

Water... it's all about the water...

Columbia River Treaty negotiations

By Senator Doug Whitsett
Oregon Senate District 28

The Council of State Governments Committee on River Governance recently met in Yakima, Washington. As last year's chair of that committee, I traveled to Washington to join Repre-

sentatives and Senators from Montana, Idaho, Washington, and Oregon, as well as a delegation from British Columbia. Our primary purpose was to discuss the impacts of the ongoing Columbia River Treaty negotiations between the United States and Canada.

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History...

The Columbia River Treaty was signed in 1961 and ratified in 1964. It essentially trades water storage in Canada for hydroelectric power generated in the United States. Extensive water storage was developed in Canada under the provisions of the Treaty. That Canadian water storage provides nearly 60% of all water storage capacity on the Columbia River. In fact, under current river management, Canadian water storage supplies virtually all of the seasonal downstream flood control capacity on the main-stream river in the United States. It also provides most of the water for the seasonal flows used for hydroelectric generation in this country. The repatriation of some of that electricity to Canada is called the "Canadian Entitlement." That "Entitlement" is virtually the only ongoing benefit that Canadians derive from the Treaty.

Renegotiations...

Under the Treaty, either country can end the agreement with 10 years' notice, beginning in 2014. That means the Treaty can be dissolved as early as the year 2024.

that they elect to discontinue the Treaty. This would force the United States federal government to completely change its management of the Columbia River.

- It would require us to use virtually all of our own storage capacity for flood control. This would result in the near complete seasonal drawdown of our reservoirs on the Columbia, disrupting virtually all other components of river management.

- Our capacity for hydroelectric generation on the River would be severely reduced. The availability of an abundant, low-cost hydropower base load is a major driver of our Pacific Northwest economy. Further, it would severely jeopardize the ability to use hydropower to offset the wind power generated by literally thousands of windmills.

- Shipping on the Columbia River is another enormous economic driver of our regional economy. That shipping would be severely curtailed by the drawdown of Columbia River reservoirs. Seasonally, it could virtually eliminate freight transport on the River.

- Irrigation diversions from the Columbia would be made physically, and economically, impossible under such a scenario. Water would not

the Canadians to continue to use their resources to store water to control flooding in the United States. At the same time, they expect British Columbia to accept the delivery of less "Canadian Entitlement" hydropower, in direct contradiction to the Canadian request for more hydropower. Further, they want the Canadians to participate in costly additions to the provisions of the Treaty that includes ecological management of the Columbia and upstream salmon reintroduction. Current Oregon political leaders appear to be in full agreement with the U.S. demands. They appear to be oblivious to the potential costs to the Oregon citizens they represent.

Tribal interests...

Tribal interests are making claims of their own that parallel and often exceed the U.S. demands. Notwithstanding the presence of nearly 40 dams on the river system, the Tribes demand that the Columbia River hydrograph be returned to near pre-settlement levels. They openly state their belief that periodic flooding is more acceptable than the current River management. The Tribes appear to be promoting the re-introduction of salmon throughout the reaches of the entire Columbia River

The United States has indicated that it would like to renegotiate and extend the Treaty. However, it appears the U.S. wants the new agreement to significantly reduce the amount of electricity exported to Canada. The U.S. also wants to add a third provision to the Treaty to include ecological management of the Columbia as an equal third component. That provision appears to include the re-introduction of salmon upstream from Grand Coulee Dam into Canada.

Canada's government has given the province of British Columbia near complete authority to either renegotiate or terminate the Treaty. British Columbia believes that the Treaty does not provide fair compensation for the services it provides to the United States. Its officials want to enlarge the "Canadian Entitlement" by increasing the amount of electricity exported to their province. They believe that can be accomplished within the current language of the Treaty. The Canadians have thus far expressed no interest in making other changes to the Treaty. They strongly oppose the expansion of the Treaty to include ecological management of the River. They further believe that the re-introduction of salmon to the upper watershed has no place in the Treaty.

Therefore...

From my perspective, British Columbia holds virtually all of the cards in this negotiation. The Province provides well more than half of all of the water storage capacity in the entire Columbia River Basin. Moreover, its dams capture and store the enormous spring runoff that can cause severe downstream flooding. The Canadians can choose to stop storing that water, as soon as 2024, in the event

be seasonally available for out-of-stream use. Moreover, the increased cost of pumping would likely be prohibitive.

- Fish passage for salmon would have to be completely restructured at enormous cost. In fact, the entire salmon management plans would require fundamental changes.

