedding plants, flower baskets and pots, along with a good selection of garden starts, are on sale now through June 3, just in time for Mother's Day. Greenhouse hours are from 8:00 to 3:30 Monday through Friday or by appointment, except this Thursday, Friday and Saturday when we will remain open until 5:30 pm. Thanks for any support you can give the students and their efforts.

Until next week...