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Engineer has solution to rising seas

Alaska's glaciers and the polar ice cap are shrinking, as are glaciers in the Himalayas and Greenland and the ice sheet in Antarctica. This phenomenon threatens to flood coastlines around the world. An Anchorage engineer, however, has come up with a possible answer.

The British Antarctic Survey estimates that the rise in global sea levels by the end of this century may reach a level of 5 meters (16 feet). Others say it will be less dramatic. But if the British Antarctic team is correct, sea water will cover many of the world's great cities, including New York, London, Cairo, Miami and most of southern Florida. One hundred million residents of Calcutta, India and Bangladesh will be displaced, and Beijing and Shanghai will be under water.

Closer to home, Alaska's North Slope will be covered, as well as most of our coastal communities, parts of Anchorage and a large section of Western Alaska.

Educated in both China and the United States, Dominic Lee came to the United States in 1962 and to Alaska in 1977. An American citizen, he runs an engineering and construction business in Anchorage and is a licensed engineer in 11 U.S. states.

Rather than simply worry about global warming, Mr. Lee set out to find a solution. He has designed a project that has the potential to address the flooding problem while creating vast supplies of hydroelectric energy and arable land.

Dominic first came to my attention last year when he submitted a proposal to build a natural gas pipeline from Prudhoe Bay to Valdez. In May I traveled with him to Beijing to explore the interest of the Chinese government in Alaska Liq-

WALLY HICKEL

COMMENT



uefied Natural Gas (LNG). At a meeting of high level oil executives, I challenged China to address the questions: "Why War? Why not Big Projects?"

"The price for a better world does not have to be blood," I said. "It can be sweat."

I challenged China, the world's fastest growing economy, to use its talent and industry to help change the world. The Chinese leaders were gracious and thanked me for my comments, but it was Dominic who heard my message and decided to do something. He tackled the flooding issue.

His idea is to create a new sea, on land. The challenge was to find a below sea-level, natural depression that is unpopulated and can absorb an ocean of excess water. After a global search, he found such a place in North Africa.

His plan is to channel seawater via one or more canals from the Mediterranean Sea to a section of the Sahara Desert that is ringed by mountains. It is located in western Egypt near the Libyan border.

Hydroelectric power plants along the canals will harness vast amounts of clean energy as the seawater flows into the land-locked sea. This power supply will

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create an economic stimulus for poverty-plagued Egypt and its North African neighbors. And, perhaps most exciting, it can be used to desalinate some of the sea water to cultivate parts of the Sahara, turning it into productive farm land.

Dominic's vision, detailed in his paper "Plan to Manage Sea Level Rise to Save Our World from Flooding," should be shared worldwide. All nations, except the land-locked few, should be eager to help fund the construction of this massive project. The cost, though large, is estimated to be less than what the US has already spent on the Iraq War.

Big projects of this kind, if begun now, can help put to work thousands of workers at a time the world urgently needs productive jobs.

The debate continues regarding the causes of climate change, but there is no argument that if the warming trend continues it will produce problems of global proportions. Such problems need global solutions. And one of those solutions may come from the creative mind of an Alaskan who, in the spirit of our great state, isn't afraid to think big.

Walter J. Hickel served as governor of Alaska from 1966-1968 and from 1990 - 1994 and as U.S. secretary of the Interior from 1969 - 1970. Founder of the Institute of the North, his latest book is "Crisis in the Commons: the Alaska Solution." E-mail, wjhickel@gci.net.