- Literally thousands of recreational sites along the Columbia would become seasonal mudflats. Both public health and public safety concerns would require their closure.

- In addition to all of that, cultural resources would be exposed, looted, and destroyed.

One small example...

One small example of the expected economic costs was demonstrated during the repair of the Wanapum Dam, located on the Columbia River in Washington. The repair of a large crack in the concrete of one of the spillways caused its reservoir to be drawn down by 26 feet for an extended period. Hydropower generation and irrigation diversion at the dam were virtually eliminated. The complete temporary restructuring of fish passage also became necessary. The entire shoreline was closed to recreation due to public safety, public health, and cultural issues. The dam is located too far upstream for the curtailment of shipping to be a significant economic factor. Nevertheless, the one-year cost for drawing down the reservoir and repair of this single, small dam exceeded \$70 million.

No resolution in sight...

U.S. negotiators have made virtually no attempt to resolve these issues during the past year. They appear to be steadfastly adhering to their expectations that Canada will concede to our demands. They are pressuring

system. Taken as a whole, it appears that meeting the Tribal demands would require the destruction of most, if not all, of the dams.

Canadian stance...

Canadian officials point out that they are quite capable of going forward without the Treaty. They are able to develop the capability to generate their own electricity using existing dams and reservoirs. Furthermore, they can do it without covering tens of thousands of fertile Canadian acres with water stored for our benefit. The Canadians are visibly tiring of both the rhetoric and the

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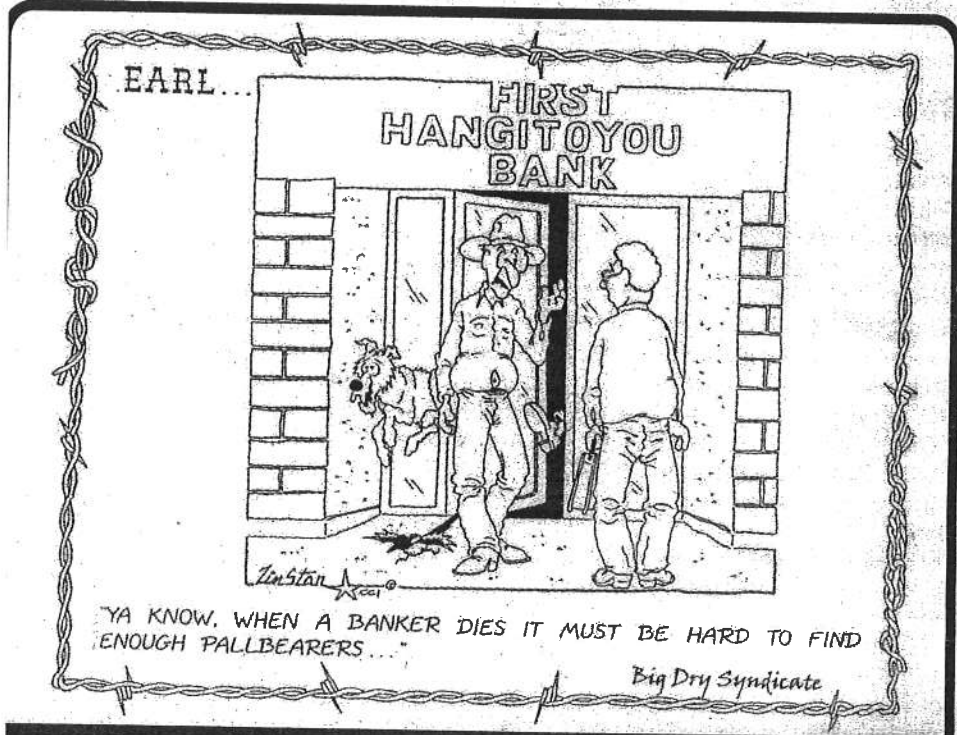
Conclusion...

It is well past time for the United States to restart the negotiations on reasonable and fair terms. The Pacific Northwest will sustain an enormous and perpetual financial loss

should the Canadians decide to end the Columbia River Treaty. They have already decided that they will bypass our President's political procrastination on the XL pipeline by building their own pipeline from Alberta to the Atlantic coast.

As things currently stand, the Canadians are reluctant

to change the Treaty. If U.S. negotiators and the Tribes insist on mandating changes to it, the Canadians may very well choose to discontinue and dissolve it entirely. We need to be aware of this possibility and act accordingly, or the long-term consequences could be devastating to our region and our way of life.



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