



# Anchorage Daily News

**Michael J. Sexton**  
President and Publisher

**Patrick Dougherty**  
Senior Vice President & Editor

**Matt Zencey**  
Editorial Page Editor

Founded in 1946 by Norman C. Brown

Fuller A. Cowell, Publisher, 1993-1999  
Gerald E. Grilly, Publisher, 1984-1993

Katherine Fanning, Editor and Publisher, 1971-1983  
Lawrence Fanning, Editor and Publisher, 1967-1971

## Time to revisit a water pipeline south

Major regions of the South 48 are running low on fresh water. Droughts and shortages are causing growing concern among local government officials and the man on the street. It's not seen as a crisis yet, but it will be.

It's not good enough to write this off to climate change and tell every citizen to voluntarily use less. This summer nearly 1 million Northern Californians have been ordered to cut back their water usage by 15 percent.

This problem will not go away, and its implications are more serious than one may imagine. Some of the nation's rivers, including the great Colorado, are being tapped to dangerous levels, with water tables and river basins being invaded by salt water from the sea.

It's time to resurrect the idea of a water pipeline from Alaska. I have long believed in the power of big projects to meet the needs of people, provide revenues for public services, and rally and inspire a state or a nation. The trans-Alaska oil pipeline, 30 years old this year, is an excellent example.

Big projects define a civilization, and they can trump the arguments of cynical corporate and government insiders who would use war to stimulate the national economy. Why war?

Why not big projects?

I've talked about a water pipeline for years, and in 1991 proposed that Alaska take an active role in helping our fellow Americans with our abundant fresh water resources.

At first, my proposal was welcomed by West Coast officials. Several Los Angeles County supervisors became enthusiastic and hired the Bechtel Co. to do some preliminary study. Eventually, the political leaders of the time withdrew

**WALLY  
HICKEL**  
COMMENT



their support, and without leadership nothing happens.

Apparently they preferred the heat of the summer to the heat of those who oppose nearly all man-made projects, especially large ones. And humorists had a field day.

With tongue in cheek, Anchorage Daily News columnist Mike Doogan, who now serves in the state House, endorsed "the garden hose to California." But the growing water shortage is no laughing matter. The International Water Management Association estimates that by 2025, 2 billion people will face "absolute water scarcity."

Fresh water is one of the truly vast, untapped resources of the Arctic. Unlike most of the rivers in the rest of the world,

the great rivers in the North run from south to north and east to west, flowing eventually into the Arctic and Bering seas. Our rivers are extremely large, among the longest in the world.

Not long ago Mikhail Nikolaev, former president of

the Sakha Republic in Eastern Siberia, hosted several of us from the Institute of the North on a day-long powerboat trip up the Lena River from Yakutsk. It was a breathtaking experience. That re-

*With tongue in cheek ...  
Mike Doogan endorsed  
"the garden hose to  
California." But the  
growing water shortage  
is no laughing matter.*

markable waterway flows 2,800 miles from the Baikal Mountains north to the Arctic Ocean. In some places it is 15 miles wide.

Alaska is also richly blessed with water resources. My concept was to transport water from the mouth of one of our great rivers where it meets the sea. I envisioned two 20-foot-diameter concrete pipelines placed side by side on the continental shelf 200 feet below the ocean surface.

There would be no environmental risk. The water that flowed into the pipeline system would represent a small fraction of the daily flow into the sea, and there would be nothing to fear from a break in the line.

Some critics said that it would take too much energy to move that amount of water that far, but they didn't calculate the pressure created by the water itself as it dropped 200 feet to start its journey to the California coast. Annually, we could deliver billions of gallons of Alaska fresh water to California for \$1 per day per Californian or less.

It would be a bargain. Californians already pay twice as much for Evian water as they do for gasoline. Someday they'll get the picture.

Walter J. Hickel served as governor of Alaska 1966-1968 and 1990-1994 and as U.S. Secretary of the Interior 1969-1970. Founder of the Institute of the North, he has written "Crisis in the Commons: The Alaska Solution."